

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD
IN THE WAYTEMORE ROOM, COUNCIL
OFFICES, THE CAUSEWAY, BISHOP'S
STORTFORD ON THURSDAY 29 JULY
2010, AT 1.30 PM

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Claire Burton	- Human Resources Officer
Alan Madin	- Director of Internal Services
Tinu Olowe	- Interim Head of People and Organisational Services
Jaleh Nahvi	- Human Resources Officer

187 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor N Wilson. It was noted that Councillor P Ruffles was substituting for Councillor N Wilson.

RESOLVED ITEMS

188 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meetings held on 8 February and 1 March 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

189 STANDBY AND OUT OF HOURS CALL OUT POLICY

The Interim Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report on a new Standby and Out of Hours Call Out Policy which would establish consistency across the Council. It was noted that those staff specifically affected were those working in Planning and Building Control and Environmental Health Officers. Staff had been consulted and their concerns were set out in the report now submitted. These issues of concern had now been resolved.

The report had been considered and supported by the Local Joint Panel at its meeting earlier on 29 July 2010. A copy of the Standby Duty and Out of Hours Call Out Policy was attached to the report now submitted.

The implications of the new policy meant that Officers in Environmental Health and the Standby Team would be paid more per annum and on average, the Building Control Officers would be paid approximately the same. Extra costs to Health and Housing would need to be found from existing salary budgets. Two Members of staff would be affected by the removal of a telephone line rental payment, as mobile phones had been provided.

The Interim Head of People and Organisational Services stated that the new policy had been supported by Corporate Management Team and if approved by Human Resources Committee, would be included in the new contracts to be issued as part of the Terms and Conditions review.

In response to a query from Councillor J Mayes, Officers confirmed that the Standby Rate per hour was £1.84. Councillor J O Ranger stated that this formed part of employees' pensionable pay. He also stated that there could be changes to the new Standby and Out of Hours Call Out Policy if the new European Work Directive was approved.

Members noted that the Local Joint Panel had resolved to recommend that the new Standby and Out of Hours Call Out Policy attached to the report now submitted, be supported.

RESOLVED – that the new Standby and Out of Hours Call Out Policy be approved. DIS

190 EXPENSES POLICY

The Interim Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report concerning the introduction of a new policy which set out what and how employees could claim expenses, as well as guidelines on how to claim business mileage and expenses. The Expenses Policy would ensure that there was a consistent approach across the Council. The Policy was also in line with HM Revenue and Customs requirements.

It was noted that there had been consultation with Unison and the Local Joint Panel, at its meeting on 17 June 2010, had recommended support for the new Expenses Policy.

The Committee supported the new policy set out in the report now submitted.

RESOLVED – that (A) the new Expenses Policy be approved; DIS

(B) the Policy include provision to pay for journeys from home to normal work base, but only where the employee would not have been expected to make those journeys, e.g. call out on a non-working day or requiring a repeat journey on a working day, such payment to be subject to tax and both the employees' and employer's National Insurance; and

(C) the Policy continue to reimburse only for additional miles where it involved home to work travel to other than the normal work place.

191 DRAFT 2009/10 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Leader of the Council submitted a draft 2009/10 Annual Governance Statement, attached to the report now submitted. The Statement had been submitted to a number of statutory

and regulatory committees and was now being reported to Human Resources Committee as part of the wider consultation process.

It was noted that the 2008/09 Annual Governance Statement had included thirteen measures to enhance East Herts Council's internal control framework during 2009/10. Eight outstanding actions had been carried forward and a further 11 actions had been added, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted.

The Director of Internal Services stated that the report covered the governance of the Council and set out what arrangements were in place to ensure good governance.

Councillor C Woodward referred to the Sustainable Community Strategy and stated that he had not seen the Action Plan. He suggested that the list of committees detailed in that report, which carried out regulatory of scrutiny functions, be amended by the inclusion of Human Resources Committee. This was supported. Councillor C Woodward also requested that Audit Committee be requested to follow up on the Sustainable Action Plan. This was supported.

Councillor C Woodward expressed concern at the number of requests which had been submitted using the Freedom of Information legislation – forty in total; 37 of which had been submitted from Councillors over the last few months. He queried whether, from the viewpoint of good governance, something needed to be done to address this issue, as he felt that 37 requests using Freedom of Information, suggested that there was a governance problem. Members supported a request to ask Audit Committee to examine the number and sources of Freedom of Information requests.

The Director of Internal Services stated that there was nothing untoward regarding the processes in place. It was up to Members to use Freedom of Information if they so wished.

In response to a query from Councillor C Woodward, the Director of Internal Services explained the background to

internal control arrangements which were “red” and “amber”.

The Committee noted the report and requested Members comments set below be submitted to Audit Committee:-

RESOLVED – that (A) the Sustainable Action Plan be monitored; DIS

(B) the number and sources of requests which had been submitted using the Freedom of Information legislation be examined within the context of good governance; and

(C) Human Resources Committee be included within the list of regulatory or scrutiny committees as set out in the Annual Governance Statement 2009/10: Action Plan 2010/11.

192 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STATISTICS
(SICKNESS ABSENCE AND TURNOVER: 1 APRIL TO 31
MARCH 2010)

The Interim Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report detailing the sickness / absence and turnover statistics for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Sickness and absence:

The Committee was advised that short term sickness absence days per full time equivalent staff were 4.43 days against a target of 5 days. The main reason for short term sickness was “flu”. The Council had also achieved a reduction of long term sickness absence days of 2.04 against a target of 3 days for 2010/11. It was noted that the most common reason for long term sickness in 2009/10 was due to stress /anxiety /depression. In relation to Occupational Health Services, Officers were still exploring opportunities, via Pathfinder, to reduce the cost of the service.

