

Medway Council
Meeting of Joint Consultative Committee
Thursday, 1 May 2025
6.00pm to 6.59pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Cook, Fearn, Hackwell and Mark Prenter
(Chairperson)

Substitutes: Councillors: Crozer and Peake

In Attendance: Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer
Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer
Nick Morgan, HR Business Partner
Nicola Trainor, Head of Council Planning and Programmes

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hamilton and Sands, and Trade Union representatives Philip Bunn ASCL, Emily Calder Evans NEU, Mark Hammond UNISON.

With the Committee's agreement the Chairperson agreed to take Agenda Item 5 - Workforce Update 2024/25, as the last item.

2 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 29 January 2025 was agreed by the Committee and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

3 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

The Chairman had agreed that Agenda Item 11 - Medpay Review: Outline of the approach to senior officer progression of pay, be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency as permitted under section 100B of the Local Government Act 1972 to enable consideration of the matter at the earliest opportunity given that the report would be submitted to the next scheduled Full Council meeting on 17 July 2025.

4 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.

Councillor Peake disclosed that he was a member of the UNISON trade union.

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

5 Revised Managing Sickness and Absence Policy

Discussion

The HR Business Partner introduced the report which advised the Committee of the revisions made during the review of the current Managing Sickness Absence Policy. Managing absence was a key area of focus and an organisational priority to support the health and wellbeing of the Council's workforce. A review of the policy and supporting guidance was required to further support employees both when they were absent and when they returned.

The Committee noted that if agreed, a suite of guidance and a programme of training for managers on identified key areas would be implemented alongside the launch of the revised policy which was planned for May 2025.

The UNISON representative queried the version of the policy that was being reviewed, stating that the third bullet point of section 4.2 referring to the outcome of the Final Review Meeting at Appendix A of the policy, had been previously removed as it had been felt to be discriminatory to those with a disability. The UNISON representative had not been able to obtain evidence of this change prior to this meeting but believed there was evidence from an old hearing where the policy had been submitted. The HR Business Partner confirmed that since being made aware of the query that afternoon, he had searched all committee papers and published documentation but could not find evidence of such a change being made. It was noted that it was an either or situation and there may be a legitimate reason to use it. It was agreed that this required further investigation outside of the meeting.

Reviewing the policy, it was agreed that there needed to be consistent language to ensure clarity that the employee could be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or a workplace colleague at every stage. It was also suggested that it would be good to have reference to reasonable adjustments referred to in the policy.

Decision:

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

6 Reasonable Adjustments policy

Discussion

The HR Business Manager introduced the report which sought approval of a Reasonable Adjustments Policy, to ensure that all employees with disabilities were provided with appropriate adjustments to support their needs and enable them to perform their roles effectively.

It was noted that introducing a Reasonable Adjustments Policy would support compliance with legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010 and promote an inclusive and supportive working environment. The policy would help the Council to attract and retain talented individuals with disabilities and support requirements and work towards creating an equitable work environment for all.

The UNISON representative welcomed the policy.

In response to a question, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer confirmed that a request would not be prevented by lack of service area resource and that she was currently working with finance colleagues on having a centralised budget. She also advised that access to work was being reviewed, in particular, how processes could be improved.

In response to a question regarding feedback, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that it had been good in parts but lacked consistency. There had been manager training around basic responsibilities and there would be further bite size learning opportunities.

Decision:

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

7 Maternity and Paternity Policy and the Parental Bereavement Leave Policy

Discussion

The HR Business Partner introduced the report which outlined the review and amendments to the Council's current Maternity and Paternity Policy and

Joint Consultative Committee, 1 May 2025

subsequent changes required to the Parental Bereavement Leave policy to support the amends. It was noted that the review included the provision of neonatal leave and pay, a new right for parents of babies born on or after 6 April 2025 into the Maternity and Paternity Policy. The HR Business Partner confirmed that Section 12 would be amended to read 'Miscarriage and Medical Termination.'

Neonatal leave: In response to a query over the requirement for a hospital stay of 7 days or longer in order to qualify for neonatal leave, the HR Business Partner advised that this was as per the legislation, but that it would also be a question of how it would be approached as a Council. During the consultation lots of different experiences had been given and sometimes it was not until there was a real-life scenario that policies were truly tested and questions arose.

