

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EMPLOYMENT AND APPEALS COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON FRIDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2022

PRESENT

County Councillor L Roberts (Chair)

County Councillors B Baynham, B Breeze, A Jenner, DW Meredith, G Mitchell,
G W Ratcliffe and J M Williams

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors M Beecham and W Lloyd and Paul Bradshaw, Head of WOD.

2. MINUTES

The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the last meeting held on 27 June 2022 as a correct record.

3. LEGAL UPDATE

The Committee received an update on recent employment case law.

The Committee noted the new case law in respect of holiday pay for part-year workers. Clarity on the implementation date of this change was being sought and the impact on the Authority had not been quantified.

4. EMPLOYMENT POLICY UPDATE

The Professional Lead Human Resources Management and Development advised the Committee that policies had previously been reviewed on a 2 yearly cycle. This was found to be too frequent and consequently reviews would now be undertaken every 5 years. It was noted however, that a policy could be renewed sooner, if required to take account of changes for example in legislation.

The Committee noted the following:

- Disciplinary and Grievance policy, toolkit and guidance – this had been reviewed and training would be available for managers
- The Carers, Violence Against Women and Whistleblowing policies had been updated and would be considered by the next Policy Forum.
- The Substance Misuse and Disturbance Payments policies were to be reviewed.

A HR platform was being developed on the Intranet where all policies and associated toolkits and guidance would be located.

It was noted that members previously participated in the Employment Policy Forum. However, this has been reviewed and changed as the Forum was an operational group for managers and trade unions to review policies and best practice. The Committee would in future therefore receive regular updates on the policies which had been updated and reviewed as part of that group.

5.	SICKNESS STATISTICS UPDATE
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The Committee received a detailed breakdown of sickness absence figures.

In respect of the sickness absence rates for September 2022 the following was noted:

- In response to a question the Professional Lead – Employment Services advised that absence figures could be provided for a whole year, rather than a specific month.
- In respect of absences relating to “Stress, depression, anxiety, mental health & fatigue” staff were asked if this was “work related” or “non-work related”. 68 of the 93 absences relating to this category have been declared as “non-work related”. The CareFirst - Employee Assistance Program, which includes a confidential counselling service was available to staff. If for example “non-work related” stress was due to a caring responsibility, HR could look at whether adjustments could be made to hours of work to enable a return to work.
- Short and long term absences are highest in Education but it was noted that schools make up over half of the total Council workforce. In response to a question the Professional Lead – Employment Services advised that percentages of absences could be provided for primary and secondary schools.
- Although benchmarking data from authorities has limitations because of the differing structures in authorities and the way data is collected, it can provide some useful comparative data.

In response to comments regarding Occupational Health the Professional Lead Human Resources Management and Development advised that an internal review of the processes in respect of Occupational Health was underway. Comment was made that there seemed to be delays in accessing Occupational Health and the officer advised she would look into this.

6.	HR UPDATE
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The Professional Lead Human Resources Management and Development advised that in respect of the National Pay Awards UNISON had accepted the offer and results from the ballots of the other two unions was awaited. If two unions accept the pay award, it is anticipated that payments can be made in the November pay period. The pay award will be backdated to 1 April 2022. Negotiations will then commence in respect of the next pay award.

Recruitment and retention has been identified as a significant objective and risk for the Authority. It was noted that there are national recruitment issues in areas such as social care and HTR but there are also local issues. In Powys the unemployment rate is very low and between 2021 and 2043 it is projected that there will be an 8.8% reduction in working age adults compared to a national average of 0.5% in Wales. Work is currently being undertaken to address this issue, including:

- reviewing the recruitment process to ensure it is a good experience for potential employees,
- reviewing how jobs are advertised and how social media is used,

- effective workforce and succession planning,
- how school and university leavers can be attracted to the authority,
- engaging with staff as to why they work for the Council.

In response to a question regarding apprenticeships the Professional Lead Human Resources Management and Development advised that where service areas are struggling to recruit staff, they could review their structures and possibly introduce an apprenticeship or career graded role where training would be provided. This was being actively promoted across the Council.

7. EMPLOYMENT DATA REQUIREMENT

The Professional Lead Human Resources Management and Development asked the Committee to consider the other employment data it wished to receive. It was noted that Committee should not consider issues which were being considered by for example scrutiny committees. However, comment was made that county wide policies which relate to all employees, such as the Corporate Safeguarding Policy, may be better considered by this Committee.

The role and remit of the Committee and its terms of reference need to be reviewed and thought given to how members can support officers in their work.

The Professional Lead Human Resources Management and Development advised that recruitment training would be provided to the Committee in the new year, to enable its involvement in the recruitment process for senior appointments.

County Councillor L Roberts (Chair)