

## Employment Committee

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Employment Committee** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Monday, 8 December 2014** at 10.00am.

**Present:**

**Employer's Side:**

Councillors E C Merry (Chair), S J Gauntlett, D Gray, J Stockdale and A X Smith

**Employees' Side:**

Mr M Connolly, Ms S Harvey and Mr G Purdye

**Also Present:**

Ms B Cooke, Head of Organisational Development  
 Ms Z Downton, Committee Officer  
 Ms S McGreal, Regional Organiser, Unison  
 Ms Jill Yeates, Health and Safety Officer

### Minutes

	Action
<p><b>17 Minutes</b></p> <p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.</p> <p>In response to a question by the Employees' Side in relation to Minute No 9, the Head of Organisational Development explained that the results of the annual staff survey 2014 were to be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Management Team later that week.</p>	
<p><b>18 Apology for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Members</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor M P Chartier (Employer's Side) and Mrs L Plant (Employees' Side). Councillor Stockdale declared he was substituting for Councillor Chartier.</p>	
<p><b>19 Sickness Report</b></p> <p>The Committee received Report No 180/14 which provided an update on the Council's sickness figures for the period 1 July 2014 to 30 September</p>	

2014.

The sickness figures for the reporting period had been broken down into quarters and by departments, and were set out within the background papers to the Report.

The Head of Organisational Development explained that feedback on the updated presentation style of the data was welcomed. She drew the Committees' attention to the Quarter 2 sickness figure of 2.15 days per full time employee on page 16, and advised that there was a downward trend in the sickness figures.

In response to a councillor's question regarding the difference in days lost due to sickness within the Housing department over Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 reporting periods, the Head of Organisational Development advised that where there was a disparity between figures, that an explanatory note would be added in future reporting.

HR  
Manager

In response to a suggestion by the Employees' Side, the Head of Organisational Development explained that data on short-term and long-term sickness trends would be highlighted when reporting on sickness figures in future.

HR  
Manager

The Employees' Side further suggested that it would be helpful to have more detail on the reasons for sickness absences. The Employees' Side also sought reassurance that managers were being appropriately trained and supported in monitoring and managing staff sickness, especially with regards to the Council's equalities duties and responsibilities. The Head of Organisational Development responded that Human Resources (HR) officers had regular meetings with Heads of Service, and that sickness management and attendance matters were discussed as standard agenda items. In response to a request from the Committee, she confirmed that she would provide a copy of the agenda for those particular meetings to the Employees' Side.

Head of Org.  
Development

The Chair informed the Committee that the HR Manager had confirmed during their discussions that work on targeting intervention to prevent sickness was being carried out by HR in liaison with managers.

Resolved:

**19.1** That Report No 180/14.

## **20 Accidents to Staff from April to October 2014**

The Committee received Report No 181/14 which presented the statistics on accidents reported at the Council between 1 April 2014 and 31 October 2014.

There had been 42 accidents during the reporting period and a breakdown of the data and statistics on those accidents were set out under paragraphs

2.2 to 2.6 of the Report.

The Health and Safety Officer explained that it was anticipated that there would be double the number of accidents reported in comparison with 2013/2014 figures. She added that her assumption was partly due to the raised profile of health and safety within the organisation and managers had been trained in the importance of reporting accidents, and not necessarily that the number of accidents occurring had doubled. The Committee suggested that it would be helpful to ascertain from staff directly whether they had been encouraged to report accidents, rather than relying on assumption. The Employees' Side asked whether questions on awareness of health and safety had been included in the recent annual staff survey, although it was thought by the Head of Organisational Development that it had not.

The Committee highlighted that it was not only about reporting on accidents, but whether there was a strategy in place to prevent accidents reoccurring. The Health and Safety Officer responded that she had investigated prevention measures with the relevant departments and followed up agreed actions, in cases where a pattern of similar accidents had occurred.

The Employees' Side brought to the Committees' attention that Unison had been actively pursuing to ensure that up to date and regular risk assessments with staff were being completed. The Employees' Side felt that the system was improving but there was still some way to go. Unison encouraged a proactive and responsible approach to risk assessments so that the process was not always carried out retrospectively. The Health and Safety Officer advised that the associated risk assessment was always reviewed after an accident had been reported.

The Committee discussed litigation matters, for example where legal action had been pursued as a result of an accident occurring in the workplace. The Health and Safety Officer responded that in the event of this happening, she worked closely with the Council's Insurance Officer and she would consider including a summary of litigation matters in future reports when it was appropriate to do so, although she added that such instances did not occur that often.

The Health and Safety Officer advised that she would include additional information in future reporting on repeat accidents and near misses to help the Committee better understand the follow-up actions taken by the Council after accidents had occurred.

Resolved:

**20.1** That Report No 181/14 be noted.

**21 Joint Health and Safety Forum Activities from April to October 2014**

The Committee received Report No 182/14 which provided an update on the main activities of the Joint Health and Safety Forum from 1 April 2014 to

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31 October 2014.

The Forum was set up to be part of the necessary safety culture change within the Council by bringing staff and management issues for discussion and agreement on action to be taken. The Forum would provide written reports to the Employment Committee for further discussion.

The Health and Safety Officer explained that the Forum was currently meeting on a monthly basis. The Forum had worked to raise the profile of health and safety within the Council through the internal training of all managers over the Summer, provided jointly by management and Unison representatives. She added that the Forum was also working on updating various existing policies relating to matters such as Fire and Emergency, asbestos, Lone Working, and driving Council-owned vehicles. The Committee noted that it was important and beneficial that the Forum met on a monthly basis.

The Health and Safety Officer provided more information regarding the Well-being month, in response to a councillor's question. She explained that the event, held throughout October which coincided with existing annual national events relating to well-being matters, covered all aspects of well-being and offered talks, workshops, information and complimentary therapy sessions for staff. The Employees' Side explained that Unison was heavily involved in the organisation of the event which raised awareness on issues such as stress, alcohol, financial advice and which signposted to employees where further help and assistance could be accessed. The Employees' Side informed the Committee that the feedback from staff was that it had been well received.

The Employees' Side advised the Committee that the health and safety training carried out jointly by management and Unison representatives had been well received and valued by those who attended. The Employees' Side was pleased to inform councillors that it had almost doubled the number of health and safety representatives across the Council, which now included representation within the Waste and Recycling department.

In response to a question by the Employees' Side relating to paragraph 2.11 on the purchase of two defibrillators, one to be located at Southover House, Lewes and one at Fort Road, Newhaven, the Health and Safety Officer confirmed that it was anticipated that both would be installed within the next couple of weeks. The Employees' Side thanked the Health and Safety Officer for organising the provision of the defibrillators, and highlighted that it had been done at a relatively low cost to the Council. Following a discussion, the Health and Safety Officer advised that she would look into the accessibility and practical issues of locking the defibrillator to be sited outside Southover House. She explained further that all first aiders had been trained on how to use the defibrillators and she would look into whether it was essential for all staff to be given training on how to use them. The Committee noted that the defibrillators had instructions and were designed to be used by anyone without the need for

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prior training.

Resolved:

**20.1** That Report No 182/14 be noted.

## **22 Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved:

**22.1** That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the discussion of items 9 and 10 on the Agenda 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.

## **23 Consideration of Matters Raised by the Employees' Side**

Ms McGreal, Regional Organiser, Unison brought to the Committee's attention that restructuring was ongoing in certain areas of the organisation. Unison suggested that, as the proposals were affecting some staff but not all, there was a need for a corporate message to be sent across the whole organisation to raise awareness. Unison had been made aware that some individuals whose jobs were potentially affected by the restructure proposals were stressed, had high levels of anxiety and felt that they were not being valued for their hard work. Staff had also reported to Unison their concern that the restructuring consultation exercises would not be carried out in a meaningful way. Ms McGreal explained that Unison acknowledged the need and rationale for restructure but she highlighted that there was a feeling of lack of empathy and care for staff. She explained further that rumours circulating were causing misunderstandings and further anxiety over the future security of individual's jobs. Ms McGreal added that Unison raised these concerns with the Employment Committee and through the Joint Health and Safety Forum to ensure that the Council avoided compulsory redundancies where possible.

The Committee responded that it did not wish for staff to be anxious during times of change. The Head of Organisational Development advised the Committee that restructuring proposals affected Service Delivery and Business Strategy and Performance areas within the Council and that the HR department would continue to provide support to staff affected. She explained that the managers for both consultation exercises had made it clear that the process was genuine and purposeful and would be carried out in a transparent way, adding that staff would have the opportunity to comment on and respond to proposals. The Employees' Side requested, in terms of general principles that a consistent approach be taken where two consultations were being carried out at the same time. It was noted that discussion on the matter would be continued at the next meeting between HR and Unison representatives.

In response to a suggestion by the Employees' Side, the Head of Organisational Development advised that she would provide feedback on the consultations and restructuring within the Council to the Committee. It was agreed that an item be added to the agenda for the next meeting of the Employment Committee relating to an update on the ongoing departmental restructure within the Council.

Head of Org.  
Development  
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**24 Consideration of Health and Safety 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 the meeting of the Employment Committee.

**25 Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved:

- 25.1** That the next meeting of the Employment Committee scheduled to be held on Monday, 23 February 2015 at 10.00am in the Ditchling Room, Southover House, Lewes be noted.

**All to  
note**

The meeting ended at 11.00am.

E C Merry  
Chair