

Minutes of the meeting of Employment panel held at Online meeting on Wednesday 12 August 2020 at 2.30 pm

Present: Councillor David Hitchiner (chairperson)
Councillor Tony Johnson (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Ellie Chowns, Liz Harvey and Terry James

Officers: Assistant director, people

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies from the members of the panel.

25. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

There were no named substitutes.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting of 13 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chairperson.

28. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

29. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

There were no questions from councillors.

30. HOME WORKING

The assistant director for people introduced the report. She explained that since March 2020 most council staff were working from home. The experience of this had been largely positive. The council was delivering services effectively and performance was as good if not better than before. A staff survey had been carried out, the feedback from which was set out in the report. The results of the survey suggested that staff would welcome the proposal to formalise home working arrangements. It was intended that the new arrangements be introduced on a temporary basis until December 2021. The impact of the changes would be evaluated before any decision to make the new arrangements permanent.

In discussion of the report it was noted that:

- Not all staff found working at home a positive experience, some did not have suitable space or found it incompatible with their personal commitments;
- Some posts would not be designated suitable for home working, this would reflect business need but requests to work at home would be considered carefully;
- If staff did not want to work from home they would not be made to, it would be a free choice;
- Some teams had a particular need to collaborate which was better facilitated by physical proximity, dedicated team space would be available for those teams;
- Care should be taken not to prejudge the decision in 2021 on making the arrangements permanent and to make sure staff were comfortable with the decisions taken;
- A shift in management approach would be required, looking at outputs rather than presentism, and support would be put in place for managers;
- Careful thought would need to be given to how new starters were introduced to the organisation;
- Home working could open up new recruitment opportunities as staff would not necessarily need to be based close to the county, however the reverse would also apply with current staff able to consider job opportunities anywhere around the country or even the world;
- There was no intention to differentiate pay grades for those working at home and those accessing offices, grades were set on the work that was done, not where it was done.

In relation to staff health and wellbeing it was noted that:

- Staff should not work excessive hours and managers would need to be alert to staff struggling to manage work / life balance;
- The council would assess the impact of the proposals on staff with protected characteristics, anecdotal evidence to date suggested that working from home gave greater control of the working environment allowing each person's needs to be met more exactly;
- If staff were contracted to work at home, the council would be responsible for ensuring that they had appropriate equipment, the level of stock should mean that there was no need to purchase new equipment;
- 42% of respondents to the staff survey said they felt they could better manage their mental health while working at home while 53% said they could better manage their physical health;
- The council had seen a small dip in sickness rates since March, despite the coronavirus pandemic.

It was resolved that:

Employment panel support the proposal to offer staff the opportunity to move to home working contracts for all or part of the working week until December 2021 at which point the success of the arrangements will be reviewed by all parties. The offer will be made to staff in roles where it is possible to maintain performance, professional and customer service standards when working from home.

The meeting ended at 3.03 pm

Chairperson