

UNION / EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Union / Employee Consultation Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Thursday, 14th March 2024 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Mary Dooley in the Chair

Councillors:- Rowan Clarke, Cathy Jeffery (from during Minute No. UECC14-23/24), Ross Walker, and Vicky Waplington.

UNISON:- Liz Robinson (UNISON Convenor), Keeley Noakes and Violet Parker.

Officers:- Steve Brunt (Strategic Director of Services), Peter Wilmot (HR Business Partner), Alison Bluff (Governance and Civic Manager) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

UECC10-23/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Sally Renshaw and Chris McKinney (UNISON).

UECC11-23/24 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to be considered.

UECC12-23/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

UECC13-23/24 MINUTES – 7TH DECEMBER 2023

Moved by Councillor Vicky Waplington and seconded by Councillor Rowan Clarke **RESOLVED** that the minutes of a Union/Employee Consultation Committee held on 7th December 2023 be accepted as a true and correct record.

UECC14-23/24 SICKNESS ABSENCE - QUARTER 3 (OCTOBER 2023 - DECEMBER 2023)

Committee considered the Sickness Absence Quarter 3 report presented by the HR Business Partner.

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Table 1 of the report showed a summary of the sickness absence levels within the Council for the October 2023 – December 2023 quarter period. The HR Business Partner noted the report presented background data, key trends, and actions which the Council was taking.

Attached to the report was a set of appendices and details on the proportions of long-term and short-term absences.

Absence for the Senior Managers Group was shown as 50% of the total absence for Joint Senior Managers, as this was split between Bolsover and North East Derbyshire District Council. For other employees the absences included were for Bolsover only (the employing authority).

The HR Business Partner highlighted that the average number of days lost per employee for Quarter 3 was 1.89 days. The 2023/24 projected outturn figure for the average number of days lost per employee was 8.72 days. This would be confirmed when the Quarter 4 data was available.

It was also highlighted that in four of the Council's services, there had been no recorded sickness in Quarter 3, and a further six services had experienced less than 1 day per FTE.

However, stress/depression remained in the top three reasons for absence since 2019/20. There had been eight cases of absence due to stress/depression during Quarter 3, two of which were work related, and six none work related.

COVID-19 had accounted for 64 days lost, in comparison to 18 days lost in Quarter 2.

There had been 11 long-term sickness cases in this quarter, eight had been due to physical health ailments and six had been related to stress/depression (two of which were work related). Appropriate support and assistance were being provided to those who had returned to work and those who were planning to do so. Three had now returned to work, eight remained absent (1 of which, the Council was pursuing the ill health retirement route) and 1 had retired on ill health grounds.

Managers received support from the HR Advisor and were issued monthly sickness absence information. Managers were also able to access sickness information on their teams on a daily basis via the HR21 Self Service.

Councillor Cathy Jeffery entered the meeting.

Steps the Council had taken to support employees included:

- Mental Health awareness sessions were now available 'on demand' for all employees via Eric and had previously been delivered across the Council as part of the Council's quarterly corporate training programme.
- Awareness training explained that colleagues and managers were not specialists in mental health and their role was to listen to employees and signpost them to the appropriate support.
- Mental Health awareness initiatives and possible support was continually publicised via Eric and the weekly bulletin. Recent examples of which included:
 - the Mental Health Map, which features all the pathways and support options

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- available in Derbyshire;
- Mental Health Awareness week – promoting the available guidance and support available;
- SHOUT – an organisation which provided 24/7 confidential support to anyone struggling to cope.
- Cycle to Work Scheme was also available to encourage health and wellbeing and to address carbon emissions – the number of employees who had subscribed during 2023/24 would be reported in the Quarter 4 report.
- The number of employees subscribing to the Gym during 2023/24 would also be reported in the Quarter 4 report.
- Managers and employees had access to Occupational Health, Counselling, Physiotherapy, the Council's Employee Assistance Programme and other support.
- Employees were signposted to incentives which were available via Leisure i.e.:
 - To encourage health and wellbeing staff could take up membership for Go! Active, which included gym, swim and classes for only £15 per month.
 - There was a Health Referral Programme (Physical Activity & Lifestyle Support) which was available to Employees residing within the BDC Area – This was a programme aimed at changing behaviours and finding solutions to assist people facing daily challenges resulting in a concentrated approach regarding service users' health and wellbeing.

In response to a Member's query, the HR Business Partner advised that there were awareness sessions for managers to enable them to stay proactive when employees had issues of mental health. This in turn prevented time-off work being taken by staff, though for some, taking time off was necessary to recover. Counselling services were also available along with a 24-hour helpline where an adviser was available. Mental health first aid training was also available. The HR Business Partner highlighted that promoting available health and wellbeing services prevented mental health issues from developing.

The HR Business Partner noted that there was no 'one' solution to handle this type of health care, however, the Council had recently recruited an Employee Engagement Officer who would explore and manage this type of support. Managers were being trained via mental health awareness sessions to identify problems as soon as possible to enable staff to access the support they needed.

The Chair noted that the Council had specific measures and programmes in place, and that one of the services, Physical Activity and Lifestyle Support, had been successful.

A Member queried the guidance that managers were receiving to assist staff. The Strategic Director of Services advised that it was not uncommon for managers to notice the changes in their staff. While some staff would need to take time off and recuperate, others may prefer to stay at work.

In response to a Member's queries, the UNISON Convenor advised that UNISON was looking to use posters to promote mental health services available to staff and the Employee Engagement Officer was looking at programmes ranging from Yoga to Pilates. Free training was available to UNISON members but were also available to staff who were not UNISON members. North East Derbyshire District Council and Derbyshire County Council also had different types of training available.

Moved by Councillor Mary Dooley and seconded by Councillor Vicky Waplington
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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UECC15-23/24 UNISON CONVENOR UPDATE

The UNISON Convenor presented UNISON's update report and advised of two new branch stewards.

UNISON thanked the Council and Committee for supporting the provision of a full-time UNISON Convenor on facility time for a further 12-month period.

From the report, the UNISON Convenor noted a lot of work had been undertaken on improving Job Evaluation timescales across the Council and also Dragonfly. The full-time role had allowed the volume of evaluations to be managed and processed in a timely manner.

For the next 12 months, the promotion of the UNISON Learning Charter would take place. This would include a survey sent to all employees of the Council to encourage take up of training which would up-skill them in their current job role. A promotion in collaboration with the HR and Payroll Team on health and wellbeing events would also take place to boost staff morale and help with the identified stress/depression statistics.

It was still unclear how the East Midlands County Combined Authority would work, so the UNISON Convenor would learn about the future role and improve the visibility of the UNISON service to the newly elected Mayor.

The UNISON Convenor noted that UNISON wanted to thank the Council's Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team for their continued support and agreeing the position of the full-time UNISON Convenor for a further 12 months. The UNISON Convenor also wished to express both unions' gratitude that the Council involved them in all decisions relating to its employees and she was looking forward to working closely with Members and employees on various topics.

The Strategic Director of Services thanked the HR Business Partner, UNISON and Unite, and reflected on the achievements made and recent awards received for digital transformation.

The Chair also expressed her thanks to the UNISON Convenor and the HR Business Partner, and the good work being undertaken. She was pleased that support was available to employees and a union representation in situ at the Council.

Moved by Councillor Mary Dooley and seconded by Councillor Rowan Clarke
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 10:27 hours.