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Employment Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Employment Committee** held in the **Garden Room, Lewes House, Lewes** on **Wednesday, 20 March 2013** at 10.30am.

Present:

Employer's Side:

Councillors E E J Russell (Chair), R Blackman, C J Butler, S J Gauntlett and A X Smith

Employees' Side:

Mr M Connolly, Mr R Haigh and Mr G Purdye

Also Present:

Ms J Amos-Davidson, Interim Head of HR
Ms A Blanshard, Committee Officer
Ms J Field, Nexus Programme Manager
Ms S McGreal, Regional Organiser, Unison

Minutes

		Action
1	Minutes The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	
2	Apologies for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Members Apologies for absence had been received from Mr N Cannan, Mrs S Harvey and Mr T Watson (Employees' Side).	
3	Urgent Items The Chair advised that she had agreed, in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, that: (a) Report No 57/13 entitled "Nexus Board Project on Workforce Planning"; which was circulated on 13 March 2013; and	

(b) Report No 58/13 entitled "Absence Statistics"; which was circulated on 18 March 2013,

be considered as matters of urgency, in order that the Committee could take its decisions based on the most relevant information which was available.

4 Nexus Board Project on Workforce Planning

The Committee considered Report No 57/13 which consisted of a Nexus Project Initiation Document (PID) regarding the creation of a Workforce Planning Project and that the Interim Head of HR was seeking the agreement of the Employment Committee to assume the role of Project Board.

The Nexus Programme Manager presented the PID to the Committee. She explained that under the arrangements for Programme Nexus it was a requirement for each project to have a Project Board. The proposal for the Employment Committee was that it become the Project Board for the Workforce Planning Project.

The Committee heard that the Nexus Programme Board oversaw all corporate projects. The methodologies used by the programme were related to those of Prince2. Each project that was considered by the Nexus Board had to have a business case, a sponsor, a manager and a project board.

The board for each project was responsible for ensuring that its' project remained valid and in scope. It was also required to ensure that the project was governed properly. This would include:

- Communications planning – for informing staff, reports to Cabinet, communication via PAM (Platform for Achieving More the Council's collaboration software), LDC News (internal newsletter for staff);
- Document control – version control and storage.
- Quality arrangements – who signed off the project work.
- Budget responsibility – who managed the project budget.
- Risk management – the Project Manager would compile a project risk register.

The Nexus Programme Manager explained that the Employment Committee, in its capacity as Workforce Planning Project Board would be responsible for overseeing the project and for giving advice and guidance to the Project Manager.

The Interim Head of HR explained that meetings of the Committee would deal with any issues that might arise during the project. The Committee agreed that the meeting schedule should be led by the Interim Head of HR

in her capacity as Project Manager. The Interim Head of HR informed the Committee that she would endeavour to avoid any duplication of responsibility between the Workforce Planning Board and the Nexus Programme Board; she would be responsible for deciding the appropriate forum for each individual matter. The Committee agreed that their meetings should be the forum for strategic thinking and planning of Human Resources (HR) policy at the Council. It would be for the Committee to decide when matters should be escalated to Cabinet.

The Committee then discussed the Project Deliverables, as shown on page 3 of the report.

The Interim Head of HR advised the Committee that following the initial viewing of the PID, some deliverables within the project should be given their own identity and dealt with individually. As an example she explained that the HR policy and guidance needed updating, she would feedback proposed changes to the Board for their discussion and agreement.

The Employees' Side suggested that there was further work required particularly regarding policy changes and drafting. It requested assurance that the work of the Board would be in line with Unison consultations. This assurance was given by the Interim Head of HR.

Resolved:

4.1 That the role of the Employment Committee as 'Project Board' for the Workforce Planning Project as detailed in Report No 57/13 be agreed;

4.2 That the Interim Head of HR be requested to circulate the business case supporting the Project Initiation Document (PID), contained in Report No 57/13, to all members of the Employment Committee; and

4.3 That the Interim Head of HR be requested to present a detailed plan of the work of the Workforce Planning Board to the next meeting of the Employment Committee.

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5 Absence Statistics

The Committee received Report No 58/13 containing the Council's Absence Statistics for 2012-13. The Interim Head of HR took the Committee through the statistics and explained that there was an urgent need for work to be undertaken in relation to absence management, staff well-being and Health and Safety.

The Interim Head of HR informed the Committee that when using these statistics to benchmark against other Councils it was important to remember that not all equivalent authorities retained a District Services function.

The Interim Head of HR expressed concern that, during the period 1 October 2012 to 31 December 2012, stress and depression accounted for 27.9% of the total absence. This was a subject of discussions between HR and Unison who were planning to work together to find a way to address this.

These discussions could lead to policy reviews as it had been shown elsewhere that even small changes could make a difference to sickness absence levels.

The Interim Head of HR explained that long-term sickness accounted for the majority of absence at the Council. The Committee suggested that the Council should focus its interventions on supporting these staff to return to work, and that it was essential to treat each case sensitively and that the Council did not become prescriptive in its approach to sickness. The Committee expressed how important it was that HR was aware of the root causes of the long-term absences. If HR could identify the causes of long-term absence then the options for intervention and assistance were greater.

The Interim Head of HR suggested that there was a need for management training; she explained that managers needed to be confident in their ability to effectively deal with sickness.

The Committee discussed the need for the Council to do all it could, including reviewing current policies, to target individual sickness and endeavour to reduce absence. The Committee also wanted to emphasise that when a staff member was on long-term absence there were remaining staff working hard to pick up their workload and that this should be appreciated.

The Committee asked if the Council had arrangements to provide staff with access to discounted or sponsored health care schemes. The Interim Head of HR explained that there was currently an arrangement between the Council and one such healthcare scheme but that there was scope to review this in more detail.

The Employees' Side agreed that there was a need for the Council's sickness policy to be revised, but reminded the Committee that it had a duty to assess the equality impact of any proposed changes. They also explained that an increase in mental health issues had been recorded regionally by the Union

Resolved:

- 5.1** That Report No 58/13 be noted; and
- 5.2** The Committee requested that in future these statistics contain more detail, to enable a fuller discussion around targeting solutions. Also that these statistics included reference to the economic costs of sickness absence.

6 Exclusion of the Public and PressResolved:

- 6.1** That, in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the discussion of items 8 and 9 as there was likely to be disclosures of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

7 Flexible Retirement Request

The Committee was informed that there would be a full report submitted to the next meeting of the Employment Committee regarding a request for flexible retirement.

8 Consideration of Matters Raised by the Employees' Side

There were no additional matters raised by the Employees' Side over and above those which had been recorded in the Minutes of this meeting of the Employment Committee.

9 Date of Next MeetingResolved:

- 9.1** That the next meeting of the Committee to be held on Wednesday, 3 April 2012 at 9.30am in Southover 7, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.35 am.

E E J Russell
Chair