

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Personnel Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 29 January 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 2.38 pm

20 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 October 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 17th October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

21 Declarations of interest

None.

22 Public speaking

None.

23 Matters of urgency

None.

24 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

25 Pay Policy Statement

The report set out the requirement of the committee to undertake a review of the Council's Pay Policy Statement, as required under the Council's Constitution which aligns with the requirements under the Localism Act.

The reviewed Statement was presented to the committee, which set out the policy relating to the remuneration of the Chief Officers and other employees, and the relationship between the pay of Chief Officers and the lowest paid employee.

This relationship, referred to as the pay multiple, stood at 4.4:1, which remains within the Council's agreed 10:1 maximum ration, and is below the previous year's figure of 5.9:1. This compared favourably to the other Devon councils.

Recommended to Council that the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 be adopted.

26 Review of Grievance Policy

The reviewed Grievance Policy was before the committee, to consider and approve as per their remit. The review had been undertaken in light of recent grievance cases that had highlighted some aspects that could be improved in terms of the provision of information to the employee following an investigation.

The changes covered:

- Clarification on some elements of the policy, for example the role of the manager considering the grievance, and the role of the employee's companion;
- A new section covering who can attend the grievance proceedings with the employee, amalgamating information from other section to provide increased clarity;
- Further clarification regarding situations where investigation is required;
- Further clarification on the written records retained, and what information from those records will be shared with the employee.

UNISON had been consulted on the amendments to the Policy and been asked for their feedback, which was provided to the committee verbally:

- That the policy and impact assessment doesn't acknowledge that some people may require the meetings and/or records to be held/presented in a different format due to their protected characteristics – it is acknowledged that this isn't explicit in the policy or impact assessment, but it is very much part of our practice and will continue to be so. It was therefore suggested that HR add this to both documents before they are published;
- That the policy does not recognise that groups of employees, as well as individuals, may have a grievance which could be dealt with through this policy – again, this is not explicit but has been the practice and it was suggested that this is clarified in the policy document before publication;
- That the policy does not recognise that there are also other avenues available that the employees can take to resolve their grievance, including an appeal with timescales set out; ACAS; their Union; or the Tribunal service and guidance may need to be given to support employees – the appeal stage of the process was included in the policy at paragraph 15. With regard to other avenues, such as ACAS, the trade union or employment tribunals, these are outside the scope of the organisation's grievance policy and form part of general employment law, so it was proposed that these are not incorporated into the policy. Employees also have access to a wide range of information on the government's website and through avenues such as their trade union or citizens advice, should they wish to access further information on ACAS or tribunal routes.

The committee discussed the response from UNISON and agreed with the course of action proposed, in that the policy should be updated to cover the first two points. An amendment to paragraph 15.5 was proposed and supported to include the word "internal" so that this paragraph would read as "This is the end of the procedure and there is no further internal appeal."

Specific grievance cases that had prompted this review could not be discussed, however in response to a question, summarised information would be provided to the committee as part of an annual report that would show the scale of work but not the detail or confidential information relating to these cases.

RESOLVED that the change to the Council's Grievance Policy be approved.

27 **People Data**

The committee considered their regular update on key people data. The update aims to inform policy decision and to provide an overview of workforce matters.

Highlighted in the report were:

- Headcount increase by 9 from 541 in August, to 553 in December, and remains in budget;
- Vacancies have dropped to 29, compared to 46 in August 2023, being the lowest level reported since reporting began in January 2022;

- Average time taken to fill vacancies has reduced to 72.83 days since May 2023, which the average time was 108.92 days. This new average is significantly below the general benchmarking data which indicates that circa 100 days is the average time taken by organisations to fill posts;
- Sickness absence levels, currently forecasted at 9.33 days per FTE are still above the end of year absence target of 8.5 days per FTE. Cold/Flu and Covid infections are the most common reasons for absence. Sickness absence continues to be actively managed, and employees are supported in accordance with the Absence Management Policy.

The committee discussed the impact of sickness absence, noting that the longer term absence can influence the average adversely; and that the winter season traditionally brought more colds/flu. Increases in Covid cases were very apparent in local communities and were also affecting staffing levels. A suggestion was put forward for writing to central Government on their current Covid policy, and how it impacted on the ability to deliver services. Whilst this had some support, there was concern that evidence on the actual impact on service delivery due to the infection would be required.

The committee resolved that in the first instance they would request that the Corporate Lead – Human Resources discussed with South West Employers the concerns of Councillors on Covid measures (including reduced vaccinations) and the impact it is having on key workers. They also requested for her to look in further detail at the sickness absence classified as due to Covid.

The committee also showed interest in having more data, if available, on the impact on sickness absence relating to home working or attending the offices.

RESOLVED that the committee endorsed the report.

28 **Personnel Forward Plan**

The committee received their forward plan of work, setting out the policies due for review at their next meeting in April. Items also yet to be scheduled to meetings in the next civic term were listed.

In addition, the committee requested:

- A report on employee benefits and support available at their next scheduled meeting;
- A report on the measures in place for dealing with the hard to recruit posts which have been vacant for over six months.

The current absence policy and related information on initiatives under the “Happy, Healthy, Here” scheme would be circulated to the committee in the meantime.

RESOLVED that the committee endorsed their Forward Plan with the additions discussed.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

E Rylance (Chair)

J Loudoun (Vice-Chair)

P Arnott

K Blakey

V Bonetta
T Dumper
P Faithfull
M Hartnell
N Hookway

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

C Brown
J Brown
R Collins

Officers in attendance:

Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance & Licensing (Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

M Chapman
D Haggerty
M Martin
S Richards
E Wragg

Chair

Date: