

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 24th June, 2014.

Present:- Councillors Brooker (Chair), Chohan, Coad, A S Dhaliwal, N Holledge (Vice-Chair), Plenty, Sandhu, Sharif (arrived at 6.50pm) and Zarait.

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 7th April 2014

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 7th April 2014 be approved as a correct record.

3. Appointment of Sub-Committees

The Committee considered a report on the establishment of the Appeals Sub-Committee and the Employment Appeals Sub-Committee. The initial political group nominations to the Sub-Committees were reported and these were added to by the Members present at the meeting.

It was noted that in accordance with changes to the Constitution effective from 1st June 2014, appeals against dismissal would in future be heard by a Chief Officer Panel. However, because an appeal was submitted on 28th May 2014, during the currency of the previous Constitution, the appellant had a right to be heard by a member Sub-Committee.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Appeals Sub-Committee be appointed for the 2014/15 Municipal Year.
- (b) That the Employment Appeals Sub-Committee be appointed to deal with one outstanding appeal.
- (c) That the terms of reference of the Sub-Committees be as set out in Appendix A and that seats be allocated to the Sub-Committees as shown in paragraph 5.1 of the report.
- (d) That the following Members be appointed to serve on each of the Sub-Committees in accordance with the wishes expressed by the Political groups in respect of the seats allocated to them:

Sub-Committee	Seats	Labour	Conservative
Appeals Sub-Committee	5 (+ 5 deputies)	4 (+4) Brooker, M Holledge, N Holledge, Plenty (Chohan, Dhaliwal, Zarait, one vacancy)	1 (+1) Coad (Strutton)
Employment Appeals Sub-Committee	3 (+ 6 deputies)	2 (+4) Brooker, Plenty (N Holledge, Zarait, two vacancies)	1 (+2) Coad (Wright, one vacancy)

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4. Introduction to the Role of the Committee and Workforce Issues for the Year Ahead

Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director Professional Services, presented an introduction to the role of the Committee and the workforce issues facing the Council in the year ahead. The Committee was responsible for all the functions relating to the Council's responsibilities as an employer, including such matters as how staff were managed, how they were paid, and how to obtain the best level of performance from them.

A number of initiatives and achievements of the Committee over the last couple of years were outlined:

- Wellbeing – staff campaigns around healthy living and keeping well
- Wellbeing – reducing sickness absence
- Introduction of a dress code
- Management / Leadership development
- Improvements to disciplinary process
- Changes to SML Grades – more equitable and making a saving
- Monitoring the Accommodation Strategy

Turning to matters on which the Committee could concentrate in the future, there was a continuing need to work on better staff engagement and motivation. This was particularly important in a time of ongoing business change and the requirement to make substantial budget savings, estimated at £14m, £9m and £6m for 2015/16 and the two subsequent years respectively. Members made suggestions as to suitable topics for the Committee to consider. In discussion, mention was made of stress among the staff, which could possibly be exacerbated by worry about redundancies arising from the need to make savings or if accommodation was inadequate.

Resolved -

- (a) That the presentation on the role of the Committee be noted.
- (b) That reports on the following matters be considered by the Committee in the year ahead:
 - Reducing sickness absence
 - Stress management
 - Agency and temporary staff contract
 - Accommodation strategy (with a proposal that the next meeting be held at St Martin's Place in order that the Committee could view new office layouts and furniture)
 - Recruitment

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5. Reducing Sickness Absence - Performance Update

Consideration was given to a report containing an update on progress with reducing the Council's sickness absence, which the Committee had confirmed should continue to be reported to future meetings.

The average full time equivalent (FTE) of days lost over the year from 1st May 2013 to 30th April 2014 was 8.4 days, a small improvement over the 8.9 days for same period in the previous year. However, this amounted to an average monthly figure of 0.66 FTE days lost over each of the last 3 months, slightly above the average for the equivalent period in 2013.

A survey comparing Unitary, District/Borough and County Council sickness information reported an average of 10.22 days lost per employee in Unitary Authorities compared to 7.54 days in District/Borough Councils and 8.61 days in County Councils. The Slough figure of 8.4 days compared favourably. A Labour Market report (covering all sectors) showed the average days lost in 2013 was 4.4 days. The Committee considered the reasons why levels of sickness in the public sector were higher than in the private sector.

The sickness absence balanced scorecard for the period to March 2014 showed an overall sickness management score of 68.1. The Committee was reminded that this comprised performance on applying the policy (50%), course attendance (25%), and Occupational Health attendance (25%). None of the Directorates had fallen below the score of 60 but two had scored between 60 and 65. The 90% target of attendance at a training course for managers had not been achieved in all Directorates and there had also been a rise in the number of Occupational Health appointments not kept.

The Committee took the view that while performance on sickness management was still broadly going on the right direction, there were still a number of areas where further improvement needed to be made. The performance of the Wellbeing Directorate was the weakest, but it had been recognised that due to the nature of the work of many of the staff, the sickness absence rate was likely to be higher than the other directorates. As a result, the target for Wellbeing Directorate was being re-profiled but the Strategic Director had accepted a commitment to improve all round performance on sickness management.

From discussion and questions, the Committee noted that the requested breakdown of sickness by gender, which showed a far higher number of sickness days lost by women than men, broadly mirrored the composition of the workforce (where the female/male ratio was approximately 70/30). Members supported the continuation of work to maintain the improvement in sickness management. In connection with the potential effect of the working environment on sickness, it was suggested that at the next meeting in St Martin's Place, it would be possible to review the new office layout and improvements being introduced, including such matters as the new desks and chairs, design of break-out areas, air conditioning refurbishment etc.

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Resolved -

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Strategic Director of Wellbeing be advised that Committee will be looking for a real improvement in the sickness management statistics, with particular reference to referrals to Occupational Health, in line with the re-profiled targets for the Directorate.

6. Children Services Recruitment - Verbal Update

The Committee received an oral update about progress on Children's Services staff recruitment. Against the background of a national shortage of qualified social workers, a comprehensive review of the terms and conditions of staff had been carried out, salaries had been reviewed and benchmarked by reference to neighbouring authorities. As a result a market supplement had been applied to all relevant posts in the children in need and child protection teams, together with a retention award payable after 18 months in post. In addition, housing colleagues had obtained the agreement of local housing associations with whom the Council work, that any void arising in their local stock would be offered first to newly recruited social workers requiring accommodation.

This improved package had been brought together and published on newly designed web pages, comprising details of salaries, benefits, and personal stories of team members, with a view to re-branding Slough as an attractive place to live and work.

In answer to questions, the Council's commitment to employing newly qualified social workers was explained, including the support, assessment and managed caseload provided as required over the first year of work. The normal training for social workers was through a three year degree course, but other options were now available by way of a conversion course for graduates in other disciplines.

Resolved -

- (a) That the progress in introducing and advertising a comprehensive new recruitment package for social work in Children's Services be noted.
- (b) That a report be presented to a future meeting about the 'Step up to social work' training programme enabling graduate career changers to become qualified social workers.

7. Work Programme 2014/15

The Committee considered a draft work programme for the Committee for the year ahead and suggested some additions.

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Resolved - That the draft work programme be approved, subject to inclusion of the items referred to in item 4, the addition of a report on Staff Appraisals, and the inclusion of a comprehensive report on Agency and Temporary workers in place of the Reducing Sickness report at the January 2015 meeting.

8. Members' Attendance 2013/14

The Committee received a report setting out Members' attendance over the past year.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 20th October 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.52 pm)