

Medway Council
Meeting of Employment Matters Committee
Tuesday, 30 November 2021
7.02pm to 7.56pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Carr, Fearn (Chairman), Prenter, Thompson, Thorne and Van Dyke
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
Maple (Substitute for Mahil)
- In Attendance:** Samantha Beck-Farley, Head of HR
Paul Boyd, Head of Business Change
Sandra Steel, Employee Services Manager
Michael Turner, Principal Democratic Services Officer

475 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mahil, who was on paternity leave. The Committee extended their congratulations to Councillor Mahil.

476 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 September 2021 was agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

477 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

478 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

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Other interests

Councillor Maple disclosed that he was a member of the GMB Trade Union.

Councillor Prenter disclosed that he was a member of the ASLEF Trade Union.

Councillor Van Dyke disclosed that she was a member of the Unite trade Union and received a pension from Unison.

479 Pay Negotiations 2022/2023

Discussion:

Members considered a report regarding progress of the pay negotiations for the financial year 2022/2023.

The joint TU pay claim for 2022/2023 was as follows:

- A 7.5% increase on all pay bands
- The deletion of all pay points below £10 per hour
- A return to NJC national bargaining power

The point was made that the last minute, very different proposal to the one negotiated with the trade unions that in some years was put to the February budget council meeting completely undermined the pay negotiation process.

It was argued that if the Council had remained in the NJC for pay then someone earning £30,000 pa when MedPay was introduced would now be earning £39,000 when in reality under MedPay the figure was £32,000. There were also concerns about inequalities thought to be inherent in the MedPay scheme.

Referring to comments at the earlier Joint Consultative Committee meeting, concern was expressed that some employees were having to use food banks to get by.

It was noted that the increase in the National Living Wage affected more than 600 staff which raised the question why their pay was so low.

Recognising 2022/23 would be a difficult financial year for the Council the point was made that with current levels of inflation the proposed pay increase being offered by the Council would mean a 5% cut in real terms.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the report, including progress made to date under the Pay Negotiations Protocol.

480 Speak Up, Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering Policies: Report on Instances September 2020 - September 2021

Discussion:

Members considered a report about the number and nature of concerns raised, between September 2020 and September 2021, under the Council's Speak Up, Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering Policies.

Whether more staff regularly working from home might lead to more fraud or staff feeling less able to report fraud was queried. The Head of HR advised that her team was working on the new hybrid working arrangements, including governance and ICT and the Speak Up policy. This involved a detailed analysis of the risks involved in the new hybrid working model. Whether people felt safe to speak up was hard to measure as the starting point was to try to first resolve concerns informally. The new Speak Up policy had been well communicated to staff and there were a number of different channels through which to raise concerns.

Reference was made to an on-going high-profile police investigation and whether any lessons had been learned for the Committee, such as sharing good HR practice with arm's length companies. A point was also made that it seemed certain that Medway Development Company and Kyndi had learnt lessons from this.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the report.

481 Gun Wharf Office Moves Update

Discussion:

Members considered a report on the progress with the office moves to allow the Ministry of Justice to use sections of Level 2 within Gun Wharf for the family courts.

The following queries were raised:

- whether the opportunity had been taken to review the Council's portfolio of buildings, including properties being rented;
- what the longer-term plan for Gun Wharf was;
- the possibility of further parts of Gun Wharf being leased to an external body and;
- the extent of consultation with specific services on the current office moves.

Members were advised that all buildings were being reviewed with priority being given where leases would expire in the next 5 years with a view to bringing services into Gun Wharf or rationalising buildings. Due to the need for

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stability for the data centre, the plan was to remain in Gun Wharf. There had been discussions about other organisations leasing part of Gun Wharf which had not been pursued but any other opportunities would be carefully considered, bearing in mind enough space was needed to accommodate staff given employees were not being required to work from home, although many were.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the report.

482 Medway Makers

Discussion:

Members considered a report which set out the background to the Medway Makers engagement champions network and its purpose, as requested at the last meeting of the Committee.

In response to a query, it was clarified that the Trade Unions were not represented on the Medway Makers network, but HR met regularly with them.

With regard to embedding change, Members were advised that Medway Makers previously had tended to discuss routine matters but the aim now was for them to genuinely influence change and help shape projects.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the report.

483 Organisational Change

Discussion:

Members considered a report which detailed new reorganisations of services and transfers under the TUPE regulations for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021 and also provided an update on on-going reviews that had previously been reported but not concluded.

Reference was made to the likely significant savings needed to be made in the 2022/23 budget and whether HR and the trade unions had the capacity to support this was questioned. The Head of HR considered there was sufficient capacity in HR to support this, but an early dialogue was needed with the Trade Unions, who were under pressure. There was now a dedicated organisational change team to support staff subject to reorganisations. Savings were likely to be made by not filling existing vacancies.

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Decision:

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

484 Early Retirement and Redundancy Payments

Discussion:

Members considered a report setting out all decisions taken in relation to early retirements and severance payments for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2021.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to note the report.

485 Date of Next Meeting

The Committee agreed to change the date of the next meeting from 25 January 2022 to 2 February 2022.

Chairman

Date:

Michael Turner, Principal Democratic Services Officer

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