

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Staff and Pensions Committee held on 14 November 2013**

### **Present:**

#### **Members of the Committee**

Councillors: Izzi Seccombe (Chair)  
John Appleton  
Jeff Clarke  
Sara Doughty  
Bill Gifford  
Brian Moss

Officers: David Carter, Strategic Director, Resources  
Angela Chisholm, HR Consultant  
Alison Lehky, Business Partnership Manager  
Ruth Wilkinson, County Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager  
Paul Williams, Democratic Services Team Leader

### **1. General**

#### **(1) Apologies for Absence**

None.

#### **(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

Councillor John Appleton declared an interest as a member of the pension fund.

#### **(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2013**

The minutes of the meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013 were discussed and agreed. Regarding item 4 (Recognition and Procedural Agreement between Warwickshire County Council and Recognised Trade Unions) Councillor John Appleton asked whether the fact that the document in question is not legally enforceable was made clear in the document itself. Officers were of the view that it was but agreed to confirm this with the committee.

#### **Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2013 be agreed as a correct record.

## **2. Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2012-13**

Ruth Wilkinson (County Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager) highlighted key issues from the published report. These included,

- the drive to reduce the bureaucracy around health and safety,
- the introduction by the Health and Safety Executive of a cost recovery scheme,
- a decrease in the number of reported accidents,
- the introduction of a new streamlined workplace inspection programme,
- changes to the auditing regime,
- the top two reasons for absence continue to be musculo-skeletal ailments and stress,
- health and safety training is being developed for employees with a view to developing greater resilience. In addition a more structured approach to health and safety is being delivered with action plans that will help to ensure that staff are aware of their responsibilities.

Ruth Wilkinson concluded by making a commitment to provide reports to the committee early in the reporting year as well as ensuring that senior managers receive quarterly reports for their areas. These initiatives were welcomed by the committee.

In response to a question from Councillor John Appleton the committee was informed that as most injury accidents were experienced by non-employees the incidents have to be reported directly to the Health and Safety Executive. If the Health and Safety Executive seeks to recover costs from the local authority these will have to be borne by individual cost centres. There is no central budget for this.

The committee was reminded that as the report is based on historical data it still retained data pertaining to care homes. These have now passed from the control of the County Council and consequently it is expected that accidents in some areas will be seen to decrease in future reports.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe questioned why the Fire and Rescue Service had seen a significant increase in reported incidents. In response the meeting was informed that this was due to changes to the criteria used with “near-misses” being included in the statistics. Whilst some members questioned the need to record these the meeting acknowledged that they may serve as a preventative tool. However, the Fire and rescue Service needs to use reporting criteria the same as other areas of the County Council. Only in this way can accurate comparisons be made.

Regarding the existence of asbestos in school buildings the committee was informed that when schools become academies the responsibility for following asbestos-related regulations goes with them to the new management.

## **Resolved**

That the Staff and Pensions Committee:

- 1) notes the Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2012-13 and endorses the proposed actions, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and priorities recommended within it for 2013-14.
- 2) Requests work be undertaken to ensure that reporting processes and the way they are used be consistent across the authority.

### **3. Employee Sickness Management Report**

Angela Chisholm (HR Consultant) stated that the County Council's sickness rates have in the year to March 2013 increased slightly. However this reflects the national trend. The high level of sickness in the People Group was noted but it was suggested that with the removal of care homes from the equation the figures for 2013/14 should be better. Long term sickness (20+ days) accounts for most absence and HR is working with managers to identify ways reducing sickness levels.

Councillor Jeff Clarke stressed the need for managers to be trained in managing sickness and that they should appreciate their important role in reducing sickness levels. He added that the uncertainties of people's futures will have increased stress levels.

Councillor Bill Gifford suggested that sickness statistics should be provided at a lower level ie not just at Group level. This will allow members to see where in various groups sickness levels are particularly high. In reply to a question from Councillor Sara Doughty the committee was informed that "other reasons" for sickness is being phased out. Inoculations are not provided for free but staff are encouraged to have them. The Director of Public Health has a role to play in this.

There was some uncertainty over whether the statistics for Fire and Rescue cover support staff only or included firefighters. Angela Chisholm agreed to check on this.

In response to a question from Councillor Izzi Seccombe members were informed that regular absentees are tackled and that there are robust mechanisms to manage this. "Presenteeism" has reduced.

Councillor John Appleton observed that Stratford-on-Avon District Council operates a staff survey and follows up suggestions for improvements. This is a useful way of reducing stress. The meeting was informed that Warwickshire County Council has seen a slight reduction in stress related sickness.

It was agreed that detailed sickness information (ie down to business unit level) will be reported to the Portfolio Holder.

## **Resolved**

That the committee:

- 1) notes with concern the increased levels of sickness absence across Warwickshire County Council and
- 2) supports a proactive approach to managing absence which includes effective training of managers

## **4. Staff Travel Rate**

Councillor Jeff Clarke introduced this item. It was agreed that any increase in car mileage rates would have a serious negative impact on the County Council's budget. Councillor Bill Gifford expressed the view that it is possible to run a car for much less than 40 pence per mile.

## **Resolved**

That the Staff and Pensions Committee agree that the unified travel rate introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013 should continue to be 40p per mile.

## **5. Any Other Business Considered Urgent by the Chair**

Following a suggestion from Councillor John Appleton it was agreed that each meeting of the Staff and Pensions Committee should receive an update on the County Council Pension Fund. As well as covering the "health" of the fund the report should include the level of take up amongst employees.

The meeting rose at 15.55.

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Chair