

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment and Staffing Committee held on
Thursday, 9 November 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

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

Councillors: Sunita Hansraj Richard Stobart
John Williams Heather Williams

Officers: Jonathan Corbett HR Advisor
Helen Cornwell HR Service Manager
Laurence Damary-Homan Democratic Services Officer
Jeff Membery Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate
Services
Emma Weston HR Advisor
Chloe Whitehead HR Business Partner

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Mark Howell. Councillor Heather Williams was present as a substitute.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Richard Stobart.

2. Declarations of Interest

With respect to Minute 6, Councillor Heather Williams declared that she had previously been involved in campaigning for fertility treatment.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Heather Williams requested that the second line of the penultimate paragraph of Minute 4 be amended from "...staff preferred to work from and how attendance..." to "...staff preferred to work from home and how attendance..."

Councillor Sally Ann Hart requested that the abbreviation of CMT be clarified as Corporate Management Team in Minute 4.

Councillor Sally Ann Hart requested that the first sentence of the second paragraph of Minute 5 be amended to read as follows:

"Councillor Dr Richard Williams suggested that the reported savings of £550,000 through replacing agency staff with permanent employees might be misleading because **other agency staff were being employed as other permanent posts** became vacant."

The Committee agreed to the amendments by affirmation. With the amendments, the Committee authorised the Chair to sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 15

September 2023 as a correct record by affirmation.

4. **4 Day Week Review**

Councillor John Williams advised the Committee that since the publication of the report (which only made reference to Key Performance Indicators [KPIs] statistic from Q1), the Q2 KPI data had been published and that it continued the trends shown by the Q1 data.

Councillor Richard Stobart joined the Committee.

The Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services presented the report. Officers provided the following points of clarity, in response to questions:

- The comparison with “a range of organisations” in page 7 of the report referred to both private and public sector organisations.
- The reduction in projected net cost for agency staff was based on both the salary costs and percentage to cover other costs, such as pensions, associated with hiring staff on a permanent basis.
- That staff turnover reduction was a comparison between figures from the 9 months of the trial and the 9 months preceding the trial.
- That the KPIs presented in the report were the public KPIs agreed, by both the Scrutiny & Overview and Employment & Staffing Committees, to be reported as part of the monitoring of the 4DW trial. Officers advised that further management information, beyond KPIs, was collected by the Council and further information could be added in future reports if required.
- Officers were able to share their experiences of the 4DW on the staff intranet, with these comments being captured, and members of the public were able to submit comment on the 4DW trial through the Council’s website.
- The Bennett Institute were expecting to produce a report at the end of the trial, but there were no plans for reports to be produced in the meantime.
- With regard to co-working with other 4DW organisations, the Council had received interest from other organisations but had been focused on delivering its own service. The Council had publicly published data and reports on the 4DW but had not been engaging on consultations with other organisations interested in the 4DW.
- That the ongoing year-long trial referred to the trial running for office-

based staff taking place between March 2023-March 2024, which had been agreed following the initial 3-month trial.

- The definition of hard-to-fill roles was nationally recognised and based off national shortages and/or high levels of specialisation required for specific posts, rather than being based on how long the Council had advertised specific posts.
- Of the posts covered by agency staff in July 2022, 14 of the roles were considered to be hard-to-fill.

Officers agreed to provide written response to some questions that required further information to answer. The Committee discussed the challenges of accounting for external factors in the data and the reduction of sickness was raised as an example of an area where both the 4DW and other variables could influence the data. Members acknowledged that the data in the report was indicative and that conclusions on the trial in its entirety could not yet be drawn. Comment was made that it was important to capture anecdotes that accompanied the increase in productivity. Some Members felt that the data was rich and that the indications were positive, whilst others held concerns over the data and the principle of the trial.

Members requested that the following be included in the next report:

- The definition of “hard to fill” roles.
- Pre-trial recruitment data to be used as a comparison alongside the recruitment numbers in the trial.
- Details of longstanding vacancies within the Council, even if they did not fall under the definition of “hard to fill”.
- Information on resident responses to the 4DW.

The Committee **noted** the report.

5. Resolution Policy & Toolkit

The HR Advisor, Emma Weston, presented the report. Members noted the need for the introduce a resolution policy and commended the solution-focused approach laid out by officers.

In response to a question regarding confidentiality and complaints, officers advised that the confidentiality varied from case to case and action towards resolution would take into consideration the context of individual cases. Members suggested that, if the details of the complainants were to be disclosed in a case, the complainant be advised of this before the information was shared.

Members noted that some of the links in the documents were not working and officers advised that this would be resolved. Members also requested that, where cross-reference was made between the policy and the toolkit, specific details be included in the references to provide clarity on which part of the corresponding document was being referred to.

Officers clarified that complainants had a right to be accompanied throughout the resolution process, by either a work colleague or a union representative, and that this was laid out in the toolkit.

Members noted the important of speed in resolutions and, in response to a question, officers advised that some timeframes were laid out in the policy and toolkit, but that speed of resolution would vary from case to case. Officers advised that a plan for monitoring the policy most effectively would have to be taken away but noted that colleague feedback had been a useful feedback mechanism for the success of other policies and that it would likely be useful in this instance.

By affirmation, the Committee **recommended** that the new style resolution policy and toolkit be progressed to Union discussion and colleague feedback and signalled the Committee's support for the resolution policy and accompanying toolkit as the replacement for the grievance policy.

6. Fertility Treatment Policy & Manager Toolkit

Councillor John Williams expressed pleasure that the Council was ahead of the game and was introducing the Fertility Policy before the Government had taken the Fertility Treatment Bill for second reading. The HR Advisor, Emma Weston, presented the report.

The Committee expressed support for the policy. Members requested that the time granted as paid leave for cycles of fertility treatment be described as "a working week" to accommodate for the different working patterns amongst staff. The flexibility of the policy was commended, and Members welcomed the additional options listed on page 45 of the report. The Committee discussed the support available to staff receiving fertility treatment, including partners involved, and officers advised that follow return to work, HR staff had an open-door policy for colleagues who wished to talk and would happily signpost staff toward support available to them, approaching each case individually and encouraging an employee-led approach. The Committee agreed that this was the appropriate approach as it would allow individuals to manage their situations in a way that best suits them. Members commended officers for bringing the policy forward prior to the introduction of the national legislation, and endorsed the Council's culture of openness around fertility and related topics.

By affirmation, the Committee **recommended** that officers proceed with policy and toolkit as presented, taking into account the comments of the Committee.

7. HR Recruitment, Retention and Absence Data Aug-Sept 2023

The HR Advisor, Jonathan Corbett, presented the report. The Committee welcomed the level of data provided in the report and encouraged adaptive reporting which responded to new data analysis opportunities. It was suggested that benchmarking data and comparisons with similar organisations be included as part of the dataset presented to Committee, where possible. Members requested that quarterly data shown as line graphs utilise separate lines for different years, rather than a singular continuous line covering multiple years, to allow for greater ease of comparison- coloured graphs were also requested. Officers took away an enquiry as to the reasons for the peak in sickness in August.

The Committee **noted** the report.

Prior to the close of the meeting, Members requested that information on the 4DW trial and progress in the Waste Service be brought to the next meeting.

The Meeting ended at 11.45 a.m.
