

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 Wednesday, 5th June 2024 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillors Rowan Clarke, Mary Dooley and Vicky Wapplington.

UNISON: Liz Robinson (UNISON Convenor) and Violet Parker.

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

UECC1-24/25 ELECTION OF CHAIR 2024/25

Moved by Violet Parker (UNISON) and seconded by Councillor Rowan Clarke
RESOLVED that Liz Robinson (UNISON) be elected as Chair of the Union/Employee Consultation Committee for the ensuing year.

Liz Robinson (UNISON) in the Chair

UECC2-24/25 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR 2024/25

Moved by Liz Robinson (UNISON) and seconded by Councillor Vicky Wapplington
RESOLVED that Councillor Mary Dooley be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Union/Employee Consultation Committee for the ensuing year.

UECC3-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absences were received on behalf of Councillor Duncan Haywood, Councillor Sandra Peake and Chris McKinney (UNISON).

UECC4-24/25 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to be considered.

UECC5-24/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

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UECC6-24/25 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Mary Dooley and seconded by Councillor Rowan Clarke
RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Union/Employee Consultation Committee held on 14th March 2024 be approved as a true and correct record.

UECC7-24/25 QUARTER 4 HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE: 1ST JANUARY 2024 – 31ST MARCH 2024

Due to a miscommunication, Item 7 was added to the agenda by mistake and removed from the meeting.

UECC8-24/25 SICKNESS ABSENCE - QUARTER 4 (JANUARY - MARCH 2024)

The HR Business Partner explained this report covered the Sickness Absence data for Quarter 4 2023/24.

The average number of days lost per employee for 2023/24 was 8.98 days; this was above the annual target for the Local Performance Indicator to the end of March 2024 (8.5 days). While over the target and something to work on, the HR Business Partner noted it was still good it fell within 9 days.

One key trend highlighted was the average number of days lost per employee for Q4 2023/24 was 2.44 days; this was an increase from Q3 2023/24 and was the highest quarter of the year in terms of average days lost. However, the 2.44 days lost per employee for Q4 2023/24 was lower than the same quarter in 2022/23.

3 Services experienced zero sickness in Q4 2023/24 and a further 4 Services experienced less than 1 day per full-time equivalent employee.

Table 3 of Appendix 1 listed the top reasons for absences, with a direct correlation between physically demanding work and health issues/problems sustained. However, Stress/Depression was in the top 3 reasons for 2023/24 and had remained in the top 3 for every quarter since 2019/20. Work-related cases of Stress/Depression had increased in Q4 2023/24.

Cases of COVID-19 had dropped, with only 5 days lost in Q4 2023/24; with future variants this may change.

There were 15 long term cases of absence in Q4 2023/24; 10 from physical health ailments and 5 related to Stress/Depression (3 of which were work-related).

Listed at Figure 2.4 were the steps the Council had taken to support employees. These included: Mental Health awareness sessions being available 'on demand'; Mental Health awareness initiatives being continually published on the Council's intranet and weekly bulletin; the Cycle to Work Scheme; and the subsidising of gym membership.

A Menopause Policy had been introduced, the Neurodiversity Policy would be presented

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to Committee at the meeting, and a Transgender Policy would be developed in the future; the intent with such policies was for the Council to be proactive.

A new all-in-one employee benefits platform would be established, with the use of a new service called Vivup. This would take over from previous schemes like Cycle to Work and introduce other promotional health schemes and preventative Mental Health provisions like a 24/7 helpline for independent advice (covering areas from health to finance), shopping discounts, support with medical costs and the rollout of green initiatives. This in turn would improve staff retention, work productivity, and increase organisational savings.

An employee Health and Wellbeing Survey would take place to provide specific feedback on working at the Council to help improve offerings, and workplace health checks would be arranged; these are what the recently recruited Employee engagement Officer would develop.

It was important for the Council to always be looking for opportunities to help its employees.

A Member thanked the HR Business Partner for the report and asked how the 24/7 helpline would work. The HR Business Partner responded that this would be provided by Vivup, which would provide even more assistance than previously offered. Employees had many different lifestyle and benefits choices, with some being more inclined to make use of the gym membership subsidy than others, who may prefer something similar to shopping discounts.

The services previously offered through another employee assistance company proved unsatisfactory, with no publicity material provided and specific data to know how many were accessing the services being difficult to collect; Vivup would be a far more proactive and professional service.

To a question on the second employee survey, the HR Business Partner stated this would be presented to the Committee at a future meeting; it had been necessary to generate the budget and build a draft survey for Managers and the Unions to ensure it encompassed everything the Council needed and maximised the number of responses. The intent was to identify key issues and work collaboratively with stakeholders.

