

Minutes of a meeting of the Staff and Pensions Committee held on 13 October 2011

Present:

Councillors: Alan Farnell (Chair)
Jim Foster
Eithne Goode
Martin Heatley
Brian Moss

Officers: David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources
John Betts, Head of Finance
Bob Perks, Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development
Ruth Pickering, Corporate Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager
Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager

1. General

(1) Apologies for Absence

None.

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2011

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

2. Corporate Health and Safety Annual Report 2010/11

Ruth Pickering presented the annual report of the Council's Corporate Health and Safety and reminded members that health and safety, and wellbeing were now part of one integrated team, reporting to herself, and enhancing the corporate approach by integrating and improving communication and procedures across the Council.

The Committee noted that the number of reported accidents had increased by 17%, although the top five causes of accidents has remained the same for five consecutive years. The increase was considered to be due largely to a campaign to raise awareness of health and safety and ensure accidents were reported. During discussion the Committee was advised that the Council is not the employer in the case of Academies and therefore Academies do not report to the Council and are responsible for their own health and safety arrangements. In the case of volunteers, if they are undertaking work for the

Council, then they must be treated as employees in terms of health and safety.

It was noted that the Council's strategy is to increase health and safety through education and communication, rather than 'reward' service areas for low incidence of accidents or sickness as a sense of competition can lead to a reluctance to report incidents.

The top three reasons for referrals to Occupational Health in 2010/11 were musculoskeletal, stress/anxiety/mental health and medical conditions. The number of referrals increased by 1% and there were 257 new referrals to short term support and counselling in 2010/11. These are classified according to the most prominent cause expressed at each session and is usually is a combination of work-related and personal issues. The Committee noted that Atherstone fire investigation, the pay and condition review and the organisational change, job insecurity and reductions in resources, should be taken into account when looking at the statistics. The stress and wellbeing working party has launched the management off work-related stress and wellbeing policy and risk assessments so that action can be taken to prevent work related stress.

The priorities proposed for 2011/12 continue the approach taken in 2010/11 and as set out in the report.

Resolved

That the Committee endorses the proposed actions, KPIs and priorities set out in the report for 2011/12.

3. Employee Absence Management

The Committee received a report setting out the sickness levels and reasons for absence for 2010/11 and noted that the average days lost per employee were 8.8 FTE which was slightly higher than in the three previous years but was still below the national average. The committee was also reminded that in some occupations (such as in care and catering) staff were not allowed to work if sick due to the risk of cross infection. A third of staff have also had no absence.

The top four reasons for sickness remain the same but for the first time stress/mental health issues is the top reason given for sickness. It is also possible that other physical symptoms (such as digestive system) are stress-related but the record is of the reported reason for absence.

Members sought assurance that there is support for individuals and were assured that individuals are followed up and support offered.

The Committee was also assured that managers were required and were undertaking return to work interviews with staff. This was recorded through

HRMS and managers were obliged to send returns on a weekly basis to state absences, and that have undertaken any required return to work interviews.

It was noted that there were currently 11 permanent ill health retirements. 18 months to 3 years is the period for short term retirements and if at the end of that a GP says the person is fit to undertake any work, then their pension is stopped.

The Committee noted the report and the steps taken to identify and reduce stress in the workplace.

- 4. Any other business**
Taken as exempt item.

- 5. Exclusion of Public**

Resolved

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

- 6. Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2011**

Resolved

That the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

- 7. Local Government Pension**

John Betts updated the meeting on the Government's proposals on Pension Reform and Bob Perks updated the meeting on the union proposals to ballot members with a view to national strike action on 30 November.

- 8. Employment Tribunals**

Councillor Eithne Goode asked what the position is with regard employment tribunals.

Bob Perks undertook to find out whether there were any employment tribunals in progress and to notify Cllr Goode of the number and whether there are any trends or lessons to be learned.

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Chair

The meeting ended at 4.25 p.m.