

Medway Council
Meeting of Joint Consultative Committee
Wednesday, 6 September 2023
6.00pm to 6.50pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Hamilton (Chairperson), Cook, 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
Tania Earnshaw, UNISON
Jane Shields, NAHT

1 Election of Chairperson

Councillor Hamilton was elected as Chairperson for the 2023/24 municipal year.

2 Election of Vice-Chairperson

Tania Earnshaw (Unison) was elected as Vice-Chairperson for the 2023/24 municipal year.

3 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Animashaun, Phillip Bunn (ASCL), Mark Hammond (Unison) and Mick Simpkin (GMB).

4 Terms of Reference

The Committee recommended that the Committee's terms of reference be amended to reflect that 2 Unison reps usually attended JCC meetings and this should be formalised in the terms of reference.

5 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 was agreed as a correct record.

6 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

7 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.

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.

8 Changes to the MedPay Salary Scales

Discussion:

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised the Committee that since the last JCC meeting, Full Council had agreed a £500 gap between grades 4-7, as well as the introduction of a range 8, and three pay points within each pay band.

The Unison representative commented on the changes noting that whilst pay was being fixed at the top, there were particular issues for lower paid staff, such as range 2. She queried how many staff were on range 2 as well as the gender profile and she considered if this was not resolved, there could be an equal pay issue.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that the next Corporate Consultative Committee (CCC) meeting was due to take place on 13 September where detailed information on range 2 employees would be available. She explained that range 2 was a small band with no career progression and that work was being undertaken in year with service managers to resolve this, including job evaluations. Consideration was also being given to the impact this may have next year and this would form part of the pay proposal.

Decision:

The Committee noted the verbal update

9 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.

The Corporate Performance Management Lead introduced this report and sought comments from the Committee.

Tania Earnshaw (Unison) made a number of comments in respect of the Strategy, and whilst welcoming the inclusion of the Strategy on the agenda and commenting it was a good start, it needed work and there needed to be improvements to the organisation. She referred to the need to reduce pay gaps, the need to improve staff forums/networks, that the Council needed to do more to be a disability confident employer, that the sickness absence policy should not be used as a trigger for the disciplinary procedure for disabled staff, and why the trade unions were not part of the Equalities Board.

Officers responded by stating if there were better disability schemes for the Council to adopt, they would be looked into. The Council supported the staff forums, including the provision of budgets and for staff to have time off to attend, and officers would look into the reasons why this was not being taken up further. There was no particular reason why trade unions could not be involved with the Equalities Board.

With regards to the sickness absence procedure, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer set out the provisions in place for disabled staff, including reasonable adjustments, disability passports, extended return to work options and redeployment.

The issue of positive discrimination was discussed, with reference to a recent RAF case, officers stated that there were no such programmes in place at Medway, however, the Strategy was looking at more general best practice around decision making, for example, removing unconscious bias from the recruitment process.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

10 Employee Staff Survey 2022

Discussion:

This report provided details of the findings of the Employee Engagement Survey 2002, 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 explained that she would give a detailed presentation at the Employment Matters Committee later that evening. In response to a question, she undertook to ensure that the presentation would be shared with JCC representatives.

The Unison representative commented that whilst 58% was a good participation rate, she queried what the other 42% thought and whether the Council was getting the whole picture. She considered the improvement in survey results around mental health to be positive.

In response, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised the Committee that the participation rate would have been 62% had all responses started been completed and submitted. Work was being undertaken with the Medway Makers to look at what could be improved for next time, and the Internal Communications team had been working with off site staff, e.g. theatres, to improve engagement and therefore participation rates next time.

In response to a question regarding benchmarking, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer explained that whilst the survey was designed and undertaken internally, Medway was part of a number of networks, which helped benchmarking and best practice. It was considered that there was an opportunity to work with other unitary authorities to assist with benchmarking and comparable data.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

Chairperson

Date:

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