

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment and Staffing Committee held on
Monday, 3 August 2020 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Henry Batchelor – Chair
Councillor Dawn Percival – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Dr. Claire Daunton Mark Howell
Heather Williams

Officers: Patrick Adams Senior Democratic Services Officer
Helen Cornwell HR Business Partner
Susan Gardner Craig Head of HR and Corporate Services

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson and Councillor John Williams.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Update on BAME Task and Finish Group

The Chair reported that Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson was Chair of the Task and Finish Group. In her absence, he asked Councillor Claire Daunton, a member of the Group to advise the Committee on this issue.

Councillor Claire Daunton reported that the Task and Finish Group consisted of the following membership, Councillors Sarah Cheung Johnson, Claire Danton, Geoff Harvey and Richard Williams and met once to draw up terms of reference. Councillor Daunton also reported that the Group were considering the following issues:

- To liaise with the City Council
- To contact a similar sized local authority and compare strategies
- To suggest anonymising the recruitment process

The Head of HR and Corporate Services explained that she and other officers had spoken to Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson about the work already being undertaken, including a review and update of equality impact assessment (EQIA) forms, work on recruitment processes and equalities training planned for staff

and councillors. It was noted that not all staff completed the equalities section on the employee personal details form, leaving gaps in the Council's data regarding the disabilities and ethnicity of its staff. It was understood that the Task and Finish Group were developing terms of reference to be agreed by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. The Group could then set up its work and action plan.

Members of the Committee made the following suggestions:

- Anonymising the recruitment process should be supported.
- Anonymising exit interviews should be considered.
- Retention and internal progression should be analysed.
- The Council should consider signing up to the Race at Work Charter.
- Data should be collected and then compared with future years to monitor any improvements.
- The Committee should complement and not duplicate the work of the Task and Finish Group.

The Committee agreed that the Task and Finish Group should be asked to suggest how the Committee could assist the Group in its work.

5. Quarter 4 Sickness Absence Report (1st January 2020 to 31st March 2020)

The Head of HR and Corporate Services introduced this report on sickness absence for the fourth quarter, which was the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020. She explained that the reduction in days lost to sickness compared to the same period last year was probably due to a reduction in infections caused by staff working in isolation during the lockdown. Unfortunately it appeared that the Covid crisis, shielding and isolation had also caused an increase in mental health issues. Flu jabs would be available to staff and councillors later in the year. The format of the report would include graphs in the future.

Addressing stress and mental health

In response to questioning, the Head of HR and Corporate Services explained that the Council was aware of high stress, mental health and depression levels in the Waste Service and resources had been allocated from HR to tackle this. In addition to this the HR service offered the following support services to staff:

- Access to a counselling service
- Mental health first aiders
- Weekly meditation sessions
- Wellbeing workshops
- Employee Assistance helpline
- Daily tips on stress release

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

6. Retention and Turnover Report: Quarter 4 (Q4) 1 January to 31 March 2020

The Head of HR and Corporate Services explained that the figure for turnover of staff for quarter 4 (1 January to 31 March 2020) was 3%, which was impressive. The number of applications for vacancies being received had increased,

including planners from the private sector.

Exit interviews

The Head of HR and Corporate Services reported that exit interviews for staff who were leaving continued to take place, despite the lockdown. Changes had been made to encourage staff to explain why there were leaving the Council, including online forms and the option of HR conducting the exit interview, instead of the line manager. The Exit Interview form has been amended following recommendations from the Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Group.

It was noted that 14 leavers had given “career progression”, as a reason for leaving. In response the Head of HR and Corporate Services explained that some teams had more opportunities for career progression than others. A career pathway scheme was being piloted in the Planning department and this could be introduced to other teams. In addition, more generic roles were being introduced, which could lead to more opportunities within the organisation.

Internal transfer of staff

The Head of HR and Corporate Services reported that recruiting to positions from within the Council aided career progression. The vacancies that this created could be filled by appointing apprentices.

Market supplements

The Head of HR and Corporate Services explained that due to the need to comply with the law regarding equal pay, there were strict rules on the payment of market supplements. If paid, the supplement would be reviewed every 12 months and it was noted that as a market supplement was not consolidated into salary, staff were not able to use the supplement for calculation of mortgages or other loans. The 12-month timeframe had been agreed with the unions and complied with guidance from the equalities commission.

The Committee unanimously supported the improvements made in the exit interview process and the new reporting measures being used with regard to the number of leavers. The Committee **NOTED** the report.

7. Update on the Impact of Covid-19 on Staff - Oral report

The Head of HR and Corporate Services gave an oral update on the impact of Covid-19 on staff.

Staff returning to the office

It was noted that a small number of staff would be returning to work at the office in Cambourne on Wednesday 5 August. Staff working from home had been permitted to take their chairs, monitors, footrests and other equipment from the office. It had been a challenging time for all staff and those with children had to juggle supervision with working from home. The flexibility on working hours offered by the Council had been valued by staff. 12 staff had been furloughed and were being paid 100% of their salary.

In response to questioning, the Head of HR and Corporate Services explained

that the Council had prioritised which staff should be permitted to return to the office, based on those who found it difficult to work at home. Approximately 30 staff were returning in the first instance.

Virtual meetings

In response to questioning, the Head of HR and Corporate Services explained that the authority was continuing with virtual Council meetings. It was expected that the Council would move to hybrid meetings in the future.

Annual leave

In response to questioning, the Head of HR and Corporate Services explained that staff were being encouraged to take their annual leave. The exception was the depot staff, who had been allowed to sell up to a week of the annual leave, as the only alternative was to bring in agency staff to cover their leave, making this a cost effective arrangement. Instead of a having to take their leave in the current year, staff had been informed that they had to take their leave over a two-year period.

The Head of HR and Corporate Services agreed to provide actual figures on the annual leave taken by staff to the next meeting, but it was understood that there was no central system recording annual leave, making data more difficult to compile.

Leadership Team

The Head of HR and Corporate Services reported that many staff including Leadership Team had been working long hours during the crisis, but with the appointment of the Chief Operating Officer, the Head of Transformation and the Head of Housing had brought Leadership Team up to full strength.

The Chair thanked Leadership Team for their regular updates to Councillors.

The Committee **NOTED** the oral report.

8. The next staff survey - Oral report

The Committee agreed that the next staff survey should keep all the questions included in last year's survey, to provide comparative data. It was suggested that extra questions should be included on home working. It was agreed that the Vice Chair would liaise with the Head of HR and Corporate Services in drawing up the next staff survey and report back to the next meeting of the Committee.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair stated that he would liaise with officers and arrange a meeting in late September/early October.

The Meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.
