



Lewes District Council

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Employment Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Employment Committee** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, Lewes** on **Monday, 29 July 2013** at 10.00am.

Present:

Employer's Side:

Councillors R Blackman (Chair Elect), C J Butler, S J Gauntlett and E C Merry

Employees' Side:

Ms S Harvey, Mr M Jones and Mr G Purdye

Also Present:

Ms J Amos-Davidson, Interim Head of HR
Mr P Beard and Mr M Penfold, ACAS
Ms Z Downton, Committee Officer
Mrs H Knight, HR Manager
Ms S McGreal, Regional Organiser, Unison

Minutes

5 Election of Chair

Resolved:

5.1 That Councillor Blackman be elected Chair of the Committee for this meeting.

6 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of the additions made by the Employees' Side as follows;

6(a) "The Employees' Side expressed concern over the worrying trend in staff sickness due to stress and depression and commented that the Council should not lose sight of workplace health, safety and welfare issues

Action

arising from the changes.”

and a copy of which is also contained in the Minute Book.

7 Apologies for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Members

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors E E J Russell and A X Smith (Employer’s Side) and Mr N Cannan, Mr M Connolly and Mr R Haigh (Employees’ Side). Councillor Merry declared that she was substituting for Councillor Russell. Mr M Jones declared that he was substituting for Mr Connolly for the Employees’ Side.

8 Best Practice in Joint Consultation Arrangements

The Interim Head of HR explained she had invited Mr Beard and Mr Penfold from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), to facilitate a general discussion on the Council’s joint consultation arrangements with the trade union and its representatives. It was noted that the Council recognised one trade union, namely Unison.

Mr Penfold, ACAS, prompted the discussion by asking for feedback on the effectiveness of the current Council’s consultation arrangements. The Interim Head of HR explained that the order in which discussions took place and the process for consultation that lead up to decision-making was not clear and not always effective. Ms McGreal, Unison, felt the process needed defining and better planning, including the timetabling of meetings to enable Unison to have meaningful input. The Committee supported the objective that the timetabling of discussions was fundamental.

The Employees’ Side commented that at times matters were escalated to senior management or Human Resources (HR) level when they could be dealt with at a lower level of management.

The Committee suggested that perhaps some managers were uncertain about when and how to engage in dialogue with Unison, or feared a breach of protocol. It was felt that this could lead to disempowering managers. The Committee supported discussions taking place at a much earlier stage, particularly where decisions may lead to changes which directly affect staff. Clarification would be needed to guide managers on when and how to inform, engage with or formally consult Unison.

Ms McGreal responded that discussions with Unison would not always need to be formal; Unison representatives could be involved in matters on an informal and, in some situations, confidential basis. The Employees’ Side added that it was important to ensure the role of a rep should be clear and remain separate and distinct from an individual’s role as a manager or within a team or staff group.

Mr Penfold, ACAS, suggested that a review of current consultative arrangements and a possible review of the role and remit of the Employment Committee would be a good starting point. It was noted that any changes would require a change to the Council’s Constitution. This

could be achieved through a facilitated joint working group where all issues, concerns and areas for improvement could be discussed. The objective of the group being to establish a clear and more efficient and effective process for engagement and consultation between Unison, managers and the Employer's Side on staffing and industrial relations issues.

The Committee considered it was worthwhile for the Interim Head of HR to pursue a proper review of the Council's joint consultative arrangements, in consultation with Unison, and thanks were expressed to Mr Beard and Mr Penfold for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

8.1 That the Interim Head of HR be requested to initiate the project on reviewing the Council's joint consultative arrangements, in consultation with Unison, and present detailed proposals to the Nexus Programme Board; and

Interim
Head of
HR

8.2 That the Interim Head of HR be requested to report back to the Employment Committee on the progress of the review of the Council's joint consultative arrangements, as appropriate.

Interim
Head of
HR

9 Draft Staff Survey Questions

The Committee considered Report No 125/13 which presented to councillors the proposed questions for the 2013 Staff Survey.

The Interim Head of HR explained that it was part of the Council's Corporate Plan to carry out the survey, which had last been conducted in 2010. This was the first opportunity for members of the Committee and the Employees' Side representatives to see the draft questions and to comment. The Employees' Side welcomed the opportunity to have further discussions on specific questions before the survey was issued.

The Interim Head of HR highlighted that she had been made aware that the draft equalities monitoring questions were not in line with the Council's Equality Policy and therefore the categories in that section would be amended accordingly.

A discussion followed regarding the confidentiality aspect of the survey. Concern was expressed that there was a potential risk for individuals to be identified from their responses to the equality monitoring questions, especially if they worked in smaller teams. Suggestions were made by the Committee and Employees' Side representatives as follows:

- It would be better to move the 'Confidentiality Promise' statement to the beginning of the survey, rather than towards the end as this would encourage people to participate in the survey by assuring the confidentiality of their responses.
- The inclusion of questions relating to Agile Working would be beneficial to ascertain people's feelings in general about the new

working arrangements and practices.

- The addition of some questions from the 2010 survey would enable useful cross-comparative analysis.
- Splitting the equalities monitoring questions from the rest of the survey could encourage a better response rate and would better protect confidentiality. Equalities monitoring could then be collected separately at a later date.
- Further consideration of 'free-form' responses would enable 'richer' data and give staff the opportunity to give further explanation and information. This feedback could be collated by theme to enable useful analysis.

In response to a councillor's question, the Interim Head of HR confirmed that the survey would be carried out electronically using the Survey Monkey online facility. Those members of staff who did not have access to IT equipment would be issued with printed surveys which could then be sent to HR for data inputting. The Employees' Side commented that there might be some merit in giving the task of data inputting to an independent person. It also repeated concerns that non office-based staff were being disadvantaged by the lack of IT facilities provided to them. The Committee also felt that it might be useful to pilot the survey on a few individuals before circulating to all staff.

Resolved:

- 9.1** That the Interim Head of HR take into consideration those comments and suggestions made by members of the Employment Committee and Employees' Side representatives at this meeting relating to the Draft Staff Survey, and consult further with Unison; and
- 9.2** That Report No 125/13 and subsequent action be noted.

Interim
Head of
HR

10 Update on HR Team Staffing

The Interim Head of HR informed the Committee that Helen Knight had been appointed as acting HR Manager, initially for a 6 month period. She also advised that Jill Yeates (previously HR Officer) had been appointed as the Council's Health and Safety Officer, following a vacancy in that post. The Health and Safety Officer role, initially for one year on a full-time basis, would focus on a review of the Council's Health and Safety policy, including scoping and setting priorities. Vacancies left due to both these appointments would be back-filled.

Ms McGreal, Regional Unison, responded that Unison had previously raised concerns over insufficient resources in the Council's HR department, particularly during a period of significant change, and that the new appointments would go some way to meeting that need.

11 Update on Nexus Workforce Planning Project

The Interim Head of HR reminded those present that the Employment Committee had agreed previously to become the Project Board for the Workforce Planning Project and was therefore responsible for overseeing the project. The Interim Head of HR, as Project Manager, updated the Committee on the various workstreams underway, such as the forming of staff-led focus groups to support plans for the Council's new customer-facing structure, staff survey, engagement with stakeholders and directorship appointments. Training had also been offered to staff on diversity awareness and on managing staff remotely.

Applications for the Council's Voluntary Severance & Early Retirement Scheme were still being considered and indications were that significant savings had been made as a result of the scheme. In response to a request from the Employees' Side, the Internal Head of HR confirmed she would provide data on the uptake of the scheme and the savings achieved to date.

Interim
Head of
HR

Local employment initiatives, such as apprenticeships, were also being planned. It was noted that Peter Sharp, Regeneration Project Manager, was responsible for the apprenticeship scheme and a part-time Project Officer had been appointed to assist him. Ms McGreal responded that discussions with Unison about the implementation of an internal apprenticeship scheme would be welcomed. The Interim Head of HR agreed to ensure there was appropriate liaison with Peter Sharp regarding this.

Interim
Head of
HR

In response to recent job advertisements relating to the new reception area at Southover House, Lewes, the Employees' Side asked to be involved in dialogue with management over the proposed structure and operation of the reception service. The HR Manager explained that the Corporate Management Team had agreed to the internal advertising of the posts (which were both subject to job evaluation) and those individuals most likely to be affected had been contacted beforehand. The Interim Head of HR and HR Manager confirmed that the Project Manager would be asked to liaise further with Unison regarding this.

Interim
Head of
HR/HR
Manager

Resolved:

- 11.1** That the update and progress of the Nexus Workforce Planning Project be noted.

12 Exclusion of the Public and Press

Resolved:

- 12.1** 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 10 and 11 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.

13 Consideration of Matters Raised by the Employees' Side

The Employees' Side asked whether there was any data available on how many staff had used the counselling service and on the nature of those enquiries. The HR Manager responded that numbers could be provided to Unison although, as this was a confidential service provided by an independent organisation, the nature of enquiries were not known and could not be tracked.

HR
Manager

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

14 Consideration of Health and Safety Matters Raised by the Employees' Side

The Employees' Side advised the Committee that they had recently raised a number of health and safety related issues primarily to do with the management and operation of Southover House, Lewes. Those matters had included signage during the building works, fire safety, first aid arrangements and specific building issues. The Interim Head of HR explained that those matters raised had been taken seriously and were being addressed.

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

15 Date of Next MeetingResolved:

- 15.1** That the next meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on Monday, 14 October 2013 at 10.00am in the Ditchling Room, Southover House, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 11.25am.

R Blackman
Chair Elect