

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY 2014, AT 3.00
PM

PRESENT: Councillor Colin Woodward (Chairman)
Councillors P Ballam, Mrs D Hone, J Ranger,
P Ruffles, J Thornton and N Wilson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors G McAndrew

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Glenda Bennett	- Interim Head of People and Property
Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Adele Taylor	- Director of Finance and Support Services

469 MINUTES

In respect of Minutes 271 and 273 - Human Resources Quarterly Performance and Equalities and Diversity, the Interim Head of People and Property Services provided an update on issues raised at that meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 2 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

470 HOME WORKING POLICY

The Interim Head of People and Property Services submitted a report on the Council's Home Working Policy. The change suggested in the policy, required employees to provide a phone number to their Line Manager where they can be contacted when working remotely.

Councillor P Ruffles raised the issue of personal privacy with regard to home inspections and queried the extent to which the employer should intrude regarding a check of the home working environment. The Chairman stated that a 10% sample of home workers would be visited by a Safety Liaison Officer to establish that the environment complied with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Guidance. The Interim Head of People and Property Services explained how the inspection process would be applied in terms of regular home workers, including how they managed confidential information and those who might work from home on an ad hoc basis, e.g. on a specific project.

In response to a query from Councillor N Wilson, the Interim Head of People and Property explained the Council's approach should an inspection of home worker's working arrangement fail health and safety requirements. It was noted that there was still sufficient office space to accommodate staff "in house".

The Chairman referred to the PDR process as a tool and process in monitoring whether health and safety and other requirements had been complied with. The Director of Finance and Support Services referred to the number of home workers within Revenues and Benefits service and of the fact that they frequently managed a 100% return of their PDRs.

Councillor J Ranger commented that Home Workers should attend the office regularly and suggested that the word "ideally" contained in the paragraph headed "Contact and Communication" (second bullet point of Essential Reference Paper "B" the report now submitted) be deleted. This was supported.

Councillor Ranger also suggested that employees be given maximum flexibility in terms of their working patterns adding that, if an employee wanted to work 10 hours in a day, and provided they complied with working directives in terms of breaks, they should be allowed to do so. This was supported. The Interim Head of People and Property Services explained that the flexibility would depend on the type of job, i.e. customer facing staff would always be needed during office hours and it would depend on Business need.

In response to a query from Councillor J Thornton regarding the number of home workers, the Interim Head of People and Property Services suggested that this was around 10% of the workforce but undertook to provide the information specifically and let him know.

In response to a question regarding the “drivers” associated with the home working initiative, the Director of Finance and Support Services explained to background to the Council’s introduction of Home Working in terms of the “Changing the Way We Work” Strategy from the viewpoint of accommodation, flexibility and the use of time in a more productive manner.

In response to a query from Councillor N Wilson regarding the Home Working Policy’s next review, the Interim Head of People and Property Services agreed to include this on the cycle of policies for review.

The Committee supported the report, as now amended.

RESOLVED – that the revised policy, as now amended, be approved.

471 HUMAN RESOURCES - QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Interim Head of People and Property Services submitted a quarterly performance report for the period up to 16 December 2013, the detail of which was set out in the report

now submitted and the supporting Essential Reference Papers. The report now submitted detailed the current headcount, new starters, current turnover and common reasons for leaving. Updates were provided in relation to short and long term absences. The report set out the Corporate Training Plan delivered within the quarter in question and of plans to develop further the “E-learning Site”.

The Interim Head of People and Property Services explained what policies would be reported to the next Human Resources Committee and that negotiations were currently underway with UNISON regarding the Disciplinary Policy.

It was noted that, in relation to proposed changes to Terms and Conditions, and the reduction in the Local Award considered by the Local Joint Panel on 3 December 2013 and recommended for approval elsewhere on the agenda, this item had been withdrawn by UNISON as an agreement had subsequently failed to be reached.

The Interim Head of People and Property Services explained that the next round of PDRs were due to take place in January 2014 and the intention to introduce a cultural change in the hope of building on good practice.

Councillor J Ranger commented that the Shared Internal Audit Service would be reporting to Audit Committee next year regarding the review of “Here to Help” and looking at how far staff had the necessary information and the lengths they went to assist an enquirer needing information.

The Interim Head of People and Property Services explained the role of the Line Manager in terms of managing the process against an established Action Plan. She hoped that the Staff Survey would also provide valuable feedback on the “Here to Help” strategy. It was noted that a Steering Group had been developed to monitor the process. The Director of Finance and Support Services explained what work was currently underway from a customer services viewpoint and how customer enquiries were channelled.

The Committee noted the report.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

472 LOCAL JOINT PANEL - MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 DECEMBER 2013:

It was noted that in relation to Minute 14 - Response to UNISON on the Local Award both the Employer’s Side and UNISON had subsequently been unable to come to an agreement, and therefore, the recommendation had been withdrawn.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2013 be received.

473 VOTE OF THANKS - GLENDA BENNETT

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked Glenda Bennett, Interim Head of People and Property Services for her help and professional advice in supporting the Human Resource and Property process over the past year. The Chairman wished Glenda every success in her next role.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

Chairman
Date