

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD IN
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 15
SEPTEMBER 2021, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Rosemary Bolton (Chairman)
Councillors S Bull, J Dumont, M McMullen,
P Ruffles and R Buckmaster

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Peter Dickinson	- Health and Safety Officer
Helen Farrell	- Human Resources Officer
Steven King	- Finance Management Trainee
Simon O'Hear	- Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
William Troop	- Democratic Services Officer

169 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Alder and Newton. It was noted that Councillor R Buckmaster was substituting for Councillor Newton.

170 MINUTES - 26 MAY 2021

It was moved by Councillor McMullen and seconded by Councillor Bull, that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26 May 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 26 May 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

171 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked Human Resources (HR) Officers for their continued hard work and welcomed back the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR and OD) from a period of illness.

The Chairman said that this was the last meeting the Democratic Services Officer would facilitate as he was leaving the Council. She thanked the Democratic Services Officer for his work with the Committee and wished him luck for the future. She also said that Helen Farrell, HR and OD Co-ordinator, was leaving the Council after 23 years, and a tribute to her would come later in the meeting.

Finally, the Chairman said that the HR and Payroll Team Update Report would move up the agenda to precede the Annual Equalities Report 2020/21.

172 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Buckmaster declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she had a member of her family working for the Council.

The Chairman and Councillor Ruffles declared non-pecuniary interests in that they were Members of Hertford Town Council which had procured some services from HR.

173 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES - 27 JULY 2021

The Chairman thanked the Health and Safety Officer as he had to both chair the meeting and taken the minutes on 27 July 2021.

Councillor Ruffles asked why the Council had become involved with wild water swimmers.

The Health and Safety Officer said that the swimmers had accessed the water via a piece of land owned by the Council. The Council had been working with the water authority to provide guidance, access and adequate signage to ensure the swimmers could enter the water safely.

Councillor Ruffles thanked the Health and Safety Officer for his attention to this matter, he was aware that the wild swimming group were grateful for assistance received from Ian Sharratt, Leisure and Parks Development Manager.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting of

the Health and Safety Committee held on 27 July 2021, be received.

174 HEALTH AND SAFETY QUARTERLY REVIEW (Q1) – APRIL 2021 – JUNE 2021

The Health and Safety Officer briefly introduced the report. Members agreed that the newly added executive summary in the report was useful and asked that this continue to be included.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

175 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STATISTICS FOR QUARTER 1 (APRIL - JUNE 2021)

The Chairman said that there had been an increase in turnover, sickness and absence. However, it was too early in the year to draw meaningful conclusions from this data and it had been agreed that this would be monitored over the rest of the year.

Councillor McMullen said that there had been a lot of retirements within Planning and asked if these were genuine retirements or whether these Officers were taking up other work elsewhere. He also asked whether there had been any instances of staff resigning when told furlough was ending.

The Head of HR and OD said that all of the retirements were genuine, although one Officer had agreed to return on a fixed-term basis. The pandemic had made staff think twice in terms of making choices about

retiring or resigning, and it was natural that this would then correct itself. The pandemic had also prompted employees to consider lifestyle choices which could have caused staff to choose to retire. Only staff from Hertford Theatre had been eligible for furlough and many had been made redundant at the conclusion of the scheme.

Councillor Bull said that he hoped to see an increase in engagement from Planning, as the turnover of staff had made it difficult for Members to forge good working relationships or know who to contact for assistance with planning matters.

The Head of HR and OD said that the Planning department was growing and undergoing a restructure. The pressure on Planning was not unique to the Council, although there was the additional burden stemming from Harlow and Gilston.

The Chairman read a detailed tribute to the HR and OD Co-ordinator which outlined her history and achievements at the Council. The Chairman, on behalf of the whole Committee, thanked her for her dedication and commitment over the years.

The Head of HR and OD said that the HR and OD Co-ordinator had agreed to return after her leave date to deliver some training and complete a handover to her successor, which encapsulated her attitude throughout her 23 years of service.

The Chairman asked what the level of uptake had been amongst staff for the mandatory e-learning. The HR

and OD Co-ordinator said that it had been approximately 70%. Further training was now being prepared for introduction in December 2021.

The Head of HR and OD said that safeguarding and data protection training had been re-developed in partnership with the relevant service managers. The data protection training would likely be sold on to other local authorities to generate income. Email etiquette training had also been developed and this was currently being refined. It would likely be rolled out in November.

The HR and OD Co-ordinator said that menopause training had been very well received, with organised sessions for managers and staff as well as drop-in sessions. There had also been courses available to staff on time management, with a specific focus on supporting apprentices to manage their educational and work responsibilities.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

176 HUMAN RESOURCES AND PAYROLL TEAM UPDATE REPORT

The Head of HR and OD briefly introduced the report. He expressed his thanks to Payroll for their continued good work. He said that a blended work offer was being prepared, which meant that staff could come back to the office full time, or accept an offer to split their time between home and the office on a 50/50 basis. This would give the Council and Officers the 'best of both worlds'. There were some exceptions to this,

such as caretakers, who would need to be permanently based at the office. As this was an offer to staff, it did not need to be written up as a formal policy and agreed at Local Joint Panel; if staff did not wish to accept the offer, they could reject it and return to the office full-time, as was outlined in their contract. This would be a fixed-term offer for one year, at which point the success of this approach would be reviewed.

Members were also advised that the HR Strategy was being drafted and would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee. There was also work being done on amending the policy around disturbance allowance as providing the current 18 month relocation provision to all staff if the Council moved premises would not be financially viable.

Councillor Dumont asked if the blended working offer would be presented as a formal written offer to Officers. He also asked if after a year the expectation would be that all staff returned to the office. Finally, he asked if the Council monitored staff's working pattern or productivity when they were working from home.

The Head of HR and OD said that staff would likely make an application to be part of the new blended working scheme. Staff could work in the office full time if they wished. There would be a review after a year and the Council would have the ability to ask staff to return to the office at this point, although this depended on the success of the arrangement. There had been no active monitoring of Officers as staff relationships were built on trust, although there were ways a manager could consider how an employee was

working if concerns were raised. Managers could also ask staff to come into the office and work alongside them if necessary.

The HR and OD Co-ordinator said that managers were encouraged to have at least three one-to-one meetings with staff each year at which their performance would be discussed. Members were advised that issues with performance were generally rare.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

177 ANNUAL EQUALITIES REPORT 2020/21

The Chairman said that there were big challenges relating to the reliability of data, however no evidence of bias during recruitment was found.

The Head of HR and OD said the incoming applicant tracking system (ATS) had been procured at no cost, on the agreement that the Council would spend a certain amount of money on advertising, which it was almost certain to do in any case. Work had been done to secure five days of support from Zellis to ensure that the ATS fed into existing systems. There had also been some refunds secured on inadequate systems.

Members were advised that the Council's diversity targets were linked to the diversity within the District, which was relatively low. This meant the Council was actually overachieving in this area, but it was recognised that improvements could be made, particularly in ensuring that it was mandatory for

applicants to complete forms relating to equalities data, although they would still have the option of not declaring information.

Councillor R Buckmaster said that the mandatory form to track this data would be welcome.

The Chairman asked when the ATS would go live. The Head of HR and OD said that it was still in the build stage, but would hopefully be live by the festive period.

Councillor Ruffles asked whether it was mandatory for local authorities and other organisations in general to collate and report equalities data. He also said he would like to stress the importance of supporting staff who were transitioning between genders; he had recently done work with a charity which highlighted what a long and difficult process this was.

The Head of HR and OD said that the Equality Act 2010 meant that the Council was required to report this data. It was mandatory for all organisations but local authorities had extra responsibilities in this regard. He stressed that this report only covered staff at the Council; diversity and equality data on residents was the responsibility of the Equalities Officer. There was also the annual gender pay gap report, and the production of an ethnicity pay gap report was being considered.

Members were also advised that there had been a member of staff who had transitioned and they felt well-supported. They had been asked to be involved in developing further guidance to ensure this was the

case for everyone. The Council did not record data regarding if a staff member had transitioned and always recognised them in their current and preferred gender.

The HR and OD Co-ordinator said that an e-learning course on supporting somebody who was transitioning had also recently been updated to reflect best practise and preferred language following feedback.

It was moved by Councillor Bull and seconded by Councillor R Buckmaster that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received and considered; and

(B) recommendations detailed in the 2021/22 action plan be approved.

178 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.58 pm

Chairman
Date