

EMPLOYEE FORUM

11th February 2015

Present:

Member representatives:

Mr D Ellis, Councillor P Harries, Councillor RM Lewis, Mr AE Sangster and Councillor M Williams.

Staff representatives:

Ms S Davies, Mr M Hill, Mr T Jones, Mr P Norman and Mr M Regelous.

Union representatives:

Ms L Rooney and Ms J Wyer (Chair, Pembrokeshire Branch of Unison).

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 1.05pm – 1.55pm)

1. Appointment of Chair

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Councillor P Harries be appointed Chair for the ensuing year.

2. Appointment of Deputy Chair

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Mr P Norman be appointed Deputy Chair for the ensuing year.

3. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Ms C Gwyther and Councillor R Owens (Member representatives), and Mr H McDyer (Unison representative).

4. Introductions

Each Member introduced themselves to the rest of the Employee Forum.

5. Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

6. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19th March 2014 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was pointed out that the date at the head of the minutes should refer to the year 2014, not 2013.

It was **AGREED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 19th March 2014 be confirmed and signed, subject to the above-mentioned



amendment.

7. **Matters arising from the minutes**

Minute 7 – Safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults

Referring to the above-mentioned Minute, the Personnel Manager reported that Pembrokeshire County Council had changed their practices with regard to the Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS) and was not, therefore, in a position to act as “umbrella” body for Pembrokeshire-wide DBS clearance purposes.

NOTED.

8. **New workplace policy: Domestic abuse and violence against women**

It was reported that, as a result of research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on the greatest inequalities in Wales, Welsh Government had established the 10,000 Safer Lives project which set eleven minimum standards for public services in Wales. One of these standards was the need for public services to produce a “violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence” workplace policy.

The draft policy presented to the Employee Forum had been informed by guidance from EHRC and aimed to raise awareness of the issues while providing a supportive environment for employees who may be experiencing violence to raise issues. The document also provided guidance for managers and colleagues and gave examples of the type of support that was available to those experiencing abuse.

Members generally welcomed the draft policy, but queried the fact that the document appeared to refer to women when, in fact, men also experienced domestic abuse and violence. The Personnel Manager replied that evidence showed that the majority of victims who experienced abuse were women and, of those, 75% were targeted at work. However, the policy had been drafted to be specifically gender neutral throughout and, as the document stated, the National Park Authority’s commitment was towards women and men who experienced violence; the guidance should, therefore, be read accordingly.

Ms J Wyer also welcomed the draft policy, adding that it was important to be supportive and to signpost to organisations that were best placed to help. She queried whether there were other local organisations that could usefully be included in the ‘Contact’ section of the appendix, and the Personnel Manager stated that she would look into the matter.

It was **AGREED** that the Personnel Committee be recommended to adopt the *Workplace Policy: Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women*.



9. 'Family friendly' provisions update

It was reported that recent statutory changes had been made in the range of 'family friendly' provisions in place for employees, and the report before the Forum highlighted how they had been implemented by, and impacted upon, the National Park Authority. These changes referred to:

- (a) the extension to all employees of the right to have requests for flexible working seriously considered by their employer;
- (b) time off for the father-to-be or current partner to accompany the mother-to-be at ante-natal appointments, and
- (c) shared parental leave.

The Personnel Manager stated that all changes had been considered in the first instance by the Authority's Core Management Team and the Staff Representatives Group, as appropriate, before being explained to managers and communicated to employees. The guidance involved was then incorporated into the Staff Handbook as a useful reference tool. She went on to say that the Authority had traditionally had a progressive set of 'family friendly' provisions and that, in some instances, statutory provision was catching up with what was already available to the Authority's employees.

It was **AGREED** that the recent statutory changes in the range of 'family friendly' provisions in place for employees be noted, and that their implementation by the Authority be endorsed.

10. Revised Health and Safety Policy

Members of the Employee Forum considered a revised Health and Safety Policy, which had been reviewed following consultation with the Authority's Health and Safety Group, the Staff Representatives Group and the Leadership Team. In revising the Policy, the Personnel Manager had initially undertaken a benchmarking exercise of other National Park Authorities' and Pembrokeshire County Council's policies, and good practice from Health and Safety Executive guidelines had also been incorporated. It was essential that good Health and Safety management was embedded throughout the Authority, and the revised Policy clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of staff at all levels with regards to maintaining safe working.

