



## Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council

**Minutes of a meeting of the Employment Policy Committee of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council held at Meeting Room, Sycamore House, Drayton Road, Bletchley on Tuesday, 20th February, 2024 commencing at 7.30 pm**

**Present:** Cllrs E Hume (Committee Chair), G Bedford, K Ely, E Hume, E Kelly-Wilson and U Osumili

**Absent:** -

**Apologies:** -

**In attendance:** Delia Shephard (Town Clerk)

### Min Ref

- EMPC23-2463 **Councillors' apologies for absence**  
All committee members were present therefore there were no apologies for absence.
- EMPC23-2464 **To note councillors' declarations of interest in matters on the agenda**  
No declarations of interests were made.
- EMPC23-2465 **Approval of minutes of the previous meeting**  
It was RESOLVED that the draft minutes of the meeting of the committee held 7 November 2023 on be approved.
- EMPC23-2466 **Public Speaking**  
There were no representations from members of the public.
- EMPC23-2467 **Formal adoption of uniform policy**  
As requested at the meeting on 7 November the clerk had made amendments to the draft uniform policy and this was now ready for approval by the committee.  
  
It was RESOLVED that the amended policy be adopted without further changes.
- EMPC23-2468 **Adoption a menopause policy**  
The clerk gave a verbal report on feedback from employees following consultation with the staff team on the proposed draft menopause policy which had been agreed at the last meeting of the council. Broadly the staff team, especially the women employees had welcomed the introduction of the policy and had few comments to make but the following points raised by individuals were noted:

**"Asking for support"** – this section of the policy did not directly specify that members of the employment policy committee should keep personal information confidential. Also it made no provision for women to talk to another woman if their line manager/town clerk/relevant councillor was not female.

**"Sickness"** – The sentences "You do not have to disclose that your absence is related to the menopause if you wish to keep this private. However, we want you to feel that you can be open about the reason for your leave." had been questioned suggesting this seemed to imply that there was no need to give a reason for sickness absence.

Members discussed this feedback and noted that the reason for introducing a



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menopause policy which was to normalise this common experience and bring it into the open. It was felt that all employees should be able to talk to their line managers about this issue regardless of gender and it was RESOLVED to amend the section headed "Asking for support" to signpost employees to the council's EAP to seek advice on how to have these conversations if they would find it difficult. It was further RESOLVED to amend the wording on confidentiality in this section.

It was decided to take no action on the wording of the section on sickness as the intent of this paragraph was to reassure employees that they need not mention the menopause though they would need to talk to their line manager in the usual way about not being fit to work on a given day and when they expected to be back.

It was RESOLVED to adopt the policy once the amendments had been added by the clerk.

### EMPC23-2469 **Introduction of cycle to work scheme for employees**

The clerk noted that following the committee's decisions at the last meeting arrangements had been made to introduce a cycle to work scheme using the [www.bike2workscheme.co.uk](http://www.bike2workscheme.co.uk), which will provide employees with the opportunity to save up to 42% on the cost of bicycles and/or equipment up to the value of £1000. This is made possible by saving on income tax and national insurance contributions, as the rental will be deducted directly from salary. The scheme chosen appears to provide the most extensive choice of suppliers in the local area including Trek, Chainey's and Corley Cycles (full list on website).

Employees had been made aware of the scheme and attention had been drawn to the fact that staff will effectively be renting the bicycle for a period of 12 months from Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council, and at the end of the period, there is a predetermined final value fee of the original cost of the bicycle if they wish to purchase the bicycle from the council. The percentages are defined by HMRC, and any variation will result in a "benefit in kind", which will mean income tax would be payable. A table showing the valuation tables and acceptable disposal value percentages had been supplied to all employees.

The scheme had been introduced during February and as yet no employees had used the scheme.

### EMPC23-2470 **Health and safety matters affecting employees and council activities**

The clerk gave an oral report on Health and Safety assessments which had recently been conducted by external providers.

#### **Legionella Risk Assessments**

Annual legionella risk assessments and audit had been carried out for Newton Leys Pavilion, Spotlight, Fenny Stratford Community Centre and Sycamore House by Ravenscroft Environmental Services during the week commencing 5 February 2024. All actions from previous risk assessments were seen to have been completed, all monitoring was up to date and correctly recorded and all sites effectively received a clean bill of health. Documentation was available to councillors on request.

#### **WorkNest Health and Safety Audits**

Visits had been undertaken by a representative of the council's health and safety consultants, WorkNest, as follows:

1	February	2024	–	Barton	Road	landscape	depot
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12 February 2024 – Newton Leys Pavilion and Fenny Stratford Community Centre  
13 February 2024 – Spotlight, Sycamore House and overall council activities

The full audit and action plan arising from the visits will be provided in the next 2-3 weeks but an overview was provided to the Town Clerk and the Environment and Premises Manager by WorkNest consultant, Rebecca Bick following the final visit.

Overall the health and safety measures, monitoring and arrangements in place across council premises were satisfactory with a few relatively minor actions identified. Rebecca will be assisting with amendments to the COSHH risk assessments for a number of specific chemicals stored at Barton Road alongside the COSHH data sheets which are already in place. In addition, while being happy with the risk assessments in place bolstering of the safe systems of work was recommended. It was also recommended that additional emergency lighting at Barton Road was required to the front and rear of the building and that the fire extinguishers be renewed. Arrangements to complete this work had been put in place.

The town council had asked for a review of current lone working arrangements since the fob system for outdoor staff had not been renewed. It was agreed that a fob system would not suit all workers and it was suggested that a new lone working procedure and risk assessment be put in place. This procedure should be developed in consultation with all staff members to find a practical and workable arrangement which is as straightforward as possible and which employees find comfortable and easy to comply with. The clerk noted it was likely that two systems would be required one for the office team and one for the landscaping. The risk to officers working on their own at individual buildings and attending evening meetings had been picked and the importance of having a record of when each employee left work was highlighted as was the ability of family members of employees to contact the council out of hours if their family member did not return from work when expected.

At the clerk's request health and safety at community events was discussed with the consultant at some length and the importance of undertaking risk assessments and determining staffing requirements at the planning stage (prior to council decisions to put on specific event) was noted. It was agreed to use one of the consultant visits owed to the council for delivery of event health and safety based top up training with key staff members. The forthcoming Martyn's Law legislation was noted and the clerk had already attended CPD events on the likely changes though most events in the town centre would not be captured by this proposed legislation.

A final issue to note was business continuity planning for the Barton Road premises. The council's general risk assessment was due for review at the next meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee on 27 February and consideration of these premises would be included.

The clerk reminded all members of the committee that they were welcome to inspect council premises for themselves during the working day by arranging a mutually convenient appointment.

### EMPC23-2471 **Proposed changes to the Town Council's employee handbook and standard contracts as recommended by WorkNest**

Members reviewed draft changes to the Town Council's employee handbook (non contractual) and the council's model contracts of employment which had been prepared by the council's employment law consultants, WorkNest. The clerk noted that changes to flexible working request legislation was due to take effect in April and the



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revisions to the handbook did not cover this as the relevant code of practice had not been adopted yet.

Following discussion it was RESOLVED that re-issue of the employee handbook be delayed until these changes could be incorporated; meanwhile members raised a number of points from the proposed draft and it was RESOLVED that these be referred back to WorkNest for further comment, advice and clarification as follows.

**S2.10 Driving** Members felt the onus on individual workers to notify their employer of any points on their driving licence provided insufficient protection for the council especially for employees who use a council provided vehicle as part of their duties and wished to explore use of a regular electronic drivers licence check undertaken by the council either using the driver's own licence sharecode or via one of the commercial providers such as Driver Check.

**S4.3 Ante-natal care/Adoption appointments** Members agreed that the restriction on employee's paid leave for up to five adoption appointments if the primary adopter or up to two occasions if the partner of the primary adopter was unfair when compared with the provision for ante-natal care appointments. It was also noted that the provision for attendance at a partner's antenatal appointments was not generous (up to two appointments) especially if a high risk pregnancy was involved. The clerk drew attention to the council's generous leave policy but members noted that these appointments were very important, should not be part of paid holiday and it was increasingly difficult for employees to arrange them outside working hours.

Members reviewed proposed changes to the council's model contracts and It was RESOLVED to approve the proposed changes and to remove the clause at 7 Normal Place of Work about working outside the United Kingdom as there was no expectation that any employee would work outside the UK.