Councillor J O Ranger felt that all staff should be

congratulated on the figures as presented. He referred to comments from the Local Government Employers Association on work related stress and the impact this had on long term sickness. Councillor C Woodward believed that a lot of work related stress was not work related and there was a need to “drill down” to get to the root of the problem.

The Committee noted the report and Officer’s recommendation that the short term sickness target of five days remain in place for 2010/11, but that the long term sickness be changed to 2.5 days giving an overall sickness absence target of 7.5 days for 2010/11. Officers also felt that further training be given to managers on stress awareness. It was also noted that Human Resources Officers were trying to find ways to reduce costs by ongoing partnership working.

Turnover:

The Interim Head of People and Organisational Services submitted a report analysing the turnover of leavers for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010. It was noted that turnover during 2009/10 was low, 5.39 % against a target of 12% (which equated to 20 leavers). The voluntary leaver’s rate was now shown as 3.5% against a target of 8% giving the Council a stability index (i.e. the retention rate of its employees) with over one year’s service) of 90%. A breakdown of the voluntary leavers by service, length of services and reasons for leaving were set out in the report now submitted.

It was noted that by using Manpower, the Council had reduced its recruitment costs by 35% and that 75% of staff had undertaken exit interviews. Officers advised that the Council had very few staff employed as temporary staff and no “interim” staff.

Councillor J O Ranger was pleased to note the figures in relation to exit interviews, but was concerned to note the responses in relation to question 10, relating to line management (56% of staff said that line managers seldom gave help or advice) and 50% of staff said that they (line

managers) seldom gave praise / recognition. Councillor J O Ranger stated that Heads of Service should watch this issue.

In relation to the demographics of the workforce, it was noted that a lot of people reaching retirement age were staying in the job they were doing, whilst other staff wanted to scale down and take a lower graded job. The Interim Head of People and Organisational Services said that the process was robust and was carefully monitored. The Council had both a Duty to Consider Working Beyond Retirement Policy and a Retirement Policy which detailed arrangements around flexible retirement. This enabled staff close to retirement to scale down their hours or take a job at a lower grade.

Councillor C Woodward also expressed concern regarding exit interviews and feedback in relation to question 10 referred to above. He suggested that training for line managers might be necessary. In relation to recruitment, he suggested that the Council should give further thought to placing recruitment advertisements in the reception foyer and local library. The Human Resources Officer explained that these were posted on the website, internal bulletins, the job centre and the local library. She undertook to investigate the possibility of putting the recruitment advertisements in the foyer.

The Committee supported the recommendations for moving forward in 2010/11 as set out in the report now submitted, including:-

Turnover – that these targets should remain unchanged;

Manpower Recruitment Contract – that this should continue to be monitored closely;

C3W – monitor closely and Human Resources to liaise with managers to find solutions to flexible working practices;

Demographics of Workforce – if current trends continued, the need to develop initiatives to attract

younger employees and strategies to support succession planning and talent management;

Review Staff Survey – to ensure talent and experience are retained within the Council; and

Terms and Conditions Review – monitoring response rates to the new contracts accepting the new Terms and Conditions and that these be reported to Corporate Management Team on a weekly basis.

Members congratulated Officers and Staff on the achievements made in relation to the improved figures and supported the recommendations concerning targets and stress related sickness as set out in Essential Reference Paper 'B'. Members further supported the recommendations concerning turnover targets, monitoring Manpower, C3W issues, demographics, a staff survey and the impact of the Terms and Conditions Review as set out in Essential Reference Paper 'C' and detailed above.

RESOLVED – that (A) in relation to sickness and absence, DIS

(1) short term sickness target of five days remain in place for 2010/11;

(2) long term sickness be changed to 2.5 days giving an overall sickness absence target of 7.5 days for 2010/11; and

(3) further training to managers on stress awareness be provided;

(B) in relation to Turnover, the targets should remain unchanged; DIS

(C) the Manpower Recruitment Contract continue to be monitored closely; DIS

(D) as the relocation phase of C3W progresses, this DIS

be monitored and Human Resources liaise with managers to find solutions in relation to flexible working practices;

(E) if the current trends in demographics of the workforce continued, the possible need to develop initiatives to attract younger employees and strategies to support succession planning and talent management be noted;

(F) a staff review survey be undertaken to ensure talent and experience are retained within the Council; and DIS

(G) those staff accepting the new Terms and Conditions contracts be monitored and reported on a weekly basis. DIS

193 LOCAL JOINT PANEL - MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JUNE 2010

The Minutes of the Local Joint Panel meeting held on 17 June 2010 were considered.

The Committee considered Minute 7 (TOIL – Time Off in Lieu) and the decision to refer the matter to the Joint Secretaries of East of England Regional Council to advise / mediate.

Bearing in mind Members' concerns expressed elsewhere on the agenda regarding the issue of governance, the Director of Internal Services suggested that Members might wish to request that the Terms of Reference of the Local Joint Panel be reviewed in order to consider a different mechanism in dealing with minor issues of disagreement and to ask Audit Committee to take these concerns on board within the 2009/10 Annual Governance Statement. The Committee supported this approach.

RESOLVED – that (A) the Minutes of the Local Joint Panel meeting held on 17 June 2010 be received: and

(B) as far as the issue of governance was

concerned (as reported at Minute 191 above), a request that the Local Joint Panel's Terms of Reference be reviewed in order to develop a different mechanism for dealing with minor issues of disagreement be noted and that this comment be forwarded to Audit Committee.

DIS

The meeting closed at 2.35 pm

Chairman
Date