

# Bristol City Council

## Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

23 September 2021 at 5.00 pm



### Members Present:-

**Councillors:** Lesley Alexander, Sarah Classick, Lorraine Francis, Paula O'Rourke, Steve Pearce and Tim Wye

### Officers in Attendance:-

Mark Williams (Head of Human Resources), Mark Jefferson (Workforce Analytics Manager) and James Brereton (HR Business Partner)

## 16 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed all parties to the meeting and introductions were made.

## 17 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Kerry Bailes.

## 18 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

## 19 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

A Member raised a concern that under Item 12 Workforce Strategy – Overview, paragraph 6., of the key points highlighted during discussion, did not accurately reflect the outcome of the discussion. It was therefore suggested that paragraph 6 be amended to read that *'In some areas response rates were slow and suggested inefficiencies, however that might be down to capacity.'*



**Resolved – That the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 July 2021 be agreed as a correct record subject to the above amendment.**

## **20 Public Forum**

There was no public forum received.

## **21 Work Programme**

The Committee received and noted the Work Programme for 2021/22.

The Head of Human Resources (HR) clarified that:

- The Health Safety & Wellbeing Annual Report and the Apprentice Annual Report had been rescheduled for the December meeting.

## **22 Proposals for Employee Travel Policy**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Workforce and Change regarding Travel Policy. The Head of Human Resources introduced the report with a detailed presentation and invited the Committee to provide views and observations on options to reform the Council's Travel Policy.

Members were informed of the significant issues in the report which were –

1. The Council's Travel Policy needed to be ambitious and reflect the requirements of the Corporate Strategy and One City Climate Strategy.
2. There would need to be changes to the Council's travel policy from 2022, to reflect the impact of the Clean Air Zone on travel for work.
3. Consultation had taken place with trade unions and council employees over the Summer on proposals for reform
4. It was important to obtain the views of Members as the Travel Policy also applied to Members

In discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised:



1. Initial consultation had already taken place and it was planned that a revised Policy would be ready to implement from next April
2. Upon review, it was noted that there had been a reduction in travel spend related to Covid 19. Although there had been a recent increase in vehicle usage it was not as high as 19/20.
3. Records have shown that the workforce currently has 73.5% compliant vehicles and a percentage of non-compliant and unclassified vehicles.
4. GPS postcode mapping was able to identify where employees lived in relation to Bristol, defined as the 'travel to work area'. Most staff live in those areas, with 60% living within the boundary of the city.
5. All employees are currently permitted to claim car mileage for business travel where agreed by their line manager.
6. The average age of vehicles for staff using grey fleet is 8.5 years
7. With Continuing Professional Development (CPD) largely delivered online it is not anticipated that this will result in a negative impact for employees.
8. From the CAZ implementation date vehicles non-compliant after 1 year will be charged except blue badge holders, which was one of the original proposals that had been consulted upon.
9. Trade union colleagues had raised the concern that there is a balance between costs and convenience. It was confirmed that there would continue to be engagement with the Trade unions once there were revised proposals.
10. In some roles employees are required to have their own vehicle and it was of concern that 30% of vehicles were non-compliant. It was additionally of concern that staff could be required to incur significant expense to change to a compliant vehicle.
11. It was recognised that the transition could be challenging for some, but employees had a year to transition to a compliant vehicle which could be extended in extraordinary circumstances. In addition, the ages of the vehicles for compliancy were 2004 for petrol vehicles and 2016 for diesel vehicles.
12. It was noted that in Leeds a modal shift transpired to compliant vehicles after the announcement of a CAZ.
13. Members asked whether there should be consideration of a wider travel to work area where staff needed to make a lot of journeys to travel across the boundary. It was noted that the salary sacrifice scheme for bikes had been well used and a salary sacrifice or other appropriate scheme for cars was being considered.
14. A proposal to update the Pool car fleet arrangements needed to be developed to consider increased locations where staff may be able to pick up a car and to mitigate against the creation of perverse arrangements where a member of staff had to travel into the zone to collect a car only to travel out of the zone to carry out their work.
15. It was noted that air travel occurs from time to time
16. Members felt it was important to be clear about the transition period for staff and what alternatives could be made available eg use of pool cars or use of incentives
17. Members asked whether there had been any consultation with disability work groups as there would be adjustments required for those that do not qualify to be blue badge holders



18. The HR Business Partner confirmed that reasonable adjustments (including arrangements for car parking) were made at or near BCC workplaces wherever it was practicable to do so. It would be more difficult to support this type of arrangement further out of the city.
19. The complexity of the issue was recognised by Members. although it was clear that the aspiration was to reduce the usage of cars through provision of alternatives, there were still lots of barriers. CAZ, buses, walking were not yet embedded in the infrastructure. It was necessary to highlight the needs of social workers and health care workers who were essential car users.
20. Officers were talking to services such as the social care team directly to strike the right balance to efficiently manage the transition to new ways of working. It was clarified that Social care teams generally used their own vehicles rather than using fleet or pool vehicles.
21. It was noted that APSE had been grappling for some years with an imperative to eradicate the use of grey fleet and it may be useful for Officers to consider their experience on this issue. It was a priority to avoid hurting people that could least afford it and avoid hurting essential workers.
22. It was recognised that Bristol was at the vanguard again and the workforce change policy needed to fully consider the new 'world' with working from home and car clubs a new norm. There may be further opportunities to save the Council the cost of running a fleet and another half a million pounds grey fleet usage. For example, to consider how innovative borrowing of green bonds could be used to make savings.
23. There was an imperative to save money, but the policy proposals were also part of significant reforms to meet the city and council's ambitions by 2030.
24. The use of grey fleet was identified as a risk area which a significant risk being around transporting service users in grey fleet vehicles.

### **23 Sickness Absence Update Report**

The Committee received a report of the Head of Human Resources on the work being done to reduce and manage sickness absence.

Members noted some key findings:

1. Comparison with other local authorities was difficult due to the implementation of different policies across organisations.
2. Health and wellbeing of staff was a priority and a new service provider had been commissioned to supply integrated occupational health, employee assistance and physiotherapy provision to support requirements from April 2021.
3. Managing absence was an ongoing priority for teams and managers.
4. The highest percentage of reasons for sickness absence were Stress, Anxiety and Depression (31.6%), and Musculoskeletal (11.6%).
5. Absence rates for different employee groups was proportionately high for disabled employees and low for employees aged 16-24. The age profile of the workforce was a factor in looking at overall picture.



In discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised:

1. It was difficult to look at longer term trends due to the significant events and impact of the past year.
2. The percentage of working days lost in the Council due to stress, anxiety and depression were of particular concern and it was understood that this may be impacted by mental health receiving a greater focus and an increased willingness of staff to report mental health concerns. Members felt it would be useful to see how the Council compared to other authorities and sectors for reporting information.
3. Working days lost for black and minority ethnic employees and lower wage women was of concern and there may be historical reasons as well as the current impact of Covid to consider.
4. The Workforce Strategy had employed targeted interventions using local organisations such as Nilari to support black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, the introduction of mental health first aiders, and the introduction of disability champions in collaboration with the Disabled Colleagues Network working directly with senior leaders. Action: The Head of HR to circulate further details regarding the various interventions.
5. Members raised that the Bradford factor had been used in several organisations as a tool to clarify the data around duration of absence, and it would be beneficial to understand whether the data referred to single day absences or longer periods.
6. It was confirmed that Human Resources Policy mandated return-to-work interviews after a sickness absence and was considered an important tool to support a dynamic workforce. Member's questioned whether it was possible to measure adherence to the policy and confirm how many had been carried out. **Action: The Human Resources Business advisor to progress.**
7. Members sought assurances that sickness absence data was not being skewed due to staff who may not request sick leave due to working from home. It was noted that staff could work in a different way when working from home which might negate the need for requesting a sickness absence.
8. The introduction of Health and wellbeing plans was a useful management tool to help managers identify support needs that may have been lacking in the past. The process had been promoted well with colleagues and was designed to build managers capability and enable structured conversation. It was noted that it might take time for the process to be fully embedded in teams and that it may not be appropriate for all staff.

**Resolved - That the report and the work being done to reduce and manage sickness absence be noted.**

## 24 Contingent Workforce Report - update

The Committee received a report from the Head of Human Resources providing an update on the Council's use of agency staff, interim managers and contractors.



In discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised:

1. The long-term relationship with Guidant had seen a reduction in spend. The use of high value contingent workforce was to cover urgent need or absence
2. Guidant was often a pathway to a job in the council
3. The 2017 IR35 legislation had be rolled out recently in the private sector to categorise workers on their employee status so taxed effectively. There were 7 categories inside of IR35 and a few placements had been made outside of IR35.
4. The current affected workforce numbered 204 and there were 3 that were outside of the legislation.
5. Members noted that use of the term contingency workers was a good definition and improved upon use of the term agency staff.
6. Scrutiny Members had noted that the Council had also engaged Arcadis for contingency workers. Officers confirmed that the organisation was a strategic partner for the Growth and Regeneration Directorate to support capital project delivery.
7. Members raised concern that capital projects should be part of Human Resources reporting to identify who was being employed and how much money was being spent. It was confirmed that the partnership was managed through Growth and Regeneration Directorate and not through Human Resources.
8. There had been several examples of temporary agency staff being successfully employed, with 16 % of temporary assignments having moved into a permanent job and if converted after the 14week contract period no additional cost were payable to the council.

**Resolved – that the report be noted.**

## 25 COVID Recovery and Update

The Committee received a report from the Head of Human Resources providing a COVID-19 - workforce and return to workplaces update since the last meeting of the Committee on 22nd July 2021.

In discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised:

1. There was cautious but managed approach to opening workplaces, with plans to review arrangements and protocols in early October after taking government plans into consideration.
2. There were very different attitudes and genuine differences of opinion surrounding the return to work and the current approach was supported by the trade unions.
3. Staff had exhibited similar patterns of behaviour to that seen in the City
4. It was confirmed that managers were undertaking Covid Risk assessments with staff, supporting reasonable adjustments, and supporting people to do what's right for them



5. With regards to compulsory vaccinations, consultation was currently taking place on a COVID-19 Vaccination Policy to comply with new legal requirements for those working in Registered Care Homes to be fully vaccinated with effect from 11 November 2021.
6. It was confirmed that onboarding of new staff had been easily adapted and delivered well online but was moving to in person processes in due course.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**

## **26 Update on key HR matters**

The Committee received a report of the Head of Human Resources providing updates on key Human Resources matters that affect the workforce.

Members noted in particular:

HR policy consultations, national pay negotiations and the Senior Coroners Pay Settlement.

1. The Consultation on Covid vaccination policy. From November staff would be required to be vaccinated in registered care homes. 78 workers were impacted and 71 had been vaccinated with 7 staff being able to be redeployed.
2. National pay settlements. The National Employers had made a final pay offer of 1.75% from 1 April 2021. This offer related to the vast majority of the Council's workforce and was being consulted on.
3. Committee would need to consider whether to apply the proposed 1.5% pay settlements locally for the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Directors.
4. Committee has oversight of the nationally agreed coroner pay settlement 2021 for the former Avon area.

In discussion and in response to questions the following points were raised:

1. Members raised concerns over the legality of employers forcing employees to have the vaccine. It was confirmed that employers had no discretion in this as it was a matter of law, although currently limited to employees of registered care homes only. There was a probability that the legislation may be extended to broaden the scope to further settings and a broader range of roles.
2. It was confirmed that employees in regulated settings must have evidence of a vaccine/covid pass.

**Resolved – That the report be noted.**



Meeting ended at 6.40 pm

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

