

Meeting of the Employment Committee

Wednesday, 18 January 2023,
10.00 am



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Anna Kelly (Chairman)

Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Helen Crawford
Councillor Nikki Manterfield
Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Paul Wood

Officers in attendance

Karen Bradford (Chief Executive)
Fran Beckitt (HR Manager)
James Welbourn (Democratic Services Manager)
Jane Jenkinson (Senior HR Officer)
Sam Fitt (Corporate Project Officer)
Sarah Downs (Democratic Officer)

33. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors' Kelham Cooke, Annie Mason and Sarah Trotter.

Councillor Helen Crawford substituted for Councillor Kelham Cooke and Councillor Nikki Manterfield substituted for Councillor Sarah Trotter.

Councillor Ashley Baxter represented Alliance SK on the Committee today.

34. Disclosure of interests

There were none.

35. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 were proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** as a correct record.

36. Updates from the previous meeting

There were none discussed in the meeting today. The Action Sheet within the agenda clarified that the Communications Team would review Members communications as part of an ongoing process and the results were to be reported back to Members at a future meeting.

37. Designation of Interim Monitoring Officer

This report was presented by the Deputy Leader of the Council.

The terms of reference of the Employment Committee permitted a recommendation to the Council on the selection of a Monitoring Officer. Full Council was to consider the Committee's recommendation and the designation to the role of Monitoring Officer on 26 January 2023. The above duties and responsibilities had been carried out by Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer, in the interim, with this being the earliest opportunity for the Employment Committee, and subsequently Full Council, to recommend and designate one of the Council's officers as Monitoring Officer. It was recommended that Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer, be designated as the Council's Monitoring Officer on an interim basis until further notice.

In his time as Deputy Monitoring Officer for South Kesteven District Council, Mr Watts had played a fundamental part in the comprehensive review of the Council's Constitution and consistently provided clear and sound constitutional and procedural advice to Councillors and Officers, whether directly or at the Council's public meetings. He assisted in the implementation of the Council's new Councillor Code of Conduct and associated training for Councillors, had led assessments and investigations into alleged breaches of the Councillor Code of Conduct and also line-managed the Council's Legal Services Team. Taking the above into account, Graham Watts had demonstrated the required knowledge and experience to undertake the role for South Kesteven District Council.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the meeting was to go into private session.

(At 10:12 The Senior HR Officer and Project Officer left the meeting).

During discussion Members took the opportunity to deliberate over Mr Watts' suitability to the role based upon his experience, knowledge and competency. The Committee wished the Deputy Chief Executive a speedy recovery and the Chief Executive provided an update on the interim measures and reallocation of duties that were to be put in place.

Members discussed the requirement for the vote to be held in the public domain and the Democratic Services Manager provided guidance. The vote was agreed to be held in the public meeting.

(The Committee ended the private session of the meeting at 10:29 and Officers re-joined the meeting)

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

That the Employment Committee agreed:

- a) **That Council be recommended to designate Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer, as South Kesteven District Council's Monitoring Officer from 26 January 2023 until further notice on an interim basis.**

Councillor Ashley Baxter requested that his vote against this resolution be recorded within the minutes of the meeting.

38. Pay Policy Statement

The Pay Policy Statement was presented by the Deputy Leader of the Council.

The Council's Pay Policy Statement was reviewed annually to ensure that it accurately reflected the Council's position and was aligned with the outcomes and objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan. The 2022/23 pay policy statement was presented to Full Council on 3 March 2022. A review of the Pay Policy Statement was carried out to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011.

The key changes included the updating of the posts in scope under the definition of officers covered by the Pay Policy Statement which detailed the Council's decision to adopt the Real Living Wage in March 2021 and set out the pay increase arrangements for our lowest grade and a number of other lower grades which were impacted by the Real Living Wage increase. It also set out that these pay increases were an alternative to the annual cost of living pay award and not in addition to.

The Pay Policy Statement made reference under paragraph 7.11 to a review of pay and reward arrangements that was taking place to ensure that our approach to pay and reward supported the objectives of the People Strategy to ensure that we can deliver "a flexible, innovative organisation" that has the "skills, resilience and motivation to deliver and achieve the Council's objectives".

During discussion, the following points were raised by Members:

- It was considered that employees were receiving a very good pension contribution of 23.9%.
- Why was there no mention of consultation with Trade Unions. Had this happened and what had been the response?
- Was there a cap on termination benefits?

The Senior HR Officer confirmed that the pension contribution rate had previously been at 17.5% for some time but now had been increased to 23.9% and the secondary rate increased to 0.9%. There was an overall estimated reduction in pension costs to the Council of £309,000.

