

UNION / EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Union / Employee Consultation Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in Committee Room 1, The Arc, Clowne on Wednesday, 12th March 2025 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Liz Robinson (UNISON Convenor) in the Chair

Councillors Rowan Clarke, Duncan Haywood and Vicky Wapplington.

UNISON:- Chris McKinney and Violet Parker.

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

UECC20-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Mary Dooley.

UECC21-24/25 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to be considered at the meeting.

UECC22-24/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

UECC23-24/25 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Vicky Wapplington and seconded by Chris McKinney (UNISON)

RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Union / Employee Consultation Committee held on 11th December 2024 be approved as a true and correct record.

UECC24-24/25 SICKNESS ABSENCE - QUARTER 3 (OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2024)

The HR and Payroll Manager presented the report to the Committee.

The average number of days lost per employee in Quarter 3 2024/25 was 2.09 days, with the projected outturn for the average number of days lost per employee being 8.93 days for 2024/25 (the target was 8.5 days).

6 Services experienced zero sickness in Quarter 3 2024/25 (a further 5 Services experienced less than 1 day per full-time equivalent (FTE) employee).

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Stress/Depression had remained in the top three reasons for absence since Quarter 2 2019/20, with 3 cases of absence due to Stress/Depression during Quarter 3 2024/25 (1 work-related, 1 non work-related, and 1 a combination of home and work-related issues).

There was a direct correlation between employees undertaking physically demanding work and high levels of sickness – Muscular/Skeletal absences were regularly in the top three reasons for sickness absence.

COVID-19 had accounted for 2 days lost due to sickness in Quarter 3 2024/25 – this was the lowest Quarter thus far in terms of average days lost during 2024/25.

There were 12 long term sickness cases in Quarter 3 2024/25, 9 of which were due to physical health ailments and 3 related to Stress/Depression (1 work related).

Health and wellbeing initiatives included: Christmas energy saving tips; Mental Health First Aider Trainers; Safeguarding Adults Webinars; an Are You a Carer? event; Support When You Need It; Vivup Rewards and Benefits (£860 had been saved by employees); Flu Vaccinations; Menopause Support Group (which followed the establishment of a Menopause Policy); wellbeing and first aid rooms were increasing in number; Mental Health Awareness Sessions; Neurodiversity Awareness Training; and Go!Active subsidised membership (for Quarter 3 2024/25, this was 62 subscribers).

A Member noted the care and attention provided by the Council as an employer was exemplary – employees were well safeguarded from the initiatives listed in the report.

A UNISON representative echoed this sentiment, sharing that from a Union point of view, and as recognised in a recent staff survey, the Council proved a good employer.

Moved by Councillor Vicky Waplington and seconded by Chris McKinney (UNISON) **RESOVED** that the report be noted.

UECC25-24/25 UPDATING THE COUNCIL'S PAY AGREEMENT

The HR Business Partner presented the report to the Committee.

The Council's Pay Agreement (the 'Agreement') had remained unchanged for several years, resulting in outdated provisions that no longer aligned with current organisational structures and workforce practices.

The Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team had agreed to revise the Agreement following staff feedback – staff had identified it was out of date with a need to also enhance overtime limits.

The HR and Payroll Team had been established in 2022. The Agreement had been last updated in 2016.

The revised Agreement was attached at Appendix 1.

One major change was the overtime provision. This had been capped at Grade 6, but disincentivised staff from working beyond their hours when required.

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Overtime pay would now be capped at Grade 7 to ensure employees at this higher pay grade would be motivated to carry on working into unsociable and / or uncontracted hours.

The Agreement also updated terminology and post titles. The required frequency of updates to the Agreement would also be changed to make the document sustainable.

The revised agreement included track changes to ensure easier viewing of the proposed changes, including all adjustments to terminology.

The Strategic Director of Services noted Streetscene and transport workers on Grade 7 were currently not incentivised to work around bank holiday periods (e.g., during the winter holiday) when some frontline services continued to operate. The new overtime provision would likely persuade employees to work these extra hours and ensure continuity of Council services.

To a question on the time-specificity of the Agreement, the HR Business Partner explained adding specific rates of pay and pay levels dated the document (e.g., the Tool Allowance (Mechanics) quoted the 2010/11 pay rate). Including time specific content was best avoided.

To a question on how many times the Agreement had been previously reviewed, the HR Business Partner informed there had been one in 2009, but with austerity measures in the 2010s there had been few updates to pay agreements and so the Agreement, along with the pay rates, Officer titles, etc., needed substantial updating.

A UNISON representative welcomed the updated Agreement – it was long overdue. The updates to the useful contact numbers listed in the document were also welcome.

