

Meeting of the Employment Committee

Wednesday, 16 November 2022, 10.00 am

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 Ashley Baxter
Councillor Annie Mason
Councillor Gloria Johnson
Councillor Judy Stevens
Councillor Paul Wood

Officers in attendance

Alan Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive)
Fran Beckitt (HR Manager)
Sam Fitt (Corporate Project Officer)
Sarah Downs (Democratic Officer)

22. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kelham Cooke.

Councillor Judy Stevens substituted for Councillor Kelham Cooke and Councillor Gloria Johnson substituted for Councillor Adam Stokes.

23. Disclosure of interests

There were none.

24. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022

A Member referred to page 7 of the minutes and asked what progress had been made with the Corporate Values Workshops and if they were to be held in public.

The HR Manager confirmed that all Members had received an invite and those who were unable to attend in person would be able to take part in an online session in the near future. There were no plans for the workshops to be held in public at this stage.

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record.

25. Updates from the previous meeting

There were none.

26. New Office Accommodation Update

The report was presented to the Committee by the Deputy Chief Executive who confirmed that the progress was on course.

Approval was given at the Annual Full Council meeting held on 26 May 2022 to vacate the existing offices at St Peter's Hill, Grantham and relocate to the empty office unit above the Savoy Cinema on St Catherine's Road. A budget allocation of up to £500k funded from the Invest to Save Reserve was approved by Council to be used for the relocation and works to be carried out for the upstairs area.

Design works and specification of the fitting out of the space has been moving forward, including consultation with all relevant stakeholders and the People's Panel. The design and floor layout for the upper floor previously agreed was starting to take shape, and works have now begun on the space. The works have been led by the Lindum Construction Group via the Scape Framework to adhere to the Council's financial and procurement regulations and was approved by Cabinet. This was expected to be completed prior to Christmas, and then members of the facilities and IT team were to begin transferring furniture and IT equipment. It was hoped this will allow staff to work from the new office in January 2023. The office space would enable staff to hot-desk and work in the same area, further building a culture of team SK.

It was also approved at Cabinet that the temporary relocation of the Customer Services provision to the Guildhall Arts Centre could take place, so that there was no disruption to customers, whilst the move was underway. Plans for this were underway and the move was to take place towards the end of November 2022.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Was the St Catherine's Road office to include customer-facing services?
- What capacity was the office space able to accommodate?
- Would Members be shown around when complete?
- Timely progress of the move was welcomed.
- Over £1 million has been spent in the last 4 years developing the public realm area near the cinema, what was happening with the old offices?

- Was the Council required to pay back the £1.3 million that was given by the Local Enterprise Partnership for a University Centre that hasn't gone ahead and how did that affect the budget?
- Ground Floor accommodation that was to be open to the public was welcomed
- Was there sufficient space for public partners?

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the eventual plan was to move Customer Services into the new office space, along with public sector partners. Imminently, Customer Services was to temporarily move to an office in the Guildhall recently vacated by Citizens Advice. The Officer continued that full capacity was to include 90 desks. Considering that staff work within the office 2 days in a week, this was likely to be more than necessary. Although not currently safe, Members would be welcome to be shown around the office space once building works had been completed.

The Chairman clarified that the report to be noted within the meeting was particularly in reference to the new accommodation and not the office being vacated.

The Deputy Chief Executive informed the Committee that the old office was being marketed and that there had been interest. The Officer confirmed that there were still ongoing negotiations over the ground floor facilities. The Council would have to pay back monies owed, regardless of the decision by Lincoln University to cancel their arrangement and this was no within the control of the Council, unfortunately. It was understood that over the period of the pandemic, educational needs had changed, particularly with the use of online learning. While space would be reduced, it was considered adequate as the demand for face-to-face service had significantly reduced.

A Member asked for clarification on how there was to be an opportunity to scrutinise the decisions discussed as part of the agenda.

The Chairman confirmed that Employment was not a scrutiny committee and the Finance, Economic Development, Corporate and Overview Committee would be the most relevant to consider such decisions.

AGREED:

- a) **That the Employment Committee noted the progress on the new office accommodation.**

27. SKDC Intranet

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities introduced a report on the Council's intranet.

The intranet was reviewed in October 2021 with a purpose of updating content, rebranding the site and updating the directory.

Whilst a review of the intranet has taken place and a number of changes and updates were made, the platform currently being used very much limited the potential of a staff intranet. There were several limitations of the current intranet platform which made it difficult to do a more substantial and significant update. The current intranet was old and did not have high usage.

All departments with content on the intranet were asked to review it and remove or replace information where required including updates to the customer services pages including the contacts, the home page links and the health and safety advice. More recent updates had included adding the desk booking guidance and app to support the new ways of working. All the 'Monty' branding was removed (previous name for the intranet) and the site was rebranded with the corporate logos and colour scheme.

Plans were being put in place to refresh the council's website and initial scoping is to take place to understand cost implications of also doing this for the intranet. User needs and possible solutions were to be explored with the People Panel including potential options for a more interactive intranet and refresh of the design.

The following questions were asked during discussion:

- Was there a target date for the new intranet to be introduced?
- A good intranet was considered to be very important, especially as staff were frequently working from home.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities informed Members that there was no start date yet as cost implications were being considered. The website for residents was considered to be a priority.

AGREED:

- a) **That the Employment Committee noted the update on South Kesteven's intranet site.**

28. Employee Rewards and Recognition Update

The Employment Committee requested an annual report to update on the employee recognition in place and any new initiatives. This was introduced by the Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities who informed the Committee that at South Kesteven, it was important to ensure all employees felt valued, inspired and proud of their contributions and to create a great company culture by focusing on

positively rewarding the right behaviours and celebrating the positive things happening more.

South Kesteven District Council's recognition strategy had been reviewed with feedback sought from the People Panel and colleagues. Examples included:

#TeamSK Thank You - Peer to peer nominations to say 'thank you' to a colleague and give a reason why. This was introduced in August and the first month attracted more than 50 nominations, followed by 47 in September. A draw was made of all the nominees and the winners received an additional day's annual leave.

Revised long service awards - These were previously awarded when colleagues leave SKDC. The new process means colleagues are rewarded when the anniversary takes place making long service recognition more meaningful and timely. Amounts given were also reviewed and benchmarked.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities informed the Committee that thankyou cards had been made for the purpose of sending to staff and invited Members to take some if they wished. The cards were supplied by the HR Team if requested.

An Employee Awards Ceremony was planned for 1 December to recognise contributions and great achievements throughout the year and had received a lot of very positive feedback.

The Chairman stated that the Committee was extremely grateful for the hard work and resilience of the staff, particularly during challenging times.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Were staff removed from the draw once they had won a day's annual leave, to prevent staff winning multiple times?
- It was recognised that a 'thank you' increased motivation and productivity amongst staff. It was hoped that the system was maintained and that nominations didn't reduce over time due to complacency.
- Some Members weren't previously aware of the thank you cards. How was this idea going to be communicated to all Members along with how to ensure staff receive their cards? There used to be a monthly online magazine called 'Evolve' that briefed Councillors.
- A Member welcomed the recent Planning Tour of Grantham as a great way of communicating to Members what part they were playing and how their decisions had a positive effect within the area of South Kesteven.
- Internal communications had to be largely positive but balanced also.

- It was important to be mindful that front-facing staff are more likely to be recognised. All staff need to be remembered.

The HR Manager confirmed that staff could only win the 'thank you' draw once a year and names were removed once a staff member had won the day's leave. Nominations were shared with staff so they could see who had been nominated.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities informed Members that it was not known why the monthly online magazine was stopped. Currently, there was a Members briefing emailed but this offered no confirmation of who was able to read it. It was considered that perhaps the HR Team could carry out a survey amongst Members to confirm what communication needs there were.

ACTION 1:

That all Members were to be surveyed for their input on communication needs.

AGREED:

- a) That the Employment Committee noted the update on South Kesteven's recognition strategy.**

29. HR People Plan and Dashboard

The Employment Committee requested that a comprehensive HR dashboard be provided every six months to Committee. This report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities.

The dashboard, provided an update on staff numbers and covered the following themes:

- Establishment
- Starters and leavers
- Absence
- Equality and diversity
- Employee relations case data
- Learning and development

The HR Manager continued with an overview of the report metrics. There were currently 534 employees – down 34 in the first two quarters of the year, in line with restructuring activities. There was an even gender mix and 20% of the team were part-time. Approximately half of the workforce were aged over 50 and discussions had taken place around potentially losing a lot of experience within a short time period. Almost half the workforce had been employed at the Council for 5 years or less. The end of the Pandemic saw a larger increase in leavers, seen on a national level as 'the Great Resignation' but levels were current down to a more expected

rate. Exit interviews were now routinely carried out with leavers as the feedback was considered very important.

Data for absences showed an average of 6.65 days per year were lost, with mental health increasingly emerging as one of the reasons given. A lot of focus was now given to well-being and employee assistance. There were 60 approaches to trained mental health first-aiders and 42 calls to the employee assistance scheme. A return-to-work interview was given in 97% of cases where staff came back to work after sickness leave.

Only partial information had been given on equality and diversity data as some staff had chosen not to confirm this information and HR were to focus on obtaining as much information as possible within this area whilst respecting the right to privacy of all staff.

In learning and development, 305 training places were confirmed within the first two quarters of the year providing learning opportunities and the number of apprentices had increased by 3. Apprenticeships were a huge part of South Kesteven and there were opportunities for these apprentices to experience several different services within the organisation.

During discussion, the following points were raised by Members:

- What proportion of the mental health sickness recorded was due to work-related issues or cost-of-living issues?
- It was acknowledged that when people are suffering with mental illness they were not always able to give a reason and it could be perceived as intrusive to ask.
- It was considered that the proportion of unanswered information relating to equality and diversity was not necessarily a negative point. It could be that staff were comfortable to exercise their right to privacy.
- Was there sufficient support for new parents returning to work?
- Were the Personal Development Reviews seen as a positive experience by staff?
- A Member highlighted an error in the ethnicity bar chart (page 43) where the first category should have read 'white british'.

The HR Manager informed the Committee that approximately half of the staff that were experiencing long-term sickness confirmed that work-related stress contributed to their absence. It was not confirmed that there were any cases where the financial crisis was a contributing factor.

The Officer continued that a parents support group had been set up earlier in the year and had received positive feedback so far. An induction had been included as part of the process to help staff settle back into work after a long absence at what was considered a challenging time in life and it was really important for the organisation to provide support.

The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities passed on her thanks to the HR Team, acknowledging that there were many ways in which the organisation were providing support for staff. It was also confirmed that the categories on the ethnicity bar chart were to be corrected.

AGREED:

- a) **That the Committee noted the information provided in the dashboard for the first 6 months of the 2022/23 financial year.**

30. Work Programme 2022 - 2023

The Committee noted the contents of the Work Programme 2022 – 2023.

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

A Member acknowledged that while a briefing was received regularly, due to news being accessible 24 hours a day, they frequently found out information through its appearance in the press. It was asked where Members should go to stay informed.

The Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged that this was recognised as happening and the Council was working towards a process that prevented this.

32. Close of Meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11:00.