

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 15 JULY 2009 AT
3.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D A A Peek (Chairman).
Councillors S Rutland-Barsby, P A Ruffles
(substitute for J O Ranger), M Wood,
N Wilson, C Woodward.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Claire Burton	- Human Resources Officer
Emma Freeman	- Head of People and Organisational Services
Chris Gibson	- Internal Audit and Business Improvement Manager
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Jaleh Nahvi	- Human Resources Officer
Lois Prior	- Head of Strategic Direction (Shared) and Communications Manager

104 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor J O Ranger. It was noted that Councillor P A Ruffles was substituting for Councillor J O Ranger.

ACTION105 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUCEMENT

The Chairman commented that with the consent of Members, he would change the order of the agenda to allow an Officer to attend another meeting.

RESOLVED ITEMS106 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2009 were submitted. Jane Sharp (UNISON) had submitted a request that Minute 722 (Human Resources of C3W Programme) be amended as follows:

Paragraph 9

Delete:- "She commented that it was unlikely that this method would work, as there were very few staff who had a spare room, which they could dedicate for home working purposes and that most rooms would have to double up".

That the following be inserted:- "She commented that this method worked well and with regard to the tax implications of home working, as there were very few staff who had a spare room, which they could dedicate for home working purposes and most rooms would have to double up for domestic and work purposes, it was unlikely that there would be any tax implications.

The Committee accepted this amendment.

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 15 April 2009, as now amended, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

ACTION107 ANTI-FRAUD AND ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY AND DISCLOSURE (WHISTLE-BLOWING) CODE

The Internal Audit and Business Improvement Manager submitted a report updating the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and the Disclosure (Whistle Blowing) Code. The two revised documents and supporting appendices, now provided a consistent approach to the management of anti-fraud measures throughout the Council. It was noted that the report would usually have been submitted to the Local Joint Panel for comment but had not. Unison had been consulted and supported the revisions. Given that there were no fundamental changes to the policies, Unison was happy for the report to be submitted directly to Human Resources Committee.

The Internal Audit and Business Improvement Manager outlined the key elements of the strategies and explained how detection would be taken forward. Of particular note, was notification to outside agencies who had previously been notified (without delay) of any suspicions of fraud and corruption. The policy had been revised so that now, any decision not to notify the Police or other agency would be made by the Chief Executive and documented in the case file.

In response to a query from Councillor P A Ruffles concerning notification to outside agencies, the Internal Audit and Business Improvement Manager explained the current arrangements in terms of notification to agencies and how revisions to the Policy would operate.

The Director of Internal Services commented that Officers would now have to put forward a case why the Police or other agencies should not be advised. Each case would be considered on its merits. By example, he explained that a straightforward Housing Benefit Fraud would not be referred to the Chief Executive.

Members supported the report and appendices now

ACTION

submitted.

RESOLVED – that the Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Strategy and Disclosure (Whistle Blowing) Code be approved.

DIS

108 HUMAN RESOURCES QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report detailing people management and human resources performance for the quarter up to July 2009. Updates were provided in terms of management actions to mitigate the pressure on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2009/10 to 2012/13. The main actions this quarter included:

- Vacancy Management – resulting in 3 vacancies, 14.5 hours of overtime and one temporary contract extension declined this quarter.
- Promotion of career breaks, reducing hours, flexible retirement through Team Update and consultation with Heads of Services.
- Identification of savings ideas via Team Update and via Unison.
- A review of terms of conditions commenced in July 2009.
- A review of retention payments to Planning and Building Control. Payments reduced by 50% for 2009/10 in line with market forces with a review in 2011.

Updates were provided in relation to

- Resourcing

ACTION

- Learning and development
- Policies
- Equalities and Diversity
- C3W Programme and other issues.

In response to a query from Councillor S Rutland-Barsby concerning Skills for Jobs Training in relation to women, the Head of People and Organisational Services undertook to investigate how this could be developed at East Herts.

In response to a query from Councillor C Woodward regarding modern apprenticeships, the Head of People and Organisational Services undertook to investigate this.

In response to a query from Councillor P A Ruffles, the Head of People and Organisational Services explained the Council's Corporate Training Plan and how this linked with the Council's Priorities and the Personal Development Review Process (PDRS). It was anticipated that a report on the PDRS process would be submitted to Human Resources Committee in October 2009.

RESOLVED - that the quarterly performance report be noted.

109 HUMAN RESOURCES AND MANAGEMENT
STATISTICS: APRIL – JUNE 2009

The Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report updating Members on Human Resources management information and HR targets.