It was added that, with the recent staff survey and the establishment of a working group to review the survey's results, the Agreement could likely change further. To a question on if any further updates to the Agreement would be brought before the Committee, the HR Business Partner confirmed any material changes would be brought back before the Committee.

Moved by Councillor Duncan Haywood and seconded by Violet Parker (UNISON)
RESOLVED that the Committee approve the Council's revised Pay Agreement.

UECC26-24/25 GENDER IDENTITY POLICY

The HR Business Partner presented the report to the Committee.

There had been a growing recognition of the rights and dignity of transgender people in society.

Despite advancements in awareness and legal protections, transgender people still faced significant challenges (discrimination, harassment, barriers to employment, etc.).

Research indicated that transgender people were disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment and workplace discrimination, leading to adverse effects on their well-being and economic security.

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Following the recent Policies on Menopause and Neurodiversity, the Council proposed the adoption of a Gender Identity Policy (the 'Policy'). The Policy was attached at Appendix 1 and sought to:

- Establish clear guidelines and procedures for supporting transgender employees throughout all stages of employment;
- Prohibit discrimination and harassment based on gender identity / expression and provide mechanisms for reporting / addressing incidents;
- Ensure equitable access to workplace facilities;
- Provide resources and awareness training to managers and staff to increase awareness and understanding of gender identity issues; and,
- Offer support and accommodations, where necessary, to gender identity employees to ensure their safety, well-being, and participation in the workplace.

Benefits of the Policy included:

- Enhanced recruitment and retention of diverse talent;
- Improved employee morale and satisfaction;
- Compliance with legal requirements and best practices related to diversity and inclusion; and,
- Alignment with the Council's organisational values of fairness, equality and respect for all individuals.

The Policy had been developed by the Council in conjunction with Unions and represented a significant step forward in promoting diversity, equality, and inclusion within the Council.

It was urged all stakeholders support the Policy and work together to ensure its successful implementation. All employees would be informed of the Policy.

While further development to protect transgender employees would be needed, the Policy remained an important step forward.

The Council cared for all employees, and the Policy complied with legal requirements and the Council's own corporate values of equality.

A UNISON representative welcomed the Policy; it was the right step forwards. It was noted that the challenges faced by transgender people remained a concern and that the Council would need to continue efforts in providing a safe and welcoming environment.

The Chair echoed these sentiments, noting it had been appropriate for the HR Business Partner to work with Unions to create the Policy and that it was brought before the Committee for review.

Moved by Liz Robinson (UNISON Convenor) and seconded by Councillor Duncan Haywood

RESOLVED that the Gender Identity policy is approved and implemented.

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UECC27-24/25 SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

The HR Business Partner presented the report to the Committee.

Following changes by the UK Government in 2024 to legislation aimed at combating workplace sexual harassment, a new Preventing Sexual Harassment Policy (the 'Policy') had been developed.

The UK legislation obligated employers to take proactive measures to prevent sexual harassment and imposed stricter penalties for non-compliance, which included increasing tribunal compensation awards by up to 25%.

The legislation also established clearer pathways for victims to seek redress.

The Council did have a general Harassment and Bullying Policy which had served the Council well. However, it was now not fully aligned with the new legislative requirements with regards to sexual harassment.

The introduction of a comprehensive, updated and dedicated Policy was necessary to ensure compliance with the law and to foster a safe, respectful working environment for all employees.

The Policy was attached at Appendix 1 and included the following components:

- Zero-Tolerance Stance;
- Prevention Measures;
- Clear Reporting and Investigation Procedures;
- Support for Victims;
- Managerial Responsibility; and,
- Legal Compliance and Accountability:
 - Duty to Prevent Sexual Harassment;
 - Vicarious Liability;
 - Third-Party Harassment;
 - Stricter Penalties.

The reasons for recommendations included:

- Legal Compliance;
- Workplace Safety and Well-being;
- Employee Morale and Retention; and,
- Minimising Legal Risks.

More information was detailed in the report.

A UNISON representative noted discussions held between the HR Business Partner and UNISON had proven beneficial in developing the Policy.

To a question from the Chair on any more policies being brought before the Committee, the HR Business Partner confirmed other policies were being developed but would not necessarily need to be reviewed by the Committee (e.g., a policy on Neonatal Care was part of UK Government legislation and the general Harassment and Bullying Policy was just reviewed with no material changes – both would be passed as a Delegated Decision

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following consultation with Trade Unions.

The Committee were informed a Domestic Abuse Policy was currently undergoing initial consultation and drafting – this would be brought to a future meeting.

Moved by Councillor Rowan Clarke and seconded by Violet Parker (UNISON)

RESOLVED that the Committee approves the adoption of this policy to ensure compliance, enhance workplace culture, and minimise legal and reputational risks.

The meeting concluded at 10:30 hours.