

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 14 August 2023 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

R Gilmour (Chairman)
G Westcott (Vice Chairman), D Broom, Mrs F J Colthorpe,
A Cuddy, G Czapiewski, M Farrell, B Holdman, R Roberts and
S Robinson and G Westcott

Apologies

Councillors

L G J Kennedy and N Woollatt

Also Present

Councillors

C Harrower, J Lock and D Wulff

Present

Officers:

Maria De Leburne (District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer),
Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and
Waste), James Hamblin (HR Business Partner), Andrew
Seaman (Member Services Manager) and Angie Howell
(Member Services Officer)

19 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00:03:39)**

Apologies were received from Cllrs L G J Kennedy and N Woollatt.

Councillors E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski, G Duchesne, F Letch and L Taylor attended the meeting via Teams.

20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00:03:49)**

No interests were declared under this item. Members were reminded of the need to make declarations of interest where appropriate.

21 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00:04:25)**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 17 July 2023, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

22 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (00:04:49)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 17 July 2023 had been called in.

23 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:04:55)**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

24 **ESTABLISHMENT UPDATE REPORT (00:05:02)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a report* from the Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste and the Operations Manager for Human Resources

which gave Members an update on both the Establishment of the Council together with its performance. This report should be read in conjunction with the functions of individual officers highlighted in the Constitution.

The following was raised by officers and the Cabinet Member for Working Environment:

- Sickness remained high since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- In house sickness training was delivered to Managers and received positive feedback.
- A new long service award process had been implemented.
- Year on year agency spend had been seen to decrease.
- That Staff survey was due to be conducted in September 2023.

The following was discussed:

- Asked what action had been taken to mitigate the high sickness rates. The Operations Manager for Human Resources explained that up to date training had been delivered to Managers within the Council, they had kept the training in-house and bespoke and confirmed that there was sickness data that could be analysed.
- It was encouraged that staff take up the offer of a free flu jab.
- Asked what support structure was in place to help employees return to work? It was explained by the Operations Manager for Human Resources that reasons for and length of sickness could vary and was based on individual circumstances. Examples of support included the employee assistance programme and an occupational health provider.
- A T-Level was similar to an apprenticeship and was something the Council had welcomed to encourage recruitment.
- That patterns of sickness were calculated with notifications when 6 days or more sickness was taken in a 12 month period. However, this would vary on a case by case basis.
- Asked whether indirect costs had been included in the calculations for delivering the training, it was explained by the Operations Manager for Human Resources that time spent training was not considered as an indirect cost. Training on key areas such as sickness absence is deemed business as usual.
- Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste noted in terms of sickness rates, the Council looked for patterns.
- Asked how vacancy rates impacted key services. It was explained by the Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste that agency costs

were a challenge and that vacancy rates were considered on a case by case basis, and was dependent on the role in question.

- High turnover was noted to be expensive and it was highlighted that private companies were able to pay a higher salary and that perks for working at a local authority seemed less competitive in recent years. The Operations Manager for Human Resources explained that exit interviews were conducted and that a level of turnover benefitted an organisation but agreed that turnover was a balancing act.

Note: *report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

25 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00:26:39)

Nick Quinn, a local resident asked:

Question 1.

Is the Workforce Review Group, and Vacancy Management as a whole, really cost effective?

The Chairman explained that the Establishment and Agency costs are separate entities but related. Higher rates of turnover, sickness and vacancies will inevitably lead to higher agency costs as the Council needs to ensure it delivers essential services to the public e.g. Waste. In coming through the pandemic but then the aftermath which basically is an economy with full employment but also high levels of vacancy (and competing wages) the public sector including local government has a considerable challenge on its hands.

The Council is addressing its challenge to reduce costs both through reducing agency expenditure but also in ensuring its establishment is appropriately resourced and aligned to its priorities. This has involved all vacancies being reviewed by a weekly Workforce Review Group panel to ensure that vacancies are either signed off with immediate effect, paused for 3 months or a longer period of time. This is so the Council is both on the best footing possible in terms of how it aligns resource to its priorities but also addresses the continuous squeeze on public resources.

Question 2

Does the Council have a traditional Organisation Chart that shows the areas of responsibility, span of control and the reporting lines for all staff?

The Chairman explained that in terms of role titles and structure charts this report is an update to the formal end of year report which is published to Cabinet each February alongside the Pay Policy and which then goes to Scrutiny and then Full Council for approval. So the time for publishing formal structure charts and posts would normally be in this report.

Question 3

If there is; can it be published so the Public, and Members, can see it?

The Chairman explained that this would be published in February 2024.

Question 4

If there is not; can one be prepared and published?

The Chairman in response, confirmed that one would be prepared and published.

26 WORK PROGRAMME (00:31:57)

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED** the *Forward Plan and the *Scrutiny Work Plan.

The following items were identified by the Committee as needing to come to a future meeting:

- Motion on governance structure, committee system, looking at pre-scrutiny. A report would go to full council (MO advised) but suggested something came to Scrutiny in December 2023.

Note: *Forward Plan and Work Plan previously circulated and attached to the minutes

(The meeting ended at 18:03)

CHAIRMAN