

**Minutes of the Meeting of the HUMAN RESOURCES PANEL
held on 18 November 2014**

PRESENT-

Councillor Judith Glover (Chairman); Councillors George Crawford, Humphrey Reynolds (as nominated substitute for Councillor Christopher Frost) and Jean Steer

Apologies for absence: Councillors Sheila Carlson and Anna Jones

Officers present: Shona Mason (HR Business Advice Manager), Paul Byford (HR Business Advisor) and Fiona Cotter (Democratic Services Manager)

- 1 MINUTES. The Minutes of the Meeting of the Human Resources Panel held on 18 November 2013 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

- 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST. No declarations of interest were made by councillors regarding items on the Agenda.

- 3 HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE - Q1 AND Q2 2014/15. The Panel received a report which provided Members with an overview of sickness absence (April – September 2014) and staff turnover (April to current date). The report also informed Members of the result of the benchmarking exercise taken at the request of the Panel regarding the inclusion of an appeals process in the Flexible Retirement Policy and provided an update on the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme and the Work Placement Scheme being run by Operational Services in conjunction with the Job Centre.

The Chairman acknowledged that there had been some discussion regarding whether or not to cancel the meeting as two Panel members and Director of HR would not be available, but reminded Members that HR related information such as sickness and turnover was now presented to the Panel less frequently moving from quarterly to six monthly: deferring its consideration would have meant that the information would have been significantly out of date.

The Panel noted that sickness levels in the Chief Executive's Division, Corporate Risk and Operations were on the higher side. The high levels within the Chief Executive's Division were attributable to one employee who had now returned to work. The situation was similar within the Corporate Risk Division with twenty-one of the lost days attributed to one employee who had undergone an operation but had now returned to work on a phased basis. Within Operations two hundred and sixty seven lost days were attributable to eight employees who had been off work on a long term basis. Out of these eight employees, one employee had now resigned, four employees had returned to work after an operation and the remaining three employees continued to be off work due to either knee injuries (which were not work related) or pre/post-operations.

The Panel was informed that HR continued to work with managers to monitor long term cases and to support employees to return to work as soon as possible. It was highlighted that Council's average number of days lost through sickness (5.7 days per employee per year) was well below the average level of employee absence for the public sector of 8.7 days per employee per year (according to the 2013 CIPD Absence Management Survey).

In respect of staff turnover, the Panel noted that, at twenty-nine employees (9.11%), this was higher than in previous years and that, if it continued at this rate, projected turnover for the year would stand at 18.2 %. This would be significantly above the CIPD 2013 median Labour Turnover rate of 11.9%. However, the report highlighted that these figures included two voluntary redundancies. The Panel was informed that turnover was measured across all Divisions and that there were currently no hot spots – there was no great cause for concern. The Chairman also highlighted that she was well aware that turnover in the private sector was much higher at the moment and that, bordering Greater London, the Council was always susceptible to losing staff to jobs in central London or its environs for reasons of personal development or higher pay. The report also noted that there was currently a Decision Making Accountability review underway looking at layers and spans of control within the Council which might address some issues around opportunities for personal development or to progress within the organisation.

At the Joint Staff Committee on 11 September 2014, it had been noted that there was no appeal process within the new Flexible Retirement Policy and a request was made to obtain benchmarking information in this regard. The Panel was informed that seven responses had been received from Surrey authorities with the majority stating that, within their policies, the decision to allow flexible retirement would be made by the senior management team with no right of appeal. Only one authority, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council had an appeals process and this was because the decision regarding flexible retirement was taken by the line managers and not the senior management team. Accordingly, the Panel agreed that it would not wish to recommend further amendment to the policy to include a right of appeal.

The Panel then went on to discuss the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme and the Work Placement Scheme being run by Operational Services in conjunction with the Job Centre.

In regard to the Work Placement Scheme, seven out of the eight candidates had completed the full eight-week placement. Initial feedback had been excellent from both candidates and the teams within Operational services with whom they were placed. Candidates were aware that permanent placements were not available but one candidate had since been for interview for an internal position and two other candidates had been offered opportunities with local stakeholders. The Panel noted that the success of the scheme was largely down to the hard work and enthusiasm of Emily Harbrecht and wished its appreciation for her work recorded.

Regarding the Apprenticeship Scheme, the Panel discussed the possibility of paying more than the apprentice minimum wage (currently £2.73 per hour) and was informed that, in the light of experience, this was something that HR had been considering in order to attract candidates. The Panel noted that a set budget for the scheme had been approved by Strategy and Resources Committee and the Panel requested that a review of the apprenticeship scheme and future funding arrangements be undertaken. The Panel considered that apprentices ought to be paid above the minimum apprentice

wage and would wish this to be seriously considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee.

Accordingly, the Panel:

- (1) Noted that sickness absence would continue to be monitored in line with Council Policy;
- (2) Noted that labour turnover would continue to be monitored and steps taken to address any areas of concern;
- (3) Did not recommend the inclusion of a right of appeal in the Council's Flexible Retirement Policy;
- (4) Noted that it was envisaged that those Apprentices whom could be supported would be recruited during the next few weeks and that a further update on their progress would be provided to the Joint Staff Committee in January;
- (5) Requested that a review of the Apprenticeship Scheme and future funding arrangements be reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee;
- (6) Noted that the Job Centre work placement programme would continue into its second phase and that, if it continued to be successful within Operational Services consideration could be given to roll it out across the Council.

4 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE, Q1 & 2 2014-15. The Panel received a report which provided Members with an update on accidents/incidents involving employees.

The report informed Members of the following statistics in relation to accidents, incidents and near misses reported during the period April – September 2014. There had been:

- 17 accidents/incidents/near misses involving employees
- 2 accidents/incidents/near misses involving a casual employee and Surrey County Council employee
- 1 incident involving damage to property/vehicle

The Panel noted that the majority of incidents involved grounds maintenance operatives but was assured that proper training and safety equipment were provided and that the number of incidents needed to be put in the context of the regularity of the performance of grounds maintenance tasks. Returns were filed with the Health and Safety Executive but none of the incidents set out in this report were reportable.

The Panel did not identify any areas of particular concern but requested that Pauline Baxter, the Council's Health and Safety Officer, be asked to come to the Panel's March 2015 meeting to outline the measures taken by her and managers in order to prevent and reduce accidents across the Council and specifically within Grounds Maintenance.

The meeting began at 19.30 hours and ended at 20.30 hours.

JUDITH GLOVER
Chairman