

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 Monday, 23rd September 2024 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Mary Dooley in the Chair

Councillors Duncan Haywood, Sandra Peake and Vicky Wappington.

UNISON:- Chris McKinney and Violet Parker.

Officers:- Steve Brunt (Strategic Director of Services), Oliver Fishburn (HR and Payroll Manager), Peter Wilmot (HR Business Partner), Angelika Kaufhold (Governance and Civic Manager) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

UECC10-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Liz Robinson (Chair and UNISON Convenor) and Councillor Rowan Clarke.

UECC11-24/25 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There was no urgent items of business to be considered.

UECC12-24/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made.

UECC13-24/25 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Vicky Wappington and seconded by Councillor Mary Dooley
RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Union / Employee Consultation Committee held on 5th June 2024 be approved as a true and correct record.

UECC14-24/25 SICKNESS ABSENCE - QUARTER 1 (APRIL - JUNE 2024)

The HR and Payroll Manager presented the Sickness Absence Quarter 1 report for April to June 2024. The report set out the average number of days lost per employee for Quarter 1 2024/25 was 2.24 days – the projected outturn figure for the average number of days lost per employee for 2024/25 was 8.96 days. The annual target for the Local Performance Indicator to the end of March 2024 was 8.5 days.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 of the attached Appendix 1 detailed the key patterns and trends experienced corporately in relation to sickness absence. Table 1 showed the total loss

UNION / EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

from sickness absence for Quarter 1 2024/25 was £88,097.39. Table 2 showed the Long Term (72%) and Short Term (28%) percentages. Table 3 showed the top 3 reasons of absence, being “Other Muscular/Skeletal”, “Operations/Hospital” and “Stress/Depression”.

Key trends in the data revealed the following:

- The overall average days lost due to sickness in Quarter 1 2024/25 was 2.24; this had decreased from Quarter 4 2023/24 and was the lowest Quarter 1 in terms of average days lost since 2022/23;
- There was a direct correlation between employees undertaking physically demanding work and high levels of sickness. This was reinforced by Muscular/Skeletal absences regularly being in the top three reasons for sickness absence;
- Three services had experienced zero sickness in Quarter 1 and a further six services had experienced less than 1 day per full-time equivalent (FTE) employee;
- Stress/Depression had remained in the top three reasons for absence since 2019/20;
- There were ten cases of absence due to Stress/Depression during Quarter 1 2024/25, five of which were work related, five none work related;
- COVID-19 accounted for 12 days lost due to sickness in Quarter 1 2024/25, which had slightly increased in comparison to five days lost in Quarter 4 2023/4;
- There were 18 long term cases in this quarter; 14 were due to physical health ailments and four cases were related to Stress/Depression (all of which were work related). Appropriate support and assistance were being provided to facilitate support for those who had returned to work and those planning to do so. Five employees had since returned to work and eight remained absent, five of which had left the Council's employ.

To a question on the causes of “Other Muscular/Skeletal” absences, the HR and Payroll Manager informed that this was not due to ill posture of staff at their desks (though this was monitored), but from those employed in manual jobs where accidents could occur. While the issue of ill posture was difficult to assess for those Working From Home (WFH), absences as a result of ill posture were decades in the making and still not as common as those in more physically demanding roles.

A Member noted that while the Cycle to Work was available to encourage health and wellbeing and to address carbon emissions, using busy roads with high levels of air pollution may not be as beneficial to staff as desired.

To a question on whether it was possible for information on the types of absences for each department be brought to the Committee, the HR Business Partner explained that with some departments utilising smaller numbers of staff, it would be easier to publicly identify which members of staff were absent and why. It was important for the Council to be cautious with such detailed information.

To a question on WFH and bringing staff back into the office (providing it was safe to do so), the HR Business Partner believed the Council had achieved a sustainable hybrid working environment (e.g., Council Tax and Revenues retained a core team in the office with most WFH). It remained the discretion of managers to negotiate appropriate WFH arrangements.

UNION / EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

Members of the Committee noted they had experienced difficulties when attempting to contact departments and members of staff. The HR Business Partner stated officers not answering phone calls or being difficult to contact was unacceptable and that Members could inform Service Managers when this occurred.

A UNISON representative noted the report painted a positive direction and echoed the HR Business Partner that WFH and hybrid working was proving successful. While it was at times very convenient to knock on a desk and chase up Council business, the ability to work from anywhere was useful to have. There was no difference when answering phone calls through MiCollab, and Microsoft Teams was also accessible by Members to directly message and video call officers.

On the "Other Muscular/Skeletal" absences, the UNISON representative explained this was likely as a result of physical work. The Strategic Director of Services added such absences were usually the result of manual handling, twisting, slips trips and falls.

On a question of why only FTE data was presented to the Committee, it was explained that the part-time equivalent (PTE) data was present, and that to ensure representative and easy to use data was reported, PTE was converted to FTE. If this was not done, the HR Team would have to correctly weight every department, costing time and resources.

The Vice-Chair noted the results were an improvement on Quarter 4 2023/24.

Moved by Chris McKinney (UNISON) and seconded by Councillor Sandra Peake
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 10:25 hours.