

Medway Council
Meeting of Employment Matters Committee (virtual meeting)

Tuesday, 11 August 2020

7.00pm to 7.28pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Carr, Fearn (Chairman), Hackwell, Khan, Mahil, Prenter and Thompson

In Attendance: Mark Parker, Legal Services
Samantha Beck-Farley, Head of HR
Michael Turner, Democratic Services Officer

163 Apologies for absence

There were none.

164 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 June 2020 was agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

165 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

166 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

Councillors Khan and Mahil disclosed that they were a member of the GMB.

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Councillor Prenter disclosed that he was a member of ASLEF but noted that this union had no dealings with the Council.

Councillor Hackwell disclosed that his wife worked on a part time basis for the Adult Education service in Medway.

167 HR Response to Covid-19

Discussion:

Members considered a report which outlined the key areas HR had responded to following the Covid-19 pandemic and explained the rationale for decisions made.

HR had responded at pace to a number of issues largely due to closure of services and a number of people unable to engage with their current work, or through health concerns associated with self-isolating or shielding. To ensure consistency, a consistent pay approach had been agreed across all contract types to help retain the workforce in preparation for either redeployment (where applicable) or recovery. This meant several policies had needed to be reviewed to support service delivery and employees.

In response to questions about the redeployment of staff and also virtual hearings, the Head of HR advised that any staff redeployed had been seconded to their new positions and the timing of when they would return to their substantive roles would depend on individual circumstances. So far, three remote hearings had taken place without any issues.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the report.

168 Gender Pay Gap

Discussion:

Members considered a report which advised that the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 required all employers with more than 250 employees to report annually on their Gender Pay Gap. The report provided an early insight into the Council's results for this reporting year ahead of sharing the detail with the Trade Unions, employee forums and the newly formed Equality Board. The results would then be published on the Council's public website by 31 March 2021 and on the Government dedicated Gender pay gap reporting website.

In discussing the report, Member appreciated that an earlier report was now being provided. Although the actions needed to close the gap were not included the newly created staff forums (including the new Gender Forum) would allow the Council to better understand the causes of the pay gap and identify the actions needed to close it.

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Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the content of this report and agree that a more detailed update be provided in January 2021.

169 Suicide Prevention in the Workplace Guidance

Discussion:

Members considered new guidance on suicide prevention in the workplaces aimed at managers and employees look out for signs of suicidal ideation and helps sign post to additional resources.

Members welcomed the new guidance and the fact that the Council would be working with professional organisations on this issue.

Decision:

Members agreed to note the report.

170 Organisational Change

Discussion:

Members considered a report which covered new organisational reviews and the transfer of staff to and from other employers for the period 1 November 2019 to 30 June 2020.

The Head of HR advised that several reviews had been suspended due to Covid-19, which had been done in consultation with the affected staff. In response to a query about what would happen to suspended reviews if there was a second wave and also whether a deeper organisational change within the Council was needed as a result of Covid, the Head of HR replied that lessons learned during the pandemic was being fed into reviews and if there was to be a second wave, then the same principles would be applied as in the initial outbreak. The current review of HR would influence how the Council would move forward.

Members queried the numbers of staff affected by the closure of the Splashes Sports Centre, how long the refurbishment would take and whether any staff would be eligible for voluntary redundancy. The Head of HR commented that she did not have the figures or the timetable for refurbishment readily available. She confirmed that the Council would first look to redeploy staff so that they could be retained in the Council, particularly given the costs of recruitment. If redeployment was not possible then the Council's policy was to first look at whether voluntary redundancy was possible before compulsory redundancy.

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Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the present position and the support arrangements for staff.

171 Early Retirements and Severance Payments

Discussion:

Members considered a report which set out all decisions taken in relation to early retirements and severance payments for the period 1 September 2019 to 31 March 2020.

In response to a query about a redundancy payment made where an individual's fixed term contract had ended, the Head of HR advised that under employment law anyone employed for more than 2 years was entitled to receive a redundancy payment.

Members were advised, following a query, that the capitalised cost of a payment was an early retirement cost linked to the employee's pension. This was not automatic and would depend on an individual's circumstances.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the report.

172 Exclusion of Press and Public

The Committee agreed to exclude the press and public during consideration of Appendix 1 to Agenda Item 9 because consideration of this matter in public would disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information contained paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and also agreed that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

Chairman

Date:

Michael Turner, Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01634 332817

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk