

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment and Staffing Committee held on Friday, 15 September 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Sally Ann Hart – Chair
Councillor Anna Bradnam – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Peter Fane (substitute) Mark Howell
William Jackson-Wood John Williams

Officers: Helen Cornwell HR Service Manager
Jeff Membery Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services
Ian Senior Democratic Services

Councillors Heather Williams and Dr. Richard Williams were in attendance, by invitation.

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Sunita Hansraj and Richard Stobart sent apologies. Councillor Peter Fane attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Stobart.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Committee authorised the Chair to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023 subject as follows:

Minute 4 – Review of Hybrid Policy

Insert the word 'Working' between the words 'Hybrid' and 'Policy' to differentiate it from other hybrid policies.

Minute 5 – HR Recruitment, Retention and Absence Data for May 2023

In the first paragraph, delete the word 'was' from between the words 'data' and 'came' in the sentence beginning 'Officers advised...' so that the sentence now says, 'Officers advised that the data came from standard reporting packages and agreed to look at alternative presentation.'

4. Staff Health and Wellbeing Survey

The Employment and Staffing Committee received and noted by affirmation a report comparing the outcomes of staff surveys carried out in August 2022 and April 2023 to gather health and wellbeing data. The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services concluded that the latter survey results showed a significant improvement in the staff's health and wellbeing.

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified the scoring system used and explained that the results for the Finance Service were indicative of the pressure staff were under at the time because of the need to get final accounts prepared for sign off. The Chair requested that the Committee be given an opportunity to review progress.

The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services assured Councillor Peter Fane that managers were monitoring the working preferences of staff as between home and office.

Referring to paragraphs 7 to 9 of the report and the relevant section of Appendix A. the Vice-Chair welcomed the improvement in the data collected from those staff identifying as disabled. The HR Service Manager said that several factors may have prompted this such as the introduction of Disability Passports, the Council's status as a Disability Confident employer, the four-day-week and flexible working.

Councillor Heather Williams asked whether there had been any analysis into where members of staff preferred to work from and how attendance at South Cambridgeshire Hall was being monitored. In reply, the Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services said that no such analysis had been carried out at this stage. It was possible to monitor attendance at the office by analysing the use of access passes, but attendance was not the primary reason for doing so. He would raise the issue with CMT colleagues. The Vice-Chair said that staff should be trusted to work as suited them best and the outcome of the latest survey was encouraging in demonstrating increased levels of happiness.

The Chair concluded the debate by looking forward to further data, especially regarding those working part-time.

5. HR Recruitment, Retention and Absence data - June and July 2023

The Employment and Staffing Committee received and noted by affirmation a report containing absence, recruitment and turnover information.

Councillor Dr. Richard Williams suggested that the reported saving of £550,000 through replacing agency staff with permanent employees might be misleading because as posts the focus of attention were filled others might become vacant. Councillor Dr. Williams also highlighted the cost of absence. Councillor John Williams, speaking as Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, explained that the Council Budget made provision for temporary posts being filled by agency staff but did not provide for permanent posts being filled in that way.

Councillor Heather Williams sought clarification of the relationship between hard-to-fill posts and the budgeted for 20% reduction in staff. The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services said that there was no fixed target for staff reductions.

The Meeting ended at 10.40 a.m.
