

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Personnel Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 4 July 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 10.54 am

1 Public speaking

None.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 February 2023 were agreed.

3 Declarations of interest

None.

4 Matters of urgency

None.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

6 Working for East Devon District Council

The report set out how the Council's pay and terms and conditions are determined, the current workforce priorities and some of the actions taken in recent years to support those.

The actions included to date covered:

- Reward review
- Worksmart
- Employer brand and recruitment process review
- Grow your Own
- Happy Healthy Here, Learning and development and Staff Benefits
- Workforce planning
- People data
- liP

Debate on the report included:

- Clarification on workforce planning, specifically in terms of the number of existing staff that had been promoted or developed into other roles. Whilst specific numbers could not be given, a number of examples of opportunities for staff were outlined;
- Desire for an expansion of the report provided into a formal briefing session for both committee and other Members at a future date;
- liP status results would come before the committee at their next scheduled meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7 **Grow our own project update**

The report set out an update on the 'grow our own' project which aims to support recruitment, retention and succession planning for the workforce. The report also included a snapshot of some of the initiatives, including apprenticeships and work experience. The project had focus on the long-term development of staff, with regular updates being provided to the committee.

Debate on the topic included:

- Recent press coverage of the experiences of recruiting younger employees elsewhere in the country. This reported lack of engagement but it was confirmed that this had not been experienced locally, in fact any engagement had been positive;
- Contact had been made with all secondary schools in the local area; some more engaging than others to date. The Council were hosting a meeting of career leads of local schools at Blackdown House in October to help establish how they could all work together to deliver opportunities for students entering the job market;
- Balancing the risk of newly qualified apprenticeships leaving for other employers, against the opportunities. Whilst it was early in the process to establish a retention rate for the District Council, such schemes elsewhere had reported a high percentage of retention following qualification;
- Outlining the types and breadth of apprenticeship schemes available to the Council would be beneficial to add for any briefing session to the committee and other Members;
- Work experience schemes were being developed, and were often dependent on when individual schools released students – often at different times of the year.

The Chair commented of her pride in the offer available to both existing staff and to students, which may provide an alternative to university and associated student loan debt.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

8 **Transgender Visibility**

The following statement was read out on behalf of Councillor Violet Bonetta:

"Firstly, I apologise that I am unable to be here this morning in person, I am away and out of the country.

I would like to start off by saying it is great to see progress being made on my predecessor's motion of transgender visibility being implemented in the council. As the first openly transgender Cllr on East Devon, it is great to see progress being made on areas that are going to impact transgender people positively in our local area.

I am happy to see the councils push on their HR systems provider to allow for different titles for non-binary and other gender non-conforming individuals. The introduction of a trans equality policy for members of staff is very much a welcomed addition too, alongside the introduction of trans-specific training later this year. I truly believe the introduction of these policies will thoroughly benefit any current or future trans or gender non-conforming staff at East Devon, making them feel more welcomed and accepted in their workplace. This will be furthered by a trans and non-binary staff network, which I understand will be introduced if there is demand for it.

In relation to the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme, I would have to disagree with the report where it states Stonewall offers "controversial advice" and promotes "trans-extremism", but I do accept the fact that the programme may not be cost-effective

for the council at this time and accept that the Council should not join the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme.

Therefore, I urge all members this morning to vote for the recommendations made in this report. The introduction of these policies is essential if our council wants to support trans and gender non-conforming people, especially in a political climate where many of us feel unsafe and unwelcomed."

The HR Manager set out the report findings, which followed an investigation into work required to meet the agreed motion at Council on 22 February 2023 on transgender visibility. This included information sought from other councils on whether they have, or plan to use, the Stonewall Programme. On the basis of the information found, and the resources available elsewhere, the recommendation was put to the committee not to implement that programme. Other actions to address transgender visibility were set out and discussed by the committee.

Debate included:

- Agreement of the proposals put forward;
- Awareness of the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme associated costs and other organisations no longer signed up to it;
- Assessing if toilets throughout Blackdown House should all be classed as unisex; in response, the current arrangements were a direct result of consultation with staff to reach a compromise; these views can be sought again if required;
- Other organisations existed to provide advice and assistance to the council on transgender and gender non-conforming issues.

RESOLVED that

1. that the Council will not implement the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme due to concerns raised;
2. that staff views on the introduction of a staff network to support non-binary and transgender employees is explored as part of the planned staff survey later this year;
3. that the Council will continue to ensure the completion of mandatory equality, diversity and inclusion training for staff and explore specific training once available;
4. that the Member Development Panel review equality, diversity and inclusion training for members;
5. the introduction of a new Trans Equality Policy, as shown at Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed.

9 Recruitment, Relocation and Overseas Employment policies

The committee were asked to approve changes to the Recruitment and Relocation policies and to agree a new policy on the employment of people who reside overseas.

The existing Recruitment Policy had been reviewed to make it more user friendly and support a positive candidate journey. The Relocation Policy had also been reviewed and required approval.

Whilst there were no current overseas resident employees, the opportunity had been taken to review the implications of this, including the complexities of employment law and tax that would arise from an employee living in another country. The proposal was therefore to not employ anyone living overseas.

Discussion included:

- Assurances that right to work processes were robustly in place for all potential employees;
- Relocations would be considered on a case by case basis. The policy had only been used rarely in recent years;
- Managers would identify where posts had the requirement for the employee to be living in the local area;
- General agreement with the policy changes as proposed.

RESOLVED that

1. **The proposed changes to the Recruitment and Relocation Policies be approved;**
2. **That the Council policy to not employ people who reside overseas due to the legal, cost and other issues associated with such an arrangements, be approved.**

10 **People data**

The regular report to committee provides key data on the workforce, to support policy decision making and an overview of workforce matters. It also included the annual People Data Report for 2022/23, which set out a wider range of detail on workforce matters. The data was also regularly share with Strategic Management Team.

Clarification was sought on a disparity between a reported absence figure of the Housing Service to the Housing Review Board, and the figures represented in the report. Detail would be checked and supplied back to that Councillor.

In response to a question, the grievance level of 2 during 2022/23 was regarded as a short-term spike and not typical.

The process for exit questionnaires, which had been recently updated, was outlined in response to a question asking if they were undertaken.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

E Rylance (Chair)
J Loudoun (Vice-Chair)
K Blakey
M Chapman
T Dumper
P Faithfull
D Haggerty
M Hartnell
N Hookway
M Martin

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow

Officers in attendance:

Joanna Fellows, Corporate HR Manager
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Mark Williams, Chief Executive

Councillor apologies:

P Arnott
V Bonetta
P Hayward
S Richards
E Wragg

Chair

Date: