

# Bristol City Council

## Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

15 February 2024 at 5.00 pm



### **Members Present:-**

**Councillors:** Lesley Alexander, Kerry Bailes, Sarah Classick, Richard Eddy, Lorraine Francis, Farah Hussain, Tim Wye and James Crawford

### **Officers in Attendance:-**

Steph Griffin (Director Workforce & Change), Mark Jefferson (Reward & Analytics Manager) and James Brereton (Head of Human Resources)

## **1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## **2 Apologies for Absence**

None were received.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

Noted that agenda item 8 'Avon Pension Fund' that members present may be affiliated to the scheme. The item was for information only and as no decision was required this was noted.

## **4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record with the following addition:



That Cllr Eddy and Cllr Alexander abstained from voting on agenda 9 'Pay Policy'.

## **5 Public Forum**

The Committee received and noted the following Public Forum items:

- One Public Forum statement from Joanna Booth.
- Two Public Forum Questions from Suzanne Audrey.

Both submitters were not present at the meeting.

**Resolved; That the Public Forum be noted.**

## **6 Trade Union Forum**

None were received.

## **7 Work Programme**

The work programme was noted.

## **8 Avon Pension Fund Annual Report**

Cllr Steve Pearce, the Council's representative on the Board of the Avon Pension Fund was invited to present the report to committee.

The following was highlighted:

- a. The Avon Pension Fund's overriding investment objective is to meet future pension payments to members, in the context of affordability for employers and addressing climate change.
- b. The Fund continues its path to achieve responsible investment. In 2022 the Fund achieved a 49% reduction in carbon intensity against the 2019 baseline. The target is to become net zero by 2050.
- c. The Fund is administered by Bath & Northeast Somerset Council; the report includes a report on the ongoing challenges with staff recruitment and the strategy in place to manage administration



of the Fund. There are two broad management areas, the Pension Administration team, and the Finance & Investments team.

- d. The Fund is signed up to the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) UK Stewardship Code 2020 for the responsible allocation, management, and oversight of capital to create a long-term value for beneficiaries leading to sustainable benefits for the economy, the environment and society.
- e. The report provides details on the outcome of pooling of assets as directed by government; Brunel Pension Partnership manages 86% of the funds' assets; the Fund in 2023 broke even with regards to net savings from operating in this manner.

The following was noted from the discussion that followed.

- f. De-investment, from companies that have to date failed to take responsibility on how they manage climate carbon emissions, is seen as the last resort. The Fund will continue to engage with industry led initiatives to improve disclosure and build meaningful engagement with investee companies.
- g. The Investment remit covers a wide geographical area and is not limited to the West of England. The future intention is to consider renewables and housing investment, but it must be the right investment with the right outturn.
- h. The achievements detailed in the section of the report headed Climate Change Metrics & Targets, were well received. Transition continues and it is not deemed prudent to apply any adjustment to agreed targets. Assurances were given that priority work would continue to retain advancement and gains already achieved.
- i. The link with Stewardship UK enables collaborative discussions with investees on decarbonisation; it is understood and accepted that companies need time to adapt business models to manage climate risk and with ongoing engagement those companies failing to act responsible can be identified. A report on the activities of the Local Government Pension Fund Forum, the collaborative body, is on line and a source of useful information.
- j. The challenges in recruiting appropriate specialists in pension administration was discussed when noting the information on backlogs. The successful transition to a digital online platform to enable members a direct access to pension services had greatly assisted communication and member engagement.
- k. The pooling of assets had been a government directive and no further instruction had been issued. Cllr Pearce shared his view, that the funds were being well managed and there would be a level of resistance to further government direction.
- l. The governance document sets out how the oversight committee is formulated and currently there is only one representative from each of; Bristol City Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council. BANES has 5 seats as the administrating authority. This is something that can be discussed following the next round of local elections.

The Chair thanked Cllr Pearce for attending and presenting the report to committee.

### **Resolved to note the report**



## 9 Employee Travel Policy - Monitoring Update

The Travel Policy Monitoring Report, was presented by James Brereton (Head of Human Resources).

The purpose of the report is to update the committee on the impact of the travel policy for Bristol City Council employees that was implemented in October 2022.

The following was highlighted:

- a. Spend on mileage claims relating to private vehicles used for BCC business remained relatively constant between 2017/18 and 2022/23 (with the exception of the expected drop in 2020/21 due to COVID restrictions)
- b. The spend on public transport in 2022/23 was less than half of what it was in 2017/18.
- c. The number of employees claiming mileage had increased by around 16% between 2019 and 2023
- d. That 84% of mileage claims relate to vehicles that complied with the Clean Air Zone.
- e. That 24 employees had taken advantage of the 'green car' salary sacrifice scheme.
- f. There are 105 employees who had taken up the cycle to work salary sacrifice scheme.
- g. An online travel booking system was in place for longer journeys and accommodation.

Following was noted from the discussion:

- h. The launch of the 'green car' scheme was to assist employees purchasing a CAZ compliant vehicle. 24 employees had taken advantage of the scheme. Amongst the feedback received was the view that the cost of new vehicles had discouraged wider participation, and therefore officers were considering reintroduction of a scheme to assist the purchase of second hand compliant vehicles. The scheme does not benefit from any government assistance that may be available to the general public on the purchase of a new car.
- i. The statistical information on mileage claims indicated there is a 10/15% increase in claimants but overall, the spend remains the same. The sum reclaimable remains at the HMRC approved rate of 45p per mile. **Action:** Officers to seek to identify reasons for the trend indicated.
- j. Noted the 50% decrease in claims for public transport costs. Officers observed this could be reflective of the change to employees working arrangements, more time split between the office and home working; a shift to meetings being held remotely following the COVID 19 pandemic. If there are savings under this budget heading it is for the budget manager to determine how to utilise the sum as part of the overall budget for the service. **Action:** Officers to continue monitoring this trend.
- k. There were concerns expressed that the introduction of the CAZ may have caused employees to leave the organisation. Members asked if this was captured in any data. Officers observed that a departing employee might mention the impact of the CAZ in their exit survey, but this is not information captured in current metrics.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report.

**Resolved to Note the report**



## 10 HR Dashboard - Sickness Absence

The Committee received a presentation from the Reward & Analytics Manager, which is attached to the minutes.

The following key points were discussed:

- a. In summary the slides provided the Sickness Trends 2020/21 to current year 2023; Benchmarking against other LA's that report into the Local Government Workforce Survey; a breakdown of Sickness Reasons; Long Term Absence trend; Short Term Absence trend; Sickness by Directorate.
- b. The target for average working days lost to sickness is 9 days and the statistics show that 9.7 days was actual average days per employee.
- c. The LGA Workforce Survey has limited value as a benchmarking tool because fewer authorities are providing data. However, the LGA is planning to pilot a replacement scheme.
- d. There is no evidence as to the prevalence of Long Covid.
- e. What is known is that long term absence did peak but is now on a downward trend as seen from the statistical graphs.
- f. Any absences resulting from health & safety incidents are also reported separately as there is a legal requirement to do so.
- g. The two top reasons for absences are stress, anxiety and depression, which accounts for 29% of all working days lost (recorded for 605 employees). Of the 605 employees who were absent due to stress, anxiety and depression 18.7% (113) were recorded as work related and 81.3% (492) is not work related. Musculoskeletal accounts for 15% of all days lost (recorded for 615 employees). Of the 615 employees who were absent due to musculoskeletal sickness 29.7% (183) were recorded as work related and 70.3% (432) is not work related.
- h. Members were assured that there is an established means of support for employees via the Employee Assistance Programme .
- i. Members were further assured that those colleagues who work in challenging environments are supported by colleagues particularly at times of emergencies and incidents.
- j. It was confirmed that sickness information was constantly available to senior leaders and heads of service via the HR Dashboards. The Chair thanked Officers for the report.

**Resolved to note the report.**



## 11 Recruitment Update

The Director of Workforce and Change provided the following verbal update:

- a. That the Director of Finance & S151 Officer is set to leave at the end of March 2024. Recruitment to an interim role was underway to cover the post whilst the recruitment for the permanent role takes place - which will be after the local elections, so that the leader and relevant members can be consulted on the recruitment arrangements. Committee was asked to note that a representative from the HR Committee would be required to attend the appointment panel.
- b. That the role of Director of Homes and Landlord Services had been advertised. and the intention was to appoint an interim whilst plans are put in place for filling the role permanently.

The Chair thanked Officers for the update and the meeting was closed.

Meeting ended at 6.35 pm

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