**EMPC23-2472 Procurement of health and safety and employment law advice for the council following the ending of current contract with WorkNest in June 2024**

The clerk noted that the town council's 3 year agreement for health and safety (H&S) specialist advice and employment law advice with WorkNest would come to an end in June 2024 and therefore a procurement exercise for future services would be undertaken. The clerk noted the legal requirement to employ a suitable "competent person" for H&S and stressed the importance of having this expert advice. Following discussion it was agreed to explore combined services (as with the current contract) and using different providers for each specialism. The clerk would report back to the committee in due course.

**EMPC23-2473 Financial management report showing expenditure against budget for the year to date on employment matters**

Members discussed a financial management report showing expenditure on staffing matters against budget to 19.2.2024. The chair of the committee noted that expenditure was running close to budget.

**EMPC23-2474 Exclusion of the public for the following items of business which are likely to include discussion of confidential personal data**

It was RESOLVED that members of the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting as discussions of the following items of business would include personal confidential data concerning employees.

(Webcasting of the meeting was stopped at this point.)



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### EMPC23-2475 **Confidential report from the clerk on matters pertaining to staff performance** **Members discuss**

Members discussed a written confidential management report on matters concerning individual employees which had been circulated before the meeting. The report also included information on lone working which had been included in the earlier oral report on health and safety.

It was RESOLVED to note the report and no further action was required. .

### EMPC23-2476 **Confidential requests for flexible working hours from individual employees**

The clerk's confidential management report referenced above also including information about two recent flexible working requests received from individual members of staff. One flexible working arrangement had previously been reported to the committee, it had been trialed over a period of 6 months, was working satisfactorily and it was now planned to make this arrangement permanent. A more recent request from a different employee involved regular working from home for part of the employee's weekly contracted hours. A decision on this request was yet to be made.

Within the report attention was drawn to changes in legislation pertaining to flexible working rights due to come into effect in April 2024. Employers would be expected to agree to a flexible working request unless there was a genuine business reason not to and the grounds on which requests could be refused were listed in the report.

It was noted that the town council did not have a written governance arrangement specifying who was responsible for making decisions on flexible working requests ie the line manager, town clerk or Employment Policy Committee. Councillors agreed that there was a likelihood that there would be more flexible working requests in the future due to the changes in legislation and discussion followed.

It was unanimously RESOLVED that future decisions about flexible working requests should be delegated to the line manager responsible for the employee making the request. This would allow such requests to be dealt with promptly and left the clerk or the employment policy committee available to handle any appeals procedures.

Members agreed that the hybrid element of flexible working arrangements should be documented and certain expectations would need to be met eg home workers must be logged into their computer and available to take phone calls throughout the working day whilst at home apart from pre-agreed breaks, all meetings must be included in the employee's work diary, the employee may be required to attend physical meetings or come into work on their regular WFH day if this was necessary due to an staff leave, training etc. It was also suggested that the council could consider core times that employees need to work together or come into the office and this could possibly be included in employee contracts. Members noted that not all tasks could be done remotely and there would be some roles where hybrid working options were very minimal eg within landscaping team.

It was agreed that the clerk would seek advice from WorkNest and prepare suitable policies and arrangements which would enable line managers to apply a consistent and equitable approach to consideration of flexible working requests. A further report would be provided to the committee in due course.

It was RESOLVED that the most recent flexible working request (which included working from home) be approved with specific conditions and regular reviews. It was



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RESOLVED that the earlier flexible working request which had been trialed be made permanent.

### EMPC23-2477 **Incremental pay increases for members of staff due to take effect from 1 April 2024**

Following the meeting of the committee in November 2023, when recommendations regarding incremental pay increases for individual members of staff had been approved in principle, the town council had since approved the 2024-25 budget incorporating the staffing budget which took account of these anticipated rises. It was not expected that the annual NJC pay award due on 1 April 2024 would be negotiated until later in the council year.

Members had received a confidential written report with details of all previously agreed contractual single point pay increments and one increment of two SCPs for one member of staff. It was RESOLVED to approve the increments as laid out in the report with effect from 1 April 2024.

It was RESOLVED to amend the SCP banding for the Town Clerk from SCP 46-49 to SCP 46-51 (Fenny Stratford Town Council Band 10), to amend the Deputy Clerk role pay band from SCP 31-35 to SCP 36-40 (Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council band 8) and to amend the Environment and Landscape Supervisor role SCP banding from SCP23 – 27 to SCP 24-28 (Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council 5).

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm