

MINUTES

Employment Committee

Wednesday, 17 November 2021, 10:00

Council Chamber - South Kesteven
House, St. Peter's Hill, Grantham. NG31 6PZ



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Sarah Trotter (Chairman)
Councillor Anna Kelly (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Kelham Cooke
Councillor Annie Mason
Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Paul Wood
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew

Officers in attendance

Alan Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive)
Jane Jenkinson (Senior HR Officer)
Alice Atkins (Democratic Officer)

38. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Barry Dobson.

Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew would be substituting for Councillor Barry Dobson, for this meeting only.

39. Disclosure of interests

There were none.

40. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- A change to the order of attendance, to ensure that Councillor Trollope-Bellew is listed under **Committee Members present**.
- The deletion of an additional 'had' under minute 34.
- The insertion of '(the Municipal Journal)' following the acronym 'MJ' under minute 36.

41. Updates from the previous meeting

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- Whether the review of the Council's intranet had been assigned.

It was confirmed that this item had not yet been assigned but that it soon would be.

- Whether work was on track for the refreshed People Strategy to be presented at the January meeting of Employment Committee.

It was confirmed that work was on track to meet this deadline.

- A query was raised relating to a trial of a Buddy System for Members, and whether this had been implemented.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that nothing was in place from a political point of view but that the Deputy Monitoring Officer would act as a Buddy for the two Councillors who had been recently elected. The Deputy Chief executive noted that he would discuss this further with Party Leaders.

42. HR Dashboard

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer communities introduced the report, and the Deputy Chief Executive presented the HR Dashboard which provided establishment data and HR metrics for the period April to September 2021/22.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- A query was raised relating to the number of current vacancies at the Council.

It was confirmed that there were 31 agency contractors currently covering vacant posts.

- Whether the level of vacancies was higher than what is normal.

It was confirmed that the current level of vacancies was normal and that vacancy statistics were lower than statistics from previous years.

- Members requested that different colours to be used on the graphs in the future to make the information clearer.
- Whether there was a process in place to analyse potential skills gaps at the Council, especially considering a large portion of the workforce would retire in the near future.

It was noted that HR had recently rolled out a workforce development tool with the aim of developing a clear succession plan. Work was ongoing to address any potential skills gaps.

- Whether absent rates had reduced or increased due to home working.

It was advised that the year being compared to was one of the lowest for ill health as most staff had been working from home full time. Conversely, current sickness levels were high. It was noted that current levels should be compared to a 'normal' year, prior to 2020, in order to gain a more accurate understanding.

- Members noted that a piece of work should be undertaken on how the values of the Council could be instilled in staff working remotely.
- Whether there was an update regarding incomplete Return to Work forms.

It was noted that HR was continuing to follow up on any incomplete Return to Work forms to ensure that all information is collected. Members agreed that Return to Work as a process was much more effective when completed on the first day of a staff members' return and should not be completed weeks later.

- What the reason for collecting the personal details information was, as so many staff had refused to provide it.

It was noted that the information helps the Council to build a more accurate picture of its staff profile in terms of equality data, highlighting areas of under-representation from which actions can be developed. The staff profile of the Council should reflect the residents it serves, and the information helped to avoid the exclusion of any parts of the community.

- Whether staff had been asked to provide their personal details information. It was confirmed that communication was sent to staff asking them to update their personal details and that this resulted in a 10% increase in response.

Members noted the information provided in the dashboard for the six-month period April to September 2021 and commended all the work which had taken place.

43. Mental Health and Wellbeing Update

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer communities presented the report which provided an update on the Council's Mental Health and Wellbeing action plan. The report highlighted the actions which had been taken to support staff and Member wellbeing, including the training of additional First Aiders for Mental Health.

The Deputy Chief Executive added that work was ongoing to ensure that managers have the tools they need to support their teams, especially as many staff continued to work virtually.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- Whether the providers of the bespoke mental health training had been evaluated and whether a comparison of costs had been undertaken.

It was confirmed that the Council has previously worked with both providers and that feedback collected had been overwhelmingly positive. The cost of the training had been compared to other available training and did not exceed average costs.

- Referring to the Equalities Impact Assessment, it was noted that the wording 'both sexes' may be perceived as discriminatory.

Members noted the update on the Mental Health and Wellbeing action plan and thanked those who had been involved in the work.

44. Name Blind Recruitment Procedure

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer communities presented the report and the appended policy document on the implementation of Name Blind Recruitment. The Committee had previously discussed the implementation of Name Blind Recruitment at the 22 September meeting and had requested the policy document be brought to the current meeting for consideration.

DECISION:

The Employment Committee approve the updated Recruitment and Selection Procedure to include Name Blind Recruitment.

45. Return to work at the Council Offices

The Deputy Chief Executive provided a verbal update on the Council's return to work at the Offices. He noted that it was important to consider that the District was currently experiencing a high rate of Covid-19 infections. At present, it was necessary for staff to work from the offices occasionally, for team building purposes but that staff would continue to work remotely where appropriate.

When considering a return to work at the Council offices, the overriding priority would be the business needs of the organisation. Following this, the impact on individual staff would be considered and finally, individual choice of staff. Most departments would have a blended approach, and this seems to be the best way going forward if possible.

Members raised various questions and the responses were as follows:

- Whether there was any indication that productivity had decreased since home working had been introduced.

It was noted that there was no evidence to suggest that productivity had decreased since staff had begun to work virtually. It was confirmed that performance management would continue, but that in general terms staff productivity had not been affected by home working. It was noted that the danger of continued home working was a loss of staff connectivity to the organisation, rather than a drop in productivity.

- How the Council monitored which staff were working from the office or from home.

It was noted that staff complete daily timesheets which documented when they worked. Whether staff worked from home or in the office was left to the discretion of line managers and would be agreed in advance. Furthermore, all staff entering and leaving the offices were required to sign in and out.

The Leader noted that the Council had become more agile in terms of its working arrangements, allowing for staff to experience a flexible work-life balance. He noted that the existing office accommodation required further work and so he would not advocate for all staff returning at the present time. It was unlikely that staff would return to the offices full time, and this was likely to be the case nationally.

- A concern was raised relating to staff and Members who may be less IT literate and who may face issues with a reliance on technology to work.

It was noted that training courses were available for those needing extra support around IT use. Members discussed how the pandemic had accelerated all age groups' use and knowledge of IT.

- Whether there were restrictions on the time staff can flexibly work.

It was confirmed that there was no formal restriction on the time staff can flexibly work. It was further noted that although staff are encouraged not to work additional or unsociable hours than they are contracted to, sometimes this was essential to support the successful operation of the Council.

- A concern was raised relating to residents having been unable to get in touch with Council staff.

It was noted that due to the pandemic, there had been an increase in demand for the Council's services whilst staff levels had remained the same. Senior management was aware of the increase in service demand and were working with all departments to attempt to solve issues prior to residents needing to contact the organisation.

46. Work Programme 2021 - 2022

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the Employment Committee Work Plan for the period 2021 -22. He noted that more non-assigned items would be assigned prior to the next meeting.

Members commented on:

- That the Gender Pay Gap would need to be added to the Work Programme, as a statutory responsibility.

- Whether the Committee ought to discuss the Pay Review at the next meeting, rather than in March 2022, as negotiations around this were currently taking place.

It was noted that the current pay negotiations were separate to the Pay Review, but that the pay negotiations could be brought to the Committee for discussion at a future meeting.

- Members agreed that going forward, the Work Programme would not need to include the items being discussed at the meeting currently being held. The Employment Committee noted the Work Plan 2021-22.

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

There was none.

48. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11:33.