

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27 November 2013 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 4.30 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Bunker (Chairman); Councillors Mrs Bromley, Coker, Copping, Ms Dean, Hammon, Mrs Knight, Mobbs, Pratt and Wreford-Bush.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Doody, Kirton and Wilkinson.

29. **SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Ms Dean substituted for Councillor Wilkinson and Councillor Pratt substituted for Councillor Doody.

30. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

31. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the 23 September 2013 meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Chairman confirmed that the curtains at the Town Hall were being replaced and the process would be completed in the New Year.

32. **MEMBERS/TRADES UNIONS JOINT CONSULTATION AND SAFETY PANEL MINUTES**

The Employment Committee considered the minutes of the Members'/Trades Unions' Joint Consultation and Safety Panel dated 3 September 2013.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Members'/Trades Unions' Joint Consultation and Safety Panel dated 3 September 2013 be noted.

33. **SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER**

The Employment Committee considered a report from the Head of Service for Health and Community Protection that requested permission for a new two year contract for the post of Sustainability Officer.

The post originally was combined with responsibility for HS2 project work, but given the current national status of the HS2 project, it was felt better to disengage HS2 work from the Sustainability Officer post.

Committee members were told that the work of the Sustainability officer would cut across both Health and Community Protection and Development Services and it would feed into policies and the development of the Local Plan.

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES (Continued)

RESOLVED that a Sustainability Officer be appointed on a two year contract from the date of appointment, subject to the Executive approving funding.

34. HS2 LIAISON OFFICER

The Committee considered a report from the Head of Development Services that sought approval for a part time HS2 Liaison Officer post, for an initial period of two years. The post would be reviewed after that period with a further report to Employment Committee if there was a need to continue with the post. The post could be terminated at any time if Central Government decided to cease progression of HS2.

The Committee was concerned that the post would not be filled until well into the New Year because there was a backlog of work to handle. The Development Manager was having to cover this, although it was planned that they would receive support from staff in Health and Community Protection subject to approval from CMT.

The post holder would work 2.5 days a week in the post and the Committee was advised that the Executive would need to determine the budget implications of the post. The Executive would have to prioritise this post against other planned posts such as an additional dog warden.

It was recognised that, although the Council was against HS2, if the project did proceed, the Council would have to seek the best deal it could in mitigation of the effects of HS2. The post holder would have a lot of work to do in this instance, which Members felt was just as important as complete opposition. The post holder would be based in Development Services and would liaise with other departments, outside bodies and organisations. The Development Manager gave examples of possible work such as petitioning a Parliamentary Select Committee and responding to the Environment Statement, which was due soon. The post holder would also examine incoming planning applications associated with HS2 and seek to mitigate their effects on the District. He informed the Committee that the two year period for the contract had been a best guess and he hoped that the vacancy would attract good quality candidates.

RESOLVED that the post for a part time HS2 Liaison Officer, for an initial period of two years, be approved, subject to review after that period, should there be a need to continue with the post. The post may be terminated at any time if Central Government decides to cease progression of the HS2 project.

35. PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered a report from Human Resources which gave an update on progress made on the People Strategy Action Plan following the People Strategy Steering Group.

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES (Continued)

It was noted that the appendix to the report had not been printed properly and so copies of the appendix were circulated to all present.

The Committee discussed what was being done to handle staff suffering from stress. A "Hotfrog" survey had been conducted for all staff which was anonymous and staff could speak to a manager if the survey indicated they were suffering from stress. If they did not feel comfortable speaking to a manager, then there were alternatives, such as Employee Support Officers, a "one to one" with the Learning and Development Officer or other Human Resources officers. It was noted that stress was caused not only by issues relating to work, but outside influences might be the cause of the stress.

There was concern that agency staff fees had crept back up and Councillor Mobbs said that he as Portfolio Holder for Finance was reviewing the whole picture and a report would be coming to the Employment Committee in the next budget round.

In respect of exit interviews, the Committee was informed that there was not a set target to achieve because it was up to the individual concerned whether or not to take an exit interview. The People Strategy Steering Group was examining this to see if an on-line questionnaire might achieve a higher hit rate.

Work was being done to control long term absence with the people concerned. Stress was a common aggravating factor and the People Strategy Steering Group was examining how this could be improved and mitigated. The Committee was informed that external medically trained counselling was offered and staff could be required to take medical examinations with an Occupational Health Therapist if their absence exceeded four weeks. Anything over four weeks was classified as long term absence and the Council was currently investigating systems to better report data collected on absenteeism.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Service, Neighbourhood Services for acting as Lead Officer at the meeting in the absence of a member of CMT. She also thanked the Learning and Development Officer and the Senior Human Resources Officer for standing in during the absence of the Head of Corporate and Community Services.

Councillor Mobbs stated that a report would be coming to Employment Committee on the National Living Wage for staff and that he had asked the Senior Human Resources Officer to look at the Pay Policy Statement.

(The meeting ended at 5.25 pm)