

Minutes of the Meeting of Personnel held in Doggetts Barn on 29 April 2024 at 11:00 am

Present: Cllrs. Angela Baker, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur (*Chair*)

In attendance: Town Clerk.

Meeting opened 11:10 am

1 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Gemmell Smith, McGregor and Todd.

2 Declarations of interest or predetermination

None.

3 To confirm the minutes of the Committee meeting held 26 February (2023-038/01)

Resolved: that the minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting held 26 February 2024 be duly signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting; pages 2023-038-01.

4 Matters arising not covered elsewhere

None.

5 To discuss Personnel Issues

5.1 To receive update on staff attendance/absence for 2023/24

Members noted attendance 2023/24: Total leave across both departments, is 153 days. The office had one member on long-term sick, hence the higher than usual sickness.

5.2 To receive an update on other staff matters

Groundstaff appraisals completed. Office staff appraisals were in the process of being carried out; however, there are no performance issues and everyone is working above and beyond their normal duties/tasks. Annual pay increments have been implemented. One employee had requested a compassionate day's leave which the Town Clerk had refused.

5.3 To receive notice of potential complaint

Members noted the Town Clerk had received an email advising a complaint was to be made re a personnel matter. They had been advised of the complaints procedure and to address any complaint to the chairman of the Council, nothing further had been received.

5.4 To note: The Groundstaff annual medicals in March

Members received a report following the recent Groundstaff medicals.

5.5 Annual Leave carryover 2023-24 update

Members note the majority of staff had used all their leave with minimal days carried over, with the exception of the Market Officer who had five days left. Members asked for these be to be taken this year, and would not be carried over a further year.

5.6 Training update and potential courses to consider

Members considered training proposals for Town Clerk, Head Groundsman and RFO/Deputy Clerk. Subject to the dates and actual costs being within budget and not excessive, for the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM), the Clerk was given approval to book and made the following recommendations to Council:

Resolved: attendance on the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) level 3 Award for the Head Groundsman; and Level 5 for the Town Clerk; with the Clerk approving reasonable costs (within the training budget allowance).

Resolved: the expenditure of £288 for the Town Clerk and RFO to do the SLCC Principles of Internal Auditing Local Councils (PIALC) qualification.

5.7 **Sick pay update**

Members,

Resolved: support the continuation of full sick pay for one employee, to be reviewed in June if phased return not started.

5.8 **Staff pay: to consider a pay scale increment increase for one employee who has not benefited from the annual increment increase and the NI reduced rate in their net pay**

Members noted following the annual pay increments employees on the LC1 substantive range (or below), the annual increment average gross £426 pa / or £35.54 pcm for a full time employee (part-time employees pro-rata). However, with the increase in the medical insurance this had impacted on the PAYE with higher amounts deducted. The NI employee reduction from 10% to 8% had saved approx. £20 in contributions. For some reason though, one employee net pay increase was only £1.03 pcm. Members were asked an additional scale increment from 13 to 14. This would be an extra £373 per year / £31.15 pcm (FT annual increase equivalent £461). This person was invaluable to the team, knowledgeable, never complains, conscientious, and had taken on extra work. Members unanimously,

Resolved: the an additional pay scale increment for one employee; additional annual budget cost £373.

6 **To receive an update on the Open Spaces Officer vacancy, consider recruitment options, including potential expenditure for a recruitment agency**

Members considered recruitment options and pay scales for the replacement Open Spaces Officer. Last year the vacancy was advertised twice locally (June and September). Members agreed that the position should be placed with a recruitment agency this time, aiming for a wider geographical recruitment area across the southeast. Members considered four agencies, selecting one based in Tunbridge Wells. They would also help with suitability matching, and ID and qualifications checks. Members were also asked to consider increasing the salary and pay band, which had previously been graded this at LC1 (13-17 £26,873 / £13.97 ph to £28,770pa). However, the Clerk felt this was under valued and asked increase this to LC2 levels, 18-23 £29,269 / £15.21 ph to level 23 £32,076pa. Added to this was the outer London fringe allowance of £689 pa. Recognition of experience/sector qualifications to also be given. Members discussed both and unanimously

Resolved: the engagement of a recruitment agency to assist with the Open Spaces Officer vacancy, and the expenditure as per terms of the agency paid on a commission basis for a positive outcome. Brook Street was selected as the preferred agency.

