

Agenda item 6

For decision: Staff Handbook and HR support provision

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Summary

This report provides details on the review of the Staff Handbook. Referring to South West Council's policies and procedures, the handbook has been updated and is now in line with current legislation. It is proposed that the revised Handbook is approved.

In January, Councillors asked the Town Clerk and the RFO to explore how to provide a comprehensive and independent HR function and to report back to Council Matters meeting. It is proposed to let a contract to Ellis Whitham to provide this service.

Background Staff Handbook

The Council's Staff Handbook forms part of the Council's Constitution. It provides a comprehensive range of employment policies and it should be used as a quick reference for staff. It is emphasised to all staff that it should be read in conjunction with their contract.

When joining the Council, staff sign a contract acknowledging that their terms and conditions of their employment will be in accordance with collective agreements negotiated by the National Joint Councils for Local Government Services.

The National Joint Councils (NJC) represent local authorities and their employees and produce a very detailed document known as the 'Green Book'. Should staff require more in-depth information than the Staff Handbook, the Green Book is available to all staff and is included in the Council's Constitution.

Staff Handbook review

The staff handbook did not require many significant changes but the review ensured the information in it is in line with current legislation and set out in such a way that any new policies or ones requiring updating can be slotted into the document.

We asked for feedback from all staff on each policy as it was being reviewed and their comments and feedback have been included in the final document. Once the Handbook is approved, in order to protect the Council but also to make sure all staff are aware of the policies in the Staff Handbook, they will be asked to sign that they understand and have read it.

Headline changes include:

- Including a Lone Working Policy
- Including an Internet and Email Policy
- Including a Shared Parental Leave Policy
- Change in the order of procedure for the Appeal Panel on conducting an Appeal Hearing
- Inserting an Underlying Medical Conditions section in the Absence Management Policy

- Replacing the Return to Work Discussion form (following sickness absence)
- Clarification of Pension Contributions following unpaid leave of absence
- Removing duplicated information which is contained in the staff contract of employment

The approved Handbook will be available on the Council’s website and a hard copy kept in the office for easy reference. It will be updated as and when new legislation is introduced or changed and we will return to this committee annually for approval.

If Cllrs would like to view the draft Staff Handbook tabled for approval, I have placed it on our [website here](#).

HR provision

Background

Cllrs requested that the Town Clerk and RFO explore external provision of HR services at Council in January 2017. This was because an increasing number of staff and increasingly complex legislation meant that the RFO’s capacity to provide HR services was under pressure. We have discussed our situation with South West Councils (SWC), our current HR support, and Ellis Whittam (EW) who provide dedicated HR support to over 100 councils around the country. We have also had discussions with the Internal Auditors and Town Clerks with a similar sized staff body.

Discussion

Whilst SWC provide a very good general level of support for a very reasonable annual subscription (£369 pa), their bespoke and specific advice is expensive. EW, being a larger organisation, are able to provide unlimited bespoke advice for a fixed fee of £2,450 pa for 3 years. Their proposal has factored in a discount of 25% due to the Council having an up to date Staff Handbook.

EW’s general service would include a review of staff contracts, policies and procedures and maintenance of the staff handbook. They will handle all employment law challenges including disciplinaries, grievances, dismissals, tribunals, performance, maternity. They also provide online access to policy documents and training. The RFO will retain all payroll functions. EW can be seen as an insurance policy which, in my opinion, is good value for money and the recommendation is to move ahead with EW.

It is proposed to retain the current services of SWC as their member training courses are excellent value for money and because it might be helpful to be able to ask for a second opinion from time to time.

Recommendations

1. Adopt the Staff Handbook
2. Accept Ellis Whittam’s proposal of HR annual support of £2,450 pa for 3 year contract.