

Minutes of a meeting of the Staff and Pensions Committee held on 13 November 2012

Present:

Councillors: Chris Davis
Jim Foster
Martin Heatley
Brian Moss

Officers: David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources
Sue Evans, Head of HR and Organisational Development
Alison Lehky, Business Partnership Manager
Ruth Pickering, Corporate Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager
Tracey Sampson, Employee Relations Manager
Paul Williams, Democratic Services Team Leader

1. General

Election of Chair – In the absence of Councillor Farnell Councillor Heatley was elected to the Chair for this meeting.

(1) Apologies for Absence

Councillors Alan Farnell, Eithne Goode, Colin Hayfield

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2011

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2011 be agreed as a correct record. Under item 8 in the minutes the committee was informed that the Council is currently involved in 5 industrial tribunal cases.

2. Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2010/11

Ruth Pickering summarised the key elements of the report stating that since the last General Election a number of changes had been made to legislation around health and safety and wellbeing. The meeting was informed of recent health and safety interventions at the County Council. These included an incident in the boiler room at Shire Hall and a case where a client being transported by the council fell from a wheelchair.

Reported accidents have fallen 16% in the last year. It is expected that this figure will further decrease further as the disposal of care homes and the

academisation of schools will remove them from the Council's responsibility in terms of health and safety. The main causes of sickness remain musculo-skeletal and stress related.

A major achievement has been the restructuring of the Health and Safety Team. This now operates on a more corporate level working across groups.

Councillor Foster asked whether good health and safety performance by staff is recognised. It was explained that whilst it is commendable for teams to have zero or few recorded accidents there is a risk that people will be reluctant to report accidents. The key is to encourage people to look after their health and safety.

Councillor Davis asked whether the addition of responsibility for wellbeing was adding unreasonably to the burden on staff. The meeting was informed that wellbeing has for some time been linked to health and safety. Mental health has a particular link to health and safety and work is being done to ensure that managers recognise the risk. The Staff Care Service is particularly well used and has proved an effective way of keeping people at work.

Benchmarking against other local authorities is difficult owing to the differences in services offered. However it was acknowledged that the targets set out in the report will largely be met.

Resolved

That the Committee endorses the proposed actions, KPIs and priorities set out in the report for 2012/13.

3. Employee Sickness Management

Sue Evans presented a report setting out the sickness levels and reasons for absence for 2011/12 and noted that the average days lost per employee were 8.2 FTE which was slightly higher than in the three previous years. One concern is the increase in "presenteeism" this being instances when staff arrive at work when ill. They do this either because they fear a poor sickness record or because they seek recognition for having good attendance.

There is now greater control of long term absenteeism. Whilst the Council offers extensive support for those experiencing long term sickness it is increasingly recognised that sometimes staff have to be let go for the good of the service.

Stress is an area of concern. Uncertainty and change can lead to stress and it is important that managers know how to address it.

Councillor Foster expressed concern at the recorded sickness levels. In response the meeting was informed that sickness can be a matter of luck. Some people fall ill more often than others. However a clear sense of purpose and a culture of support can help to keep sickness levels manageable.

Resolved

- (1) That the Committee notes the performance information in relation to the management of employee sickness absence during 2011/12
- (2) That the Committee supports a proactive approach to managing absence which includes effective training of managers.

4. Reorganisation of the Equality and Diversity Team

Sue Evans introduced this item outlining the need for the organisation of the team and the challenges that face the operation of an in-house translation service. Highly sensitive areas such as child protection require translation services of the highest standard. Because of their often technical nature these can be more effectively provided by commissioning from outside sources. She also talked about the equality and diversity agenda.

Resolved

That the committee notes the report

5. 2013/14 Pay Claim

Sue Evans opened this item explaining that the four year pay freeze imposed on Warwickshire County Council staff has resulted in a 13% fall in income in real terms taking account of increasing costs. She added that it is particularly the lower paid staff that are beginning to struggle with a significant number seeking to take on second jobs to bring in a reasonable income. One concern arising from the pay freeze is the inability to recruit new staff particularly to middle and senior roles.

As proposed by the unions consideration has been given to providing a 1 – 1.5 % pay rise next year to all staff. Councillor Foster asked if consideration had been given to giving a pay rise to the lowest paid only. He was informed that it hadn't at this stage.

Reductions in car allowances were cited as a further way in which staff had been negatively affected. The meeting was informed that nationally consideration is being given to slightly increasing the allowance from 40p to 45p a mile.

Resolved

That the Committee recommends Warwickshire County Council to support the Local Government Employers in making a standard pay award to all staff in 2013-14.

6. Any other business

None

7. 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.

8. Term Time Payments

Tracey Sampson explained the background to the report before David Carter recommended the adoption of Option E as stated in it.

The committee agreed to adoption of option (e) and related recommendations as set out in the exempt (private) minutes of the meeting.

9. Equal Pay

David Carter updated the committee on the current position regarding claims for equal pay.

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Chair

The meeting ended at 11.05 am