The report and appendix to the report now submitted detailed statistical information relating to:

- Turnover

ACTION

- Sickness absence
- Training and Development / Performance management
- Equalities Monitoring.

The current projected turnover was 9.61% against a target of 12% and the voluntary leavers' rate was 0.54% below a target of 8%. Short term sickness was 0.43 days against a target of 5 days. Long term sickness was 0.45 days against a target of 3 days. It was noted that the new Absence Management Policy would be launched and, once approved, would focus on preventative measures and effective absence management at all stages with an emphasis on resolving issues at the informal stage.

It was noted that 88.08% of staff had a Training Plan. During the first quarter this year, 20.19% staff had received corporate training. The outturn for completed PDRs was 87.21 % against a target of 100%. Equalities monitoring targets had been amended for relevancy.

In response to a query from Councillor C Woodward concerning retaining the right staff, the Head of People and Organisational Services commented that the Council had a new performance management policy which would support the HR process. The PDRS process also complemented this policy and the second round would focus on "quality".

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

110 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT 1 APRIL 2008 – 31 MARCH 2009: TURNOVER REPORT 1 APRIL 2008 - 31 MARCH 2009

The Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report on employee absence levels in the short and long term and measures to reduce absence. The report also reviewed turnover rates and reasons for turnover and

ACTION

measures to improve retention and stability rates.

It was noted that the outturn of 7.94 sickness days was significantly below the average for local authorities at 9.8 days. This was also an improvement on 2007/08 from an average of 9.6 days per FTE to 7.94 days. Short term absence levels had dropped from 5.42 days in 2007/08 to 4.91 in 2008/09. The Head of People and Organisational Services commented that the definition of "long term sickness" had been amended in line with best practice as a period of sickness over 28 days. Long term sickness had reduced since last year from 4.14 days to 3.03 days but was still not within the Council's target of 2.5 days. The report now submitted set out the reasons for short and long term sickness absence.

Updates were provided in relation to the role of the Council's Occupational Health Adviser and the Employee Assistance Programme.

In terms of moving forward for 2009/10 in relation to Sickness Absence, the Head of People and Organisational Services recommended a number of initiatives as shown below, the detail of which was set out in Appendix A of the report now submitted, including:-

- A review of the Council's Absence Management Policy.
- The re-promotion of the Employee Assistance Programme via Team Update.
- A change in long term targets to 5 days per FTE for short term and 3 for long term leading to an overall target of 8 days.

The Head of People and Organisational Services commented that the turnover rate for 2008/09 was 8.6% against a target of 12% and that the voluntary leaver's rate was 6.3% against a target of 8%. The Stability Index was 81.82% against a target of 90% in terms of the people who

ACTION

left the Council within the first year. The reasons for the reduction in the turnover and voluntary leavers statistics was set out in the report now submitted.

In response to a query from Councillor P A Ruffles regarding long term illness and different aspects of stress, the Head of People and Organisational Services commented that these were not just work related. She commented that any work related stress would be picked up in the PDR process so that managers could make sure smarter objectives could be set. She commented that the Council had halved stress related long term absence from 2007/08 up to the last year. She outlined the process in terms of the involvement of Occupational Health and immediate managers to establish the reasons for absence. Councillor Ruffles commented on the duty of care to staff and the need to catch stress related illnesses early.

Councillor C Woodward congratulated the Human Resources service for the processes which had been applied. He queried whether exit interviews could be conducted via post to improve feedback and so that staff were assured that their comments would be treated in confidence. The Head of People and Organisational Services confirmed that this would be investigated and the role of HR Staff in conducting exit interviews. Councillor Woodward commented on the presentation of statistics in relation to Voluntary Leavers by Service and requested that Officers give thought to how this information should be presented in the future, i.e. percentage of staff in each service.

In terms of moving forward for 2009/10, the Head of People and Organisational Services recommended a number of initiatives as shown below, the detail of which was set out in Appendix B of the report now submitted including:-

- A review of the Exit Interview Form.
- Monitoring Manpower Recruitment Contract.

ACTION

- Work Life Balance – Flexible Working and developing strategies to attract younger employees and retaining older employees.
- Demographics of Workforce and its implications on turnover.
- Review of Staff Survey and career progression.

Members noted the report and supported the approach to be taken in 2009/10 in relation to the Exit Interview Form, monitoring Manpower Recruitment, encouraging Flexible Working, the demographics of the workforce and the results of the 2008 Review Staff Survey recommendations as detailed in the Appendices now submitted and summarised above.

