

Medway Council
Meeting of Employment Matters Committee
Wednesday, 17 June 2015
7.35pm to 8.20pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Avey, Fearn, Godwin, Hicks, Murray, Saroy and Wicks (Chairman)

In Attendance: James Bilsland, Assistant Head of Legal - Place
Carrie McKenzie, Head of HR and Organisational Change
Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services
Michael Turner, Democratic Services Officer

37 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 28 January 2015 and the Joint Meeting of Committees held on 27 May 2015 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

38 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies.

39 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

40 Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests and other interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Murray disclosed that she was a member of the Universities and Colleges Union.

41 Review of Apprenticeship Training Allowances

Discussion:

The Head of HR and Organisational Change introduced a report which sought agreement to proposed revised training allowances payable to Medway Council apprentices. She clarified that whilst the financial implications set out in the report stated that the proposals could cost the Council an additional £20,500 to £34,300 per annum, the latter figure of £34,300 was calculated in respect of Level 4 apprentices. However, there were currently none at this level in the Council.

A Member referred to the target of recruiting 60 apprentices and asked what the extra costs would be if the proposals were agreed, given the report was based on the current number of 44 apprentices. The Assistant Director Organisational Services advised that each additional apprentice recruited would cost approximately an extra £500-600 per annum if the proposed increases were agreed. Managers would be largely expected to absorb these costs but there was scope for the some of the £800,000 set aside for pay to be used to fund this. It was important that apprentices were given meaningful roles and not seen as a solution to meeting budget savings.

There was a general consensus amongst Members that allowances should be increased both to address the issue of competitiveness with neighbouring employers and also as a matter of fairness. However, some Members queried how the proposed increases had been arrived at and whether they would actually address the concerns about competitiveness. Members were advised that rates had been benchmarked with local employers. The data had been analysed and other information taken into account such as living and travel to work costs in Medway when reaching a view about an appropriate increase. The proposed increases were in the middle of the ranges paid to apprentices locally and officers felt they were reasonable. One Member agreed the proposed increases were reasonable and pointed out some interns worked for no wages.

A recent national study on apprenticeships was referred to and concern was expressed that increasing numbers of under 19s may be missing out on opportunities to become an apprentice.

In conclusion, Members decided to support the recommended increases provided the matter was reviewed in the near future and the information requested at the meeting provided. The possibility of apprentices attending a meeting of the Committee to talk about their experiences was also raised

Decision:

The Employment Matters Committee:

- (1) agreed to approve the revised training allowances payable to Medway Council apprentices as follows:

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Level 2 - £110 per week

Level 3 - £130 per week

Level 4 - £160 per week

- (2) requested a further review of allowances, to be completed within three months, in the light of Members' concerns about whether levels are sufficiently competitive, with the outcome reported to the Committee
- (3) requested a briefing note providing information on the detail of the benchmarking exercise into rates paid to apprentices, the age profile of Medway Council apprentices and the contributions of apprentices to the Council
- (4) agreed that these allowances are reviewed as appropriate and any proposed changes are referred to this Committee.

42 Review of the Relocation Scheme

Discussion:

The Head of HR and Organisational Change introduced a report which sought agreement to a revised Relocation Scheme. The policy had been revised to update post titles, provided clarification of eligibility criteria and made minor amendments to the reclaim procedures.

A Member referred to paragraph 5.4 of the revised policy and expressed surprise that the Council would only consider waiving the requirement to repay the assistance granted under the Scheme in exceptional circumstances such as ill-health retirement or compulsory redundancy. He felt that in those circumstances it should be automatic that assistance should not have to be repaid. The Assistant Director Organisational Services advised that she was confident that in practice the Council would not expect assistance to be repaid in these circumstances in these circumstances but was happy for the wording to be amended to remove any uncertainty.

Decision:

The Employment Matters Committee agreed that:

- (1) the revised Policy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved, subject to the reference in paragraph 5.4 that the Council will consider waiving the requirement to repay assistance granted under the Scheme in cases of ill-health retirement or compulsory redundancy being amended to make it clear that in these circumstances there would be no requirement for an individual to repay assistance
- (2) this Policy is reviewed in two years time and any proposed changes are referred to this Committee.

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43 Review of Use of Consultants

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Organisational Services introduced a report which provided an update on the use of consultants in the Council.

Members asked that future reports include, where possible, details of the duration of contracts and also the total costs of employing consultants.

Decision:

The Employment Matters Committee agreed to note the information in the report and asked that future reports include more details as outlined above.

44 Proposed Reorganisations

Discussion:

The Employment Matters Committee considered a report which covered new reviews and transfers since the last report

Decision:

The Employment Matters Committee noted the present position and the support arrangements for staff.

45 Equalities Working Group Update

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Organisational Services introduced a report regarding the outcome of a recent meeting of the Equalities Working Group.

Decision:

The Employment Matters Committee agreed to note the report.

Chairman

Date:

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