

Minutes of the Meeting of Personnel held in Doggetts Barn on 3 September 2024 at 2:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Michael Gemmell Smith, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur (*Chair*), Stuart McGregor, Michael Stockdale, Bob Todd

In attendance: Town Clerk

The RFO asked to speak to Committee prior to the meeting to express her thanks for their support over the past few months which had been a particularly difficult time for her; everything the Council had done had been very much appreciated.

14:31 Meeting opened.

1 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllr Baker.

2 Declarations of interest or predetermination

None.

3 To confirm the minutes of the Committee meeting held 29 April (2023-047/1-4)

Resolved: that the minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting held 29 April 2024 be duly signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting (pages 2023-047/01-4).

4 Matters arising not covered elsewhere

The Town Clerk and Cllr McArthur had attended a Worknest webinar on Sexual Harassment in the work place and advised that the Council should consider a sperate policy in addition to what was in the employee handbook.

5 To discuss Personnel Issues

5.1 To receive update on staff attendance/absence for 2024/25

Members noted attendance 2024/25: Total leave across both departments was 62 days; this included one long term sickness.

5.2 To receive an update on other staff matters

Following a recent disciplinary hearing, one member of staff's employment with the Council came to an end. Procedures were followed and in consultation with Worknest, as well as a conversation with ACAS. Full notes of the hearing and investigation are on file. Members had no further questions.

The Town Clerk's appraisal was carried out in May, and noted.

5.3 Market Officer - fixed term contract

The Market Officer started in 2022 initially on a one year fixed contract. An extension was given to 31 May 2024. Fixed term contracts can be offered for up to four years, after this they are considered a permanent employee. Members,

Resolved: to extend the fixed-term employment to Guy Holder for a further two years up to 31 May 2026 and with a review of the position in October 2025 to tie in with budgeting period.

5.4 Training update and the apprenticeship

5.4.1 Training update

Members noted Committee had supported training through the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM), for the Head Groundsman (level 3) and Town Clerk; unfortunately due to lack of

further information available this had not proceeded.

Head Groundsman and Grounds Apprentice had been booked on a playgrounds and parks inspections training in September. The Council subscribes to Worknest E-learning portal. All employees now had an account set-up, with details emailed to them, with some webinar training courses allocated to suit their roles. Other subjects could be added or employees can opt for additional ones; there was over 50 different courses. Webinars vary from 10 to 45 minutes, ranging from PPE, GDPR, first aid, fire safety awareness, hazardous substances etc.

5.4.2 Apprenticeship update

Members noted the groundstaff apprentice enrolled on the Horticultural and Landscape Construction Operatives (level 2) in October 2023. Both the Head Groundsman and Town Clerk attended the online 10-weekly reviews with Plumpton College. Kai was progressing well. He has been building his portfolio of evidence and learning the Latin names of 25 plants which he would be tested on. A key focus of this year would be preparing for the End-Point Assessment (EPA) by Easter. A reminder the apprenticeship was offered on a 2-year fixed term contract, (up to October 2025). An option could be to enrol Kai on to the level 3 starting September 2025, and another 2 year fixed contract, subject to performance measures.

In July, Cllr Baker and the Town Clerk attended as guest speakers at the SLCC Youth Engagement Themed Summit, having been asked to deliver a 35-minute session on the process and Edenbridge's experience on the Groundskeeping Apprenticeship. This was held online, had over 80 attendees and was an interesting event exploring how to engage with younger people in councils, as employees and councillors.

Following the event the College of Business, situated within the City of Liverpool University, had been in touch interested to explore potential Business Administration levels 2, 3 & 4 within councils and how maybe the College of Business could also work with councils.

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

Members received a further update on visitors to the the office and staffing hours. Office visitors April to 31 August 2024 (listed monthly). The highest day had 42 visits:

| | Monthly total | Daily ave. |
|--------|---------------|------------|
| August | 326 | 20 |
| July | 334 | 21 |
| June | 302 | 17 |
| May | 264 | 18 |
| April | 220 | 15 |

The additional staff hours had come down for officers, though it was noted the Town Clerk was still averaging an extra 50 hours a month.

7 To receive an update on the Open Spaces Officer vacancy

At the April committee meeting, it was agreed to use a recruitment agency to help with the advertising and recruitment. We received eight applications, shortlisted to four. Unfortunately, no one was appointed. The proposal was for the Council/Town Clerk to manage the recruitment without a recruitment agency but to use the recruitment online platforms such as Reed and Totaljobs, as well as Council's Facebook and noticeboards. Members,

Resolved: to advertise the Open Spaces vacancy additionally using online recruitment platforms Reed and Totaljobs, expenditure up to £500.

8 Budget review/update

8.1 To receive an updated view of budget 2024-25

Members received an updated view of the current budget. In view that there had not been an Open Spaces Officer in place, and the loss of another employee, the budgets were forecast at year-end to have a net saving/surplus of £14,583.

8.2 To consider groundstaff staffing and recruitment

The Town Clerk provided a verbal report on the groundstaff staffing, and potential options to consider. During July and August, the groundstaff team had work to ensure the consistency of high standards to the Council sites, despite being one person down. As the winter was approaching, the work would reduce with less grass cutting and overall, whilst they would not advocate reducing the size/strength of the team, they support waiting to consider recruitment of another apprentice or a skilled worker to ideally start in April. Members were supportive of this and asked the Town Clerk to explore the apprenticeship route subject to the Head Groundsman being able to accommodate college release days.

8.3 To consider employee recognition for the Groundstaff

Members noted the pressures the groundstaff team had been under over the summer period with additional work load and over the coming months, and unanimously,

Resolved: to award a one-off payment to the each member of the team £1,000 in recognition of the additional work load and to make this payment in the November pay.

9 Budget considerations and first view for 2025-26

Members received three spreadsheets on potential budget implications for 2025-26. Initially, the Town Clerk said she would have liked to have asked Committee to consider recruiting an additional member of staff to the office team, but the impact on the budget would have meant the Band D potentially increasing by approx. £16. However, even without staff increases and looking at the base line number of employees, the impact on the Band D was potentially be £7.89 (subject to the 2024/25 NJC pay award and projected 2025/26 award). To note, the NJC pay award for 1 April 2024 was still outstanding as the unions continued to ballot its members.

Members noted the first view of staffing costs for the new budget year (2025-26) however, this would be discussed and consider at its next meeting before any recommendations made to the Finance Committee and Council.

10 To receive and approve updated contractual documents as reviewed by Worknest

10.1 Contract of Employment

Each year, Worknest review the employee contracts to ensure they remain current and reflect any legislative changes. Members,

Resolved: the updated contracts, and to present to full Council to adopt.

Members also,

Resolved: the updated version of employee contracts be issued to all employees to proved further clarity; and where a contract may have individual specifications to include in the updated version (thus material details remain the same).

10.2 Employee Handbook

Members,

Resolved: to recommend to full Council to adopt the updated employee contract as reviewed by Worknest.

15:36 Meeting closed.