

Minutes

Employment Committee
Wednesday, 23 September 2020



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Kelham Cooke
Councillor Barry Dobson
Councillor Annie Mason (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Jacky Smith (Chairman)
Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Paul Wood

Other Members

Councillor Phil Dilks

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Richard Wyles, Interim Director of Finance
Shahin Ismail, Director of Law and Governance
Lee Sirdifield, Strategic Director for Transformation and Change
Paul Thomas, Strategic Director for Growth
Gary Smith, Strategic Director for Commercial and Operations
Elaine Pepper, Head of Organisational Development and Change
Neil Moverley, Senior HR Officer
Jane Jenkinson, Senior HR Officer

51. Register of attendance, membership and apologies for absence

Councillor Ashley Baxter would be substituting for Councillor Anna Kelly for this meeting only. Following a register of attendance, it was confirmed that all members of the Committee were present.

52. Disclosure of interests

No interests were disclosed.

53. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

54. Sickness Absence Statistics and Analysis

The Leader of the Council introduced the report on the sickness absence statistics and analysis. He explained that the report covered the absence statistics for the whole of the 2019/20 financial year and quarter 1 of 2020/21.

The Senior HR Officer then gave an overview of the main points in the report. The HR department was supporting managers to deal with absences through training in absence management. A dashboard had also been developed to display absence statistics, which would better enable managers to understand any patterns of absence within their service area. The dashboard also included completion rates for return to work interviews.

It was highlighted that a particular emphasis was being placed on addressing mental health related absences, due to the increased pressure Covid-19 had placed on people over the preceding months. Managers had been encouraged to make use of resources available and take more of a pro-active approach to supporting the mental wellness of their staff. The Employee Assistance Programme had also been promoted to both staff and Members.

Members were asked if they had any questions relating to the report or the appended information. A question was raised regarding the figures provided in Appendix 1. A Member asked if any further analysis had been undertaken in relation to age or gender for the absence statistics and asked why the total for the percentage values in each table did not total one hundred percent. It was confirmed that a further breakdown of the absence figures, including factors such as age and gender, could be provided at a future meeting. Due to the large scope of options for reporting types of absence, not all of these had been included within the tables in the appendix but officers confirmed that greater detail could be provided in future reports.

Reference was made to a comment from the Leader that the statistics gave a more positive outlook without the Street Care absence figures included. A Member queried if the higher levels of absence in the Street Care team was a cause for concern. It was explained that a higher level of musculo-skeletal absences was expected in teams undertaking manual job roles. The Strategic Director for Transformation and Change added that having an in-house manual workforce caused a greater variation in absence statistics in comparison to local authorities which outsourced their manual operations.

One Member noted the positive improvement in the number of return to work interviews completed and asked for this to be closely monitored moving forward, with a view to attaining a one hundred percent completion rate in future.

Officers were asked if the absence management training was optional for those managers undertaking it as refresher training. It was confirmed that the refresher training was currently arranged on a voluntary basis but as part of the HR Team's wider work with managers, it would be more proactive going forward in identifying any areas where improvement and training was required. It was suggested by the Chairman that a training log should be developed to keep track of training undertaken by managers.

A comment was made that the Council's absence rates were higher than expected. Members felt that it would be prudent for an action plan to be developed to address absence rates. The Leader confirmed that this suggestion would be developed and presented at the Committee's next meeting, along with the suggested further information requested regarding the absence statistics in the report.

Action Points

- **A further breakdown of absence statistics to be provided at the next meeting, including a wider range of absence types and a breakdown by age and gender.**
- **The completion rate of return to work interviews to continue to be monitored by the HR Team.**
- **An action plan to be developed for managing levels of absence within the Council and presented at the Committee's next meeting.**

55. Gender Pay Gap

The Leader of the Council introduced the report on the Gender Pay Gap. He explained that the report had originally been scheduled for consideration by the Committee in March 2020 but this had been postponed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council was required by law to publish an annual gender pay gap report, which was a valuable tool for assessing levels of equality within the workplace.

The Head of Organisational Development explained that as the figures were published retrospectively, the information presented within the report referred to the 2018/19 period. She stressed the importance of gender equality being a corporate initiative to encourage women into a wide range of roles and levels of responsibility at the Council. The increased flexibility regarding working hours that had been offered during the school closures was highlighted as a positive example of encouraging flexible working for staff with family responsibilities. The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions relating to the report.

One Member referred to tables 1.6 and 1.9 in the report and queried the significant difference between the distribution of percentages in band A of the pay quartiles by gender between 2018 and 2019. Officers confirmed that some additional analysis would be undertaken to establish the reason for this change and any findings would be reported back to the Committee.

Following a question regarding the timescales presented in the action plan, it was confirmed that the actions relating to recruiting returners to employment and benchmarking the gender pay gap information against other organisations would begin over the following couple of months and any progress would be reported back to the Committee.

A member of the Committee asked if there were any supplementary key performance indicators in relation to the gender pay gap that could allow the Council to track progress towards improving its gender pay gap outcomes. Officers confirmed that key performance indicators could be incorporated into the action plan.