The Strategic Director of Services noted that the average number of days lost per employee for 2023/24 being 8.98 days was only a 5% variation above the annual target. The Committee should also highly commend those involved, particularly HR, for the support employees received and for their handling of long term sickness cases. The Committee asked this statement be put on the record.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

UECC9-24/25 NEURODIVERSITY POLICY EXECUTIVE REPORT 2024

The HR Business Partner explained the purpose of the report was to seek approval for the implementation of a Neurodiversity Policy and was, like the Menopause Policy, designed to help create policy, increase awareness, and provide inclusivity at the Council.

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There was a natural variation in thinking in society and conditions such as Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Dyslexia could bring unique skills and perspectives to the workplace, including enhanced problem-solving abilities, creativity, and a high attention to detail.

The Neurodiversity Policy aligned with the Council's commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion. All employees deserved opportunities, encouragement and support to realise their full potential. This would, in turn, provide a unique quality and skill set to the Council.

Key components of the Neurodiversity Policy were to raise awareness and education, tailor recruitment and hiring practices to provide inclusivity and accessibility, identify potential workplace adjustments, and provide an inclusive and supportive workplace where all employees could thrive.

The Chair stated the Unions' point of view was that they favoured the implementation of a Neurodiversity Policy.

A Member expressed concern on the recruitment and interview process of potential employees; how would the Council as an employer react when a neurodivergent individual applied for a role. The HR Business Partner stated it would be up to the individual whether they informed the Council or not, but if informed the Council could make any required adjustments. One example was the ability to work in a quiet location. Another was lowering the brightness of artificial lighting.

Awareness sessions were also key to encouraging responses to make these adjustments in the first place. The HR Business Partner reiterated that diverse teams brought individual qualities and strengths to the Council; opportunities to bring other ways of working was important. The Member noted it was excellent to accommodate all at the Council.

In response to questions from the UNISON Representative, the HR Business Partner stated the Council would be providing training, support, and awareness sessions. The latter would highlight the capabilities of neurodiverse individuals, and these sessions could be comprehensive that Managers would not necessarily need further in-depth training.

In response to further questions from the UNISON Representative, the HR Business Partner explained the Neurodiversity Policy would provide enough adjustments so a recent fire alarm would not have had as an issue to those with sensory sensitivities. Managers would also have flexibility to make work adjustments; a high level of detail on this may not be necessary (working hours are already adjusted regularly across the Council).

To a question regarding handling disciplinary matters towards neurodivergent individuals, the HR Business Partner admitted it was difficult to imagine a disciplinary action affecting conduct, but if it was a factor it would be part of the mitigation process for what had taken place; this would be factored into the disciplinary process. It would likely be more of a factor to performance management, but this would be geared towards making improvements for the employee and workplace.

The Chair, as UNISON Convenor, had emailed the HR Business Partner prior to the

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meeting the recommendation to add onto Section 8 the Neurodiversity Policy, with the Committee's approval, the Access to Work programme, which was set up to fund practical support to employees who had a disability or Mental Health condition.

A Member noted that during interviews, people would likely disclose more information about any of their conditions if they were in a comfortable environment. Job interviews could be quite stressful, but if neurodivergent individuals felt comfortable, they would likely explain their requirements, and this would likely help them and the Council if mentioned earlier on in the hiring process.

On disciplinary matters, the Member stated it was important for the Council to be mindful of those on the spectrum who could struggle on what was or was not right; it would need to be black and white for those who would be part of the Neurodiversity Policy – be specific and direct.

The Strategic Director of Services explained, in terms of disclosure of any condition, the Council may invariably find it would be disclosed on the Pre-Employment Occupational Health form, but there was no guarantee the occupational health provider reviewing that form would disclose it to the Manager of the relevant team.

In terms of disciplinary matters, the Strategic Director of Services agreed that if the Council was aware of any conditions, it was important to set it out in black and white to highlight future expectations. If adjustments had been made but the level of performance and conduct fell short of what was then expected, Managers could take reasonable action; it was important to set out what was expected of the employer and the employee.

A Member stated they approved of the Neurodiversity Policy and added one way to improve inclusivity was to highlight the relevant international days of recognition of the multiple conditions the Policy would cover. The HR Business Partner explained awareness was something the Council promoted, though the recently appointed Employee Engagement Officer would make sure these awareness initiatives take more of a centre stage.

Moved by Councillor Vicky Waplington and seconded by Councillor Rowan Clarke
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 10:35 hours.