

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD IN
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS,
HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 21 JUNE 2023,
AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Rachel Carter (Chairman)
Councillors M Connolly, T Deffley, V Smith,
Swainston, D Willcocks and R Buckmaster
(substitute for D Hollebon)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Daar

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Michele Aves	- Democratic Services Officer
Emily Cordwell	- Human Resources Officer
Simon O'Hear	- Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development

58 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was moved by Councillor Smith and seconded by Councillor Connolly, that Councillor Swainston be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Human Resources Committee for 2023/24. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Swainston be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Human Resources Committee for 2023/24.

59 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new administration and thanked officers for their work in the preparation of the papers.

60 APOLOGIES

There was an apology of absence from Councillor Hollebon. It was noted that Councillor Ruth Buckmaster was substituting for Councillor Hollebon.

61 MINUTES - 15 FEBRUARY 2023

The Chairman said that as there were no Members from the previous administration present, the Minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 15 February 2023 would be resubmitted for approval once she (and Members) had watched the webcast.

62 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

63 SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES - 9 MAY 2023

The Chairman said that it would be beneficial for new Members to be given an outline of the Safety Committee from the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the Safety Committee was set up as per Health and Safety Executive law. He said that he was the Chair of the Safety Committee, whose membership comprised of both officers and union members.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the Human Resources Committee received the Minutes from each of the Safety Committee meetings as they had responsibility for providing focus and monitoring the Council's health and safety matters.

Councillor Connolly referred to paragraph 6.2 of the Safety Committee Minutes and expressed her concerns regarding Marshgate Bridge. She asked if action regarding the bridge would be trackable via future Safety Committee Minutes.

Councillor Smith said that Marshgate Bridge was a very busy bridge which was very important to the community, and she asked if an update would be available at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that Marshgate Bridge had been identified as a potential concern, which the Council wished to get ahead of as it was the only access to Hartham. He said that the Assets Team were to confirm ownership of the bridge, and that the owner would then be contacted regarding a structural survey.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that as Marshgate Bridge was an action in the Safety Committee Minutes, the Human Resources Committee would see any updates in the next Minutes of the Safety Committee. He said that the Safety Committee met quarterly, and he would also arrange for Members of the Human Resources Committee to receive an email update on Marshgate Bridge.

Councillor Buckmaster referred to paragraph 13.3 of the Safety Committee Minutes and expressed her concerns regarding the long hours which some employees had worked on the District Elections day.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that concerns from employees had been raised with the Returning Officer and the Monitoring Officer. He said that the Council attempted to not employ staff for both polling station and count duties on the same day, and that there was an option to delay the count until the day after polling, which several authorities had adopted.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Safety Committee held on 9 May 2023 be received.

64 HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023
INCLUDING Q4 SUMMARY

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the report in the absence of the Health and Safety Officer.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that there had been no reportable accidents, no serious non reportable accidents and no on-site serious accidents. He said that the Lone Working Contract had changed from Skyguard to Peoplesafe and explained how the lone working devices gave security to council staff working in the field, to include being able to tracked if necessary.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that home working staff had completed Display Screen Equipment Assessments. He said that council vehicles had been badged to make them more visible and that consideration was being given to adding a van to the vehicle fleet for the transportation of dogs.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that there were some increases in non-reportable accidents at Quarter 4 of the report, but these were due to an increase in footfall at the Council's leisure facilities due to Covid-19 restrictions lifting and Hartham and Grange Paddocks reopening.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and asked if all the council's chairs had been replaced following a recent inspection.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the council had only replaced those which were no longer fit for purpose. He said that the replacement chairs were both better quality and good value.

The Chairman asked if the condemned chairs had been recycled.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that some chairs were offered to staff for a token gesture, but that the majority had been taken for recycling.

Councillor Connolly referred to paragraph 9.1 of the report (which reported no incidents or accidents for the period by the council's grounds maintenance contractor, Glendale) and sought clarification as this appeared to contradict paragraph 6.2 of the Safety Committee Minutes, in which the incident was detailed.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the incident in question did not cause any harm or injuries but required remedial action to ensure that all cables were clearly marked. He said that therefore this incident would not be recorded as an accident.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said the Health and Safety Annual Report covered the period to March 2023, and that the Safety Committee meeting was held on 9 May 2023, and this may have caused the omission of the incident from the report. He said that he would flag this to the Health and Safety Officer for an update in his Quarter 1 report, which would be on the agenda at the next meeting of the Committee.

