

Meeting of the Employment Committee

Wednesday, 15 June 2022, 10.00
am



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Sarah Trotter (Chairman)
Councillor Kelham Cooke
Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Rosemary Trollope-Bellew
Councillor Paul Wood
Councillor Penny Milnes

Officers

Alan Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive
Fran Beckitt, HR Manager
Keeley Asher, HR Officer
Sam Fitt, Project Lead
Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Anna Kelly and Councillor Annie Mason.

Councillor Penny Mines was a substitute for Councillor Anna Kelly.

2. Disclosure of interests

None disclosed.

3. Updates from the previous meeting

The HR Manager stated that the Phase 1 restructure had been confirmed and currently there were no further updates.

4. Employee Engagement Survey

The HR Manager presented the report on the Employee Engagement Survey 2021/22 which had taken place in December 2021.

The survey had been undertaken by an independent provider, Protostar UK. Areas covered within the survey included management, leadership, communications and wellbeing, with 55 questions being asked.

Members were given a presentation in respect of an on line document that had been compiled and would be communicated to employees concerning the results of the survey and the action plan in place following the feedback received. The document would be kept updated throughout the year and actions communicated to employees.

Forty-five percent of employees had responded to the survey which was down from 64% the previous year. The response rate was lower than anticipated and there had been challenges engaging with people who were working from home. Work had been done to engage with as many people as possible, with officers going down to the depot to encourage people to respond and the survey deadline had been extended.

The engagement index which was made up of six key questions was 64% which was lower than the 65.5% of the previous year. Positive areas of the survey were around Covid and decision making during this period, and individual teams being treated with respect and supported within those teams scored highly. One of the lowest scoring questions was around moral which at 32% was similar to previous surveys. Work had been done to explore the reasons for this. Other low scoring questions were around communication between departments and perceived career opportunities within the Council. Due to the lower response rate and variation in team sizes it had been difficult to compare and breakdown the responses received.

Highest responses had been received from the senior management in neighbourhoods and licensing, leisure and building control. The lowest scores had come from housing repairs, arts and benefits.

One of the steps following the survey was the launch of the People Panel in March 2022. The Panel comprised 25 colleagues from different departments and they looked in more depth at the results of the survey, what it was telling us, what people were thinking when they completed the survey and what actions could be derived from the feedback received. Separate sessions were also held with the Leadership Teams of each department around what the survey results revealed. Managers then held separate engagement sessions with their teams on the results and what specific actions employees wanted to see. At a meeting of the People Panel held last month priority actions from across the Teams were agreed.

A comment was made about the low response rate, less than half the employees had completed the survey, and the question was asked if employees still had the opportunity to take a break and fill the survey in during work time, also that the survey continued to be anonymous. It was also felt that due to the low response rate the results were not as meaningful as previous surveys where completion had been higher. It was caveated that due to the change and transformation taking place especially in the last year, those areas such as housing, arts and culture where poor performance was being dealt with would have a response rate that was less favourable. The Leader stated that he would like to see a robust plan in place

for the next survey and that staff were allocated time within their working day to complete it. It was felt that the low response rate did not give a conclusive result.

The Deputy Chief Executive accepted the comments made, but stated that although statistical the whole results were valid, when they were broken down into teams they were not, due to the small numbers involved. Staff needed to know that it was worthwhile to complete the survey and that it did make a difference. The HR Manager stated that even if a higher percentage of survey returns had been received, the same trends would still be shown.

Another Member acknowledged the low response rate and referred to issues that had happened such as Covid and the changes currently taking place within some section. The survey was a snapshot in time, it was how the responses to the survey were addressed going forward. This was echoed by other Members and it was noted that the new ways of working and new office accommodation would affect results going forward.

Discussion on how the survey was completed followed and acknowledgement made of the current challenging period.

The Engagement Plan was then discussed. It detailed what people felt was important:

- communications
- better ways of working together between teams
- more social events
- career opportunities

and what actions could be put in place to support these areas such as having virtual Find out Fridays and work done following appraisals to help develop and support employees.

Further discussion on the Engagement Plan followed and the work being undertaken on engagement, development and support for new line managers, communications, having a wellbeing plan, the hybrid approach to working, and looking at pay. It was noted that pay was not consistent and the HR Manager stated that benchmarking was taking place but it was inconsistent, an update on the pay review would come to the next meeting of the Committee.

➤ **Action**

An update on the Pay Review to the next meeting of the Committee.

More discussion then followed on the employment market and that some sectors were finding it very challenging to recruit staff. Covid had impacted the market and there had been a major shift with a large proportion of people reaching retirement age. Work was on going to address gaps in the market with graduate and apprenticeship schemes together with partnership working and succession planning together with the staff offer available.

The HR Manager was thanked for the presentation and the work being undertaken.

5. People Plan Update including HR Dashboard

The Chairman introduced the report which updated Members on the HR People Plan and included the HR Metrics from the HR Dashboard for the financial year 2021/22.

The People Plan focused on the six main strands of the HR Strategy:

- Engagement
- Development
- Recruitment/Workforce Planning
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Reward and Recognition
- Wellbeing

and the actions being taken/planned in respect of each area. Engagement had been spoken about during the previous agenda item.