The Chief Executive informed Members that pension contributions were dependent on salary level up to 12% and that there had to be sufficient funds so as to avoid a deficit situation. A significant increase was required if there had been a large draw on funds for medical retirement, for example. That additional contribution would be paid by the Local Authority. An exit payment cap had been considered by the Government at £95,000 but this was withdrawn and there have been no further proposals at this time.

The HR Manager confirmed that Trade Unions were consulted and responded positively. Regular monthly meetings were held to keep representatives informed.

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

That the Committee:

- a) **Recommended that the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 be submitted to Full Council for approval.**

39. Employee Handbook

The Employment Committee requested an update on the employee handbook which was presented by the Deputy Leader of the Council.

The employee handbook was a valuable communication resource for both employees and the organisation and provided guidance and information relating to the council's policies and procedures.

Previously, the Council moved away from having documented HR policies and instead, commissioned an agency to provide the 55-page handbook which details guidance on a range of employment topics. The HR team regularly reviewed the content and updated where required. Feedback from employees was that it needed a complete refresh. Employees and line managers had raised a preference to have a shorter handbook which signposted policies and guidance documents on specific subjects. It was proposed that the next stage of the review moved to re-designing

the handbook in a new format and designing HR policies. A policy and handbook refresh was therefore launched and the principles for the policy review were:

- Focus on informal resolutions where applicable
- Short, simple policies
- A new user-friendly layout
- Supporting guides and process flowcharts to provide guidance
- Signposting further support e.g., HR, our Employee Assistance Programme, related forms and documentation etc.
- Alignment to the culture and values that we want to inculcate.

The handbook refresh was underway and the shorter book provided links to policies which were being drafted, reviewed and updated.

The Flexible Working Policy had been drafted to reflect that all employees can request flexible working regardless of their length of service. Upcoming legal change was to make this a statutory requirement.

Members welcomed the updated policy, commenting that increased flexibility would assist in the retention of staff.

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

That the Employment Committee:

- a) Noted the update on South Kesteven's Employee Handbook review.**
- b) Approved the amended Flexible Working Policy.**

40. Pulse Surveys - Wellbeing and Staff Socials

Presented by the Deputy Leader of the Council:

At SKDC, there was a holistic approach to wellbeing which included mental health first aiders, an employee and members assistance programme, colleague networks and leading numerous wellbeing initiatives which recently had included:

- White Ribbon domestic violence awareness involving a staff football game and pledge tree.
- Various mental health awareness activities including Men's Mental Health Week with a mental health workshop open to all colleagues.
- Financial wellbeing support for Talk Money Week.

A priority was also initiating ways of bringing our people together more. This was a key action from our 2021 Engagement Survey and subsequent focus groups. Over the past year we had therefore focused on bring people together from across the Council through:

- Wellbeing networks which support colleagues on topics that are important to them including our Menopause Café and Parents Forum.
- Holding our first staff social since pre-pandemic. We did this by holding a #TeamSK Awards night.

The Wellbeing Survey was cascaded to all staff in November 2022 and received 85 responses. Some key highlights were as follows:

- When asked to rate their mental wellbeing, 46% said good or very good. This has increased from 37% in 2021.
- A further 41% rated their mental wellbeing as 'okay' meaning 87% of respondents answer 'okay' or higher.
- 85% said they felt the Council currently provides enough support for their mental wellbeing which was a 25% increase on the 2021 score.

Suggestions from the survey had been built into an action plan which included:

- Physical wellbeing month taking place this month (January 2023) including a team steps challenge and working with Leisure SK to give staff more access to activities. The steps challenge is already a big success with 20 teams of 6 taking part.
- Standing desks at the new office.
- More networks opportunities for colleagues to come together on topics of interest.

On 1st December 2022, a #TeamSK Awards and Staff Celebration evening was held in the Guildhall. More than 100 colleagues attended the event which included the presentation of employee awards, followed by a buffet and disco.

Of the 62 colleagues who provided feedback having attended the event:

- when asked to rate the evening out of 5, 97% rated it either 4 or 5.
- 98% said they would be likely/very likely to attend a future social event.
- Feedback about the awards, recognition, room décor, social opportunity and atmosphere were overwhelmingly positive.

During discussion, the following points were made by Members:

- HR were to be commended on the work done to raise staff morale and engagement.
- How much was allocated within the budget for staff wellbeing?

The HR Manager confirmed that £25,000 was allocated within the budget for this year and that a big difference in staff wellbeing was noted as a result of the recent focus.

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

That Employment Committee

- a) **noted the results of the two pulse surveys and commented accordingly on the findings.**

41. Work Programme 2022 - 2023

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

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

There was no other business.

43. Close of Meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 10:58.