

**MINUTES AND REPORT OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2024**

- * Councillor S Downey – Vice Chair
- * Councillor Heagin – Chair
- * Councillor Holliday
- * Councillor Kiehl
- * Councillor Weightman
- * Councillor Follows (*ex officio*)

* Present # Absent & No Apology Received 0 Apology for Absence L Late

307. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 September 2024 were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

308. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and recorded as above.

309. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER REGISTERABLE INTERESTS

Members made no declarations of interest in relation to any item on the agenda for this meeting, which is required to be disclosed by the Localism Act 2011 and the Godalming Members' Code of Conduct.

310. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Committee's work programme. Following decisions shown at Min No 312-24 below, Members agreed to add to the work programme the requirement for the SHE Committee to review contractor control (revised work programme attached to record minutes..

311. 2024-25 NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL PAY AWARD

Members of the Staffing Committee considered the proposed National Joint Council for Local Governments Services (NJC) pay scales for 2024-25 to be implemented from 1 April 2024 and resolved to:

- a. Recommend that Full Council approve the NJC negotiated National Salary Award.
- b. Recommend to Full Council that Full Council authorise that any settlement reached by the Joint National Committee (JNC) for Youth & Community Workers that is equal to or less than that agreed by the NJC may be signed off for payment by the Town Clerk without the matter first being brought to a scheduled or Extraordinary meeting of the Full Council.

Members noted that the NJC 2024-25 National Salary Award does not provide for a single across the board percentage increase, but rather provides for an increase of £1,290 (pro rata for part-time employees) to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all NJC pay points 2 to 43 inclusive, and 2.5% above that point, meaning staff on the lower pay scales receive the largest percentage increase and that for GTC staff this provides a percentage increase range between 2.5% to 5.67%. Additionally, allowances are increased by 2.5%.

In making recommendation b. Members noted that the annual settlement for the Council's youth workers who are employed under the terms and conditions governed by the JNC runs from September to August each year and that the JNC settlement has not yet been published.

As such In order to avoid unnecessary delays in the payment of the pay award agreed for youth staff, and, as the sign-off of a pay award is a reserved matter for the Full Council, Members agreed to recommend to Full Council that if the settlement for the youth staff is of an equal or lesser amount than that agreed by the NJC, the Town Clerk should be authorised to implement the JNC pay award. In doing so, Members also noted that should the JNC proposes a settlement above that agreed by the NJC the matter will have to come before Full Council for payment of the award to be approved.

312. WORKER PROTECTION (AMENDMENT OF EQUALITY ACT 2010) ACT 2023

Members noted that with the introduction of the Workers Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, employers must take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their workers, including by third parties. The Act requires employers to be proactive in assessing risk, identifying action and regularly reviewing their processes.

Members noted that Godalming Town Council (GTC) already has strong policies relating to Equality & Diversity and Dignity at Work, which are required to be read by all employees and councillors. These policies set out the Council's commitment to having a workplace which is free from harassment, including sexual harassment and bullying and ensuring that all employees, contractors, and others who come into contact with the Council are treated with dignity and respect. Members also noted that these policies are supported where required by the Council's Grievance and Disciplinary Policies.

However, Members considered that whilst GTC's current policies and procedures provide a framework, including preventative duty relating to bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment, it is appropriate that they should be reviewed and strengthened with additional safeguards where appropriate and necessary.

In considering the guidance and steps set out by the EHRC, Members noted and agreed the following:

Step 1 – As representatives of all work areas, it is appropriate that the SHE Advisory Group be invited to review the Dignity at Work Policy against Step 1 of the 8-Step guide. Additionally, the SHE Advisory Group should be asked for suggestions relating to issues of third-party harassment and sexual harassment.

Step 2 –Whilst the Council already encourages an open-door policy for staff to contact the Town Clerk or the Chair of the Staffing Committee as appropriate, the approach set out in Step 1, alongside the Staffing Committee's workplace visits, the existence of the SHE Advisory Group, and the invitation for exit interviews extended by the Chair of this committee to staff leavers, meets the guidance suggested at Step-2.

Step 3 –The risk of sexual harassment should be assessed as any other risk would be. As such the Operations & Compliance Officer is to conduct a risk assessment for all areas of council services to help GTC strengthen its response to its preventative duty.

Step 4 –The existing GTC policies set out the mechanism for reporting all forms of bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment and have been shown to be understood and usable. The guidance sets out that consideration should be given to an independent online or telephone-based reporting system. Whilst such a system might be considered suitable for a large organisation with hundreds or even thousands of employees, as an employee with 19.12 FTE when fully established, such a system is considered disproportionate on resource grounds. However, Members agreed that whether the introduction of such a system is

appropriate or whether it is considered the existing processes for reporting are suitable to meet the Council's duty should be established as part of the risk assessment.

Step 5 – As previously identified by this committee, Members confirmed that external training in the prevention, identification, and actions to be taken relation should be provided for all line managers.

Step 6 – GTC's current policies and procedures, supported by guidance from the Council's HR providers or other bodies such as ACAS/EHRC, are to be used to support the action of managers to deal with a complaint.

Step 7 – Although the GTC's Dignity at Work Policy does state that the Council will take appropriate action if any employees or contractors are bullied or harassed by our stakeholders or suppliers, it may be appropriate for this statement to be reviewed and strengthened to include harassment by third parties, such as customers, clients, suppliers and contractors etc.

Step 8 – Members agreed that any evaluation of the effectiveness of steps taken should lie with this committee, which will include an annual review of complaints data and lessons learnt sessions following the resolution of any future complaint of sexual harassment.

In order to implement these measures, Members resolved to agree that:

- a. The Operations & Compliance Officer conducts a council-wide risk assessment relating to sexual harassment within the workplace.
- b. The SHE Advisory Group should review the Council's Dignity at Work Policy against the guidance set out by the Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to ensure that staff are content with the existing reporting process or whether changes to the process are required.
- c. The SHE Advisory Group should review the Council's Dignity at Work Policy against the guidance set out by the EHRC and where appropriate consider actions to ensure that contractors working for, and others using the Council's services, are aware of their obligations to the Council to prevent sexual harassment.
- d. External training should be arranged for staff with line-management responsibilities.
- e. A review of contractor control should be undertaken via the SHE Advisory Group with recommendations brought to the Staffing Committee for consideration

313. EMPLOYEE TRAVEL SEASON TICKET LOAN SCHEME

In order to support staff recruitment and retention, and to promote sustainable travel wherever possible, which includes rail travel, Members agreed to approve the implementation of an employee travel season ticket loan scheme that complies with the provisions of HMRC for the provision of an interest free loan for the purchase of an annual rail travel season ticket.

In considering the approval of this scheme Members agreed a loan limit of £6,000 and that the approval of any loan should be subject to the following requirements:

Members agreed the information required in order for an employee to make an application for a season ticket loan the following information will be required:

Name of employee / Departure station / Destination station – Godalming / Days per week office working / Annual cost of season ticket / Advance requested / Monthly repayment amount (10-month repayment) / Employees monthly net pay / Requested payment date / First repayment date / Final repayment date.

This information is to be provided in an appropriate format and the application is to be sign-off as set out below:

RFO verification – Ticket cost verified/net monthly salary verified

Town Clerk

Staffing Chair

} Approval of commute route (travel time) and number of days travel

Payment of Season Ticket Loan

The cost of the season ticket will be paid in advance with the payment date coinciding with the upcoming payroll pay-run following the date of approval. The employee is required to purchase the season ticket and provide proof of purchase to the RFO, who is to retain an evidence copy. Evidence of purchase must be provided within 28 days of the advance, failure to provide such evidence or provide a reason for a delay in purchase (for example strike action or major engineering shutting the route) will result in recovery action being instigated and the forfeiting of future access to the Employee Annual Travel Season Ticket Scheme.

Members noted that season tickets can generally only be purchased up to 2 weeks in advance and that if the staff member is trying to take out this loan with the intention of waiting until the season ticket becomes available for their required start date, this should be communicated to the council, and the loan payment will be held until the window for purchasing the ticket opens.

Loan Recovery

Members accepted National Rail recommendation that recovery the loan should be by 10 months of equal deductions taken from the employee's salary starting from the first monthly payday following payment of loan advance. Members noted the reason for this recommendation is because annual season tickets do not have any refund value past 10 months and 12 days.

Members were informed that any deductions will be made from net pay, i.e after normal taxations, employee pension contributions, other deductibles (Student Loan), etc.

314. YOUTH SERVICE REVIEW

Having previously received the report relating to the review of Youth Service activities, structure and staffing from Kapasun Training & Development on 19 September, Members prioritised recommendation three for immediate implementation (Min No 245-24 refers).

The Committee Chair updated Members on actions taken to implement recommendation three, which involved the dividing of the Youth Services Officer's role into two dedicated, separate positions: Head of Youth Services and Youth Services Manager.

The Chair stated that the priority is to complete the recruitment stage of recommendation three and to onboard the Youth Services Manager followed by fully establishing the Youth Services Support Committee.

Members considered the remaining actions and resolved to accept all recommendations and agreed initial actions for their implementation. Table of recommendations and initial actions attached to the record minutes.

315. REVIEW OF APPRAISAL & PERFORMANCE REVIEW SCHEME

Having previously reviewed GTC's existing appraisal scheme and agreeing that a revised scheme based on the ACAS guidance should be considered (Min No. 239-24 refers), Members reviewed a new draft Appraisal Policy and Appraisal Form (attached to the record minutes) and resolved to agree to recommend them for adoption by Full Council.

316. REVIEW OF POLICY DOCUMENTS

Members considered the Council's extant DBS Data Handling Policy and resolved to approve to retain the DBS Data Handling Policy in its current form.

317. SALARY BUDGET 2025/26

Members noted that Financial Regulations require that the salary budgets are reviewed at least annually as part of the budget preparation process for the following financial year and such review shall be evidenced by a hard copy schedule signed by the Clerk and the Chair of Council or relevant committee.

With the budget-setting process underway and as the Staffing Committee is responsible for ensuring the staffing structures are sufficient to deliver the aims of the council, the Chair of the Staffing Committee is the relevant person to countersign the hard copy schedule.

Members resolved to agree that the Chair should sign the proposed 2025/26 salary budget schedule.

It was noted that the RFO will inform Members of any changes impacting on the budget requirement for the coming year in good time.

318. SERVICE AREA SITE VISITS

Members agreed the following dates for Service Area visits:

Executive & Support Services	Friday 31 January 2025	08.30
Grounds & Maintenance Department	Friday 14 February 2025	08.30
Youth Services	Friday 14 March 2025	13.00
Museum Service	TBC	

319. COMMUNICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING

Members identified no matters, discussed at the meeting, that required additional publicity.

320. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Staffing Committee is scheduled to be held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 13 February 2025 at 7.00pm or at the conclusion of the preceding Full Council meeting, whichever is later.

321. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.