

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
WEDNESDAY 5 JUNE 2024, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Rachel Carter (Chair)
Councillors M Connolly, T Deffley,
D Hollebon, M Swainston and D Willcocks

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Michele Aves	- Committee Support Officer
Jackie Bruce	- Section 106 Programme Manager
Steven Linnett	- Head of Strategic Finance and Property
Alex Wanless	- Service Manager (Human Resources and Organisational Development)

40 APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE-CHAIR FOR 2024/25

It was moved by Councillor Connolly and seconded by Councillor Hollebon, that Councillor Swainston be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Human Resources Committee for 2024/25. 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 2024/25.

41 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

42 MINUTES - 6 FEBRUARY 2024

It was moved by Councillor Carter and seconded by Councillor Swainston that the minutes of the meetings of the Human Resources Committee held on 6 February 2024 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. It was noted that Councillors Connolly, Deffley, Hollebon and Willcocks abstained from the vote.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Human Resources Committee held on 6 February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introduced the new Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager. She confirmed that she would like to be referred to/addressed as 'The Chair' during the meeting.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45 HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which had been prepared by the Health and Safety Officer and covered the past civic year under his remit.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that there had been no accidents reportable to the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence Regulations (RIDDOR), and no reportable accidents involving employees during the period. He said that there were no reported accidents regarding BEAM (formally Hertford Theatre) and two reported accidents

regarding members of the public.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the Health and Safety Officer was utilising tools to update Display Screen Equipment Assessments for home/blended working employees.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report.

Councillor Willcocks sought clarification on how the top deck of the Northgate End Car Park was being closed at night.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that due to its proximity to Yew Tree Place the Northgate End Car Park was under planning restrictions which required the top deck to be closed at 23:00 hours. He said that grills were used to stop access after this time, but that the Car Park, which was open until midnight, now closed completely at 23:00 hours.

Councillor Connolly said that it was good to see that the Health and Safety Officer was now working as part of the Transformation Team and that an Equalities Impact Assessment had been undertaken.

The Chair asked for details on the Health and Safety procedure around the use of pesticides by the Council.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that personal protective equipment (PPE) would be always used under the current contract. He said that he could not comment on the type of pesticides being used, but he could obtain this information and arrange to have it circulated to Members via the via Committee Support Officer.

The Chair said that this information would be helpful, and that it would be good to know the timing of when the pesticides were used, i.e., not when the public were in

situ.

Councillor Swainston said that the use of pesticides was a subject which was recently looked at by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair said that the report was very encouraging and showed that the Council had a good safety culture.

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

RESOLVED – that the Annual Health and Safety Report 2023/24 be considered, and any comments/amendments be provided to the Service Manager of HR and OD and the Health and Safety Officer.

46 EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT 2023/24

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which concerned the wellbeing and sickness absence of the Council's employees. He said that generally absence was under UK averages and below targets.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the Council supported its workforce with its Occupational Health Line, which was being reviewed in 2024 to ensure it gave best service, and with its Employee Assistance Programme, which offered advice and mental health support. He said that Mental Health First Aiders were also being explored in 2024.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for this report and said that the Council had a lot of support for its employees.

Councillor Deffley sought clarification of when the Council's blended working policy began.

The Unison Representative said that blended working began following the Covid-19 pandemic, and offered employees the opportunity to work a 50/50 split between home and the office (or workplace).

Councillor Deffley asked if blended working had any impact on the duration of sickness and sickness patterns.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that from his background in Human Resources, he knew that generally blended working had decreased the level of short-term sickness.

Councillor Swainston said that the report showed that the Council's short-term sickness was above their target, but lower than the local authority average.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that this may be a metric, and that he would clarify this with officers and include confirmation in his next report.

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

RESOLVED – that the annual Employee Health and Wellbeing Report 2023/24 including the actions (in section 8.0) planned for 2024/25 be considered and any comments be provided to the HR and OD Service Manager.

47 ANNUAL TURNOVER REPORT 23 - 24

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which gave detail on the Council's employee turnover for 2023/24. He said that the

biggest reason for employees leaving the Council was retirement, as there was a large number of people over fifty-five in the organisation. He said that the second biggest reason for leaving was to achieve promotion.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that over half of the employees who left the Council completed an exit review – which was a good return rate. He said that most of the exit reviews were positive, with eight four percent recommending work at the Council.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the number of council vacancies was higher than last year, but that some roles were awaiting review due to potential cost savings. He said that Planning vacancies remained difficult to fill for all local authorities, with vacancies in Environmental Health following this trend.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the new Applicant Tracking System was being used to streamline and make the recruitment process more attractive, and that there were plans to organise social events for staff.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report.

Councillor Willocks asked if data which showed annual turnover trends across other local authorities was available.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the Council had signed up to InfiniStats which gave benchmarking across the sector.

The Chair said that the Committee had requested benchmarking data, and so the inclusion of this would be helpful. She added that the difficulties in recruiting to Planning vacancies were an ongoing challenge.

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

RESOLVED – that the Annual Turnover Report 2023/2024 including the actions (in section 11.0) planned for 2024/25 be considered and any comments provided to the HR and OD Service Manager.

48 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT 23 -24

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which detailed the investment in employees made by the Council.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that training budgets were split into different pots. He said that general training was delivered via an e-learning programme - which had a good uptake, and via ad hoc training requests.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the Next Steps Programme included First Step for aspirant managers, for which feedback had been good. He said that The Next Step was designated for Service Managers to develop skills and give exposure to other department managers, and that Blueprint, which was written by the former Interim Head of Service, was being developed for Line Managers.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the Council continued to fund master's degrees for Planners and were committed to make use of the apprenticeship levy. He said that the Transformation Programme would also provide training opportunities.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for this report and said that she welcomed the idea of supporting

apprentices.

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

RESOLVED – that the Learning and Development Review for 2023/2024 be considered and any comments provided.

49 HUMAN RESOURCES QUARTER FOUR STATISTICS
2023/24

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which covered the period of January to March 2024. He said that the report detailed similar trends to those included in the evenings Annual Report.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report and drew Members attention to the Minutes of the Health and Safety Committee which were now included as an appendix.

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

RESOLVED – that the Human Resources Management report for Quarter 4 (January to March 2024) be considered and any comments provided to the HR Officer/Head of HR and OD regarding the content or formatting of the report.

50 FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICY REPORT

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which detailed the

proposed updates to the Flexible Working Policy, in line with new legislation passed in April 2024.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the legislative changes now entitled employees to submit a 'day one' flexible working request (FWR), removing the requirement for them to have at least twenty-six weeks of continuous service. He said that the changes also allowed employees to make two FWR in a twelve-month period, and reduced the time limit for employers to respond to such requests.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report.

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

RESOLVED – that the updated Flexible Working Policy be approved.

51 GENERAL LEAVE POLICY REPORT

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which addressed legislative changes regarding Carers Leave, allowing employees to take unplanned planned leave to look after dependents.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the Council already allowed five days (FTE) of paid emergency Dependency Leave and that Carers Leave would be included and split between this pot.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report and said that it was good to see that the Council recognised and gave support to carers.

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

RESOLVED – that the updated General Leave Policy be approved.

52 FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICY REPORT

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which involved a legislative update, and proposed that this be combined with a current operational policy.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the changes entitled employees to now separate their two weeks of Paternity Leave within the fifty-two weeks following birth or adoption. He said that employees also now only need give employers twenty-eight days' notice of the expected birth or adoption.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report and concurred that the policy was now better organised.

Councillor Connolly expressed her admiration to Human Resources for the changes to the policies and their support to colleagues.

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

RESOLVED – that the updated Family Friendly Policy be approved.

53 REDUNDANCY POLICY REPORT

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which proposed an update to the Redundancy Policy, reinstating a clause to protect council and public money.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the clause appeared to have been removed approximately fifteen years ago, but there was no audit trail of this. He said that the clause prevented employees from taking redundancy money and then being rehired by the Council within six months.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the policy had been updated in consultation with the union – Unison, and a waiver to the clause (via the Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive) had been added following the meeting of the Local Joint Panel on 21 May 2024.

The Unison Representative said that the waiver was intended to cover specialist niche job roles in extenuating circumstances, i.e., where a role was funding dependent.

The Union Representative said that the feeling was that it was not appropriate for the Council or the Council's remaining staff that employees be able to receive redundancy and then be rehired within the given time frame. She said that neighbouring authorities polices had been consulted for guidance, and that redundancies were always avoided with redeployment used where possible.

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report.

Councillor Deffley asked if 'redundancy hopping' was a feature.

The Union Representative said that when an employee took redundancy, they could not work in another local authority for four weeks, or they would have to repay the redundancy monies.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that a person's employment history would show such activity, he said that the recruitment process looked at history and references, so this behaviour would be suspicious and would be unable to be hidden. He added that this behaviour did not tend to happen at district level, and that it was rare to find people who wished to return once they had a pension in payment as this would cause the pension to stop.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that 'hopping' would also prevent employees from building a big redundancy pot.

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

RESOLVED – that the updated Redundancy Policy be approved.

54 VOLUNTEERING POLICY REPORT

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager introduced the report which proposed a new and operational policy to enable volunteers to be recruited at BEAM.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that The Executive Member for Communities had experience as a volunteer coordinator and had given her input into the policy. He said that thought had been given to enable under eighteens to volunteer, but this had been decided against for now as it added pressures such as Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS).

The Chair thanked the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager for his report.

Councillor Connolly said that she was concerned with some of the content of the policy, she referred to Section 5.0 – Dress Code, and said that a ‘no trainers’ policy could be a barrier to diverse recruitment. She said that some trainers today were smart and that the term seemed old fashioned, adding that a policy of ‘smart casual’ dress code would suffice.

Councillor Connolly referred to Section 9.6 – which related to BEAM having no upper age limit for volunteers and observed that the second sentence of the paragraph which detailed when a volunteering role may become detrimental to somebodies’ health, could apply to a volunteer of any age. She therefore suggested that the second sentence of this section be separated as it could be seen as ageist.

