

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2023 - 3.00 PM



PRESENT: Councillor G Christy (Chairman), Councillor Dr H Nawaz (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor A Gowler and Councillor S Imafidon

APOLOGIES:

Officers in attendance: Sam Anthony (Head of HR and OD), Marie Harley (HR Business Partner), Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer) and Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer)

EC10/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 28 July 2023 were approved and signed.

EC11/23 CAPABILITY POLICY

Members considered the Capability Policy report presented by Sam Anthony.

Proposed by Councillor Benney, seconded by Councillor Davis and AGREED to note the policy and approve the adoption of the revised Capability Policy.

EC12/23 PENSION DISCRETIONS UPDATE

Members considered the Pension Discretions Update report presented by Marie Harley.

Members make comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Nawaz asked if there is anything more that members need to know, given that this is legislation driven and of no cost to the Council. Marie Harley responded that the driver for change was purely to introduce the option for employees to increase their pension benefits and the only requirement on Fenland District Council is to administer that process. Councillor Nawaz said if the Council is merely facilitating the process for the employee, then he could not see why the recommendations should not be approved.
- Councillor Davis commented that she is personally reaping the benefits from having paid AVCs when working; it is good to facilitate the scheme and she believes this to be a win-win situation all round.
- Councillor Christy agreed with Councillor Davis that this is a good scheme that pays dividends in the future, and he would hope that HR encourage staff to take up this offer, it is an enhancement to the comprehensive set of existing employee benefits.

Proposed by Councillor Nawaz seconded by Councillor Gowler and AGREED to approve the recommended changes to the discretions statement to be exercised under the LGPS Regulations.

EC13/23 PLANNING TEAM RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION -MARKET SUPPLEMENT

Members considered the Planning Team Recruitment and Retention – Market Supplement report

presented by Carol Pilson.

Carol Pilson apologised for an error at 3.1 of the published report in which the figures quoted, £47,500 in Years 1 and 3, should read £55,000 in Years 1 and 3.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Christy commented that many local councils use this approach to attract the right candidates and it is a situation that he has discussed at great length with officers.
- Councillor Davis said she supports this request, there have been problems in Planning for some time and they need to be addressed. Planning is a front facing department and if things go wrong it is reputational for the Council, and she is glad the supplement will also be applied to existing staff. Councillor Davis added that a lot of money has been paid in agency fees and reputationally it is not good to be seen to employing so many agency staff.
- Councillor Nawaz said that in essence he supports this, but he would like to know how the market supplement figure was arrived at and if any research has been undertaken to see if that figure is too little or too much. Carol Pilson responded that the precise figure is subjective, however research was undertaken, and a benchmarking table in the report compares salary levels with other local district councils, with senior posts being in the upper quartile by just a small amount. When attracting people to work at the Council, consideration needs to be given to their individual situations and what will entice them from the comfort of their existing roles. Carol Pilson added that the Council has tried but been unable to attract applicants with the existing salaries and benefits on offer without a market supplement and some roles have had little or no response. Despite all the positives that the Council can offer as an organisation in terms of culture and the one team approach along with all the other benefits, this is a competitive market with other councils and agencies. The Council now needs to test the market to see if the right call has been made to attract good quality candidates but whilst using public money responsibly.
- Councillor Nawaz said that he understands then that the figure is subjective but there has been no objective market research and the figure just chosen as what may be an inducement. He asked if anyone had been recruited to the additional planning posts which were approved at the last meeting. Carol Pilson responded that the planning policy roles had not yet been advertised, pending this discussion, so have not yet been tested on the market. However, in terms of evidence, when still in a shared service arrangement with Peterborough, the Council tried to engage agency staff and could not get them. From experience around advertising, the same external factors exist for principal and senior planners, with some of these roles having been advertised for over a year.
- Councillor Benney said he welcomes this but wondered if it goes far enough. He has been saying for a long time that the Council needs to pay more; these are professional people, their expertise is needed, and quality needs to be paid for. Councillor Benney reiterated that the Council needs good quality planners as an investment in its performance; members aspire to see growth and the delivery of new homes but if there is not the planning team to deliver this, then the Council is failing. It is competing in a market where the private sector can offer more money. The Council is currently paying a lot of money for good agency staff, so the quality is out there, but cannot attract them to work full time. Things like golden handshakes are needed, other councils are doing it so he would not say this is a cost, he would say this is an investment to obtain the quality staff required to deliver member aspirations. Therefore, he welcomes this report and if this does not work he would be happy for this committee to revisit the amount being offered.
- Councillor Davis said the Council is in a situation where planners are like hens' teeth; it is difficult to get staff anyway and it has to make Fenland attractive. The Council must look at other ways, not just money, to attract them.
- Councillor Gowler asked if the Council offers relocation packages. Carol Pilson responded that relocation packages are offered over a certain band. It is one of the benefits advertised for these roles as it is an important consideration however it becomes repayable if someone leaves before a certain time.

- Councillor Nawaz said he agreed with the previous comments made by fellow members but going back to his earlier question, will this be enough? As asserted, quality costs money or will the committee have to revisit this again? Councillor Christy responded that there have been a number of discussions regarding this, there are some views that maybe more should be offered for some of the more senior roles, but he would like to ask, in terms of the recommendation, if the committee agrees with the principal of the market supplement but also his proposal to delegate the amount to the Chairman of the Employment Committee, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Portfolio Holder for Planning. He added that there is sufficient budget available and a massive saving to be had, and as alluded to by Councillor Benney, this is about creating a centre of excellence for planning for Fenland even to the point of potentially creating a source of income. In the first place, the Council has to attract the right people and, having discussed AVCs earlier in the meeting, the Council is starting to put together a very appealing package. Councillor Nawaz thanked Councillor Christy saying that addressed his concern and he would be happy with that arrangement.

Employment Committee AGREED to the principal of market supplement for new and existing staff in the Planning Team and to delegate to the Chairman of Employment Committee, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Portfolio Holder for Planning to determine the final amount payable through market supplement.

This item comprised EXEMPT INFORMATION within Appendix 1 which is not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) but it was not necessary to go into confidential session.

3.34 pm

Chairman