

8 JUNE 2023

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

HR COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the HR Committee held on Thursday, 8 June 2023

* Cllr Jill Cleary (Chairman)

* Cllr Steve Davies (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

Mark Clark
* Keith Craze
* Kate Crisell
* Sean Cullen

Councillors:

* Jeremy Heron
* Colm McCarthy
* Joe Reilly

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

John Sleep

Councillors:

Apologies: Cllr Mark Clark

Officers Attending:

Heleana Aylett, Alan Bethune, Zoe Ormerod, Andy Rogers, Spencer Scott and Sophie Taylor.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 March and 22 May were confirmed by the Chairman as correct record.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no issues raised in the public participation period.

7 HR UPDATE

The Committee received the HR Update report.

Topics covered included:

- Learning Management System

- Get Inspired – Southampton and New Forest
- Staff Army Training Day
- Local Government Apprentice of the Year
- Mental Health Awareness Week
- Wellbeing Walks
- Leadership Development Programme.

In response to a question, it was explained that the aim was to produce a consistent, rolling Leadership Development Programme for senior managers, tailored to local circumstances. Mentoring would be part of the Programme. It was noted that a further Staff Army Training Day was planned for August.

In respect of Mental Health Awareness Week, it was explained that there were 25 staff who were Wellbeing Champions and all employees had access to the available resources and initiatives. Members supported the measures outlined in the report acknowledging the current prevalence of mental health concerns nationally.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8 RECRUITMENT UPDATE - APRIL 2023

The Committee received the Recruitment Update for April 2023.

The report gave details of historical vacancy information, steps to improve recruitment campaigns, and staff resources.

It was confirmed that as well as LinkedIn, recruitment sites such as Total Jobs, and Indeed were used, as well as Facebook.

Members were especially pleased to note the 3-month work experience placement scheme in collaboration with Travis Perkins. NFDC was one of only two authorities leading the way on this initiative, with a similar arrangement running in Swindon which had proven very successful.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the Committee support the proactive steps outlined in the report to improve recruitment campaigns.

9 ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT 2022/23

The Committee received attendance management data from 2022/23, including trend data from 2018 onwards.

The report included sickness absence trend data, as well as data on measures to address attendance issues.

The report also detailed a number of ongoing attendance management actions.

The Council continued to proactively manage attendance which was reflected in the reduced sickness absence over the last financial year.

Whilst it was acknowledged the Council could not arrange Covid jobs for staff, it was noted that the HR Advisory Team would be reviewing the way in which Flu jobs were provided to the workforce.

Members noted the injuries to staff caused by sharp objects left in waste sacks and queried the extent of messaging to residents on this issue. In reply, it was explained that this topic had been covered in press releases, and on Facebook and other platforms, but instances still occurred and one incident was detailed elsewhere on the agenda. It was anticipated that such occurrences would fall off with the introduction of wheelie bins, but in the meantime, staff were reminded to adhere to the prescribed manual handling techniques and provided with suitable protective clothing.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

10 QUARTERLY HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT (Q4 2022-2023)

The Committee received the quarterly health and safety report, including detailed accidents and incidents data, a merged action plan from the safety panels, progress and actions completed by the health and safety team, and projects completed across the Council over the last financial year.

In respect of employee use of display screens, it was confirmed that staff were offered a paid for eye test every two years.

It was suggested that when sharp objects were found in waste sacks, the Council write to residents in that area, reminding them of the dangers and harm to staff, and giving appropriate advice to avoid future occurrences. This would be raised with the waste services management and the appropriate safety panel.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of this quarterly report, the accidents and incidents recorded in Q4, and the merged action plan from the safety panels be noted.
- (b) That HR Committee note the progress and actions completed by the health and safety team projects which have been a focus of resources across the Council for this financial year.

11 CHANGE TO DISMISSAL APPEAL PROCESS

The Committee considered a proposal to change the internal Appeal process in relation to dismissals.

It was proposed that all dismissal appeals up to and including Band 11 employees would be heard by a Strategic Director or above. It was stipulated that the Strategic

Director could not be responsible for the service area that the individual was employed within.

For Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Assistant Directors it was proposed that an appeal panel would remain as it currently was now, with the appeal following the procedures as laid out in the councils standing orders.

It was explained that the Council had sought information on the approaches used in neighbouring authorities through South East Employers. As a result it was also noted that this Council was in the minority when it came to using members for its dismissal appeals.

It was noted in the report that the Council had a number of senior officers that were experienced in HR matters and would be able to provide an impartial view in an appeal situation.

It was also highlighted that the chair of any dismissal appeal may be required to provide evidence in an Employment Tribunal.

The Committee noted that the Employee Side had no issues or concerns with the changes proposed.

One Member spoke against the proposals, and suggested that excluding elected members from the process for staff in Band 11 or under, and instead involving strategic directors from another service to hear the case, would not result in the matter being heard by someone who was truly independent. The Member went on to suggest that the process be amended to require a Strategic Director to be accompanied by one or two Members of the Appeals Committee, to provide a more independent perspective.

Overall, members supported the proposal as set out in the report, and the point was made that it was difficult for elected members to be kept fully abreast of the constant changes in what was often complex employment law.

Furthermore, some members observed that the use of independent or external persons in such a process was not a common arrangement for many employers, especially in the private sector.

RESOLVED:

That HR Committee support the proposal to change the internal Appeal process in relation to dismissals as set out in the report.

Note - Cllr Craze requested that his abstention from the above resolution be recorded.

CHAIRMAN