

## Employment Committee

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Employment Committee** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015** at 10.00am.

**Present:**

**Employer's Side:**

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

**Employees' Side:**

Ms S Harvey, Mr M Busby, Mr G Purdye and Ms L Plant

**Also Present:**

Ms Z Downton, Committee Officer  
 Ms R Brittle, Committee Officer  
 Ms S McGreal, Regional Organiser, Unison  
 Ms J Yeates, Health and Safety Officer  
 Ms H Knight, Human Resources Manager  
 Mr S Reid, Head of Customer Services

### Minutes

		<b>Action</b>
<b>26</b>	<p><b>Minutes</b></p> <p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.</p>	
<b>27</b>	<p><b>Apology for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Members</b></p> <p>An apology for absence had been received from Ms B Cooke, Head of Organisational Development.</p>	
<b>28</b>	<p><b>Staff Survey 2014</b></p> <p>The Committee received Report No 31/15 containing the results from the Annual Staff Survey which was completed in 2014.</p> <p>The survey questions had been approved at the Employment Committee meeting on 21 July 2014. The breakdown of the data relating to the answers</p>	

to the questions was set out on pages 5 – 40 in Appendix 1 of the Report.

The Committee expressed concern that the headline on page 6 stated that there had been a response rate of 49%, which was lower than expected. There was also concern over the way in which the data had been measured with the results being shown as a percentage of a percentage.

The Human Resources Manager responded that there had been a lot of encouragement given to staff to complete the survey. She also responded that the return rate had actually increased since 2010. The Human Resources Manager advised that she would welcome any further suggestions on how to improve the response rate, including providing possible further incentives, and that she would keep the Committee informed of future plans to improve the response rate. The questions for the 2015 survey would be brought to the Employment Committee by the Human Resources Manager prior to the survey being finalised and sent to staff.

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The Committee queried why there was such a varied response rate between departments. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that varied responses would be followed up with the assistance of managers, which would include managers “buddying up” with each other to get independent viewpoints on the reasons behind the response rates between different departments.

The Committee suggested that the questions in next year’s survey should be consistent with this year’s questions to enable the results to be compared. It commented the Council had gone through restructure changes during the period of the survey, and that the results were a measure of the staff feeling relating to those changes. The Committee queried the use of the answer option “neither agree nor disagree” and suggested that this option may have led to non-committal responses. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that the questions next year would be consistent, and reported that the key messages taken from the survey included increasing the number of team meetings and appraisals, promoting use of the Counselling service and improving communications relating to the restructure changes.

The Committee noted that there was a strong variation of results between Waste and Recycling and other departments. Ms McGreal, Unison’s Regional Organiser, highlighted that the survey took place in October 2014 at which point the restructure changes had only just happened in the Waste and Recycling department. As such, the survey did not reflect staff feeling regarding the changes in all departments.

The Human Resources Manager clarified that the survey was sent out on 17 October 2015 and collated until 7 November 2014, during which time it was not just the Waste and Recycling department that had experienced the structure change but also the Service Delivery department.

The Employees’ Side expressed concern regarding the response rate and advised that it would have hoped staff would feel more engaged. It also

raised concern relating to the confidentiality of the survey and whether answers could be traced back to individual staff.

The Human Resources Manager confirmed that the results were confidential and could not be traced back to the individual staff member. She also confirmed that there was a confidentiality statement at the start of the survey and in the covering email. The Committee suggested that, if staff remained uncertain, it would be helpful in future to reiterate the confidentiality of the survey.

The Employees' Side expressed concern over the number of people who responded that they had experienced or witnessed bullying and/or harassment, particularly in the Waste and Recycling department. The Committee added that it was pleased that people felt they could answer honestly regarding bullying and harassment, but that it was also concerned about the high numbers reported.

The Human Resources Manager highlighted the work done as part of the recent Dignity at Work Campaign. She commented that it was important to clarify the definition of what bullying was but that the results of the survey would not be disregarded. She confirmed that she would report back to the Committee on this issue as part of the follow up action plan. The Employees' Side confirmed that it would also be working with members with regard to tackling bullying and harassment.

In response to a query from the Employees' Side, the Human Resources Manager confirmed that an Equality Analysis had been carried out on the questions but had yet to be undertaken for the survey results. She confirmed that it would be completed as part of the action plan.

The Employees' Side commented that the "other" box used to clarify the types of bullying or harassment could be more specific. The Committee suggested adding more guidelines to the survey to encourage completion of an "open text" box.

The Committee added that the Report had provided an insight into the organisation and that it supported the encouragement of more staff to respond to the survey.

Resolved:

**28.1** That Report No 33/15 be noted.

## **29 Facilities Policy**

The Committee considered Report No 32/15 which set out and sought approval for the implementation of the Facilities Agreement between the Council and Unison. The agreement ensured that Unison representatives had reasonable time off in order to undertake their duties efficiently and effectively on behalf of their members, and that Unison representatives had adequate facilities to carry out their roles.

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A new Local Government Transparency Code had been introduced which required councils to be proactive when publishing certain categories of information. The intention was to hold local councils to account about the services they provided.

The new Facilities Agreement would ensure the Council was compliant with the Code and with ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) best practice guidance. The breakdown of the agreement was set out on pages 43 – 50 in Appendix 1 of the Report. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that the Council had worked closely with Unison on the agreement.

The Committee asked whether all workplaces are covered by at least one representative as mentioned on page 44 of the agenda. In response, the Employees' Side confirmed that there was not currently a representative covering each workplace but that Unison were working to resolve this.

Resolved:

**29.1** That Report No 32/15 be noted; and

**29.2** That the implementation of the Facilities Agreement, as set out in report no 32/15 be approved.

**30 Accidents to Staff from April to December 2014**

The Committee received Report No 33/15 which detailed statistics on the accidents reported between 1 April 2014 to 31 December 2014. The Employment Committee had previously requested that this standing item be reinstated on the agenda.

There had been 57 accidents during the reporting period and a breakdown of data and statistics on those accidents was set out under paragraphs 2.2 - 2.7 of the Report.

The Committee noted and welcomed the extra information in the Report from the Health and Safety Officer. It expressed concern over staff experiencing accidents due to broken glass in refuse bags and asked how this would be tackled.

The Health and Safety Officer responded that it was likely that the number of accidents had not increased but that the level of reporting had. The Health and Safety Officer and the Head of Customer Services confirmed that ways of tackling the hazard of broken glass, and of raising awareness of the issue with staff and members of the public, were being investigated

In response to a query from the Committee, the Health and Safety Officer stated that it was a possibility that there had been an increase of dog bites to staff members, but that it could also be that people were more willing to report it. She further stated that dog handling courses in how to recognise the danger were being organised for staff at risk

The Health and Safety Officer confirmed that Team Leaders were encouraging staff to also report near misses more as these were not reported as much as accidents.

**Resolved:**

**30.1** That Report No 33/15 be noted.

**31 Customer Service Hub Update**

The Committee received the oral update from the Head of Customer Services which consisted of an overview of the recent changes within Customer Services.

The Head of Customer Services explained that the Customer Service Hub was introduced to improve areas of customer services, following customer feedback. He continued that different departments had now been brought under one remit and that by doing this, frontline staff had been brought together in a more supportive role. The Head of Customer Services added that the Hub had given the opportunity to staff to gain new skills and knowledge with cross training across departments. The results so far had been impressive with waiting times halved, response times to correspondence shortened and staff knowledge expanded.

The Head of Customer Services confirmed that the Hub will take ownership of the new web site, and will be instrumental in the roll out of the new telephony system.

He explained that the phone numbers and email contacts on the website had been streamlined and there was now more staff trained to answer queries across a range of departments. The Head of Customer Services also explained that customers were not being transferred between departments and the service provided had improved as a result.

The Human Resources Manager confirmed that staff were doing the same jobs but in different areas, and that there would be more development opportunities arising from this.

The Head of Customer Services reported that the results and feedback would be measured not only from the telephone interactions but also via the web site. He commented that currently the web site did not encourage feedback and that the new web site would put more onus on the public to perform transactions online. The Head of Customer Services also commented that use of a feedback survey was being explored.

The Employees' Side raised concern that the changes in the Customer Services Hub were moving forward without consultation with Unison. The Human Resources Manager responded that Unison had been invited to initial meetings relating to the changes and that the timeline and plans had been shared with Unison.

The Head of Customer Services informed the Committee that Unison and

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managers would be informed shortly about which service area staff will be assigned to. The Head of Customer Services was requested to update the Committee on this matter at a future meeting.

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The Employees' Side raised concern over the introduction of structure changes as the speed of the changes would not give staff adequate time to prepare. It advised that this would lead to increased pressure on staff to learn new areas of work and systems quickly

The Head of Customer Services clarified that the majority of staff would continue in their same roles from 1 April 2015, but may come under new managers. Staff would be given support depending on individual training and learning requirements.

The Committee commented that staff morale was important and that, along with competence, needed to be monitored. The Committee thanked the Head of Customer Services for his informative update.

**Resolved:**

- 31.1 That the oral update of the Head of Customer Services be noted.

**32 Recent Service Delivery Update**

The Committee received the oral update from the Human Resources Manager on the recent Service Delivery restructure.

The Human Resources Manager began by explaining that with the introduction of "One District, One Council" there had been two new Directors and six Heads of Service appointed. The Service Delivery restructure had affected 35 members of staff. She confirmed that there had been meetings with all the managers over the period of October and November 2014 requesting their comments on the restructure.

The Human Resources Manager continued that the 35 staff affected by the changes had been ring-fenced for 30 new roles, with 10 people who had been affected by the changes choosing to take voluntary redundancy.

She recognised the magnitude of the change within the Council and informed the Committee that all 35 staff had received support during the restructure from the Human Resources Department.

Sarah McGreal, Regional Organiser for Unison, stated that Unison had concerns over the process the Council had adopted while implementing organisational change, and that the Union had raised these issues previously in other meetings but that they wanted to bring it to the attention of the Committee also. She added that the generic approach that had been adopted meant that there had been a loss of recognition of skills, and that

the impact on services had not been acknowledged.

Ms McGreal also added that there had been a lack of risk assessment of the impact of the changes on the remaining posts and that there had not been proper consideration of moving staff into new posts. She commented that there were differences between the selection processes used in various restructures, and that there were concerns over the job evaluation process and lack of justification for downgrading posts. Ms commented the Committee that Unison had concerns over the use of the restructure as a way to change and reduce terms and conditions.

Ms McGreal continued that there had been a failure to recognise redeployment needs and a lack of proper consideration for the application of pay protection or to recognise the stress that the process had put on staff. She advised that Unison felt that appropriate impact assessments should be undertaken and considered at an early stage. The Committee requested that responses to the concerns raised by Ms McGreal be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

**Resolved:**

- 32.1** That the oral update of the Human Resources Manager be noted.

**33 Exclusion of the Public and Press**

**Resolved:**

- 33.1** 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.

**34 Consideration of Matters Raised by the Employees' Side**

**Resolved:**

- 34.1** That 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.

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

The Employees' Side commented that it wished to continue to have proactive discussions relating to mental health, stress and managing stress and to work towards a greater understanding within the Council of mental health issues.

The Committee commented that this should be done in partnership

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between Councillors, Officers, Managers and the Employees' Side.

**Resolved:**

**35.1** That the matters raised by the Employees' side be noted.

**36 Date of Next Meeting**

**Resolved:**

**36.1** That the next meeting of the Employment Committee provisionally scheduled to be held on Monday, 1st June 2015 at 10.00am in the Telscombe Room, Southover House, Lewes be noted.

**All to  
note**

The meeting ended at 11:15am

E C Merry  
Chair