

**Medway Council**  
**Meeting of Employment Matters Committee**  
**Wednesday, 6 September 2023**  
**7.00pm to 8.35pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

- Present:** Councillors: Hamilton (Chairperson), Cook (Vice-Chairperson), Fearn, Field, Filmer and Hackwell
- Substitutes:** Councillors:  
Nestorov (Substitute for Animashaun)
- In Attendance:** Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer  
Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services  
Lesley Jones, Corporate Performance Officer

**231 Apologies for absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Animashaun.

**232 Record of meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 6 June 2023 was agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record subject to the references to "Chairman" being replaced by "Chairperson".

The record of the Joint meeting of Committees held on 24 May 2023 was agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

The record of the meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee held on 24 January 2023 was noted.

**233 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

**234 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests**

Disclosable pecuniary interests

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

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### Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

### Other interests

Councillor Cook disclosed that she was a member of the NAHT trade union.

Councillor Field disclosed that he was a member, trade union representative and branch chair for the TSSA in Transport for London.

Councillor Hamilton disclosed that she was a member of Unite the Union and the NEU trade union.

## 235 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

### **Discussion:**

This report provided details of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which would be positioned above the existing Fair Access and Inclusion policy. The Strategy would reinforce the Council's commitment to embracing diversity, attracting, and retaining the best staff and providing the best and most accessible services to residents. It also included an Equality Action Plan which would be the foundation on which an inclusive Council would be built.

Members then raised a number of questions and comments, some of which referred to matters discussed at the Joint Consultative Committee held immediately before this meeting, which included:

**Positive discrimination** – in response to a question as to whether there could be a risk of positive discrimination against the Council as a result of approval of the Strategy, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that there were no structured programmes in the Strategy regarding recruitment, and that the Strategy would look at applying best practice in the Council's decision making, for example, removing unconscious bias from the recruitment process by ensuring there was a gender and ethnicity mix for interviews.

**Introduction of the Strategy** – in response to a question as to why the Council did not previously have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, the Corporate Performance Management Lead advised the Committee that a Fair Access and Inclusion Policy had been in place for a number of years, however, it was recognised that it was now necessary to introduce and develop this Strategy.

**Benchmarking and Best practice** – in response to a question, the Corporate Performance Management Lead advised the Committee that research was undertaken to inform this Strategy to ensure best practice was followed.

**Resourcing** – in response to a question on whether there was adequate resourcing in place (to support the Strategy), the Corporate Performance

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Management Lead advised the Committee that resourcing was difficult, for example, there were officers who worked on data analysis, but their time was limited. This was reflected in the timelines set out in the Action Plan.

**Strategy title** – following on from discussion at the Joint Consultative Committee, it was commented that the title could be amended to include “equity”. It was also commented that the Strategy could be read as relating to recruitment only and it was necessary for this to be embedded more within the organisation.

**Staff networks** – in response to a question, the Corporate Performance Management Lead advised the Committee that staff networks and forums were integral and important to the Council and support was available but not always taken up. Reference was made to the important role that trade unions could play on boards and networks. It was also commented that any informal, disempowering, networks needed to be dismantled as part of the delivery of the Strategy.

**Flexible working** – references to flexible working in the Action Plan should refer to all staff, not just service managers and above.

**Modern Slavery** – it was commented that the Strategy should be improved in terms of its existing references to modern slavery, and more thought given to a human rights framework.

**Delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan** – Committee members discussed the Strategy with particular reference to how regularly update reports should be submitted to the Committee, how ambitious the action plan was and the resources available to deliver it, whether HR work needed to be reprioritised in favour of the delivery of the Action Plan, and as such whether the Strategy should be approved at this stage as a draft, pending further discussions with HR.

### **Decision:**

The Committee agreed the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy as set out at Appendix A to the report, as a draft strategy at this stage, and that it be referred back to the next meeting of this Committee, to facilitate:

- (i) An informal meeting to which Committee members will be invited to, prior to the next Committee meeting, to discuss the prioritisation of resources to deliver the action plan at a faster pace against other priorities.
- (ii) A briefing note to be sent to Committee members prior to the next Committee meeting, setting out the priorities across HR and the current Workforce Strategy against available resources.

## 236 Employee Survey 2022

### Discussion:

This report provided details of the findings of the Employee Engagement Survey 2022, the action taken in response to it and the key actions going forward. The report also provided details of the Employee Engagement Survey 2023-28.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer gave a detailed presentation to Members which outlined the results of the employee survey undertaken in September 2022 as well as actions arising from it.

Members then raised a number of questions and comments, some of which referred to matters discussed at the Joint Consultative Committee held immediately before this meeting, which included:

**Timings** – some Members expressed concern regarding the length of time it had taken to bring this item to Committee, taking into account the survey had been undertaken in September 2022. Concern was also expressed regarding submission of this item to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee before this Committee (July 2023). The Chief Organisational Culture Officer referred to engagement undertaken with service managers, and wider staff engagement, earlier in the year on the survey, which in part, led to missing the opportunity to submit a report to this Committee in March 2023, but accepted that the employee survey should be submitted to the Committee much sooner next time.

**Participation rate** – noting that the participation rate was 58%, in response to a question regarding how this could be improved, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer highlighted off site employees as an area where work was required to improve the participation rate and also referred to work with Medway Makers (internal staff engagement forum) and Internal Communications in this area.

**Benchmarking** – in response to a question regarding benchmarking, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised the Committee that benchmarking with other unitary authorities had been undertaken in relation to the MedPay review, more work was required in the area of employee surveys going forward, and she would take this item away from the meeting.

**Risk rating** – in response to a question as to why the risk rating for pay was BIII rather than BII, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer explained that there was a new methodology which had been introduced this year, which would take some time to get used to, and that she would take this issue away from the meeting.

**Productivity** – in response to a question on hybrid working and how any increase in productivity could be accurately measured, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer cited examples including Legal Services and the Customer and

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Business Support teams which used case management systems which would provide detailed information.

### **Decision:**

- a) The Committee noted the contents of the report.
- b) The Committee approved the draft Employee Engagement Strategy 2023-28 as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.
- c) The Committee agreed that the results of future employee surveys be reported to this Committee before being reported to the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee and within 3-6 months of the survey being conducted.

### **Chairperson**

**Date:**

### **Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services**

Telephone: 01634 332509

Email: [democratic.services@medway.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@medway.gov.uk)