Action Points

- **Further analysis to be undertaken to ascertain the reasons behind the significant change in figures for band A in tables 1.6 and 1.9.**
- **Officers to report back at a future meeting of the Committee to update it on the recruitment of people returning to employment and gender pay gap information.**
- **Officers to consider including key performance indicators in the gender pay gap action plan moving forward.**

56. Apprenticeships at South Kesteven District Council

The Leader of the Council introduced the report giving an update of apprenticeships at South Kesteven District Council. He gave an overview of how the apprenticeship provision had developed and been broadened over recent years.

The Senior HR Officer then explained how the funding for apprenticeships was calculated and how this affected the Council's use of apprenticeships. There were currently 12 apprenticeships that had commenced in 2019/20, with an additional 4 as a continuation from previous years. It was explained that the way the Council delivered apprenticeships was changing to provide optimum value to the individuals partaking and to the organisation, with a greater focus on supporting employee development.

Members asked if the Council was on track to reach its apprenticeship target for 2020/21. It was explained that Covid-19 had impacted on the delivery of apprenticeships for the current year, meaning that the target had not yet been met. Opportunities would continue to be explored for recruiting further apprentices but officers confirmed that if the target was not met, there would be no detriment to the Council. The Committee would be updated on the progression of this at its next meeting.

A question was asked regarding the gender and age details of apprentices. Officers confirmed that this information was available and could be provided in the next update. The Leader wished to highlight the Local Government Association's National Graduate Development Programme, which the Council had taken part in as an additional way of supporting employee development; a graduate had been offered a position and would be commencing their employment with the Council on 12 October 2020.

The Chairman expressed her support for the use of apprenticeships and suggested that some of the current apprentices were invited to meet the Committee and provide their first-hand experiences at a future meeting.

Action Points

- **The Committee to be kept updated with the Council's progress towards its apprenticeship target.**
- **A breakdown of age and gender details of apprentices to be provided with the next update.**

- **Arrangements to be made for one or two Council apprentices to meet the Committee before/after one of its future meetings.**

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED**:

- To endorse the approach to diversify the type of apprenticeships at the Council and the greater application of apprenticeships into workforce planning.

57. Employee Surveys 2020/21

The Leader introduced the report on employee surveys. He explained that employee surveys were one of the many communication tools that had been used over the preceding months to keep in touch with staff and keep track of their wellbeing during the pandemic.

The Head of Organisational Development outlined the results of the two internal pulse surveys that had been undertaken in 2020 and how the Human Resources team had responded to the feedback from these surveys. A full staff survey was planned to take place in October 2020. The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions relating to the report.

A Member enquired as to the cost incurred for the surveys. Officers confirmed that the pulse surveys were created internally using pre-existing software and as such incurred no cost to the Council. A tender process had been carried out for the all staff surveys; Protostar UK had submitted the best tender and the cost would be £8k for two full surveys. The second survey would be carried out in 2021.

A comment was made in relation to the feedback from the pulse surveys that staff had not had the time to read the HR communications received by email. Officers confirmed that this had been addressed by the HR team and employees had been encouraged to take regular breaks during the day to protect their mental health whilst working from home for sustained periods.

The Chairman requested that the results of the upcoming all staff survey were presented to the Committee at a future meeting.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED**:

- To recommend the use of pulse surveys in the future.
- To receive a report following the forthcoming all staff survey on the analysis of the results, action planning and organisational response.

58. Members Development Programme

The Committee was presented with the report detailing plans for the Members' Development Programme. It was confirmed that training sessions were open to all Members. One member of the Committee suggested that it would be helpful for the Chairmen of Committees to have regular refresher training to assist them in chairing meetings effectively.

The Director of Law and Governance referenced the increasing skills required of Councillors to meet the demands upon them as elected Members. An external trainer had been arranged for chairing skills training and an internal training session would be provided for all Members on the rules of procedure for meetings. Any Members who had suggestions for further training were encouraged to put their ideas forward to the Members' Services team. Several Members also referred to the cross-party Local Government Association training that was available to all Members, which was thought to be a valuable provision.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED:**

To approve the draft Members' Development Programme for 2020/21.

59. Work programme

The Committee reviewed its work programme for upcoming meetings. A Member of the Committee requested that previous meetings were removed from the Work Programme moving forward.

Exclusion of the press and public

The following item (item 10, Corporate Restructure) would consider information which was exempt under paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), as it related to individuals or could reveal the identity of individuals. The Committee therefore agreed that any members of the press and public should be removed from the meeting before moving to the next item. Due to the sensitive nature of the information included, those officers who were not entitled to remain were also removed from the meeting for the duration of item 10.

60. Corporate Restructure

The Committee was presented with the corporate restructure proposals. The content of the discussion which took place is contained within the exempt minute for this item.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED:**

To adopt the recommendations as presented in the exempt report.

61. Close of the meeting

The meeting closed at 12.22pm.