It was moved by Councillor Buckmaster and seconded by Councillor Swainston 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 Report 2022/23, including the Quarter 4 statistics be considered and that any comments/ amendments be provided to the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and the Health and Safety Officer.

65 HR QUARTERLY STATISTICS REPORT Q4 2022-2023

The Human Resources Officer introduced the report. She said that the Council currently had thirty-one vacancies, twenty-two of which were within the Planning Department.

The Human Resources Officer said that turnover and staff absence had increased from Quarter 3 and explained the acronyms used within the report; RIPA – Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, and PACE – Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

The Human Resources Officer referred to paragraph 3.5 of the report and highlighted that the comparison data had been updated to that from the 2011 Census to the 2021 Census. She drew Members' attention to an error in paragraph 4.0 of the report, where the total figure for disabled comparison should read as 13.7% and not 13.6%.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational

Development said that the 2021 Census question relating to disability asked respondents to choose from two options, and that it was worth noting that those who said that their activities were limited 'a lot' may be unable to work.

The Chairman thanked the Human Resources Officer for her report.

Councillor Deffley asked if the offer of fixed term contracts had been used to attract recruits to the vacancies within the Planning Department.

The Human Resources Officer said that the council had offered fixed term and permanent positions, and that in the interim agency staff had been used to fill these vacancies. He said that there was a national shortage of Planning officers, and that generally people wanted permanent contracts. He said that in an attempt to be more attractive, Planning vacancies were career graded and had market supplements awarded.

Councillor Smith asked how the vacancies impacted the workload and stress for staff.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the council was currently heavily reliant on agency staff within the Planning Department. He said that it was a challenge to try and convert officers from being agency to permanent members of staff, as agency remuneration was so attractive.

Councillor Connolly asked how much stress was

related to long term staff absence.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that staff received regular 1-2-1's with their line managers and had access to employee support. He said that there was a Stress Risk Assessment in the Council's Sickness Policy, and where staff were absent for four weeks or more, they were referred to Occupational Health. He said that Human Resources would continue to look at the results from the staff wellbeing survey for patterns.

Councillor Connolly said that this would be a useful exercise. Councillor Deffley asked if the council had insurance against employment tribunals.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the council did not have insurance against employment tribunals. He said that this was considered but such insurance was very expensive and it was felt that the Council could defend itself.

It was moved by Councillor Connolly and seconded by Councillor Buckmaster 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 2023) be considered and any comments provided to the Human Resources Officer/Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

66 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW 2022/23

The Human Resources Officer introduced the report which gave a breakdown of training budgets and detailed the courses delivered in 2022/23.

The Human Resources Officer said that the council had launched its e-learning programme which provided staff with mandatory learning modules to complete, and that consideration was being given to adding modules on climate change and display screen equipment (DSE) to this programme. She said that the council continued to fund apprenticeships and staff degrees in Planning.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the number of courses delivered referred to the number of in-house events which the Human Resources Department had delivered, and that therefore external courses attended by individual staff would increase this number. He said that the e-learning programme gave a rich tapestry of training.

The Chairman thanked the Human Resources Officer for her report. She asked which departments had apprentices, and if they lived locally.

The Human Resources Officer said that there were apprentices in Customer Services, Planning and Strategic Finance and Property. She said that she herself had completed an apprenticeship within the

Human Resources Department.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that adverts for apprentices were placed on the website, but that applicants tended to be local. He said that under the Transformation Programme there was no longer an automatic apprentice budget for each department.

It was moved by Councillor Smith and seconded by Councillor Willcocks 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 2022/23 be considered and any comments be provided.

67 ANNUAL TURNOVER REPORT 2022-23

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the report which looked at the council's employee turnover. He said that as earlier highlighted by the Human Resources Officer, the report did have some crossover of information with other reports which were on the agenda.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that staff turnover was down and that the reasons given for staff leaving were consistent and of no concern. He said that in line with savings, ten posts had been deleted and that there were four posts on hold.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) from Webrecruit had improved a candidate's experience and enabled the hiring manager to see job applications before the closing date. He said that the onboarding of new employees was still however being undertaken by Human Resources as the ATS did not allow for the approval and manipulation of contracts.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that 'name blind' recruitment had not progressed as wanted as this also removed an applicant's qualifications from view. He said that the council was not paying to use ATS, but that a fix for this was being sought. He reassured Members that statistics did not show any recruitment bias.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development drew Members' attention to an error in section 11 of the report, which should read 2023/24 and not 2022/23. He said that there had been improvements to both the job section on the council's website and the staff recognition scheme.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the Human Resources Department had undergone a review by the council's Lean Six Sigma team. He said that the recommended process changes from this review have been implemented, which included the inclusion of interview dates on job adverts.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the council's induction process had moved more on-line and that the reasons for successful

candidates declining job offers or not commencing a job were to be investigated further.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development for his report.

Councillor Smith asked if the deleted posts were removed to make savings or because they were not required.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that in line with the Transformation Programme the posts were deleted for a combination of these reasons. He said that any vacancies now went before a panel before being recruited to, and that fixed term contracts were being used in some circumstances.

Councillor Smith asked how deleting posts effected those remaining staff's workload and expressed her concerns regarding these workers and stress.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that some staff embraced the opportunity to develop new skills and that some stress was unavoidable.

It was moved by Councillor Buckmaster and seconded by Councillor Swainston 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 Turnover Report 2022/23, including the actions in section 11.0 planned for 2023/24, be considered and any comments be provided to the Head of Human

Resources and Organisational Development.

68 EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT 2022-2023

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the report and gave credit to its author. He said that staff sickness levels had increased, but levels remained lower than the sector average.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that staff were keen on the blended working model and that a policy was being drafted. He said that staff felt supported and that a range of resilience workshops were available on the intranet.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development for his report.

Councillor Connolly asked if the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development was confident that staff absence for minor illnesses was not stress related.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that this was a hard question to answer, but that he had to accept what staff put on their self-certifications. He said that some stress was personal, and that during 1-2-1's staff were asked how they were. He said that staff were given tools and signposted to resources were appropriate.

Councillor Willcocks asked if a year-on-year

comparison was available for the reasons relating to long term absence.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that previous year's reports would have this information. He said that this was an area which Leadership Team were to look at.

Councillor Smith said that 41% of respondents to the staff wellbeing survey had said that a demanding workload was their biggest challenge and asked why addressing this was not in the report's actions for next year.

The Human Resources Officer said that responses to staff exit questionnaires were fed back to Heads of Service and Line Managers.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that respondents to the staff wellbeing survey were asked what their biggest challenge was and were given multiple choice answers. He acknowledged that a demanding workload was commonplace but said that when asked elsewhere in the survey if they felt supported staff had replied 'yes'.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that it was unaffordable to employ extra staff and that supervision and support was in place for staff. He said that this was why it did not appear as a specific action within the report, but that he was open to any suggestions Members may have.

Councillor Smith asked for further information

regarding Mental Health First Aid training.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that Mental Health First Aiders were volunteer members of staff who were visible to others. He said that the council needed to train more staff to add to the current number.

Councillor Connolly asked if there were indicators on how far the council could go in relation to reducing staff.

Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that front line services needed to be protected, but due to finances it was now not always possible to afford a gold standard of service. He said that the Council had several shared services, and that service reviews and business cases would suggest required staffing levels.

Councillor Connolly asked if there were any indicators for how reductions were impacting staff health, and if the reduction process contained a risk assessment question relating to the impact on staff.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the service review in Planning did not lead to any reductions and that the Corporate Support Sub review was currently being worked on. He said that the review in Finance did result in some redundancies, but the process set out how the service would work without the redundant positions. He said that it was a balance for managers as the Council had to make savings.

Councillor Connolly asked if the Committee could be provided with data relating to staff stress going forward.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that he would include the analysis of staff stress and mental health in the Quarter 1 report, which would be on the agenda at the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Willcocks asked if staff were obligated to work from home.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said an offer of blended working was made to all staff (where their job allowed), and that staff who wanted to work in the office, could do so. He said that home workers had to confirm that they had the appropriate equipment to work from home.

The Chairman asked what opportunities there were for informal social networks for home workers.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that the council advocated a 50/50 blended working pattern to ensure interaction between staff. He said that home workers needed to be fully contactable and in the case of new starters supported by colleagues in office.

It was moved by Councillor Buckmaster and seconded by Councillor Willcocks 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 2022/23, including the actions in section 8.0 planned for 2023/24, be considered and any comments be provided to the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

69 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.37 pm

Chairman
Date