RESOLVED – that (A) that the Sickness Absence and turnover targets for 2009/10 be agreed; and

(B) the approach to be taken in relation to Turnover and Absence for 2009/10 as now submitted and detailed in the appendices including a review of the Exit Interview Form be supported.

111 STAFF SURVEY FINDINGS AND ACTION PLAN

The Head of Strategic Direction (Shared) Performance Manager and Communications Manager submitted a report on the findings of the recent staff survey.

It was noted that three staff surveys had been undertaken in 2004, 2006 and 2008. In the 2008 survey, 267 members of staff (74%) had completed the online survey compared with 66% in 2006. The report and action plan attached to the report now submitted, provided an overview of the findings and where improvements could continue to be made. It was anticipated, that by the next survey, all staff ought to be able to identify changes and improvements as

ACTION

a result of management taking on board staff comments.

The report provided feedback on:-

- job satisfaction levels;
- how staff would speak about the Council to people outside the organisation;
- statements about respective jobs;
- whether relationships at work were strained;
- relevance of jobs in delivering Council Priorities;
- views on direct line management;
- views on senior management;
- job satisfaction in terms of the six most important factors;
- information to staff about the organisation;
- statements concerning communications;
- how staff found information about the Council and preferences;
- training and development;
- partnership working; and
- the C3W Programme.

Areas for improvement were detailed in the report now submitted. Appendix A to the report now submitted, detailed Senior Management Group's comments as a result of the survey. Appendix C to the report now submitted detailed the action proposed arising from the

ACTION

survey in relation to senior management issues. It was noted that two training sessions had taken place recently in Buntingford and the results of this would be fed back to Members at some future point.

Councillor C Woodward commented on the benchmarking of staff from Bishop's Stortford and ensuring consistency across the service. He commented that Bishop's Stortford staff had not been mentioned at all in the Action Plan. The Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Communications Manager assured Members that a consistent approach was being adopted across both sites and that the C3W programme involved all members of Staff. It was noted that the Communication Strategy in relation to C3W had changed to reflect the "what do I need to do my job" approach.

Councillor C Woodward expressed concern regarding the public's perception that the Council was "deserting" Bishop's Stortford. The Director of Internal Services commented that the Council was not leaving, rather it was moving "next door". He undertook to make arrangements to publish plans for the Council's occupation of Charrington House to reassure the public. The Chairman supported this approach and the dissemination of information to the public.

Members noted the key findings of the Staff Survey and supported the approach set out in Appendices A and C of the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the findings following the Staff Survey be noted; and

(B) the actions set out in Appendix A and C of the report now submitted be agreed.

DIS

112 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WORK SOLUTIONS

The Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report introducing the services provided by Work

ACTION

Solutions and how working in partnership with them would enable adults with physical and learning disabilities to undertake work “tasters” at the Council. Working with Work Solutions would help the Council achieve its equality and diversity objectives as set out in the Comprehensive Corporate Equality Plan. Services provided by Work Solutions and how the Council would work in partnership were set out in the report now submitted.

It was noted that during the consultation process some concerns had been expressed by Heads of Service and UNISON about the additional work in terms of staff resources in administering the scheme. “Taster” sessions were proposed to see how the processes worked and which would identify any potential issues.

Councillor C Woodward supported the approach and commented on the need to publicise this scheme widely.

Members supported the introduction of Work Solutions “taster” opportunities.

RESOLVED – that the introduction of Work Solutions work taster opportunities be approved.

DIS

113 LOCAL JOINT PANEL – MINUTES: 17 JUNE 2009

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Local Joint Panel meeting held on 17 June 2009 be received.

(see also Minutes 114 – 115 below)

114 REVISED HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES

The Committee considered and supported the recommendations of the Local Joint Panel meeting held on 17 June 2009 on revised Human Resources Policies and new Appeals Policy.

RESOLVED – that the revised Human Resources

DIS

ACTION

Policies and the new Appeals Policy be approved and reviewed in 12 months.

(see also Minute 113 above)

115 PEOPLE STRATEGY 2009/2012

The Committee considered and supported the recommendations of the Local Joint panel meeting held on 17 June 2009 on the development of a People Strategy which would support the Council’s framework for the delivery of people management over the next three years.

RESOLVED – that the People Strategy 2009-2012 be approved.

DIS

(see also Minute 113 above)

The meeting closed at 4.25pm

Chairman
Date