

Medway Council
Meeting of Employment Matters Committee
Thursday, 6 June 2024
7.05pm to 8.00pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Mark Prenter (Chairperson), Cook (Vice-Chairperson), Field and Hackwell
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
McDonald (Substitute for Hamilton)
- In Attendance:** Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer
Steve Dickens, Democratic Services Officer
Nicola Trainor, Head of Council Planning and Programmes

41 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fearn, Hamilton and Sands.

42 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 30 January 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct and the Committee noted the record of the Joint Consultative Committee held on the same date.

43 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

44 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

Councillor Hackwell disclosed that his wife is a casual employee of Medway Council.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

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Other interests

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

Councillor Field disclosed that he was a member of the trade union TSSA and Unison.

Councillor Prenter disclosed that he was a member of the ASLEF trade union.

Councillor McDonald disclosed that he was a member of the CWU trade union.

45 Workforce Strategy

Discussion:

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report. She highlighted the report was intended to support the One Medway Council Plan, Financial Improvement and Transformation Plan and the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The strategy was focused on three main priorities, the workforce 2028, enabling development and engaging, rewarding and wellbeing.

The strategy would be developed and evolved in response to the ongoing staff survey and changing circumstances and needs of the Council. It was supported through a number of future strategies such as the Employment Engagement strategy, Learning and Development strategy and Recruitment strategy which would contain key actions with measurable data. She added the strategy was ambitious for Medway and successful delivery was dependent on the whole organisation rather than being reliant on the HR service.

The following issues were discussed:

Previous Workforce Strategy – it was questioned what had changed to enable the new workforce strategy to be successful and implemented fully where the previous strategy had not been put in place. The Chief Organisation Culture Officer informed the Committee that she believed there was an increased commitment from the senior leadership of the Council to implement the workforce strategy. This was shown by the investment in rightsizing HR to support the required additional activity, the recent pay award to staff and a commitment to increasing the learning and development budget for staff.

Age of workforce – it was commented that 40% of the Council workforce was 50 years old plus and the Council had struggled to recruit 16-24 year olds, with working from home being an issue for some. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer told the Committee she intended to bring forward a recruitment strategy to the Committee later in the year to support the workforce strategy and improve recruitment and retention, particularly amongst young people. The Council had a number of successful initiatives such as apprenticeships, graduate programmes and was working with schools to develop taster sessions for young people. She assured the Committee that the Council recognised young people learning a role may need to be in the office and despite the

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building restrictions anyone who wanted to work in Gun Wharf was able to do so.

Staff forums – in response to a question about the status of staff forums, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer acknowledged that staff forums had not been as active as hoped in the recent past. There had been some feedback from staff that this was in part a question of having time to take part in such forums. She added that senior officers were committed to encouraging forums and celebrating their success. The current staff survey encouraged staff to consider what other forums could be beneficial for staff and the results of the survey would inform the Council's response.

Equality, diversity and inclusion – concern was expressed that the Joint Consultative Committee had been informed that staff were reluctant to declare their disabled status. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer acknowledged that some staff preferred not to declare a particular status and explained that the current staff survey included a question why staff felt unwilling to declare their status, the results would enable the Council to provide additional reassurance to staff.

A Member asked how the Council would identify groups that were reluctant to come forward and provide additional support. In response the Chief Organisational Culture Officer explained that regular 1:1 meetings, wellbeing conversations and career progression discussions would help to identify where staff required additional support.

Medway 2.0 – It was commented that the Medway 2.0 transformation programme would have a significant impact on the way staff worked and had this been considered in the workforce strategy. The Chief Organisational Culture Office agreed that Medway 2.0 would have a significant impact on ways of working and the workforce strategy would be changed in response to the changing needs of the organisation.

Measures of success – in response to a question how the strategy links to other Council strategies such as the One Medway Council Plan and how success would be measured, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer noted that various Council strategies such as the One Medway Council Plan and the Financial Transformation Programme link together and success would be measured through a review of all those relevant strategies. One example of this was the Learning and Development Strategy which was currently being reviewed, would highlight the importance of developing transferable skills for staff so employees who wish to change career could be retained in different roles within Medway Council. HR were working with managers to improve career conversations with staff to improve retention and promote upskilling within the workforce.

It was commented that the policy was in the view of some Members dependent upon the HR Department and what could the department do to ensure successful implementation. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer responded that the actions required to implement the strategy were spread across the

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department and there had been investment in HR to support the strategy, this included the appointment of a Policy Procedures Manager who would shortly undertake a review of the sickness policy to support the strategy.

Zero hour contracts - in response to a question regarding what action the Council were undertaking to reduce zero-hour contracts the Chief Organisational Culture Officer informed the Committee that a number of staff remained on zero hour contracts, some of which were appropriate such as event staff. Other zero-hour contracts were considered as part of the Medpay review and it was hoped that all staff would have begun the review process by March 2025.

Retention – it was asked what benefits the Council had considered outside of pay to improve recruitment and aid retention. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer informed the Committee that a recruitment and retention strategy would be developed and considered by the Committee following the conclusion of the employee survey.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee noted the Council's Workforce Strategy, as set out in at Appendix 1.
- 1.2. The Committee agreed the proposed key actions in the Workforce Strategy and timescales for delivery in each case.
- 1.3. The Committee provided comments on other areas for improvement and associated key actions that they considered necessary to ensure the Council's was able to meet the priorities and actions associated with the One Medway Council Plan and Financial Improvement Plan as set out in the minutes above.
- 1.4. The Committee noted the comments of the Joint Consultative Committee that the strategy was welcomed but relied heavily on HR, that further work was required in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion to support staff members and greater consistency in managers understanding and implementation of procedures.

46 Organisational Change

Discussion:

The Head of Council Planning and Programmes introduced the report, and highlighted there had been six re-organisations in the period 1 October 2023 - 31 March 2024. 75 of 78 staff were redeployed in a service wide restructure and three staff were made redundant.

The following issues were discussed:

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Vacancy list – in response to a question whether restructure and redeployment had reduced the levels of vacancies in the Council, the Head of Council Planning and Programmes informed the Committee that the redeployment of staff from positions such as the Visitor Information Service had reduced the vacancy list.

Redeployment Pool – it was questioned whether staff were in the redeployment pool for a specified length of time. The Head of Planning and Programmes informed the Committee that the length of time staff would be in the redeployment pool was dependent on the notice period in their contract, so differed for staff. However, staff were provided early entry into the redeployment pool to maximise opportunities for staff at risk of redundancy.

Decision:

1. The Committee noted the present position and the support arrangements for staff.
2. The Committee noted the comments of the Joint Consultative Committee that despite positive redeployment, many staff remained worried and that information in future reports should take account of these concerns.

47 Early Retirement and Redundancy Payments

Discussion:

The Head of Council Planning & Programmes Officer introduced the report which informed the Committee of the decisions taken in relation to early retirements and severance payments in the period 1 October 23 – 31 March 2024. Three members of staff took early retirement in the period at a total cost of £29,000 to the Council.

Decision:

1. The Committee noted the report.
2. The Committee noted the comments of the Joint Consultative Committee that future reports should include information on flexible retirements.

Chairperson

Date:

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