

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE

The meeting took place in a virtual environment using “Zoom” video conferencing technology and members of the public and press were given the opportunity to observe or participate in the meeting.

NOTE: Although participation in or absence from the meeting is recorded below, for legal reasons participation in this meeting by councillors does not qualify as attendance at a meeting for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972.

Held on Wednesday 16th March 2022 at 7.00pm

PRESENT: Cllr John Haywood, Chairman
Cllr Jeremy Heron, Chairman of Policy & Finance Committee
Cllr Gloria O'Reilly
Cllr Glenys Turner

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Mrs Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk

ABSENT: Cllr Tony Ring, Town Mayor

S/0067

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No members of the public were present.

S/0068

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Ring.

S/0069

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

S/0070

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th September 2021, having been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

S/0071

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Deputy Town Clerk updated Members on staff changes since the last meeting, which included the appointment of an Office Administrator/Information Officer, Caretaker/Cleaner, Café Assistant and both a Manager and Assistant to operate the Visitor Information service on Saturdays from Easter to September.

Contracts of Employment had been reviewed by Worknest and updated in line with new legislation. The National Pay Award for 2021/22 had now been confirmed at 1.75%; this had been implemented in December in advance of the formal decision and backdated to 1st April 2021.

The Town Clerk reported that a number of employees had moved to a hybrid working pattern, with some days in the office and some at home. They appreciated the flexibility this offered and would value the continuation of this arrangement. Members agreed that there had been no change to the level or quality of service and that there would always be a place for remote working. However, there was a need to ensure this was balanced with the need to support the whole team, in particular those who were unable to work from home, and for managers to deal with queries face-to-face when necessary. It was agreed to monitor the situation over the next year, and that a homeworking policy should be introduced if appropriate.

In response to a question about making greater use of Microsoft Teams, the Town Clerk reported that he would be liaising with the ICT support company to discuss providing support to councillors and making better use of available software.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

S/0072

ANNUAL REVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

Members considered the Town Clerk's report regarding the annual review of employment policies (*Annex A*). It was noted that the Employee Handbook had recently been reviewed by Worknest as part of its support contract. Some minor amendments were agreed, as follows:

P30 – enhanced maternity pay – include number of weeks in first bullet point

P32 – enhanced adoption pay – include number of weeks in first bullet point

P77 – update and fit organisation chart on page

P120 – should reference be made to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 to make it clear that spent convictions do not have to be disclosed?

RESOLVED: That the report be noted, and the Employee Handbook be updated as agreed.

ACTION J Hurd

S/0073

POSSIBLE STAFF RETENTION MEASURES

Members considered the Town Clerk's report (*Annex B*).

The Town Clerk advised that his report was not driven by any concerns about staff morale or imminent departures, but more “the time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining”, taking a proactive approach to staff retention and ensuring all staff are treated fairly and not underpaid.

Members discussed the measures outlined in para 2.2 of the report, as follows:

Adopting a Leave for Public Duties Policy – it was noted that existing policies allow discretion to give time off for public duties but not to offer payment. It was agreed that a policy should be drafted, specifying the number of hours and when they could be taken, with a pro rata entitlement for part time staff.

Seeking accreditation as a Living Wage Employer – it was agreed that this was unaffordable and unmanageable at this time due to the constraints of the NJC Payscales, but that the Council should keep a watching brief and not rule out seeking accreditation in the future if possible.

Undertaking a general re-grading of posts – Members agreed that the time was right to undertake a re-grading exercise. It was agreed that the Town Clerk should investigate the

costs of employing sector specific consultants to assist, which would give both staff and councillors the assurance that the process was carried out fairly.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That a draft Leave for Public Duties Policy be prepared for consideration at the next Committee meeting;
- 2) That the Council does not seek accreditation as a Living Wage Employer at this time; and
- 3) That a general re-grading of posts be undertaken and that the principle of engaging consultants to assist be agreed, subject to the costs being acceptable.

ACTION C Wilkins

S/0074

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public were excluded because publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature

The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk left the meeting at 8.20pm.

S/0075

TOWN CLERK'S PAY AWARD

Members agreed with the report presented by the Chairman and were clear that they held the Town Clerk in high regard, especially for the way he had managed the Council through the many unknowns of COVID. Members felt that another set of unknowns - the post-COVID world - would feature in the upcoming year or two and were confident that the Town Clerk would handle these in the same proficient manner.

RESOLVED: That, with regard to his performance during the year, the Town Clerk be awarded the standard progression on his pay scale.

ACTION J Hurd

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.24pm.

Note: The text in the Action Boxes above does not form part of these minutes.

*RECEIVED
30th March 2022*

*APPROVED
14th September 2022*

TOWN MAYOR

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

STAFFING COMMITTEE

16th March 2022

Report on employment policies

1. Introduction and reason for report

- 1.1 This report is intended to support the annual review of employment-related policies by members; a task delegated to this committee and last undertaken in March 2021.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The Council has adopted many policies relating to employment matters. These are brought together in a handbook for staff. The handbook was reviewed and updated by Worknest (formerly Ellis Whittam) under the contract for the provision of specialist support on employment law and human resources matters. Hard copies are available at each of the Council's workplaces and each employee is sent a copy by email. A copy will be emailed to each councillor with this report.
- 2.2 The documentation is so lengthy that a line-by-line review by members would be impracticable and unnecessary given that this is what the Council is paying Worknest to do and the policies have changed little over the last year.
- 2.3 Although no changes have been made yet, officers are considering the following:
 - 2.3.1 Reviewing the section of the handbook covering computer use and the possible need for a more thorough "Information Security Policy" to protect Council data and systems; and
 - 2.3.2 How best to address changes in working practices and expectations brought about by the pandemic, especially as regards working from home and other forms of remote or distributed working.
- 2.4 Members are invited to raise questions about or make suggestions regarding the existing policies, the two areas under review mentioned above and any other areas where it may be felt that further policies might be useful.

