

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

15 April 2024

Minutes of the Human Resources Committee Meeting held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 15 April 2024 at 6:30pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors D.B. Oliver (Chair), S.J. Coleman (Vice-Chair), L. Hacking, Mrs E.M. Kirby-Green and M.C. Legg.

Committee Members present remotely: Councillors Mrs V. Cook (ex-officio) and A.K. Jeeawon.

Advisory Officers present: Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer, Director – Place and Climate Change, Human Resources Manager, Interim Human Resources Programme Manager, Development Manager and Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present: 9 members of the public via the live webcast.

HR23/14. **MINUTES**

(1)

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meetings of the Human Resources Committee held on 30 August 2023 and 29 February 2024 as correct records of the proceedings.

HR23/15. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES**

(2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Prochak, MBE.

HR23/16. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

(4)

There were no disclosures of interest or dispensations noted.

PART I – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

HR23/17. **UPDATE TO PENSION DISCRETIONS POLICY**

(5)

Members received the report of the Human Resources Manager which sought approval to update the Council's Pension Discretions Policy to reflect the amendments recently made to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). Making these amendments to the Rother District Council Pension Discretions Policy demonstrated the Council's commitment to compliance with regulatory requirements.

The Council's pension scheme operated under the Local Government Pension regulations and the policy set out Rother's approach to

Pension Discretions. A key principle behind this policy was to set out the Council's approach to pension discretions, treating employees fairly and consistently, whilst being open and transparent.

Members of the Committee supported the recommendation to update the Council's Pension Discretions Policy, as amended.

RECOMMENDED: That the Council's Pension Discretions Policy, at Appendix A to the report, updated to reflect the amendments recently made to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), be approved and adopted.

PART II – DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

HR23/18. STAFFING DIGEST - APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024 (6)

Members considered the Staffing Digest report of the Human Resources Manager covering the period April 2023 to March 2024, which gave an update in the field of staff management. The following key points were highlighted:

- recruitment remained active and similar to previous years; turnover was 10.19%, a decrease on last year's turnover and slightly better than the Council's neighbouring authorities;
- difficulties around professional post recruitment had been raised with Members previously and remained a concern. Work continued with other authorities across East and West Sussex, including the Local Government Association (LGA) and South East Employers, to gain insight into the current challenges surrounding recruitment;
- one disciplinary hearing had been undertaken during the year and a continuing flexible working request, which the Council was endeavouring to resolve imminently;
- regular Human Resources (HR) Liaison Group meetings were being held to discuss all HR matters, which had been proven to be an effective communication and feedback tool;
- there had been no staff survey taken within the past year, however the workforce plan was looking to address this in the forthcoming year;
- the Council had five apprentices successfully complete their training and secure permanent posts in service areas across the Council; the focus had been on higher level apprenticeships up to level 5 to aid recruitment and retention issues within professional posts. Since the scheme's introduction, 18 apprentices had successfully completed;
- two students had completed their work experience week with the Council over the last year, working through a variety of service areas and teams within the authority;
- the HR team had attended several recent jobs fairs, including the De La Warr Pavilion fair. There has been excellent turnout at the

fairs and a great deal of interest was received in opportunities at Rother District Council;

- the majority of training had continued to be delivered online, such as management training courses from ACAS, Personal Resilience and Wellbeing courses through the provider 'Yellowday'. iHASCO (the Council's Learning Management System) continued to be utilised for induction training and refresher training on topics such as GDPR, Cyber Security, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, along with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion courses. Menopause Awareness training would be added, to go alongside the Menopause Support Group introduced this year;
- the Council had successfully appointed a recruitment and training officer this year, which had enabled the HR team to better support managers and teams with help and guidance in organising professional training in various service areas;
- Sussex Training Consortium continued to deliver courses essential to Continuing Professional Development for Council staff and added new courses each quarter to their offering. There had been a steady increase in course attendance;
- three minor staff accidents had been reported during the year, a slight increase on the previous year. All had been investigated fully and were found not to be reportable. Refresher training for first aiders had continued;
- the Council had five staff volunteers trained as Mental Health First Aiders to help support any staff dealing with poor mental health, in addition to supporting information released from HR to aid staff in identifying issues and signposting where help could be found through outside organisations, or via the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). An increase had been noticed in assistance being sought from the Mental Health First Aiders and the EAP;
- reported COVID-19 cases had increased for a short period throughout the winter months, which had resulted in a slight increase in overall sickness absence. These cases were treated in the same manner as a standard sickness absence; and
- no new policies had been brought forward in this period. Policies had been reviewed and updated as required throughout the year.

The cost of living remained a concern for staff members; with the satisfactory conclusion of the pay award for September 2023, it was hoped that this would help to alleviate some of those financial pressures. The pay award journey had had an effect on staff morale, with strike action being averted. It was hoped, with all the work on the People Strategy, that the Council would be able to address this temporary dip in morale.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

HR23/19. **ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL FIT FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAMME - PEOPLE STRATEGY**

(7)

Members considered the report of the Chief Executive and Interim People Programme Manager, which provided the Human Resources (HR) Committee with an update on the People Programme of work, including the draft People Strategy and Workforce plan framework, and to recommend adoption of Rother District Council (RDC) Values.

The HR Committee was aware that the RDC Fit for the Future (FftF) programme included a People Strategy as a key workstream, enabling delivery of the other workstreams that were focussed on financial resilience, asset management and digital transformation. A high-level illustration of the programme was included at Appendix 1 to the report. The agreed deliverables for the People Programme were: a People Strategy; an Operating Model for the design of the organisation; and People Policies, to deliver the People Strategy priorities.

A review of the People Programme was undertaken in February 2024 and workstreams proposed to accelerate activity and ensure key deliverables were achieved by Q3 2024/25.

In March 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation on the progress of the audit recommendation to develop and implement a Workforce Plan for RDC during 2023/24. A People Strategy Working Group (PSWG) was set up, drawing on a cross section of staff, along with trade union representation, to review the first six weeks of programme activity and consider: Workforce data aligned to the Draft People strategy pillars and outcomes; a Draft People Strategy; Draft Values and Behaviours; and Draft Workforce planning priorities. The draft outcomes and pillars of the People Strategy were also shared at an officer away-day for feedback.

Feedback from the PSWG had been very positive; Group members were pleased to see action being taken and how that would impact in the long term. Regular updates would be shared with Members.

Attached at Appendix 2 to the report was a draft People Strategy framework and draft Workforce Plan priorities were attached at Appendix 3. The draft Values and Behaviours, detailed at Appendix 4 to the report, had been developed based on work undertaken in late 2023 with staff and managers, to capture views on organisational values. This was grouped under the mnemonic 'ROOT' with a memorable visual linked to the RDC logo and analogy in that the Council's values 'are the root from which we grow'.

The Committee was requested to consider three options, as detailed in the report and it was recommended that Option 2 be agreed, on the basis that the approved FftF Programme People Workstream was a critical aspect of the overall RDC change programme. This option had funding allocated and contributed to both resolving an outstanding audit recommendation, as well as improving organisational performance. This option was the best balance between cost and pace, making progress on this priority activity in Q1/2 of 2024/25, enabling benefits delivery starting Q3/4 of 2024/25.

Members of the Committee were happy to agree to Option 2 as detailed in the report and the Chair thanked the Interim People Programme Manager for his work on progressing the Programme.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) progress on the People Programme be noted;
- 2) the recommended approach to develop the People Strategy and Workforce Plan framework be approved; and
- 3) the Rother District Council Values and Behaviours framework be reviewed and approved.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 6:41pm