

**Minutes of a Meeting of the
Employment Committee held at
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath
House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15
3HD on 12 October 2023**

+ Cllr David Whitcroft (Chairman)
+ Cllr Shaun Macdonald (Vice Chairman)

- Cllr Shaun Macdonald	+ Cllr Leanne MacIntyre
+ Cllr Alan Ashbery	- Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam
+ Cllr Lisa Finan-Cooke	+ Cllr Josh Thorne
Cllr Mark Gordon	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler

+ Present
- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Mary Glauert (In place of Cllr Shaun Macdonald) and Cllr Richard Wilson (In place of Cllr Alan Ashbery)

Members in Attendance: Sally Kipping, Eddie Scott, Julie Simmonds, Cllr Sarbie Kang, Cllr Morgan Rise, Cllr Helen Whitcroft and Cllr Valerie White

Officers Present: Sally Kipping, Julie Simmonds and Eddie Scott

7/EC Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 7 October 2023 were confirmed by the Committee.

8/EC People Strategy

The Committee considered a proposed new People Strategy which outlined how the Council would be made an attractive proposition in the employment market, encourage empowerment and positive performance management and how workforce resilience would be built.

It was noted that the proposed policy had been considered by the Joint Staff Consultative Group at its meeting on 14 September 2023. However, the Consultative Group had not proposed any changes to the policy.

Following Members' questions and comments it was clarified that during the development of the policy, whilst the staff focus groups were relatively small they were diverse and representative of the Council's employees in relation to ages and pay grades. Moreover, it was noted from the survey, which aimed to ask which benefits were most valued by staff, that there was significant value placed towards leave over Christmas and little importance placed on the Cycle to Work scheme. Following Members' questions, it was clarified that the value placed on Christmas leave was more reflective of workloads and not in respect of the diversity of the Council, which largely reflected the population it served. It was acknowledged that

there was room to improve take-up of the cycle to work scheme including options such as e-bike take up.

Members were advised that there was ongoing exploratory work being undertaken in respect of the Council's future use of artificial intelligence which would inform the Council's forthcoming Digital Strategy.

Further Committee Members' questions resulted in it being emphasised that the Council did not mandate working from home and employees were allowed to work anywhere in the Council areas of Surrey Heath House. In addition, it was noted, following questions that mentoring opportunities across councils already existed. However, it was felt by Members' that there was room to explore a greater amount of shared roles with neighbouring Councils in order to increase the scope of roles and thereby retention.

There was discussion on the impact of the recent publicity on the Council's financial position. It was advised that there were no plans to undertake another all-staff survey, as the results and comments of the last survey had not yet been fully actioned.

Furthermore, the Chair of the Committee informed Members that he had informally spoken to staff and Human Resources to identify the effect of recent statements. It was noted that suggestions had been made that this affected staff morale and retention. However, the Chair emphasised that the administration was confident that a revised financial plan would be produced which would stabilise the Council's financial position and commented that since his election in May 2023 he was impressed with the ongoing professionalism, quality and high level of service which Officers provided. He expressed his thanks and hoped that staff and administration would continue in partnership long into the future.

There were also a number of typographical changes which the Committee agreed should be amended.

RESOLVED that the People Strategy, as appended at Annex A to the agenda report, as amended be approved.

9/EC Capability Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered a proposed revised Capability Policy and Procedure.

The policy had been reviewed, as part of the regular review of the Council's HR related policies and not as a result of legislative changes. The significant proposed change was to allow the opportunity for employees to be brought into the capability process at a higher stage, where the employees' actions were dangerous or had caused reputational damage to the Council.

Following Members' questions it was affirmed that where an employee felt that they were not being fairly treated throughout the process, the employee had an opportunity to engage with Staff Representatives or raise a formal grievance through the grievance process.

However, resulting from the Committee's discussions it was agreed to the change paragraph 9.1.3 to 'discuss', the possible reasons instead of 'explain' and to change 'why', to 'where', in paragraph 10.1.5.

There were also a number of typographical changes which the Committee agreed to be amended.

RESOLVED that the revised Capability Policy and Procedure, as per Annex A to the agenda report, as amended, be adopted.

10/EC Organisational Change Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered a proposed revised Organisational Change Policy and Procedure which gave guidance to staff when their service or team was undergoing a restructure. The proposed changes aimed to make the rights of employees clearer in the process.

At its meeting on 14 September 2023 the Joint Staff Consultative Group recommended that the use of the word 'complete', in relation to ring-fenced interviews should be replaced with 'have the opportunity to be considered for the role or roles'.

Following the Committee's discussion, it was acknowledged that there was a potential opportunity to explore the use of seconding staff to partnering councils, in order to avoid their redundancy.

RESOLVED that the revised Organisational Change Policy and Procedure, as at Annex A to the agenda report, be adopted.

11/EC Mental Health Policy

The Committee considered the proposed new Mental Health Policy which gave guidance to staff on support available, guidance and where to go for advice in respect of their mental health.

The proposed policy had been considered by the Joint Staff Consultative Group at its meeting on 14 September 2023. However, the Consultative Group had not proposed any changes to the policy.

It was felt by Members that there was room to acknowledge some of the existing good practice and policies which contributed to the positive mental health of employees. Furthermore, it was suggested following discussions that there was room to also highlight and signpost local services of mental health support in addition to the more general means of support already signposted on the Council's Intranet.

It was agreed to amend a number of typographical and formatting changes.

RESOLVED that the Mental Health Policy, as per Annex A of the Agenda Report, as amended, be adopted.

12/EC Flexible Working Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered the proposed revised Flexible Working Policy and Procedure, following a review as a result of legislative changes.

The policy was a key part of the Council's attraction and retention policy and following legislative changes, allowed 2 flexible working requests per employee per year and put a time limit of 2 years for applications to be processed. In addition, it was proposed that employees would be able to submit a flexible working request from their first day of employment.

The revised Policy had been considered by the Joint Staff Consultative Group on 14 September 2023, with no changes recommended.

Following Members' comments and feedback it was acknowledged that the Council's flexible working practices could be given a higher profile on its job adverts. Furthermore, it was agreed to amend paragraph 2 of the policy to add '(please note this may not be available for all roles)', to the first bullet point for the purposes of clarity.

RESOLVED that the revised Flexible Working Policy and Procedure, as per Annex A of the agenda report, as amended, be adopted.

13/EC Work Programme

The Committee noted its Work Programme as published in the Supplements Report Pack.

The Chair also asked Members where possible to submit questions and comments to Officers in advance of future meetings to aid the meeting process.

Chair