3. Issues for decision and any recommendations

Members are invited to note this report but also to raise queries or offer guidance if desired.

For further information, contact:

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STAFFING COMMITTEE

16th March 2022

Report on possible staff retention measures

1. Introduction and reason for report

- 1.1 Members are invited to consider whether the Council should take measures to promote staff morale and reduce the risk of existing staff leaving.

2. Background information

- 2.1 There are several reasons why such measures aimed at staff retention may be timely:
 - 2.1.1 As the labour market tightens, it becomes more important to take a proactive approach to retaining existing staff (recruiting suitable replacements may prove increasingly difficult, time-consuming and expensive) and the measures considered below can boost morale by demonstrating interest, concern and a practical commitment to fair remuneration;
 - 2.1.2 Some relate to issues raised by members of staff at their annual reviews conducted in recent weeks; and
 - 2.1.3 All existing employment contracts incorporate the “Green Book” terms by reference and these include provision for re-grading in circumstances which apply to the Council now (e.g. that no comprehensive review has been undertaken for a considerable time, that many posts have undergone significant changes since the last review and that some posts have a scale of pay-points whilst others have only a single pay-point and no rationale for the difference appears other than that the latter arose through a TUPE transfer many years ago).
- 2.2 There are various measures that might be taken but the following have been mentioned specifically:
 - 2.2.1 Adopting a Leave for Public Duties Policy which builds on the relevant statutory entitlement and includes provision for payment;
 - 2.2.2 Seeking accreditation as a Living Wage Employer
 - 2.2.3 Undertaking a general re-grading of posts
- 2.3 By virtue of the Employment Rights Act 1996, all employees are entitled to request reasonable time off for specified public duties (this includes things like being a school governor but not helping-out at social or hobby clubs). The employer decides what is reasonable, save in respect for jury service, for which time off cannot be refused. Employers may choose to pay the employees during such leave but are not obliged to do so. Whilst it might be considered appropriate to delegate to officers decisions about reasonable time-off for such purposes, the policy on whether all or any of it should be paid is properly a matter for members.
- 2.4 Accreditation as a Living Wage Employer would require the Council to commit to paying the “Real Living Wage” (as distinct from the National Living Wage – the legal minimum which all employers are required to pay). It also covers the use of contractors as an anti-avoidance measure. Fuller details can be found on the website of the Living Wage Foundation at www.livingwage.org.uk. The Council has several posts which are either currently paid below this rate or have pay-

scales attached which extend below it, so seeking such accreditation would require a review of pay-scales.

- 2.5 Whether prompted by an application for Living Wage Accreditation or otherwise, the Green Book contains much information on how reviews of pay-scales should be conducted. It is not a simple or quick process. Every post would have to be analysed in detail in consultation with the current holder. The agreed findings would then have to be compared with standard criteria to determine fair comparisons, with care being taken to exclude personal factors (it is the role that is being assessed, not the person) and avoid discrimination. It would require significant officer time and member input. However, there is no sensible “quick and dirty” alternative. A rushed or botched review risks lowering staff morale and doing more harm than good. Unless there is a commitment to doing the review properly, it is best avoided altogether.
- 2.6 It is also prudent to be realistic about the likely outcome. This could not be an immediate saving on payroll costs – it could only result in either no change or an increase. Moreover, with payroll costs accounting for (very roughly) 4/7ths of all revenue expenditure, any increase would have a noticeable effect on future budgets. If it transpired that any staff are currently being paid more than the fair rate, the lower rate could only be applied when the post next falls vacant. Conversely, it would be difficult to justify delaying the implementation of pay increases (or awards of increments) beyond 1st April 2023. It would be sensible to begin any review early in the financial year so that the outcome can be established (or estimated) in good time for setting of the budget for the following year.
- 2.7 It would be possible for the review to be undertaken entirely “in-house” by officers and members. However, there may be benefits to enlisting the help of outside consultants. The two obvious providers (because they are specialists in our sector) would be Local Councils Consultancy (a “not-for-profit” arm of the Society of Local Council Clerks formed in 2018) and Local Government Resource Centre (a private firm formed in 2014 by a leading former clerk). Both provide consultants who are very experienced in doing reviews of this kind – they are familiar with the process and with the outcomes at other comparable councils. Their involvement would not only relieve the burden on officers and members, but also give greater assurance about the fairness of the outcome. Such assurance would be important to the morale effect and to members being asked to sanction any budget increases that may ensue. There would, obviously, be a cost to engaging consultants but this could only be established after briefing them on precisely what help is being sought.

3. Issues for decision and any recommendations

The Committee is invited to consider whether to approve all or any of the staff retention measures canvassed in this report or suggested at the meeting and, if a general review of staff grades is approved, how it should be conducted (with particular reference to the question of whether outside consultants should be engaged).

For further information, contact:

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