

EMPLOYMENT PANEL

THURSDAY 1 OCTOBER 2015 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillors Bloxham (as substitute for Councillor J Mallinson), Mrs Bowman (as substitute for Councillor Mitchelson), Mrs Bradley (as substitute for Councillor Stothard), Burns, Glover and Ms Quilter.

OFFICERS: Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Financial Services and HR Manager
HR Advisory Services Team Leader
HR Advisor

EMP10/15 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Glover be appointed Chairman of the Employment Panel for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Glover be appointed Chairman of the Employment Panel for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

Councillor Glover thereupon took the Chair.

EMP.11/15 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman sought nominations with regard to the appointment of a Vice-Chairman for the Panel.

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Stothard be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Employment Panel for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Stothard be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Employment Panel for the Municipal Year 2015/16.

EMP.12/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf Councillors J Mallinson, Mitchelson and Stothard.

EMP.13/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest affecting the business to be transacted at the meeting.

EMP.14/15 PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was agreed that the items of business in Part A be dealt with in public and the items of business in Part B be dealt with when the public and press were excluded.

EMP.15/15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – 1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2015 be agreed as a correct record of the meetings and signed by the Chairman.

EMP.16/15 VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCY, EARLY RELEASE IN THE INTERESTS OF EFFICIENT INITIATIVE

The Financial Services and HR Manager submitted report RD.34/15 which suggested that a Voluntary Redundancy / Early Release initiative be instigated to avoid compulsory redundancies.

The Financial Services and HR Manager reminded the Panel that staffing savings of £1.295m had been targeted in the Medium Term Financial Plan for delivery early in the 2016/17 financial year. The Senior Management Team in consultation with Portfolio Holders had developed plans for making staffing savings through vacancy management, voluntary redundancy and early release in the interests of efficiency whilst maintaining the Council's policy of minimising compulsory redundancies.

In 2014 the Council had undertaken a Voluntary Redundancy initiative which resulted in 46 volunteers. Due to the key roles undertaken by the majority of the volunteers only 10 were able to be released which resulted in Revenue Savings of £231,000. The Financial Services and HR Manager summarised the required savings profiled against the number of staff needed over the next three years. The issue with the 2014 initiative had been the requirement to lose the post of the applicant, however, based on the number of applications received in 2014 it was felt that there would potentially be enough demand if a new initiative was instigated.

Financial Services and HR Manager informed the Panel of the definition of Early Retirement / Early Release as set out in the Council's Redundancy Policy. She explained that there were circumstances where a key member of staff wanted to take Voluntary Redundancy but could not as their job was critical to the Council. There was also staff corporately able to step into such roles with relevant and reasonable development. Providing that the other staff role could be deleted from the structure without impacting on junior career progression opportunities, the member of staff who wanted to leave could leave in the interests of efficiency. She added that requests from certain key posts including Drivers and Loaders with no ready replacement would still be an issue.

Currently staff requesting Voluntary Redundancy had their redundancy calculated based on 2 ½ weeks' pay per qualifying year worked whilst staff requesting Early Release had their settlement calculated at 1 ½ weeks. It was suggested that, for this initiative only, the severance packages should be identical for both Voluntary Redundancy and Early Release to ensure the remuneration package was attractive as possible.

The Panel discussed the proposal and asked for clarity with regard the deletion of posts following early release and information on the procedures that would be in place to ensure the initiative was transparent and fair across all departments.

The Financial Services and HR Manager explained that the Council would be open to challenge if they allowed a member of staff to leave on early release then, following a Service Review, their post was deleted if the early release package was different to the voluntary redundancy package.

The Panel had concerns that posts would be deleted and duties would then fall to other members of staff. The HR Advisory Services Team Leader advised that some duties from deleted posts were retained and shared out amongst other staff members. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reminded the Panel that the inflexibility of the previous voluntary redundancy initiative had prevented a number of staff leaving. The new initiative would allow the authority to have the flexibility needed to reorganise and refresh the workforce.

The HR Advisory Services Team Leader informed the Panel that the Council had engaged with 'Timewise' which will help to deliver an agile workforce. It would allow staff to consider flexible ways of working which may include a reduction in hours allowing for further savings. The procedures for the initiative would be drawn up by HR in consultation with the Unions who had been supportive of the more flexible initiative.

RESOLVED – 1) That a Voluntary Redundancy / Early Release initiative be instigated to meet the challenging MTFP savings and to avoid compulsory redundancies subject to the criteria set out in the procedures which are delegated to the Town Clerk and Chief Executive.

2) That the remuneration package for both Voluntary Redundancy and Early Release be the same at 2 ½ times weekly salary multiplied by qualifying years worked, for this initiative only, subject to the approval of the funding requirements by the Executive at their meeting on 19 October 2015.

EMP.17/15 REVIEW OF HR POLICIES – GRIEVANCE POLICY

The HR Advisory Services Team Leader submitted the amended draft Grievance Policy (RD.28/15) for approval.

The HR Advisory Services Team Leader reported that a number of HR policies were being reviewed in the light of minor legislative changes, best practice, management roles and contacts within the Council. The Grievance Policy had been reviewed and a draft had been appended to the report.

She detailed the existing Policy which had timescale issues, gave employees the opportunity to have more than one appeal in addition to the provision of a final appeal to a Members Appeals Panel and gave little detail on the process, content or proposed solution of a grievance to aid management consideration. No other local authority within the region included a grievance appeal to Members with the majority allowing only one appeal to Senior Management.

The HR Advisory Services Team Leader drew Members attention to the changes proposed as detailed in the report highlighting the use of mediation, solution focused, removal of Members Appeals Panels from the process and the introduction of a document to be used when raising a formal grievance.

During the September CJC meeting Unions were informed of the suggestions to amend the Grievance Policy and Unions were supportive of the proposed changes with a suggestion of a 12 month trial of the removal of the Members Appeal Panel from the process. The draft Policy had been developed in line with the ACAS Code of Practice and represented a modern approach to dealing with informal and formal grievance matters.

The Panel welcomed the updated and more comprehensive Grievance Policy but some felt strongly that Members should not be removed from the Grievance procedure. They believed that members of staff should be given the opportunity for the grievance to be heard by Members if they so wished. A number of questions were raised including the role of ACAS and potential threat of unresolved grievances.

The HR Advisory Services Team Leader explained that grievances were usually operational and therefore considered to be best handled by the senior management team with final appeal to the Chief Executive, further to this members of staff would have the opportunity to take grievances further through ACAS mediation and tribunals should they not be satisfied with the outcome internally.

The Panel asked for information on the number of staff grievances that had been completed at stage one, stage two and Members Appeals Panels for their consideration at the next meeting of the Panel along with the results of the consultation.

RESOLVED – 1) That the adoption of the proposed changes to the Grievance Policy as set out in report RD.28/15 be approved for consultation purposes with both Union representatives and employees.

2) That the consultation responses be considered by the Employment Panel before the Grievance Policy is approved.

3) That details of the number of staff grievances that had been completed at stage one, stage two and Members Appeals Panels be reported to the next meeting of the Employment Panel.

(The meeting finished at 11.20am)