

Medway Council
Meeting of Employment Matters Committee
Wednesday, 4 September 2024
7.00pm to 8.53pm

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, Hackwell, Hamilton and Sands
- Substitutes:** Councillors: Tejan (Substitute for Fearn)
- In Attendance:** Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer
Jo Budd, Head of Talent and Development
Steve Dickens, Democratic Services Officer
Nicola Trainor, Head of Council Planning and Programmes

262 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Fearn.

263 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 6 June 2024 was agreed by the Committee and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

264 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

265 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

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

Employment Matters Committee, 4 September 2024

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

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

Councillor Hamilton disclosed that she was a Member of NEU and Unite Trade Unions.

266 Employee Engagement Survey 2024 Results

Discussion:

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report which outlined the results of the employee survey undertaken in May 2024. She provided a detailed presentation of the results and changes compared to the last survey which was undertaken in 2022.

The following issues were discussed:

Communications – Members welcomed the improved two-way communication between management and staff. In response to a question to what extent was this planned and what part represented a cultural change in the organisation, the Chief Operating Officer replied that there had been a deliberate choice by senior leadership to be more accessible following the employee survey of two years ago where communication was identified as an issue of concern. This meant that a number of events had taken place such as Medway Live, Chief Executive team visits and senior managers were more visible in Gun Wharf.

It was noted that electronic communication between management and staff was less favoured than other forms of communication, it was asked whether this was a risk for the Council in relation to the move toward more digitisation through Medway 2.0. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer explained that the Council needed to improve some systems to promote digital communication, for example, intranet Medspace messages disappear after 24 hours. The Council would also consider increased use of social media to promote the Council, but Medway 2.0 would support staff through increased digitisation.

Healthy work practices – A Member asked if constraints on the Gun Wharf building was a causal factor in less healthy working practices. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer acknowledged that restrictions on officers being in the building meant some staff were working in less healthy ways, such as being less active and talking to colleagues less. In addition, that the Council had some positions vacant for an extended period and this created additional workload pressure. The Council had undertaken some rightsizing of teams to ensure it was able to respond to demand but also needed to improve the speed of its recruitment.

Employment Matters Committee, 4 September 2024

Bullying – in response to a question how the Council defined bullying, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer replied that the Council did not provide a specific definition for staff as defining bullying would not take away from officers experiences of it, so it was based on how staff felt they experienced bullying.

Pay and recognition – a Member commented that following last year's pay award, 30% of responders reported being satisfied with the pay and recognition and this was a disappointing result. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer replied that in any organisation she would expect a percentage of staff to say they were not satisfied with the pay. A cohort of staff would not receive a pay increase following the competition of Medpay review and this would be naturally disappointing for those affected.

Mental Health – Members expressed concern at results related to mental health and requested further information. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer explained that the results suggested there was not one particular problem related to mental health in the Council, staff dealt with a number of issues some of which related to work. In addition the Council had improved how it addressed poor performance, this would create higher levels of sickness, stress and complaints as staff were held to account.

A Member asked if successful strategies promoting positive mental health could be shared, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer, said that Mental Health Champions had been a positive development for the Council. More training for mental health champions would be useful ensuring managers had the knowledge of the available support. What mental health champions and managers found difficult was the line between where the role of the employer ends and the role of the mental health professional begins.

Disabled staff - a Member expressed concern that the most experienced discrimination was related to disability, and asked if the Equality Board would take this issue up. The Chief Organisational Officer explained that work was being undertaken to ensure the Council was a disability confident employer, and the needs of disabled staff included in all Council project work, for example, Gun Wharf project board were reviewing adaptations required for the building to meet the accessibility needs of staff.

A Member asked if there was any evidence that neuro diverse staff had reported mental health issues at a higher rate, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer replied that she did not have the data available and undertook to review and provide information to the Committee outside of the meeting. It was commented that this may be an issue of how staff and workers considered themselves, differently abled rather than disabled and more inclusive language was required. The Head of Planning and Programmes explained that the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy which was being development would ensure the Council used inclusive language.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the report.

- b) The Committee noted the comments of the Joint Consultative Committee that 30% of staff were satisfied with the pay and conditions and that 60% of staff who had reported bullying were unhappy with the outcome.