Keeping in touch days: In response to a question, the Head of Council Planning & Programmes confirmed that keeping in touch days could only amount to 10 instances by law and could not be divided up to 20 half days for example.

Returning to work: Concern was expressed about the negative language which read as a deficit and seemed more appropriate for managerial guidance and training than a policy document.

Miscarriage and medical termination: It was queried whether elective procedures should be excluded and advised that this was a sensitive subject that needed to cover an array of circumstances and at end of day the Council wanted to be a supportive employer.

Decision:

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

8 Breastfeeding policy

Discussion

The HR Business Partner introduced the report which sought to introduce a Breastfeeding Policy to inform and support employees who were breastfeeding and wished to continue when returning to work. The policy would help to make sure the necessary accommodations were put in place, where possible, to enable continuation of breastfeeding upon returning to work. The policy aimed to help inform discussions between managers and employees during maternity leave to allow for provision to be made to support breastfeeding on a return to work.

It was queried whether access to water and an electrical supply could be added to the requisites for locations. The HR Business Partner advised that this would

be difficult and limit possible locations. He confirmed that areas were being looked at as part of the Gun Wharf renovation project.

Decision:

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

9 Medpay Review: Outline of the approach to senior officer progression of pay

Discussion

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report which introduced the MedPay Review principles for senior managers (Strategic Service Managers and Service Managers), to ensure that the senior officer pay scales were adjusted to align with the rest of the organisation to enable progression through the pay ranges, based on a career progression framework which would be developed.

A competency framework had been agreed in January 2025 at the Employment Matters Committee as a supporting document to enable development, however this did not enable progression through pay grades and further work was now required to build the progression frameworks for senior managers. The framework aimed to address historical problems and legacy issues, ensuring fairness and consistency in performance management and pay progression. The proposal included a single progression opportunity per year for managers, with extensive performance management requirements.

It was noted that the Corporate Management Team's (CMT) preferred option was Option A, as this mirrored the three progression points of the rest of the organisation and provided continuity of one pay model for all colleagues. With an agreed understanding that there would be one opportunity per year for senior managers to apply for progression, possibly June, which aligned to the rest of the organisation, and it was accepted that progression within the range would be unlikely to happen every year for all, as it was based on performance and not time served. The budget for this work had already been agreed.

The UNISON representative raised a number of concerns which included: that the report felt rushed; lack of demonstrated costings; was not comparable with the MedPay review in that the pay spans were much wider; concern at how this looked when there were members of staff using food banks; and a general request for further detailed information including evidence on retention issues.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer confirmed that the report had initially been considered by CMT in January. Since then, work had been carried out to improve the language and understanding. The report was requesting that the same principles of MedPay be overlayed and permission be given to carry out the job evaluations and costings, which would be when affordability would be uncovered. However, at the moment there were various retention payments in

place where there were flight risks in key areas, and bands that did not match the current market, so evidence of need was there.

Further concerns were raised with regards to the possibility of backdating the payments; the pay range differences and the percentage increases of the different options.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer advised that the pay ranges could not be changed and there had been an early decision not to return to NJC at this time and in light of local government reform. CMT desired consistency across the leadership posts as bands were not currently equal. It needed an overhaul but would take too much change. It was noted that these positions did not benefit from flexitime and had to be on call 24/7.

Decision:

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

10 Workforce Update 2024/25

Discussion

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report which provided the latest information on the Council's workforce for 2024/25. The report was the first annual report on staffing levels across directorates, together with comparative information from the previous year. The report also provides information on diversity and demographics.

The UNISON representative requested further data on the first-year turnover rate of 29.3%, and high rate of first year turnover, and commented that money spent on agency staff could be better spent on looking after current staff on the frontline services. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer agreed to share the data and confirmed that there would be further investigation as it might include statistics on staff moving within the organisation. She further advised that the recruitment challenges for certain positions were also faced by organisations such as Kent County Council, much of the recruitment and use of agency staff issues had been set out in a paper to the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Decision:

The Committee to provide comments to the Employment Matters Committee as outlined above.

Joint Consultative Committee, 1 May 2025

Chairperson

Date:

Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 01634 332115

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk