

Meeting of the Employment Committee

Wednesday, 9 July 2025, 2.00 pm



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

MINUTES

Committee Members present

Councillor Anna Kelly (Chairman)
Councillor Gloria Johnson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Ian Stokes
Councillor Ashley Baxter, Leader of the Council
Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader of the Council

Other Members present

Councillor Tim Harrison

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Fran Beckitt, Head of Service –
Human Resources and Organisational
Development
Jane Jenkinson, Senior HR Officer
Joshua Mann, Democratic Services
Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rhys Baker.

2. Disclosure of interests

There were none.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2025

Both the public and private minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2025 were AGREED as an accurate record.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2025

Both the public and private minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2025 were AGREED as an accurate record.

5. People Strategy (2025 - 2028)

The People Strategy 2025-28 was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

The Leader outlined the following six key priorities encapsulated by the strategy:

- I. Workforce Planning - Building a resilient, agile workforce aligned to future service needs.
- II. Learning and Development – Fostering a culture of continuous learning and development.
- III. Employee Experience – Creating an inclusive, engaging and supportive workplace.
- IV. Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) – Embedding inclusive practices and celebrating diversity.
- V. Wellbeing – Promoting mental and physical wellbeing through proactive support.
- VI. Reward and Recognition – Ensuring staff feel valued and motivated through fair and meaningful recognition.

The implementation of these priorities was supported with a strategic action plan including responsible lead officers and timeframes.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) were also established and would be reported to the Employment Committee via the HR Dashboard.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Members praised the positive steps taken to support officers and create a positive working environment. Particular praise was given to the Wellbeing Team for the extensive and regular initiatives that they facilitated.
- The reduction in employees leaving the organisation was identified and commended.
- A Member urged for changes across the authority to be communicated more effectively to seek to improve the result of 49% of respondents believing that the Council introduces change effectively.

Following discussions, it was proposed, seconded, and AGREED to recommend the approval of the People Strategy 2025-28 to Cabinet.

6. HR Policy Review

The Human Resources (HR) Policy Review was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

The Leader outlined that, as part of an ongoing review, the HR team had undertaken a refresh of key people management policies. This was intended

to make the policies more accessible, aligned with best practice and Employment legislation. Following this review, a breakdown of the proposed changes were outlined within the cover report relating to the following policies:

- Supporting Performance Improvement Policy
- Zero Tolerance Policy
- Ill Health Capability Policy
- Leave Policy
- Maternity Policy

Approved policies and supporting documents would be added to the newly launched HR Hub, accessible to all employees.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- Members welcomed the proposed introduction of a Safe Leave Policy, supporting victims of domestic abuse. It was noted by officers that the policy was not industry standard and cases would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- It was clarified that maternity/ paternity leave was still covered by the policy previously brought before the Employment Committee. The policy provided two weeks paid paternity leave and enshrined enhanced maternity leave.
- A Member commented that only five days compassionate leave seemed short. The HR team clarified this figure had been reached after discussions with trade unions but matters would still be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Should five days be insufficient in a particular case then this could be covered by the sick leave provisions.
- It was identified that the Parental Bereavement Leave policy had been duplicated on page 4 of the Employee Leave Policy booklet (appendix 4). It was proposed that the HR policies presented to the Committee were accepted with a delegation to the Head of Paid Service and HR Manager to make this necessary amendment.

Following this proposal, it was seconded and AGREED to accept the following HR Policies with a delegation to the Head of Paid Service and HR Manager to amend the Parental Bereavement Leave duplication within the Leave Policy:

- Supporting Performance Improvement Policy
- Zero Tolerance Policy
- Ill Health Capability Policy
- Leave Policy
- Maternity Policy

7. Biannual HR Dashboard and Key Performance Indicator Update

The Biannual HR Dashboard and Key Performance Indicator update was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

Recruitment and Workforce Planning:

- The establishment as of 31 March 2025 was 582 employees (316 males and 266 females).
- During the year, the Council had 79 new starters and 100 leavers.
- More than half (55%) of our workforce had been working for SKDC for less than 5 years.
- The total combined service of Officers at the Council was 4927 years.

Reward and Recognition

- The Council's recognition strategy included Long Service Awards, Employee Awards and #TeamSK Thank You which had received over 436 nominations during the year April 2024 to March 2025.
- National Employers had made a full and final offer of a 3.2% pay increase for 2025/26. Nationally, the Trade Unions were currently consulting with their members. SKDC were not part of national negotiations but normally followed the agreed pay award and were seeking approval via a separate report to the Employment Committee to pay this % increase as soon as possible as an interim pay increase, pending the outcome of the final pay award agreement for 2025/26.
- A staff awards evening was held on 19th June 2025. More than 230 nominations for the awards were received prior to the event and 19 awards given on the evening, 9 of which were chosen by staff and 10 chosen by CMT.

Engagement

- The Employee Engagement Survey for 2025 was due to take place between 7 July 2025 and 31 July 2025.
- Analysis of the survey results were due to take place during August. These would be presented at a future Employment Committee.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- A focus on being an inclusive place to work had continued in 2025 and had included holding Menopause Café sessions on Women's Health Physiotherapy, Reflexology and Nutrition.
- The Carers Forum held information sessions for employees and managers to raise awareness, and introduced a Carers Guide and Carers Passport to support.
- Nearly 70% of the workforce were aged over 40, with the largest numbers in the age range of 50-59. In Q2 of 2024, South Kesteven was an accredited 'AgeFriendly Employer'.
- The Council had a minimal gender pay gap, as reported to the Employment Committee in March 2025. Women earn £0.99 for every £1 men earn when comparing median hourly pay.

Development

- There were 669 places filled in learning events during the year.

- 100% of appraisals had been completed and the outputs would be built into the Workforce Development Plan.
- There were 33 colleagues on apprenticeship programmes in topics ranging from Senior Leadership and Joinery to Facilities Management and IT.
- Development opportunities since April 2024 included excel training, mentoring, internal work experience, IT skills specifically aimed at Operatives, presentation skills and various bitesize learning sessions.

Wellbeing

- Sickness absence increased during year with an average 12.15 days lost per FTE compared to 10.33 days for the same period last year and 13.53 for the previous year.
- Sickness absence increased significantly in December 2024 and January 2025 due to an increase in cold and flu related absences which accounted for almost 30% of all absence during those months.
- 50% of cold and flu related absences in December 2024 and January 2025 occurred in Street Scene and Waste and Recycling. To try and avoid a repeat of this free level of absence flu vaccinations were to be promoted to all eligible staff and onsite provision arranged for Street Scene and Waste and Recycling with the aim of improving the take up of vaccinations.
- The top reasons for absence (days lost) remained as stress and mental health related illness, as well as other musculoskeletal issues.
- The Council's wellbeing programme continued to offer a diverse agenda. The 'learn a new skill' introduced knitting and SK Choir to the programme, with photography and painting to also take place over the summer.
- Activities such as stress awareness, sleep health workshop, Mental Health Awareness Week, finance workshops, and working parents' webinars have supported Mental and Social Wellbeing.
- Physical wellbeing had also been supported and encouraged by a football tournament, step challenge, and health checks.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- It was confirmed that veterans, care leavers and disabled candidates were guaranteed interviews with SKDC if they met the job requirements.
- Clarification was sought about long-term illness. It was confirmed that long-term illness was any illness for which an employee had been off work for 20 days or more.
- Given that Musculo-skeletal related absences were high, it was queried whether any additional support was offered for this. It was confirmed that external health insurance was not provided by SKDC.
- It was queried why stress and mental health related absences were not reflected as being a common reason for days lost due to absence given that stress and mental health was identified as the most common

reason for long term absence. The Senior HR Officer agreed to look into this and feedback to the Member following the meeting. **ACTION**

- Many respondents had not completed the demographical questions about disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Clarification was given that these questions were only posed as an opportunity for employees to inform their employer of anything they wish the employer to be aware of. It was not compulsory to answer the questions, consequently, why there was a high level of employees that had not answered the questions.
- Clarification was sought about SKDC's approach to apprenticeships, especially regarding the retention of apprentices. It was confirmed that there were 33 current apprenticeships and SKDC were keen to keep the apprentice's following the completion of their apprenticeships. These apprenticeships had helped to fill recruitment gaps and there were training contracts in place to cover the costs should any apprentices decide to leave. Apprentices were chosen by engagement with colleges, universities and public advertisements.

The biannual HR Dashboard and Key Performance Indicator Update was noted by the Committee.

8. Pay Award 2025/26

The Pay Award 2025/26 report was introduced by the Leader of the Council.

The Leader outlined that on 24 April 2025, the National Employers announced a full and final offer for Council employees, a pay increase of at least 3.2% across all National Joint Council pay spines and all payments above the maximum pay spine but graded below deputy chief officer. A 3.2% pay increase was also proposed for Chief Officers and Chief Executives.

South Kesteven District Council was not part of the national consultation process and the Council's pay scales were not on the National Joint Council (NJC) scales. Instead, SKDC consulted with local Trade Union Representatives and aligned local agreements. However, in recent years, the pay award mirrored the outcomes of national negotiations.

Aligning the national pay offer to the Council's own pay scales, the offer amounted to an increase of 3.2% on all pay points. This enabled the council to recognise the hard work and dedication of its employees.

It was noted that delaying the final pay offer could negatively impact some colleagues financially because receiving a larger lump sum back payment could affect benefit entitlements and payments.

The 2025-26 budget process predicted a pay award of 2%. Therefore an offer of 3.2% would leave a shortfall of 1.2%. This shortfall would equate to a

budgetary impact of £244k on the General Fund and £76k on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

There would also be a potential impact of £9k on the budget for Members allowances which currently increased in line with staff pay awards. However, it was anticipated that the impact would be contained within the existing budget.

During discussions, Members commented on the following:

- It was queried why only a 2% increase had been budgeted for. Clarification was given that some previous years had not seen any increase, some only a 1% increase, and some a lump sum rather than percentage increase. Advice given nationally was to budget for a 2% increase. A Member commented that he would urge the Council to overestimate within future budgets.
- In response to a Member, the Head of Paid Service confirmed that SKDC had not been compensated for all of the increase to employer national insurance and therefore this had to be accounted for within the existing budget.

Following discussions, Members AGREED to:

1. Note the National Employers' for Local Government Services final pay award offer of 3.2% for the financial year 2025/26.
2. Note the current budget allocation for the pay award is only 2%.
3. Recommend to Council additional budgets to fund the proposed pay award of 3.2% from 1 April 2025:
 - £244k in order to fund the additional General Fund. This was to be funded from the Local Priorities Reserve.
 - £76k in order to fund the additional Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This was to be funded from the HRA Priorities Reserve.

9. Work Programme 2025 - 2026

It was AGREED for the following to be added to the Work Programme:

- Speeding Policy and the Substance Misuse Policy update (date tbc)
- Practicality of the provision of Employee Health Insurance (date tbc)
- Interview for the Recruitment of a Director of Law & Governance (September)
- Local Government Reorganisation update (November)
- Shared Parental Leave – HR Policy (November)

10. Any other business, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

There was none.

The Chairman concluded the meeting at 15.23.