

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD IN
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 26 MAY 2021,
AT 7.00 PM

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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

28 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR 2021/22

It was moved by Councillor Newton and seconded by Councillor Alder, that Councillor Ruffles be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Human Resources Committee for 2021/22. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Ruffles be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Human Resources Committee for 2021/22.

29 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Dumont.

30 MINUTES - 16 FEBRUARY 2021

It was moved by Councillor Bull and seconded by Councillor McMullen, that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 February 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 16 February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman asked, following a request from Councillor Ruffles, that the Committee's sincere thanks to Officers be placed on record, given the additional work they had taken on during the pandemic period.

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

33 LOCAL JOINT PANEL MINUTES - 5 MAY 2021

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting of the Local Joint Panel held on 5 May 2021, be received.

34 HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES - 27 APRIL 2021

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting of the Health and Safety Committee held on 27 April 2021, be received.

35 HEALTH AND SAFETY QUARTERLY STATISTICS/UPDATES (QUARTER 4)

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

36 HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Health and Safety Officer briefly introduced the report. He said that quarter four had been a challenging period, largely due to the May elections. The elections had been a success in the main, with good feedback from polling station staff on the COVID-secure measures and general management of the elections.

Councillor Newton asked how many staff had been ill with COVID-19.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR and OD) said that he did not have

exact figures to hand, although it had been in excess of ten. He thanked the Health and Safety Officer for all of his work, including acting as Health and Safety Officer for the May elections when a candidate for the role withdrew. More work had been done on collating data from third party service providers. The contract managers were now all attending Health and Safety Committee meetings and further data would be presented to the Committee in next year's annual report. Members were also advised that work on annual risk assessments was up to date.

The Chairman thanked Officers for all of the work highlighted in the report.

It was moved by Councillor Bull and seconded by Councillor Newton 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) the Committee agree the combination of the Health and Safety Quarter 4 and Annual report next year.

37 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT STATISTICS - QUARTERLY REPORT

The Head of HR and OD said that in future HR would consider combining the quarter four report with the Annual Turnover Report. This was supported by Members.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

38 ANNUAL TURNOVER REPORT 2020/21

The Chairman said that it was good to see that turnover had reduced over a five year period. She asked about posts on hold and particularly the ten on hold in Planning.

The Head of HR and OD said that the posts on hold in Planning were currently covered by agency staff, rather than vacant. There had been a surge of planning applications during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Five staff had also departed, with the main reasons being retirement and relocating to other areas in the country. However, recruitment was underway and there was ongoing work on the restructure in Planning. Two team leaders had been recruited, although recruitment in Planning was generally difficult and costly due to a lack of Planners. Members could be assured that progress was being made on the restructure.

Councillor Alder asked whether apprentices were receiving the correct training and support given increased workloads for Officers.

The Head of HR and OD said that the Planning framework had been suspended, so no further Planning apprentices would be taken on until this was resolved. However, existing apprentices were still being supported and this included support around

workload.

Councillor Newton said that residents should understand that Planning were facing a 'perfect storm' of problems relating to increased demand and staffing.

Councillor Bull said that there was a perception amongst some residents that applications were being rushed through without due consideration.

The Head of HR and OD said that he could not comment in detail on the work of Planning, however there had been anecdotal suggestions that the situation at the Council was better than at other local authorities in the county. Members were assured that any suggestion that an Officer had not carried out their duties correctly would be investigated.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

39 EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT 2020/21

The Chairman said that staff had worked very hard all year and their health and wellbeing was imperative to the Council's continued progress. She said that it was good to see short term absence was down, but drew Members' attention to the fact that stress was the third most common reason for short term absence.

The Head of HR and OD said that working from home had played a part in reducing absence, as discussed by the Committee at previous meetings, although the Council had been making good progress in reducing it

prior to the pandemic in any case. Short term absence had increased slightly in quarter four, with one of the main drivers of this being staff having adverse reactions to COVID-19 vaccinations. The target for long term absence had been achieved, but Members were told it would not be advisable to lower this further currently as the gradual return to working in the office may mean absence levels rose slightly again.