Councillor Connolly referred to Section 14 and said that there was confusion as the volunteering contract was with BEAM but volunteers where to follow East Herts Council’s health and safety policies and procedures. She questioned how volunteers would have training and access to these policies.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that BEAM was not a legal entity, and that as East Herts Council was the legal entity reference must be made to it.

Councillor Connolly said that the policy contained sentences which stated that volunteers must comply with BEAM, and that therefore this needed clarifying.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that BEAM was a venue which had specific risks (such as working at height, in enclosed spaces, and with pyro techniques) and required separate health and safety policies. He said that this resulted in there being three health and safety documents.

The Chair sought clarification that said these were East

Herts Council documents which referred to BEAM.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that when BEAM was spoken about this referred to the building, so the health and safety documents referred to BEAM the building.

Councillor Connolly referred to Section 17- which detailed confidentiality and data and said that this appeared confused, and suggested it be reviewed by the Legal Department. She said that in particular she was concerned with the status of documents and how volunteers were trained on and accessed these. She said that with regards to confidentiality, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) should be referred to.

Councillor Connolly referred to Section 19 – and asked if the procedure for a volunteer leaving BEAM was a separate document which would come before the Committee. She asked how a volunteer would raise a complaint or grievance and if there was a feedback mechanism.

Councillor Connolly said that it appeared to be a complicated volunteering organisation, and that this together with the risks described, required a lot of training. She said with the open loops which she had detailed she would be concerned with approving the policy.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that should the policy not be approved the operation of BEAM could be jeopardised.

The Chair asked when the Committee would next have sight of the policy, as the use of volunteers from sixteen years of age was an expected future update.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that the next Human Resources Committee was scheduled for September, and that if there were concerns to address these would be worked on with

urgency, and the policy brought before the next meeting.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager said that with regards to the concerns raised by Councillor Connolly the reason for no trainers may be due to PPE requirement, for which he would obtain clarity. He reiterated that BEAM was the building and the brand name.

Councillor Hollebon said that she understood the implications but did not want to overload things for the volunteers. She asked that with Everyone Active (EA) taking responsibility for BEAM if discussions had been had with them regarding the use of volunteers.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that EA was not taking over the running of BEAM, which remained a Council's operation. He clarified that two experienced theatre managers from EA had been seconded to BEAM to give advice, guidance, and technical assistance to the Council's in-house Operations Team while the building was mobilised. He reiterated that there had been no decision to outsource BEAM to EA.

Councillor Hollebon said that she had been misadvised, and that it was the responsibility of the Leader of the Council and its Executive to communicate with clarity so that every Member knew the true position regarding BEAM.

The Chair echoed the comments regarding the need for clarity for Members and the members of the public which were made by Councillor Hollebon.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager referred to the comments regarding Section 19 which were made by Councillor Connelly. He said that this area would be covered by the Council, with the Human Resources Team giving support when required. He agreed that this could be made clearer within the policy.

Councillor Connolly voiced her concerns that BEAM was to be run with volunteers, with its risks and a policy which contained gaps.

Councillor Willcocks asked for clarification that the policy could be passed with comments/ reservations and returned to the Committee for review.

The Committee Support Officer advised that the Committee needed to stipulate the actions required and give a timeframe for this.

The Chair said that she appreciated the requirement to safeguard volunteers but was conscious not to be too onerous or unfriendly.

The Unison Representative said that BEAM (or Hertford Theatre as was) had a large number of dedicated and skilled volunteers, who other venues were envious of. She said that her understanding was that these volunteers were keen to return, and hoped that this information alleviated some of the concerns raised. She said that she appreciated the need for a clearer policy but emphasised the need to take the policy forward.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager reiterated that he was happy to take the comments on board and encouraged Members to email him with any further comments.

Councillor Deffley asked if the comments could be addressed, and the amended policy circulated for approval outside of the meeting.

Councillor Connolly suggested the organising of an extraordinary meeting of the Committee.

The Chair said that the concerns raised related to one policy, with a small number of amendments. She suggested that the policy be approved, subject to it

returning to the Committee in September to allow second discussion. She said that BEAM was to open at the end of August 2024 and that recruiting volunteers would be a long process.

The Head of Strategic Finance and Property said that as the Committee was constituted Members were required to be present at a meeting to vote, for a decision to be valid.

Councillor Swainston said that whilst she recognised the concerns raised by Councillor Connolly, she could see nothing in the policy which posed an immediate danger. She suggested that the policy be approved, the amendments be made, and the policy brought before the next meeting of the Committee. She noted that Southmill Arts Centre was run with volunteers, and so the situation was not unusual.

It was moved by Councillor Willcocks and seconded by Councillor Swainston, that the recommendations, as detailed, be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED. It was noted that Councillor Connolly abstained from the vote.

RESOLVED – that the updated Volunteering Policy be approved, with the amendments made as detailed, and returned to the September meeting of the Human Resources Committee for further review.

55 URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 8.12 pm

Chairman
Date

