

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD IN
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 25 MAY 2022,
AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Rosemary Bolton (Chairman)
Councillors A Alder, S Bull, J Dumont,
M McMullen, S Newton and P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Michele Aves	- Democratic Services Officer
Peter Dickinson	- Health and Safety Officer
Jane Mackie	- Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager
Simon O'Hear	- Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development

21 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR 2022/23

It was moved by the Chairman and seconded by Councillor McMullen that Councillor Ruffles be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Human Resources Committee for 2022/23. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Ruffles be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Human

HR

Resources Committee for 2022/23.

22 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

23 MINUTES - 15 FEBRUARY 2022

It was moved by Councillor Bull and seconded by Councillor Ruffles that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 February 2022, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 15 February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reminded Members of the Committee to use their microphones when speaking, as the meeting was being webcast.

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were declarations of interest from Councillors Alder, Bull, Newton and Ruffles who were all members of Town or Parish Councils which had procured the services of East Herts District Council's Human Resources Department.

26 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES - 22 FEBRUARY 2022

Councillor Alder referred to paragraph 7.3 of the minutes and asked for clarification if the use of March 2021 was a typing error, and if March 2022 was the correct date for the next phase of the project at Hertford Theatre. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that this was a typing error, and that March 2022 was the correct date. He said that the minutes would be amended to reflect this.

Councillor Newton referred to paragraph 9.3 of the Minutes and asked for clarification of the acronym "APCOA". She also asked when the Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Safety Committee which was held on 3 May 2022 would also be available to the Committee. The Health and Safety Officer said that APCOA was the organisational name of the Council's parking contractor. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that parking would be added when using APCOA in future to make this clearer to Members. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development confirmed that the Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Safety Committee held on 3 May 2022 would be made available to Members of the Committee at the next meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Health and Safety Committee held on 22 February 2022 be received.

HR

27 HEALTH AND SAFETY QUARTERLY REVIEW - QUARTER 4,
INCORPORATING THE ANNUAL REVIEW

The Chairman asked if Members had any questions regarding the report.

Councillor Dumont referred to paragraph 9.0 of the report and asked if Members were to be issued with the new lone worker devices. The Health and Safety Officer said that there had been no further discussions regarding this matter, but that there was provision for Members to be included within the current contract. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that a Members Group were looking at this matter, and that an app based system was thought to be more appropriate for Members and the way in which they worked.

Councillor Alder referred to paragraph 13.4 of the report and asked when it was expected that all staff would return to working at the Council offices. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that staff had returned to the offices in November 2021, under the new blended working offer. The offer consisted of the option for the majority of staff to work up to 50% of their hours at home, with the remainder of their hours worked at the offices. He said that the blended working offer was to be reviewed after 12 months, in November 2022.

Councillor Alder said that she had experienced delays when contacting the Council by telephone. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that extra resources were being given to these issues and that both the Executive Member for

Corporate Services and the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy would be the best placed to speak to regarding such issues.

Councillor Newton asked for the definition of a 'non-reportable accident', and if there was any explanation as to why Grange Paddocks appeared to have a higher number of these accidents compared to the Council's other leisure facilities. The Health and Safety Officer said that a non-reportable accident would be a minor accident, and gave the examples of a paper cut, or a trip. He said that the higher number of such accidents seen at Grange Paddocks was due to the increased size of, and therefore the higher footfall at this facility. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that comparable data for Grange Paddocks would be sourced, which would provide reassurance for Members. He added that the use of term IP in the report was an acronym for 'injured person'.

Councillor Bull asked if there were any plans to move the closed tip facility at Aspenden (which is not owned by the Council) to the recycling area at Buntingford. The Health and Safety Officer said that he was not aware of any such plans, but that he would make enquires regarding this matter with the Head of Operations. Councillor Bull said that recycling facilities at Buntingford were needed as outlining villagers also used these alongside the residents of the town. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that although there were no known plans to re site the aforementioned closed tip, there were plans to maximise the existing recycling site at Buntingford in partnership with North Herts Council.

HR

The Health and Safety Officer said that the expansion of such services at Buntingford had already begun, but the site presented challenges due to its small size.

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

RESOLVED - that the Health and Safety Quarterly Review (Quarter 4) – January 2022 to March 2022 and Annual Report be received.

28 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT QUARTERLY STATISTICS REPORT - QUARTER 4 2021/22

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development briefly introduced the report.

Councillor Alder referred to Item 3, paragraph 1.4 of the report and voiced her concerns about the high number of staff vacancies which existed within the Planning and Housing and Health departments. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the vacancies which were being referred to were 'posts on hold', which were not currently being actively recruited to on a permanent basis. This included 8 vacancies within the Planning Department. He continued by saying that these figures had not changed since the last quarter, and were currently being filled by agency staff.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that there was a countrywide

shortage of planning staff, and that internal apprenticeships had been adversely affected by the pandemic not allowing for trainees to work alongside planners. He said that post pandemic the council needed to make savings, some of which would come from encompassing administrative roles to within the proposed Corporate Support Hub. He finished by saying that Service Reviews had now been performed on all departments.

Councillor Ruffles referred to paragraph 3.1.1 of the report and asked for clarification on how a staff member was counted as retiring when leaving the employment of the Council. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that these were real retirements, where the staff members had begun to draw down their pensions. He added that the pandemic had placed an extra burden upon the staff within the Revenues and Benefits Department, and this had contributed to an increase in staff within this service deciding to retire.

Councillor Ruffles referred to 3.3.3 of the report and asked if Members of the Committee should be recommending any measures to be taken forward to protect the mental health of staff. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the role of the Committee included monitoring, the querying of officers, making suggestions and approving recommendations when appropriate. He said that the council would again shortly be running its Wellbeing Survey, explaining that Covid had affected the survey results relating to staff mental health. He continued by saying that mental health issues are now more openly discussed, but were no easier managed,

adding that it was disappointing that staff participation in wellbeing events was low.

Councillor Dumont also referred to the known spike in mental health issues due to the pandemic, which largely correlated with people being at home and not having interaction with others. He asked that this, alongside any questions surrounding productivity be considered when the blended working offer was reviewed in November. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that he agreed with points made by Councillor Dumont, and added that the current cost of living crisis was also impacting this already complex situation.

Councillor McMullen also referred to the productivity of staff working from home, and asked how managers were measuring this alongside ensuring that all staff remained well. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the way in which productivity was measured has not changed, managers continue to set tasks, and use 1-2-1 meetings and the appraisal system to monitor staff performance. He said that working in the office was good and should not be discarded, which was an area that continued to be looked at. He followed on by saying that staff who work from home should be fully contactable, with Heads of Service being asked to monitor this.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that staff working from home also gave the council the option of creating enough space to enable the taking on of a large tenant in the building, thus generating income. He voiced his

intention to include Members participation in the forthcoming Wellbeing Survey, which would provide a customer view.

Councillor Ruffles referred to 3.4.7 of the report which referred to the staff SkillsBuild training platform, encouraging Members to also participate in the modules on offer. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development agreed with Councillor Ruffles, adding that a full rollout of the courses to Members was being facilitated. Councillor Newton said that she too agreed with Councillor Ruffles and expressed her desire to complete the 'Bouncebackability: Rolling With Life's Punches' module which was to be offered to staff.

The Chairman referred to 3.4.2 of the report which referred to the PDR training which was delivered to both managers and staff during Quarter 4, and asked if plans were to continue this training virtually. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that this training would continue to be delivered by a mixed provision, both via zoom and with in-person sessions.

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

RESOLVED - that the Human Resources Management Statistics for Quarter 4 (January - March 2022) be received.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development briefly introduced the report.

Councillor McMullen asked for further information regarding the Council's review of the Staff Recognition Scheme. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the current scheme was being reviewed by the East Herts Together Group, with the intention of creating more categories and increasing recognition and celebration in line with the council's core values. He said that the new scheme would have sponsorship, and offer an annual awards ceremony. There would be no financial reward for winners, instead they would receive a small prize, such as a paperweight.

Councillor Dumont asked if productivity would be rewarded within the scheme alongside values. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that although productivity was not rewarded directly it did link into the Council's core values. He gave the example of a very productive employee giving excellent customer service, and aiming high.

The Chairman referred to item 5 of the report and said that turnover of staff looked high, but that the stability rate which shows the retention of employees in their first year of service was good. She said it was disappointing that only 55% of people leaving the employment of the Council completed their exit questionnaire. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that a return rate of

more than 40% for a questionnaire was statistically successful, and that it was not possible to force people to complete one. He said that turnover was slightly higher than the local government average, but the government average figures had not been updated since 2018/19. He continued by saying that he would explore providing further comparison figures for the Committee at the next meeting, and that the Leadership Team had requested to see future data expressed as figures as opposed to a percentages.

The Chairman said that it was good to see that the Council's vacancy rate significantly was lower than average, and that there had been lower recruitment costs. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that this was due to the deal which the Council had with Ideal, and the good advertising package which existed with ATS. He added that the Council attempted to avoid high agency fees, but this may be required to recruit specialist posts such as lawyers. He concluded by saying that there was a clear direction of travel with the costs of recruitment, and that should this inflate there would be a reason which he would make Members aware of.

Councillor Dumont said that not all agency fees were high and that many agencies supported Local Authorities and such organisations well, with many of the soft costs not seen. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that he was only comparing percentages to advertising costs.

It was moved by Councillor Alder and seconded by Councillor Dumont that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting

HR

and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Annual Turnover Report 2021/2022 including the actions (in section 11.0) planned for 2022/23 be received.

30 ANNUAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW 2021/22

The Chairman invited questions on the report.

Councillor McMullen asked how the lone working provision/ training was progressing. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the lone working provision was now under the central ownership of the Health and Safety Officer, and that this had resulted in improved monitoring.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development drew Members' attention to the underspend in training, and clarified that it was mainly due to an increase in extra funding. He said that this was further impacted by the council's repayment scheme which saw training fees being recouped from employees should they leave shortly after completion.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development also advised Members of the use of 'Golden Hello's' to attract applicants to certain jobs. He said that this had been used in relation to a recent Planning vacancy, but that unfortunately this had not made any difference to the process.

It was moved by Councillor McMullen and seconded by

HR

Councillor Ruffles that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Learning and Development Review for 2021/2022 be received.

31 EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT 2021/22

The Chairman invited questions and comments on the report from Members.

Councillor Alder referred to paragraph 3.3 of the report and asked if staff absence figures could be broken down into departments, and included in the next report. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that he would investigate if this was a possibility.

Councillor McMullen asked if there were still plans for another Staff Wellbeing Survey. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that this was the plan, and that the survey would include questions on what support staff would like, and what would make them take that support up.

The Chairman said that it was important that the Council continued to support the health and wellbeing of its staff, and that planned actions met these specific needs. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the Staff Wellbeing Survey would include asking employees how they felt now in comparison to during the pandemic.

HR

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

RESOLVED – that the Annual Employee Health and Wellbeing Report 2021/22 including the actions (in section 8.0) planned for 2022/23 be noted.

32 HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL PLAN 2022/23

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development briefly introduced the report. He said that plan had been considered by the Leadership Team on 17 May 2022, and that they had asked for the wellbeing section to be enhanced, and that a peer review be undertaken with the Local Government Association in Quarter 4.

All Members indicated that they were happy to accept the report with the Leadership Team requests.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) any comments and recommendations on the draft East Herts Human Resources and Organisational Development Annual Plan for the financial year 2022 /2023 be provided to the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development;

HR

and

(B) the Human Resources and Organisational Development Annual Plan for the financial year 2022 /2023, subject to changes, be agreed and approved.

33 HUMAN RESOURCES AND PAYROLL TEAM UPDATE

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development briefly introduced the report.

The Chairman asked for clarification on the findings of the audit, which had resulted in the payroll audit assurance level changing from 'significant' to 'reasonable'. She expressed her concerns that the remedial action from this change would involve further checks from the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, and questioned if this was the best use of their time and skills.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that he had been asked to carry out these checks when he joined the organisation. He conceded that these checks took time, but said that they were useful. He reiterated that the audit had found no errors in payroll or accuracy, and that the change in the assurance level was ultimately 'a moment in time' due to staffing. He said that plans had now been put in place regarding the replacement of staff.

The Chairman said that it was good to see that Broxbourne Borough Council was now receiving

HR

services from East Herts Council's Human Resources and Payroll Team. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development agreed, and said that the new higher rates of fees and charges were being received for these services.

RESOLVED – that the report be received.

34 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.12 pm

Chairman

Date