Under the Development section:

- 497 individuals attended learning events across 112 separate events.
- There were 14 apprenticeships (9 new and 4 graduated from courses)
- Apprenticeships covered building control, planning, electricians, plumbers and HGV drivers.
- Two people had been employed through the Government's Kickstart Scheme which was aimed at people aged between 16 – 24 years old who were on Universal Credit getting into work and had been very successful.
- Work was in progress to employ a student from Loughborough University as part of a sandwich placement in Planning Services.
- 66%, 220 appraisals had been completed to date.
- Work was on going to upskill managers and aspirations discussed during the appraisal process.
- A wide array of different management courses taking place around the new on-line Management System.

Under Recruitment/Workforce Planning Section:

- Outturn headcount for Quarter4 was 546, 282 males, 264 females, 435 FT and 111PT.
- There had been 90 new starters and 119 leavers, this was an increase in leavers from the 84 of the previous year and mirrored what was happening in other organisations. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities showed that South Kesteven was still below average in turnover. Exit interviews took place with Managers and HR to discuss the reason for the leaving the organisation.

A question was asked about whether it was specific sections or demographic where staff were leaving. It was noted that street scene had a high turnover of staff as did housing. From a demographic perspective the leavers tended to be 50+.

- 44% of staff had been with the authority less than 6 years, but there was a good mix of other service time.
- Work was being undertaken on attracting people to come and work for South Kesteven with videos being taken of staff as part of the campaign and in person inductions starting again.
- Work was being done in respect of resignations and contingency planning.
- Currently 97% of staff were on a one month notice period and when annual leave was built into it, it didn't leave time for a decent handover or recruitment period. Consultation was taking place with unions to increase some contractual notice periods and work was being done to improve the quality of handover planning.

Questions were asked about career fayres for local schools and universities and open days. In respect of apprenticeships work was done with local schools but work had been impacted by Covid and it was confirmed that open days had taken place in the past. The Leader indicated that he had attended sixth forms and colleges in the past and also there had been an increase in applications for work experience at the Council Offices this year. The HR Manager confirmed that there were students coming for work experience during July 2022 and a programme had been compiled which included meeting the Leader and it would help to promote the Council with younger people.

The next area covered Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

- Pie charts covered disability, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation although it was noted that this information was not held for a large number of those who worked for the Council. One Member asked if going forward the information could be listed with numbers rather than shown in a pie chart as it was felt that zero did not add anything to the information before the Committee.

➤ **Action**

In future information in respect of disability, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation to be listed with numbers rather than shown in a pie chart.

- Over 50% of the Council's workforce was 50+.

A question was asked about the difference between "declined to answer" and "did not answer" to which Project Officer replied.

- The gap between gender was narrowing with only 18 more males than females, although sections such as street scene and repairs tended to be dominated by males with revenues and customer services having more females.
- In respect of diversity a Menopause Café had recently been set up and had received a good turnout and an expert was coming next month. A Parents

Forum had also been set up supporting working parents and more information had been asked for around children's mental health and a development programme working with the Conversation at Stamford, who were a charity had been arranged with a question and answer session next month.

Reward and Recognition was the next strand and work had been focused on the Recognition Strategy. Long Service awards were being looked at and rather than the recognition of doing 30 years when someone leaves it was now being undertaken when it happens. Also, other work in respect of monthly staff recognition draws and employee awards was being undertaken.

Sickness absence figures for 2021/22 which came under the Wellbeing strand were then discussed. Short term sick, which was an absence under four weeks stood at 1973.99 for 2021/22 and long term sick stood at 4968.68 which was an average of 13.69 per full time equivalent working days lost. In 2019 that had been 12 days and in 2020 that had fallen to 9 days. The reason for short term sick tended to be colds and flu and long days by a significant margin the reason was mental health issues and it highlighted the need to support colleagues with mental health issues.

A question was asked about the average sickness absence in the Local Government Sector to which the HR Manager replied that in relation to those authorities that were benchmarked South Kesteven was in the middle. Everyone had seen an increase and it was slightly higher than the public sector benchmarks. Work was being undertaken in respect of those with long term sickness absence with occupational health getting involved and upskilling for line manager on how they could support long term absentees.

It was asked if comparison figures could be included with other authorities in respect of absence to give a clearer picture of where South Kesteven stood.

➤ **Action**

That comparison absence figures for other local authorities be included going forwarded.

A question was asked about occupational health support to which the HR Manager replied that currently tendering for a new occupational health contract was being undertaken but independent occupational support was available.

(11:26 Councillor Paul Wood left the meeting and did not return)

The presentation then highlighted return to work interviews which at 92% was lower than it should have been. Although interviews were being undertaken that was not progressing to the iTrent system. The Employer Assistant Programme had received 73 calls up from 54 calls the previous year and the Mental Health First Aiders had received 83 visits opposed to 27 the previous year. The information showed that the mental health support on offer was being increasingly utilised. A wellbeing survey had been conducted and based on the responses received a Staff Wellbeing Plan had been put together for 2022/23 by the Wellbeing Steering Group based on what staff wanted.

The HR Manager concluded the presentation highlighting the number of disciplinaries that had been undertaken during 2021/22 which had increased during quarter 4 and had been impacted by a specific case.

6. Work Programme 2022 - 2023

The following items were discussed for inclusion on the Work Programme:

- Director's targets – next meeting
- Pension Policy – next meeting
- Report to Committee on the move to the new accommodation when it had been completed

The HR Manager stated that she would be meeting with the Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities, the Monitoring Officer and the Chairman of the Employment Committee to discuss the next agenda.

One Member asked about when the Intranet would be coming to Committee. It was stated that a fundamental overhaul of the system was required and a report would be coming to the September meeting about what the next steps entailed.

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

None.

8. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 11:36.