Resolved: to confirm the scale and spinal point range for the Open Spaces Officer of LC2 (18-23), starting salary £29,269 (subject to experience/qualifications), plus other standard benefits.

7 **Budget review/update**

Members received an update on budgets. There were no questions.

8 **To receive an update on office hours, visitors to office and staffing hours**

Members received an update on visitors to the the office and staffing hours with the new office opening hours (Monday-Thursday 9.00 am - 3.30 pm), and 9-day fortnight (Clerk and RFO). It was not a proper comparison of the staff hours and evaluate any benefit following changes, due to staff shortages but the officers available time to attend to other tasks was helping with managing work loads better.

Update of monthly visitors numbers:

April (to 25/4)	220
March	268
February	260
January	270
December (closed 21-2 Jan)	130
November (new hours - 4 days)	199
October (5-days open)	308
September (5-days open)	369

Staff were still working an average of 5-11 hours per week additional (unpaid); with some weeks higher but not reflected in the averages.

9 To receive and approve updated contractual documents as reviewed by Worknest April 2024

9.1 Contract of Employment

Defer to next meeting.

9.2 Employee Handbook

Defer to next meeting.

10 Medical Insurance: To receive the renewals for 2024-25

Members received an update on the Medical scheme and annual premiums. The Council currently supports medical insurance for its employees following 2-years continuous service, as of 1 April. Medical insurance annual costs have been increasing each year, with this year seeing a 31% increase on premiums. This was partly due to staff claims, including work related. Members considered the value of the scheme and benefit to the employer and agreed the scheme should remain supported with the same qualifying period. The broker had looked at other providers but advised to stay with current provider. Medical insurance was included in employee contracts as a benefit and budgeted in staff salary costs. Members recommended to Council to unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm to continue supporting the medical insurance scheme for employees, and those qualifying after 1 April two-years continuous service.

11 Pension Scheme Review: as per Council December 2019, consider whether to investigate alternative schemes (triennial basis)

Members noted in November 2019, Personnel Committee had proposed to Council if consideration could be given to review the pension scheme and asked if research into private schemes should be considered for new employees. Council's December meeting, concluded that there was no opportunity for the Town Council to ask to join a scheme designed for employees of commercial organisations. However, it was agreed that as pension legislation changes it would be worth reviewing on a triennial.

The Council is part of the Kent Local Government Pension scheme. The employer contribution rate last year and this year is 23.9%, with employee rates ranging from 5.5% to 6.8% (higher contributions dependant on pay level). Members unanimously,

Resolved: to make recommendation to full Council to continue with Kent Pension Scheme, and to keep on a triennial review for each council term (4-yearly) to confirm or review.

12 Employee Assistance Programme: Health Assured App review and to consider continuation

In July 2021, Council supported Health Assured a 3-year agreement £600 per year for all Council employees and councillors as part of its Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Health Assured are the largest provider of employee assistance programmes supporting over 70,000 businesses and 13 million employees across the UK and Ireland, providing a range of mental health and wellbeing support services 24/7 with its in-house confidential helpline supporting and includes an App providing other advice on lifestyle improvements, mindfulness and virtual wellbeing workshops, bereavement advice, stress management, and legal advice. The facility had been used

2023-047/04

by some over the past 3-years (due to a new App upgrade, it has been possible to access any statistics to know by how many). Renewal costs were expected to be similar. Members agreed this was a valid facility for both employees and councillors, and unanimously,

Resolved: recommendation to Council to continue with Health Assured and Wisdom App on a further 3-year agreement.

Meeting closed 12:04 pm