In response to a query from Councillor P Harries about effective channels of communication for staff concerns, the Personnel Manager reported that there were a number of avenues open to staff, although there was always room for improvement. All employees were aware that every accident was to be reported and, perhaps more importantly, every 'near miss' as well. Mr M Hill stressed the importance of reporting 'near misses', as such a course of action could prevent a potential risk from occurring. He



was unsure as to whether all staff realised the importance of doing so, but he had certainly found the procedure invaluable, particularly when working outdoors.

Members were pleased to hear that officers were aware of the importance of monitoring risks, while Ms J Wyer asked whether the Authority held a risk database and whether that was monitored. The Personnel Manager stated that there was, and that procedures were amended when something happened to instigate such a change or when circumstances required them to. Mr Hill added that outdoor staff carried a number of safecards, which were referred to before every work operation was carried out. These safecards were also kept centrally along with all other Health and Safety guidance.

It was **AGREED** that the Personnel Committee be recommended to adopt the revised Health and Safety Policy.

11. The Living Wage

The Chief Executive presented the Employee Forum with a discussion paper on the Living Wage – an hourly rate of pay calculated by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University, and which was designed to ensure a minimum acceptable standard of living. The rate, which was currently set at £7.85 (outside London) was updated annually. There was no requirement on public bodies to commit to the Living Wage, although Welsh Government was actively encouraging this as a means to alleviating child poverty.

The discussion paper set out the pros and cons of implementing the Living Wage, and the implications of so doing (in terms of financial costs, particularly in a climate of reducing budgets; the expectation of staff that the Living Wage would continue to be paid in the future, and the reduction in differential between staff paid at Scale 1 and Scale 2).

Also set out in the paper were a number of options for the National Park Authority, together with a recommendation that a supplementary living allowance could be adopted.

The Chief Executive added that the discussion paper had been considered and supported by a number of internal fora, including the Authority's Leadership Team and the Staff Representatives Group, and their comments were incorporated in the paper before Forum Members that day. Mr P Norman stated that, of those members of staff to whom he had spoken, all were supportive of implementing the Living Wage.

Mr AE Sangster pointed out that the National Park Authority, as with all local authorities, paid staff in accordance with National Joint Council pay



scales, yet the Living Wage was not reflected in those. He suggested that the Welsh Government should provide the wherewithal to help local authorities meet the Living Wage requirements.

Ms J Wyer stated that Unison would applaud any employer that was considering paying their staff enough money so that they didn't have to live in poverty; however, she questioned why the National Park Authority only intended to "sign up temporarily" to the Living Wage. The Chief Executive replied that the Authority had suffered 14% cuts in its budget over the last two years, with a definite expectation that this would continue into the future. While the biggest driving factor in implementing the Living Wage for 2015/16 was fairness, he did not want to permanently commit the Authority to a decision that might have a huge impact on services elsewhere as a result of ever-decreasing future budgets.

Councillor RM Lewis reflected that, by implementing the Living Wage, the pay differential between those staff paid on Scales 1 and 2 would decrease. The Chief Executive accepted this, although he explained that those staff on the bottom of Scale 2 would progress in time through to the maximum of the Scale. He added, however, that no member of staff would be any worse off by implementing the Living Wage. Ms J Wyer pointed out that, if the Authority had undertaken a job evaluation process in the past, then it could find itself in difficulties if it raised the Scale 2 starting salary. The Personnel Manager responded by saying that there was no intention to change salary Scale points, but merely to pay a supplement to those staff who were currently being paid less than the Living Wage. However, she agreed that the whole process, if approved, would have to be dealt with sympathetically.

It was **AGREED** that the Personnel Committee be recommended to endorse the proposal contained in the briefing paper presented to the Employee Forum, in that the National Park Authority should consider the practicalities of adopting a supplementary living allowance payable as a separate element of pay to bridge the gap between the actual pay rate and the current value of the Living Wage.