

9 JUNE 2022

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

HR COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the HR Committee held on Thursday, 9 June 2022

* Cllr Edward Heron (Chairman)

* Cllr Jill Cleary (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Hilary Brand

* Keith Craze

* Kate Crisell

Councillors:

Michael Harris

* Maureen Holding

Mahmoud Kangarani

*Present

Apologies:

Cllrs Harris and Kangarani

Officers Attending:

Kate Ryan, Heleana Aylett, Zoe Ormerod, Spencer Scott and Andy Rogers

4 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March be confirmed and signed

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5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest

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6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no issues raised in the public participation period.

7 HR UPDATE REPORT

The Panel received the HR update report which gave an update on HR matters since the last meeting.

The report covered:

- Learning at Work Week
- Mental Health Awareness Week
- ITRENT Upgrade
- Recruitment
- IFINISTATS data collection tool
- Employee Benefits
- Equality and Diversity Training for members

It was noted that an SLA for NFDC payroll and HR advisory services to the NPA had been agreed for a further year.

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that, where practicable, the Council welcomed work experience placements for people with disabilities, though to date the Authority had not been approached for this.

Members emphasised the need to ensure that staff with disabilities were proactively made aware of the Council's various assistance initiatives.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8 MINUTES OF EMPLOYEE SIDE LIAISON PANEL

The Committee received and noted the draft minutes of the meeting of Employee Side Liaison Panel held on 12 May 2022.

9 HR METRICS

The Committee received the HR Metrics report, which included various workforce related data and statistics.

The report compared data since 2017 and replaced the annual employee report. It provided data from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 and aimed to provide a high level overview of key workforce data and the relevant trends to inform the Council's workforce strategies and priorities.

It was noted that, as a result of the changes to Leisure provision, the NFDC workforce had reduced from 1162 to 775 in 2021/22, which was mainly part time posts. FTE posts had reduced by 112.

It was noted that numbers of recruitment campaigns had returned to pre covid levels. 45% of staff had 5 years' service or less.

Members stressed the importance of ensuring the Council's Performance Development requirements were adhered to, particularly to help develop staff.

It was further noted that 47% of staff were over the age of 51, which was a factor for future succession planning.

It was suggested that a report be brought to a future meeting giving an overview of Exit Interviews.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the conclusions identified in the report be supported.

10 ANNUAL SICKNESS AND COVID ABSENCE REPORT

The Committee received the Annual Sickness and Covid Absence Report.

The report provided an update on the Council's approach to managing sickness absence and provided new data for the 2021/22 financial year and trend data where applicable. Sickness and absence relating to COVID were also detailed in the report.

It was noted that the total sickness absence figure per FTE had increased by 5.82 days per FTE, which it was thought to be attributable to covid, and higher incidence in operational roles. It was acknowledged that recovery from some long term sickness had been hampered by the effect of covid on waiting lists. When all sickness data had been collated together, the total number of days had reduced from 12,362 in 2020/21, to 8338 in 2021/22.

The report outlined the sickness absence action plan, as well as mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

The Committee noted the Employee Side Comments, which asked whether sick leave recording could be broken down in different ways, though it was explained this may be limited by the iTrent system. Also, Employee Side queried whether covid absence should be recorded as sickness absence, where some employees could do some work from home with covid, where operational staff could not, and it was felt that this appeared to be unfair.

In response, it was explained that it took a minimum of 3 occasions to trigger the sickness absence scheme. There were a number of other medical conditions where office - based staff could work from home, but where operational staff could not. Managers were given a framework within which to manage sickness, but dealt with it on a case by case basis, where managers had a degree of discretion.

The Chairman acknowledged the disparity between staff who were able to do some work from home whilst ill, when operational staff who were not able to do so. However, he did not feel that covid should be treated differently to other similar illnesses, and having covid being counted in the system did not prevent managers from taking an individual's circumstances into account. Accordingly, he supported the proposals to include covid absences in the sickness figures, together with the other measures set out in the report.

It was noted that stress and depression figures had increased by 45% on the last year, and it was suggested some staff activities could be organised to help with this. A number of health and wellbeing initiatives were outlined in the report.

It was explained that HR would always provide leadership on such issues but there was also a key role for managers on culture within the organisation, engaging with teams to address the issues identified in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted, and that the proposed future management of Covid sickness absences and the sickness absence action plan be supported as set out in the report.

11 APPRENTICESHIPS UPDATE AND FUTURE TRAINING PROPOSALS

The Committee noted an update on apprenticeships undertaken over the last year, including those currently underway, and options for future apprenticeship, T-Levels and trainee opportunities across the council.

It was explained that providing local workers with opportunities such as apprenticeships was a key corporate priority and helped sustain the future of the Authority, whilst showing that the Council led by example.

It was commented that networking with the Freeport representatives had highlighted an apparent disconnect between what businesses expected from new employees in terms of skills and experience, salary expectations and career opportunities, compared to what young people anticipated would be the case. The Council offered apprenticeships and planned to offer T Levels, and ensured managers were trained, whilst working with the education sector and employers.

RESOLVED:

That the continuation of apprenticeships be supported, where appropriate, for both new apprentice recruits, as well as for training existing staff, where this was the best method for doing so.

12 QUARTERLY HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

The Committee received an update on key health, safety and welfare issues during quarter 4. It also received the updated Accident and Incident Reporting & Investigations Policy, which better captured work practices currently in place.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of this quarterly report be noted, including the accidents and incidents recorded in Q4.
- (b) That the updated Accident and Incident Reporting & Investigations Policy be noted.

13 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY UPDATE

The Committee received the updated Health and Safety Policy, which had been reviewed and updated to reflect the recent changes to Service structures, and changes to senior management in the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Health and Safety Policy be noted.

14 CHANGE IN DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 15 September 2022 be cancelled, and the new date of 11 August at 10am be agreed, to meet reporting timescales.

CHAIRMAN