Councillor Ruffles said that the Council should be sensitive to staff's wellbeing and not inappropriately encourage them to work through illness just because they were working from home. He also asked whether this pattern of lower absence when working from home had been seen across the sector more widely.

The Head of HR and OD said that he was aware that some figures suggested this was a wider trend. The Council would be careful not to foster a culture of staff working excessive hours from home as had been seen elsewhere and to ensure that staff were supported with their wellbeing and work-life balance. The Council's Live Well, Work Well scheme and provision of mental first aiders aimed to prevent burn out and stress, and the results of the wellbeing surveys had been positive.

Councillor Newton asked whether absence caused by stress had increased. She also said that the Council should be aware of the risk of 'long COVID' to staff.

The Head of HR and OD said that although he did not have data to hand, his impression was that absence had not increased due to stress; stress and workloads

had always posed a challenge. Stress factors had increased during the pandemic but attendance levels were positive. HR had an established practice of using stress risk assessments which was enhanced in the revised absence management policy, this had been useful during this period and meant that staff suffering from stress were supported with an action plan. One member of staff had suffered with long COVID, although they had since returned to work. Members were also advised that feedback was being collated from the agile working trial, particularly regarding the COVID-secure measures in the office, and this would be considered when shaping policy going forward.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

40 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW 2020/21

The Chairman noted the underspend in training budgets due to the pandemic and asked what the plans were for learning and development going forward. She also asked if whether mixed media training would continue to be used.

The Head of HR and OD said that the budget for next year would be stretched. Members were advised of a correction to the figure given for the Service Training and Development budget for 2021/22. The figure given included funds for Member development and also costs related to the shared Revenue and Benefits Service. The final figure when these costs were deducted was £22,480. Mixed media training and e-learning would continue. The production of e-learning

course also gave the Council the opportunity to sell these on to other organisations for revenue, which had already been achieved in some cases. Members were also advised that local training budgets would now be centralised and HR and Leadership Team would approve requests for training.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

41 EMPLOYMENT POLICIES DEVELOPED REPORT X 5

The Chairman thanked Officers for their extensive work in developing the policies and noted that they had already been subject to scrutiny from Leadership Team, Local Joint Panel (LJP) and East Herts Together.

The Head of HR and OD said that the one key addition since LJP's last meeting was a flowchart in the Capability Policy. He also said that HR's work on redeveloping policy would now slow down, with customer work coming to the fore. However, the Agile Working Policy and the Re-organisation Policy would still be worked on and would be presented to the Committee when fully drafted.

It was moved by Councillor Bull and seconded by Councillor McMullen 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) the revised Capability Policy be approved;

(B) the revised Flexible Working Request Scheme be approved;

(C) the revised Recruitment and Induction Policy be approved;

(D) the revised Organisational Development Policy be approved;

(E) the revised and reduced Appeals Policy be approved in line with the changes made to the policies (A) and (B) above; and

(F) additional clauses regarding management of Leadership Team members and ensuring the Chief Executive is available for appeals relating to the three policies (Managing Absence, Probation and Disciplinary), be approved.

42 HR AND PAYROLL TEAM UPDATE

The Chairman asked about ongoing issues with the Resource Link system.

The Head of HR and OD said that the Council had committed significant amounts of time and funds to the system, so problems would have to be worked through. He had secured a refund for a recruitment module and also secured five days' work from the developer to ensure the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) was compatible with other software, an exercise which the developer had previously wanted to charge several thousand pounds for. The system had presented many challenges but work was continuing to

improve performance.

The Chairman said that she was pleased to see that Payroll successfully processed all year end statutory requirements for the 2020/21 financial year to HMRC and the pension provider. She asked that the Committee’s thanks be passed on to staff and in particular to Carmela Bavaro.

The Head of HR and OD said lateral flow testing was an additional measure on top of the Council’s COVID-secure measures to give more assurance, it was not compulsory for staff and Members if this was causing major distress, discomfort or illness.

RESOLVED – that the report be received and considered.

43 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.57 pm

Chairman
Date