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Agenda Item 4

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

Thursday 17 December 2015 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Mike Wollacott
Councillor Tim Leaman
Councillor Naomi Rylatt
Councillor Richard Eddy
Councillor Gary Hopkins (part)
Councillor Geoff Gollop

Officers in attendance:

Richard Billingham - Service Director, Human Resources
Mark Williams - People Business Partner
James Brereton - HR Advisor
Louise deCordova - Democratic Services

21. Apologies, Substitutions and Introductions (agenda item no.1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Stephen Clarke Councillor Mike Langley, Councillor Hopkins in substitution.

22. Declarations of Interest (agenda item no.2)

No declarations of interest were received.

23. Urgent Business (agenda item no.3)

None

24. Minutes of the Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 24 September 2015. (agenda item no.4)

Resolved: that the Minutes be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

25. Action Sheet (agenda item no.5)

Resolved: that the Action Sheet be noted.

26. Public Forum (agenda item no.6)

The following Public Forum items were received:

Agenda Item	Author of Statement/Question	Subject of Statement	No
No.8	Unite – Martin Jones	HR Dashboard	1a
No.9	Unite – Martin Jones	Performance Management	1b

The Committee agreed that each statement would be considered in conjunction with the relevant items on the agenda. A copy of the statement is appended to these minutes and available in the Minute Book held by Democratic Services.

27. Work Programme 2015/16 (agenda item no.7)

James Brereton referred Members to the work programme and outlined the programme updates.

The following items are to be carried forward to a future meeting:

- Manager Development to move to February 2016

In discussion the following was noted:

- (a) Members raised concern that the current work programme may not have included consideration of policy items that would have previously been considered by the Human Resources Committee. **Action: James Brereton to confirm**

Resolved – that the updates to the Work Programme for 2015/16 be noted.

28. Human Resources Dashboard (agenda item no.8)

Mark Williams introduced the report and updated the Committee on the key metrics as at 30 September 2015.

In discussion the following was noted:

- (a) Workforce size and costs - headcount had risen since April 2015 and spend, discounting consultancy costs, were on budget.
- (b) Members sought clarification of the term 'consultancy costs'. Confirmed that this related in the main to procurement of specialist advice for large scale projects, for example regeneration projects and was usually subsidised by developers.

(c) Confirmed that agency spend has reduced from £10m to £4.5m.

The Chair invited Martin Jones to speak to the Unite public forum statement

- (d) Unite had stated that it was aware that agency staff were being employed in a number of services in order to fill vacant posts, and an example of this was the Housing Management Service. They understood that Housing Advice Officers may have been difficult to recruit due to an imminent restructure and that further staff may be leaving the organisation due to workload and capacity issues.
- (e) Officers confirmed that the Council was proving to be uncompetitive in some trades and that this needed to be addressed within the constraints of the Council's budget as a whole. For example in the Information Technology and Social Work sectors.
- (f) It was understood that some skills which had been let go in the restructure were now difficult to recruit.
- (g) Officers were talking to Unions and competitors in the labour market to look at ways to address this, including how market supplements might be used for key posts, but it was recognised that this was not a sustainable solution. It was understood that there were challenges across the West of England
- (h) Members asked whether the use of overtime could reduce agency and casual spend. Human Resources would work with services to look at the best options to manage capacity issues. **Action: Richard to report back on this issue.**
- (i) Sickness – had gone up slightly, but there was a decreasing trend. 7.9 days (average) was above the public sector average but comparable to Core Cities results. Targeted work with managers had resulted in a reduction of long-term sickness absence.
- (j) Members questioned whether managers were holding 'back to work' conversations with staff rather than just recording the sickness. Officers confirmed that there was targeted work with Public Health colleagues to understand the early signs of stress, anxiety, depression and the tools to support this. The introduction of a new HR System 2016/17 would make it easier to monitor how sickness was being recorded.
- (k) Members raised concerns over the numbers of cases of muscatel skeletal instances recorded within Social Care. Officers advised that work was being done to address this by enabling social care staff to rotate their duties. The Council recognised its duty as an employer to take risk assessments and ensure 100% compliance.
- (l) Members questioned the possibility of extracting more benchmark data to enable the Council's sickness absence performance to be viewed in a wider context. Officers advised that some organisations had not been

willing to share data, although the Council compared well to Core Cities, for example the average sickness absence in Health and Social Care is 16 days across Core Cities.

- (m) Turnover and Retention – turnover referred to people in the role for 12 months and more. Retention referred to leavers. Figures did not account for those who had moved jobs within the Council. Officers confirmed that it was healthy for there to be some turnover in the workforce.
- (n) Workforce Diversity – it was confirmed that there were a high number of ‘unknown’ declarations and it was acknowledged that there a long way to go to reflect the communities served by the Council.

Resolved – that the report and actions be noted.

29. Performance Management (agenda item no.9)

The Chair invited Martin Jones to speak to the Unite public forum statement

- (a) Unite sought assurances that there would be proper monitoring of the new performance management system at regular intervals. Officers confirmed that this was the case.

Richard Billingham introduced the report and summarised the key points.

In discussion the following was noted:

- (b) The previous performance system named PMDS was an all paper based system, inconsistently applied and reliant on self-returns.
- (c) The new system was more effective enabling clarity over performance standards and enabling managers to track, monitor and target problem areas throughout the year, not just at the end of a year. It was clean and simple to use and encouraged managers to have quality conversations with their staff.
- (d) The system enables Human Resources to see where learning and support is needed for staff as poor or mediocre performance cannot be tolerated.
- (e) Confirmed that three months since its introduction of the new performance system there had been 71% compliance and the remaining 30% was being chased up.
- (f) Members supported a holistic and supportive approach over a disciplinary approach to performance but recognised that managers needed to be trained in order for this to work.

Resolved – that the report be noted.

30. Volunteering (agenda item no.10)

Richard Billingham introduced the report and summarised the key points.

In discussion the following was noted:

- (a) Members raised concerns that the Council was not harnessing the use of volunteering in service areas where there was a shortage of staff, for example in libraries. Not to replace paid staff but to support them and there was currently no structure in place to encourage this use.
- (b) Members were concerned that there had appeared to be some confusion over the use of the Lone Working Policy in libraries which had resulted in some unexpected library closures. Members suggested had been some clear opportunities to mitigate against this by having other Council services delivered from library buildings, for example by staff from the customer service points working alongside librarians and thereby maximising the hours available for library services.
- (c) Officers confirmed that the Corporate Safety Panel was considering amendments to the Lone Working Policy on 21st January.
- (d) Officers confirmed that the Council was engaged in partnership with organisations such as Bristol Aging Better which were looking at a raft of creative opportunities for volunteers.
- (e) Members suggested that volunteering for council staff could be included as part of an employee's wider pay and benefits package.

Resolved – that the report be noted and that the Committee's views be sought on the revised volunteering policy.

Date of Next Meeting – 18 February 2015 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 3pm.

Chair



HR COMMITTEE THURSDAY 17TH DECEMBER 2015

Agenda Item 8 – HR Dashboard

UNITE is deeply concerned to note that Agency Staff and Consultancy Fees are now running on average at around £2M per month. This equates to £24M per year if maintained, and therefore UNITE would like to know if the civic budget is affected by these costs and whether these costs were set aside in the original budget.

UNITE is aware that agency staff are being employed in a number of services in order to “fill voids” of vacant posts. UNITE would argue that if the authority were to pay the market rate for many of these posts, not only would the vacancies be filled and staff retained, the authority would also be making a considerable saving, as on average it costs around £42K per annum for each Agency Staff being employed, including agency fees. And the fact that leavers are increasing gives added speculation to the fact that many of the authorities posts salaries are below the current market rate against other comparator organisations. This is a consequence of continuous below market rate cost of living rises driven by the Governments Public Sector pay cap.

What the report fails to set out in its figures for managing absence under page 26, is that whilst over a quarter of the employees on long term sickness are suffering from stress, arguably the biggest single reason for the stress is the after effects of the civic restructuring in 2014, where service delivery had to be sustained with a greatly reduced workforce. UNITE would recommend that the number of stress risk assessments which have been compiled since the civic restructuring (and continues to be compiled), is included in future statistics.

Unite was advised at the start of the 2014 restructure that releasing staff through a voluntary severance exercise would achieve the required savings. That employees remaining with the Authority would have the security of knowing the savings required had been achieved. Unfortunately a degree of uncertainty has returned now that a new wave of cuts and service reviews are planned.

Agenda Item 9 – Performance Management

The report sets out the new system of staff appraisal entitled “My Performance”. Whilst UNITE would accept that the former PMDS had its problems, not least some of the contentious scores given by managers towards employees, and the

inconsistencies across the authority by managers in their scoring, UNITE believes it is too early to comment on My Performance, as the system is still very much in its infancy.

The report does not give any indication as to how the new system is going to be monitored for its effectiveness and success, and UNITE seeks assurances that there will be proper monitoring of the new system at regular intervals.