

Minutes of: EMPLOYMENT PANEL

Date of Meeting: 12 November 2024

Present: Councillor T Rafiq (in the Chair)
Councillors C Cummins, E Moss, M Walsh, T Tariq,
J Lancaster, L Smith and J Rydeheard

Also in attendance:

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor R Bernstein and Councillor J Grimshaw

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence are noted above.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was agreed that the notes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 WORKFORCE POLICY REVIEW

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion explained that the Council's Grievance Procedure was revised by Employment Panel in June of this year. As with any new policy its initial period of operation provides an opportunity to identify areas for clarification and improvement. Furthermore, in October of this year, a new duty to take reasonable steps to prevent the sexual harassment of workers came into force and there is a need to strengthen the Grievance Procedure to address this.

Policy Headlines

Key changes to the policy from the version agreed previously include:

- A clearer delineation between standard 'grievances' and 'dignity at work' related matters (including sexual harassment) and clarity on expectations and processes around how these matters will be addressed.
- Removal of the requirement for a formal 'hearing' stage in keeping with best practice in the management of grievances and legal and ACAS guidance. – A more straightforward and less adversarial process is set out which retains the key formal elements and same right of appeal

- Clarity on the expectations and arrangements for communication with the parties a grievance is raised against (where relevant)
- Clarity that the policy can apply to both individual and collective grievances
- Clarity on the expectations and arrangements in relation to note taking.

It was explained that the internal timelines when dealing with appeals was being reviewed in relation to whether they could be dealt with more swiftly within a politically led organisation.

Members of the Panel were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and the following points were raised:-

- Councillor Moss referred to where the procedure cannot be used and asked why there was a cut off of over three months?

Simon explained that this was about moving forward, dealing with the issue promptly, forming a mutual resolution and not letting bad feelings fester.

- Councillor Lancaster asked how many grievances were received each year and how learning was shared from them.

Sam explained that compared to other organisations the number received was small and that this was consistent year on year.

With regards to learning from grievances it was explained that case reviews were carried out and any specific issues highlighted would be shared within debriefs and sharing lessons learned. It was reported that a better dashboard of learning was being developed. It was also explained that the SLT receive updates and information relating to themed trends.

- Councillor Walsh referred to the 3 month time frame and explained that she felt this was too short a period of time.

Sam explained that a pragmatic approach would be taken with all grievances but that the three month time limit was consistent with other council policies.

- Councillor Tariq explained that this wasn't just about having a policy but about making sure that the policy was effective and making a difference. Councillor Tariq asked whether the policy has the trust and confidence of the workforce, whether the workforce are aware of the policy and how they progress a grievance should they have one.
- Councillor Tariq also referred to the mediation provision that was set out in the policy and asked for assurance that this was available and happening.

Sam McVaigh explained that there were 370 managers within the organisation all of who are required to attend specialist management training which covers all areas including grievances. It was also explained that ACAS will be invited to come in to the

council to support HR. The policy had been developed with support from the trade unions and from best practice with North West Employers and ACAS.

Sam also reported that the council had in house trained and accredited mediators and that work was ongoing with the trade unions to promote this service, it was also explained that if required, employees can access external provision.

- Councillor Rydeheard referred to the provision of external mediation and if this was available this option should be stated in the policy.
- Councillor Rydeheard also requested clarification in relation to disclosure and the fact that both parties need to be informed of what is happening.

Sam explained that ACAS guidance is clear that all parties should be kept informed but do not have to be told information that is not relevant to them. Also, if the result requires an action to go forward to disciplinary you wouldn't advise a third party. It was explained that lessons learned would be shared. Information has to be shared appropriately but always have to be mindful of data sharing.

- Councillor Walsh asked if there was any way to simplify the document with the use of bullet points etc?

Sam stated that the Council has to have a policy which is the legal document and wouldn't encourage other versions being produced that may confuse. The council must ensure that employees can access support from their unions representatives or HR.

Sam explained that employees will be advised of the launch of the policy and drop in sessions will be taking place which will allow questions and comments.

- Councillor Cummins stated that she would be interested to hear what comments were received from the workforce following the communication of its launch.

It was agreed:

1. That the Employment Panel agrees the changes to the grievance procedure once the inclusion of the provision of external mediation is included.
2. That the revised procedure will go forward for endorsement via the Council's Corporate Joint Consultative Committee before being published on the Council's intranet pages and communicated to staff with the intention to come into force from 2 December 2024.

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR T RAFIQ
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.00 pm)