

## **Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 6th June, 2013.**

**Present:-** Councillors Rasib (Chair), Plenty (Vice-Chair), Brooker, Chohan (left at 7.40pm), Coad, Davis, A S Dhaliwal, S K Dhaliwal and Sharif

### **PART 1**

#### **4. Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

#### **5. Minutes of the Meeting held on 3rd April 2013 and the Special meeting held on 16th May 2013**

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2013 and the special meeting of the Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2013 be approved as a correct record.

In answer to a question regarding minute 30 (Use of Suspensions) the Committee was informed that CMT had considered a report about the process and criteria applied leading up to suspension. Further information had been requested and another report would be made to CMT in the next 2/3 weeks.

A request was made that consideration be given to holding meetings of the Committee at an alternative location, subject to further investigation of suitable venues.

#### **6. Accommodation and Flexible Working**

The Committee considered a report about accommodation and flexible working as part of the accommodation strategy, with an oral update on the work due to be carried out at St Martins Place (SMP). The report detailed actions and progress in relation to:

- Document scanning and secure accessible storage
- Developing suitable, flexible accommodation
- Developing community hubs with drop in and log on facilities
- Extending flexible working

The programme of work at SMP to refurbish/ replace the air conditioning, wiring and IT cabling was outlined, which would require the evacuation of staff from a floor of each wing of the building for a temporary period. This would go hand in hand with the overall work plan to redesign the layout of the accommodation at SMP with new office furniture to fit the current and future needs for the most appropriate location of staff in relation to their customers and optimise the use of space. The Committee was shown two indicative floor plans for SMP showing existing and proposed layouts which illustrated the use of smaller desks (now possible since introduction of compact flat screen PCs), reduced file storage (given the increased use of document

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scanning) and additional meeting rooms and break-out areas. The plans also showed new space designated for hot desks and a 'touch down' area.

Redecoration and refurbishment of space at Landmark Place was currently in progress which when complete would allow the transfer of Housing staff from The Centre. Office space vacated at The Centre would be used for the staff temporarily decanted from SMP during the works there.

The Committee was concerned about the effect of the proposed changes on general staff welfare. It was felt that there were a number of questions which remained unanswered together with a number of matters on which further explanation and assurance was sought. In summary these were:

- The original strategy of the Council on moving to SMP (ie short / medium term, temporary /permanent).
- The Health and Safety space standards for staff and how the proposed new desks/seating arrangements comply.
- How old are the existing desks and what is the cost of the replacement furniture?
- Details of the numbers of additional desks, numbers of staff who can be accommodated, the number and allocation of hot desks.
- The impact of change/moving on staff and the measures being put in place to deal with stress and other issues arising.
- The total cost of the works at SMP, the business case and the alternatives considered.

The Committee noted the consultations already carried out with staff but considered there were lessons to be learned from local companies who had gone through a similar process.

**Resolved –** to RECOMMEND the Cabinet that no further work at St Martin's Place be undertaken on the accommodation strategy until the Director of Customer and Community Services has reported to Employment and Appeals Committee to answer members' concerns about the effects of the proposals on staff.

### 7. Temporary Agency Staff - Progress on Implementation and Baseline Monitoring

The Committee considered a progress report on the contract with Matrix SCM to supply Temporary Agency staff for the Council, which had been in operation since January 2013.

The implementation of the new contract had a savings target for 2013/14 of £250,000. Expenditure on agency staff from 6<sup>th</sup> January to 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013 amounted to £1,930,548, meaning there would be a saving of £90,459 under the formula agreed with Matrix.

It was noted that 69% of the workers from the 123 agencies now signed up with Matrix were travelling less than 10 miles to their work location. Also,

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since the last progress report the total number of agency staff in place had decreased from 137 to 95. These numbers were based on the temporary staff employed via the full approval process. Those employed via the short term/urgent process were separately recorded but these had also decreased. The Committee noted there were also temporary staff engaged 'off-contract', where because of recruitment difficulties staff had been employed direct without reference to Matrix.

An appendix to the report provided a breakdown of the number of temporary staff per Directorate, together with their roles and a commentary as to their usage. It was noted that owing to a number of internal restructurings taking place, there was a tendency to use a greater number of temps. However, if a temp was taken onto permanent staff, no finders fee became payable under the contract.

The Committee noted ongoing progress and identified a number of areas where further data would be helpful.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the following information be included in the next progress report:
  - How many Agency staff live within 5 miles of their place of work or are resident in SL1 to SL3 post code areas;
  - What is the extent of the off-contract spend on temporary staff;
  - How many consultants or interims are engaged by the Council currently; and
  - How many sessional workers are engaged and where are they used.

## **8. Reducing Sickness Absence Performance Update**

The Committee considered a report with an update on progress of reducing the Council's sickness absence.

There had been a significant decrease in the average full time equivalent (FTE) days lost per month since introduction of the new sickness absence policy compared with the equivalent month in the previous year. For instance, the March 2013 average FTE absence reported 0.3 days compared to 1.2 days in March 2012. The early indication was that the Council was well on its way to achieving the overall target reduction to 6 days per FTE by 2014/15.

The report also contained the sickness balanced scorecard showing numbers (and percentage) of staff per Directorate at each stage set down in the absence policy during the six month period to February 2013. This also showed numbers of staff referred to Occupational Health, together with the small number who had failed to attend a booked appointment. It was noted

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that in cases where depression was a cause of absence, early assistance was sought from Occupational Health and the Counselling service.

The Committee noted that an internal audit review of the new sickness reporting processes had resulted in a favourable report.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the next progress report include the numbers (and percentage) of staff on long term sickness.

## **9. Update on Wellbeing Strategy**

The Committee received an update on the staff initiatives introduced to support the Wellbeing agenda as part of the wider Workforce Strategy.

The initiatives included a Healthy Eating Campaign day due to take place on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013 at which there would be taster sessions, information on food labelling, knowing your portions, and alcohol awareness, together with a fun quiz and a survey. Also planned was an initiative called “Pace along with your Pedometer” being organised in conjunction with the British Heart Foundation. This was due to begin on 1<sup>st</sup> July, last for one month and comprise teams of five with each team member issued with a pedometer. Various locations would be identified in Slough where participants could “clock up” the miles. A team of Councillors was suggested and Cllrs Coad, A Dhaliwal, S K Dhaliwal, Rasib and Sharif volunteered to take part.

Further initiatives still in the planning stage were a ‘Tour de Slough’ to link with promotion of the Council’s salary sacrifice scheme to purchase a bike, a health MOT and a piece of work around stress contributors.

**Resolved –** That the report be noted.

## **10. Work Programme 2013/14**

The Committee received a proposed work programme for 2013/14 reflecting the main priorities for the coming year.

The programme had been designed to support initiatives in the workforce strategy and was built around regular updates about sickness absence and the Temporary Agency Staff contract, with periodic reports about other topics within the scope of the Committee.

**Resolved –** That the work programme be approved, subject to the addition of a report on suspensions and disciplinary cases at the year end.

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### **11. Members' Attendance 2012/13**

The Committee received a report setting out Members' attendance over the past year.

**Resolved** – That the report be noted.

### **12. Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.38 pm)