

## Employment Committee

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Employment Committee** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Monday, 13 June 2016** at 10.00am.

### **Present:**

#### **Employer's Side:**

Councillors J Peterson (Chair), M Chartier and E Merry

#### **Employees' Side:**

Mr M Busby and Mrs L Plant

### **Also Present:**

Ms B Cooke, Head of Organisational Development  
Ms Z Downton, Committee Officer  
Ms S Hardy, HR Business Partner  
Mrs H Knight, HR Manager  
Ms S McGreal, Regional Organiser, Unison  
Ms Jill Yeates, Health and Safety Officer

### **In Attendance:**

Mrs J Norman, Committee Officer

## Minutes

		<b>Action</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Minutes</b>  The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	
<b>2</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Members</b>  Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors P Franklin and S Gauntlett (Employer's Side) and Mr M Connolly, Ms S Harvey and Mr G	

Purdye (Employees' Side).

### **3 Staff Survey 2016**

The Committee considered Report No 71/16 which presented an update regarding the results from the Annual Staff Survey completed in October/November 2015.

The Head of Organisational Development highlighted the broad headline data, under Section 3 of the Report, taken from the results of the Staff Survey. The survey results and data analysis were detailed in full under the background paper to the Report. The Head of Organisational Development explained that the collated information had been discussed by Lewes District Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) in early January 2016 prior to being circulated to eCMT (extended CMT) for the Heads of Services to note.

The Head of Organisational Development also explained that Lewes District Council's survey had provided an excellent format and basic template for the Eastbourne Borough Council staff survey that was launched in February/March 2016. She reported that the delay in presenting the Lewes District results to the Committee was regrettable but was in part due to gaining both Councils' results in order to conduct a 'compare and contrast' analysis at the request of the new shared Chief Executive, Rob Cottrill to understand where there were notable similarities and differences in responses for similar questions between Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils.

The Head of Organisational Development explained that the merged Corporate Management Team, formed as part of the continuing Joint Transformation Programme, would look at both Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Council's results. She informed councillors of the proposal to bring the comparative data and resulting action plan back to the Committee for consideration.

The Employees' Side raised concern that the delay in publishing the results and action plan could make it difficult for staff to re-engage in the process. The Employees' Side perceived the survey as a tick-box exercise rather than providing qualitative data. It questioned whether the use of an independent survey host would be preferable for next year's survey, rather than using Survey Monkey, as that might increase staff participation and their trust in the anonymity of their responses.

The Head of Organisational Development drew the Committee's attention to the positive aspects of the survey results, such as high appraisal rates and the regularity of team meetings. She explained that areas which needed to be addressed, such as the visibility of senior staff and staff confidence levels would form part of a future action plan.

The Committee discussed the 53% response rate to the survey and the need to overcome the reasons why members of staff were reluctant to

participate in the survey, or to answer particular questions. The Committee noted that those who completed the survey manually were able to avoid answering some questions, while electronic survey respondents had to answer certain questions before they could move onto the next section of the survey.

Ms McGreal, Regional Organiser, Unison, highlighted that across the service areas all but two had dropped in their response rate compared to the last survey. She added that the positive spin in the way in which some of the results had been collated and presented could make people disengage from the process if the results were not truly reflective.

The Committee requested if it would be beneficial next time to see throughout the collated data an additional column on each table to indicate the actual number of people who answered. The Committee commented that presenting the results as a percentage skewed the overall results and made it difficult to interpret a true reflection of the responses.

The highest rates of disagreement on whether staff thought that top management were regularly visible and accessible had been within the Waste Services department and by those who had submitted responses where their service area was not stated, ie. via paper copy, as detailed on page 11 of the Agenda. The Employees' Side highlighted to the Committee that ways to effectively communicate specifically with the Waste and Recycling department were ongoing, given that those staff did not work at Southover House, Lewes, where senior management were based.

The Employees' Side also highlighted that there was a need for a clear change management policy, as raised by Unison at a meeting of the Joint Forum as part of the Joint Transformation Programme. The Head of Organisational Development confirmed that a two week deadline had been set following that meeting for a combined Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Council's Change Management Policy to be drafted ready for consultation and that Unison would be fully included in that process.

The survey results had indicated that 52% of the respondents felt that people were treated with fairness, dignity and respect, as detailed on page 21 of the Agenda. The Employees' Side expressed concern as to why 48% of respondents therefore did not agree and why the responses did not shed light on the reasons why. The Head of Organisational Development responded that the issue of the cultural aspects of fairness, dignity and respect in the workplace could be taken forward as an action point to be addressed.

In relation to the section of the survey on discrimination, harassment and bullying, the Employees' Side raised concern over the numbers of staff who had experienced, witnessed, challenged or reported bullying, given that the Council had a zero tolerance approach to bullying. A discussion followed on the ways in which bullying in the workplace was reported either formally or informally. The HR Manager confirmed that HR had not received 14 formal reports, as indicated by the survey results and there was a need to

HR  
Manager

understand how people had reported their experiences. The Employees' Side suggested that staff were coming to Unison to share their experiences but were perhaps not then following this up formally with HR. The Employees' Side added that there were perhaps more staff affected who had chosen not to answer the relevant question. The HR Manager clarified that the question on bullying was only optional for those who completed the survey manually.

The Employees' Side queried how the Council was monitoring workloads, in relation to the survey question on whether staff had felt pressured to work long hours. The Head of Organisational Development responded that within the last year managers had been trained to undertake more pastoral aspects in their supervision, such as ensuring staff were taking a lunch break and working reasonable hours.

The Committee noted that the responses to the question on whether staff had felt supported by their immediate manager were mostly positive, as detailed on page 28 of the Agenda. The Employees' Side added that although mostly positive, staff were not able to raise any concerns with their immediate manager if they did not have the confidence that they would be supported, which linked in with the need for a clear change management policy. Ms McGreal informed the Committee that Unison had been made aware of a perception amongst staff that the Joint Transformation Programme was a takeover bid by Eastbourne Borough Council, partly as Lewes District staff had been informed of the proposal that their employer would become Eastbourne Borough Council, rather than Lewes District Council. The Head of Organisational Development responded that staff could be signposted as to where to find the information and communications previously circulated in relation to the Joint Transformation Programme in lieu of the next steps which were to be decided at a meeting of Full Council in July 2016.

Head of Org.  
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Ms McGreal suggested that discussions with Unison should take place in terms of the questions being asked in next year's Staff Survey in order to gain meaningful responses.

The Head of Organisational Development would take the matters raised by the Committee and Employees' side in relation to the Staff Survey results to eCMT and Heads of Services.

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Development

Resolved:

- 3.1** That the broad headlines of the Staff Survey 2016 results, as set out under Section 3 of Report No 71/16, be noted; and
- 3.2** That it be agreed that the Head of Organisational Development present a further report at the next meeting of the Employment Committee which will provide an update on areas of similarity and difference compared to the results of a recent Eastbourne Borough Council Staff Survey, along with a Joint Action Plan to

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harness areas of good practice and address areas of concern.

#### **4 Sickness Report**

The Committee received Report No 72/16 which provided an update on the Council's sickness figures for the period 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2016.

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 HR Manager highlighted, under paragraph 2.5 of the Report, that although there had been a reduction in the average sickness absence during Quarter 4 of 2015/2016 in comparison with Quarter 3, the Council had exceeded its overall target of 9 days per full time employee for 2015/2016. She explained that she would expect to see a reduction in figures for the coming reporting period and added that close scrutiny and management by line managers and HR of sickness absence continued to be a priority within the organisation. In response to a query by the Committee, the HR Manager explained that, although the Council had not met its target and the figures were high, those figures had remained stable for the past 6 or 7 years as a result of continuing work alongside managers.

The HR Manager highlighted that, in conjunction with the launch of the new Attendance Management Policy and review of the Sickness Policy in collaboration with Unison, the organisation would be introducing a new Wellbeing programme across both Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils to include emphasis on a more holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of staff.

The Employees' Side raised concern in relation to the way sickness absences were currently being managed in the Waste and Recycling service area. Ms McGreal, Regional Organiser for Unison, explained that due to previous management failure to correctly follow sickness absence procedures, some members of the Waste and Recycling staff were now part of a catch up process and felt a lack of support by the HR department as they perceived they were being hurried through the procedure. Ms McGreal added that the situation was likely to cause further sickness absence as a result of stress that some members of staff had reported. The Employees' Side added that as there had been no back to work interviews conducted for some time, members of staff were questioning the validity of the process. The HR Manager responded that the Waste and Recycling service area accounted for around half of the Council's sickness figures due to the nature of the work being carried out in that department. She explained that there was now an HR Officer based at the recycling centre for three days a week to provide HR support and receive feedback from staff, provide training to managers and deal with grievance matters.

The HR Manager confirmed that all managers had received staff sickness absence management training. She explained that the message had been communicated to staff within the Waste and Recycling department that the

additional HR support was available to them. By meeting with staff face to face on a regular basis, the HR Manager hoped the additional support would help HR and managers to understand better and seek to address the cultural problems that existed in relation to the management of sickness absence within the Waste and Recycling department.

The HR Manager would update the Employment Committee at a future meeting on the progress of the management of sickness absence within the Waste and Recycling service area.

HR  
Manager

Resolved:

- 4.1 That Report No 72/16 be noted.

**5 Accidents to Staff from April 2015 to March 2016**

The Committee received Report No 73/16 which presented the statistics on accidents reported at the Council between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

During the reporting period there had been 65 accidents reported by staff. A breakdown of the data and statistics on those accidents were set out under Section 2 of the Report.

In response to a query by the Committee, the Health and Safety Officer explained that each individual must take personal responsibility for their safety in the workplace, although the onus was on the employer, under health and safety law, to ensure that it had done all that was reasonably practicable to prevent accidents occurring in the first instance. The Health and Safety Officer reported that it was a complex issue and the Council was focused on increasing staff understanding of health and safety as part of their everyday role, for example through the increase of mandatory manual handling training and regular refresher training.

Resolved:

- 5.1 That Report No 73/16 be noted.

**6 Health and Safety in Lewes District Council May 2016**

The Committee received Report No 74/16 which provided examples of the Council's Health and Safety activity.

The Health and Safety Officer explained that there had been some important events recently that had illustrated in a positive way the Council's external health and safety profile, as detailed within Section 2 of the Report. Paragraph 2.1 of the Report highlighted that the Council did not have much interaction with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and to have three inspections had been unusual. The HSE was satisfied by the responses provided by the Council's officers and had offered praise. The Health and Safety Officer explained that the officers had demonstrated to the HSE the importance in which the Council considered Health and Safety matters.

The Health and Safety Officer had shared the positive news with staff via the Council's weekly internal newsletter and, further to a suggestion by the Committee, would ensure it was included in the next edition of District News, a publication that was distributed to every residential home in Lewes District on a quarterly basis.

Health and  
Safety  
Officer

The Employees' Side commented that, although it was positive to see the responses from the HSE, it was regrettable that there had been no acknowledgement within the Report of the significant work and input which Unison had undertaken in contributing to and instigating various Council policies on health and safety matters, such as the Asbestos Policy.

Resolved:

**6.1** That it be noted that members of the Employment Committee wished to extend their congratulations to the managers and officers, as named in Report No 74/16, for their successful achievements in responding to the Health and Safety Executive inspections and investigations and thus maintaining the external Health and Safety profile of the Council; and

Health and  
Safety  
Officer

**6.2** That Report No 74/16 be noted.

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

Resolved:

**7.1** 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 10 and 11 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.

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

The Employees' Side discussed further the Staff Survey results relating to discrimination, harassment and bullying, as detailed on pages 34 and 35 of the Agenda. The Committee noted that the results indicated varying degrees of experiences in relation to discrimination, harassment and bullying and the disparity between the number of reports of bullying in the survey results compared to the formal number received by HR. The Employees' Side noted that there would be further discussions on the responses to that section of the survey as part of an action plan and Unison was keen to be involved in those discussions. Ms McGreal added that as part of a future action plan, there was work to be done to encourage staff to report in a formal way, reiterating the zero tolerance approach to bullying and making clear to staff the expected standards of behaviour in the workplace. The Head of Organisational Development explained that in future it would be useful in that section of the survey to include the service area data to help understand the responses and address issues.

In response to a request from the Employees' Side, the Head of Organisational Development would provide a brief update Report on the progress of the Joint Transformation Programme to each meeting of the Employment Committee until further notice.

Head of Org.  
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**9 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.

**10 Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved:

- 10.1** That it be noted that the next meeting of the Employment Committee was scheduled to be held on Monday, 12 September 2016 at 10.00am in the Ditchling Room, Southover House, Lewes.

**All to  
note**

The meeting ended at 11.55am.

J Peterson  
Chair