

Staffing and Appeals Committee Minutes

Date: 7th November 2023

Time: 2.00p.m. – 3.40p.m.

Venue: [New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon, PE28 4YE](#)

Present: Councillors H Batchelor, K Billington, B Hunt, E Murphy, L Nethsingha, K Reynolds, T Sanderson, N Shailer, S Tierney

69. Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Nethsingha, seconded by Councillor Shailer and resolved unanimously to elect Councillor Murphy as Chair for the municipal year 2023-24.

70. Election of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Shailer, seconded by Councillor Nethsingha and resolved unanimously to elect Councillor Black as Vice Chair for the municipal year 2023-24.

71. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillor M Black. No declarations of interest were received.

72. Minutes – 24th March 2023

The minutes of the meetings held on 24th March 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

73. People Strategy Update

The Committee considered a report detailing progress with implementing the Council's People Strategy, including work to inform the creation of an action plan that responded to various engagement routes with colleagues and internal stakeholders, as well as some early headlines from the IPSOS Employee Survey. Attention was drawn to the engagement with internal stakeholders following the approval of the strategy by full Council on 16th May 2023. It was noted that some feedback including the introduction of a volunteering policy had already been addressed. Other feedback to be considered included engagement sessions with Adults, Health and Commissioning, and qualitative data from exit interviews and questionnaires. Members were advised that the results of the Employee Survey, which had attracted a 54% response rate, would be available shortly, and the themes would be used to shape the action plan. Members noted the timeline for the creation of the action plan for presentation to committee in February 2024.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- welcomed the new volunteering policy particularly as the council depended on volunteers to support its work.
- queried who decided what organisations colleagues could use locally that supported the Council's vision and values. Members noted that staff needed to talk to their line manager first about volunteering. It was agreed that a copy of the volunteering policy, which detailed examples of organisations, should be e-mailed to the committee. The Chief Executive explained that there was already a pre-existing website for Cambridgeshire detailing volunteering opportunities, as well as five volunteer centres which employees were directed to, which met the Council's vision and values.
- queried whether information would be gathered on usage of the volunteering policy. It was noted that the time spent by staff volunteering would be recorded, and officers would need to consider how the selection of organisations could also be captured and reported on.
- requested clarification that drivers involved in the car-sharing scheme were required to have the appropriate insurance. Members were informed that staff driving for business purposes were required annually to produce their driving licence, MOT documentation, and insurance.
- highlighted the inclusiveness of the Council and how this could be maintained given the changes in the way staff now worked. It was noted that staff in the focus groups and Employee Survey had been asked what kind of organisation they wanted to work for. In response, the words friendly and caring had been identified, and it was important that this was reflected in the action plan. Staff appreciated opportunities to come together including for downtime. There would therefore be a challenge for managers to support this in physical workspaces and the need to learn how this could be facilitated in the virtual space.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) note the progress made in engaging with colleagues to create an action plan that would support the delivery of the commitments we had made in our People Strategy.
- b) endorse the proposed timeline for presenting a final action plan to Staffing and Appeals Committee in February.

74. Workforce Profile Update

The Committee was reminded that it had requested a brief mid-year report on workforce demography and the current people related challenges across the organisation at its meeting in February. Attention was drawn to the Council's workforce, which showed that average turnover was coming down to nearer 12% from over 15%. The wellbeing offer had contributed to this reduction and to a reduction in absence as a result of mental health, stress and anxiety. A new Recruitment Hub system had been operating for a year, which had resulted in an increase in the number of candidates accessing the system, and an improved experience for recruitment managers and candidates. The system was being used to proactively reduce barriers and increase applications from applicants with diverse backgrounds. Recruitment of the right skills and experience continued to be a challenge particularly for some services.

One Member expressed concern that 25% of long term absences were related to mental health and queried what was being done to combat this. It was acknowledged that mental health was the primary reason for long term absence, and Members would receive information on the actual number at their meeting in February. HR services worked with anyone who had been absent for more than 21 days citing anxiety, mental health and stress as a reason. This also included supporting Line Managers to assist an employee's return through the provision of reasonable adjustments or access to services needed.

Another Member commented that it was important to get staff back into work as quickly as possible. It was therefore queried what work was being done to enable staff to come back to work with support. It was welcomed that staff felt they were able to identify mental health as an issue. It was noted that there were monthly one hour conversations with staff on topics such as wellbeing. Employees had monthly one to one conversations with Line Managers where wellbeing was discussed. There were also Mental Health First Aiders. The Council's understanding of mental health issues in the workplace had improved to enable reasonable adjustments and support to be provided to assist return to work.

The Council worked closely with Maximus, the Government funded Access to Work service, which specifically supported employees with mental health issues on a one to one basis. The Employee Assistance Programme had also experienced a 20% utilisation rate, which was high compared to other organisations and was seen as a positive measure of engagement with the wellbeing offer. There was training for staff and Line Managers on wellbeing including mental health. The Council would also be introducing Schwatz Rounds which provided a structured forum where staff could come together regularly to discuss the emotional and social aspects of work.

The Chief Executive reported that the Council's total absence for October 2022 to September 2023 was 8.39 days per person, which was a significant reduction and compared reasonably well with other public sector organisations. It was important to note that mental health was also the primary reason for long term absence in most organisations.

Another Member suggested that stress should be included with anxiety, mental health and depression which would increase the percentage. The interventions to tackle this

issue were welcomed but early involvement of occupational health was also highlighted. The Chair suggested that the causes of stress were often linked to the work related environment and evidence was needed, possibly anonymously, as to how they were being addressed. It was noted that there were various tools such as stress MOTs to identify problems, and then different policies and approaches were used to address issues identified.

One Member welcomed the aim to make the workforce more diverse but highlighted the need to guard against unconscious bias. It was noted that this was being addressed via internal education such as recruitment training sessions for Line Managers, which included an element of learning about unconscious bias, and advice on interviews and selection. Although it was also noted that empirical data from Middlesex University on the effectiveness of unconscious bias training demonstrated that it was not that effective. It was also important to note that the Council did not advocate positive discrimination. Instead the Council was removing all barriers to attract a diverse range of applicants so that the best person could be selected for the job.

Another Member queried the effectiveness of Covid and Flu vaccinations on staff absence. It was noted that in line with national guidance, the Council had stopped recording Covid related absence; it was instead recorded as a respiratory illness. Although staff were encouraged to get vaccinations, this was not recorded.

It was resolved unanimously to:

comment and take note of the detail within this report and request any areas for more detailed focus in the full annual workforce report which will be produced for February 2024.

75. Gender Pay Gap Update

Members were reminded that this report containing a detailed analysis of the 2022 Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap data, as published in March 2023, followed on from the report considered in March 2023. It also highlighted planned or ongoing actions to address the gap, which would be considered as part of the People Strategy and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy action plans. Attention was drawn to a summary of the analysis set out in Section 2 of the report and Appendix 1. It was noted that there had been improvements in parity of starting points for men and women, as well as improvements in how closely rated there were in their performance ratings. The data for median gender pay for full time workers by age group for under 40s was good and for over 40s more work was needed to look at length of service and types of roles occupied. Strong messaging would continue within the organisation in relation to staff disclosing ethnicity in order to improve understanding. The next report would be presented to committee in February 2024.

One Member highlighted the continued need to encourage men to enter into the lower paid sectors which were predominately occupied by females such as the caring sector. There was also a need to encourage people in their 40s and 50s to come back into the workforce, as well as encouraging people in areas of the County who did not think they had the skills to become managers. It was noted that the Council was providing compassionate and inclusive leadership training, which covered the need to consider

the imaging used in recruitment and telling of stories to demonstrate diversity at all levels of roles. Work was ongoing with Integrated Care System partners looking at entry routes into health and social care, in particular how to make those careers more engaging and attractive for the male workforce.

Another Member suggested that the Council should consider paying one demographic group less rather than paying another group more in order to achieve parity so as to relieve the pressure on the Council Tax payer. One Member queried the performance of other counties and it was noted that officers would be contacting other comparable authorities where the gap was lower to learn from best practice.

It was resolved unanimously to take note of the information contained in the report.

76. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Nethsingha, and agreed unanimously to exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that the agenda contained exempt information under Paragraphs 1,2,3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed – information relating to any individual, information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), and information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.

77. Cost of Living Increase 2023 – Leadership Pay Scale

The Committee considered a report on the cost-of-living increase 2023: Leadership Pay Scale.

It was resolved:

- that the cost of living increase to the leadership pay scale should be set at a 3% increase to each point on the leadership pay scale and be backdated to 1st October 2023.

78. Council Senior Management Structure -Section 4, Local Government and Housing Act

The Chief Executive presented a formal report, in his statutory capacity as Head of Paid Service and in accordance with Section 4 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, detailing the current and future senior management structures and organisational arrangements.

It was resolved to agree the recommendations set out in the report.

Chair