267 Job Evaluation Policy

Discussion:

The Head of Council Planning & Programmes introduced the report and outlined the policy which would complement the use of the Council's Guage+ software. The software promoted a consistent approach by the Council in job evaluation, provided a clear audit trail and guidance for managers in decision making. The Policy had been consulted upon with trade unions.

The following issues were discussed:

Discrimination – in response to a question whether the policy took into account issues where some work was limited such as long term illness or pregnancy, the Head of Council Planning and Programmes explained the Council worked closely with staff who returned from long term illness and those issues were covered by policies related to staff with long term conditions or disability discrimination legislation.

A Member noted the Council had recently decided to recognise children who had been in care as a protected characteristic, but the equalities statement did not reflect the change. The Head of Council Planning and Programmes explained that work was being undertaken to review and policies in line with the recent Council decision and changes would be made in due course.

Staff not covered by the policy – A Member noted the policy related to staff at ranges 1-8 and requested further information regarding the job evaluations for staff not covered. The Head of Council Planning and programmes explained this would include staff who were employed under other terms and conditions such as Soulbury or the NHS. She undertook to provide further details to Members regarding the process of job evaluation for those staff not covered by the Job Evaluation Policy outside of the Committee.

Guage+ software - a Member raised concern that the use of software in job evaluation gave a risk the Council was exposed to equal pay claims and asked if the Council could provide the supplier with feedback if there was a negative trend. The Head of Council Planning and Programmes explained that feedback would be provided to the software supplier were it required and undertook to review how the effects of the software was monitored.

Decision:

- a) The Committee approved the introduction of the Job Evaluation policy.

Employment Matters Committee, 4 September 2024

- b) The Committee noted the comments of the Joint Consultative Committee that the Head of Council Planning & Programmes provide further information to the Committee regarding the company Pilat which supplied the Guage+ software.

268 Recruitment Strategy 2024-26

Discussion:

The Head of Talent and Development introduced the report which outlined the recruitment priorities for the Council for the next two years to improve systems and processes in response to market challenges.

The following issues were discussed:

Recruitment of underrepresented groups – it was commented that Council staff were broadly representative of the community save disabilities, where 6% of staff were disabled compared to 16% in the community. A Member asked if the disparity included those members of the community who were unable to work because of their disability and would it represent a better comparison to not include those unable to work. The Head of Talent and Development replied that she did not have the details available but would provide the information outside of the meeting.

In response to a question what the strategy was to recruit more men, particularly young men, to the Council workforce, the Head of Talent and Development explained that the Council was aware it needed to consider the disparity between the numbers of men and women, the Council had a positive apprenticeship scheme which attracted many men, so it needed to monitor drop out rates of men from its workforce.

Armed Forces Covenant – Clarification was requested whether the guarantee of an interview for ex-services and their families included currently serving members of the armed forces. It was confirmed that current members of the armed forces would be provided with a guaranteed interview under the armed forces covenant and this included immediate family.

Advertising – in reply to a question whether the Council advertised in outlets which promoted under represented demographics, the Head of Talent and Development explained that the Council had offers from niche advertisers, however, financial constraints was a limiting factor on where the Council advertised. The Council was able to track who started applications so it would review whether there was a higher dropout rate from some demographics than others.

Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCOs) – Members requested further information whether the demographics of Council workforce would be significantly changed if Local Authority Trading Companies were also included. The Head of Talent and Development did not have the information available so undertook to provide updated statistics to Members outside of the meeting.

Employment Matters Committee, 4 September 2024

Blind recruitment - in response to a question whether the introduction of a blind application process would be considered for future inclusion in the strategy, the Head of Talent and Development explained that the Council's recruitment software had the capability to do this. The Council would review recruitment data from January 2025 through quarterly monitoring and six monthly reporting, following this, the Council would identify trends and give further consideration to trialling a blind application process in July 2025.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the Council's Recruitment Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1.
- b) The Committee agreed the proposed high level key actions in the Recruitment Strategy and timescales for delivery in each case.
- c) The Committee proposed monitoring of blind recruitment for six months from January 2025 as an area for improvement that they feel is necessary to ensure our recruitment and selection processes, procedure and system changes, enable us to meet the priorities and actions associated with the Workforce Strategy, One Medway Council Plan and the Financial Improvement and transformation Plan.
- d) The Committee noted the comments of the Joint Consultative Committee which were that pay and benefits remained an issue and trade unions remained in favour of a return to national joint council pay and conditions.

Chairperson

Date:

Steve Dickens, Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01634 332051

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk