

Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

16 December 2021 at 5.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Lesley Alexander, Kerry Bailes, Sarah Classick, Richard Eddy, Lorraine Francis, Farah Hussain, Paula O'Rourke, Steve Pearce and Tim Wye

Officers in Attendance:-

Mark Williams (Head of Human Resources), Steph Griffin (Head of Internal Communications and Organisational Development), Mark Jefferson (Workforce Analytics Manager) and James Brereton (HR Business Partner)

27 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

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

28 Apologies for Absence

None received.

29 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

30 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved – That the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 September 2021 be agreed as a correct record.



31 Public Forum

No statements/petitions had been received from the public.

32 Trade Union Forum

Members had received a paper from UNISON and GMB commenting on several key Human Resource issues, in particular the Council's Travel Policy. The Chair explained that due to some legal technicalities the paper could not be discussed in the public domain and would be amended by the trade unions accordingly. The Head of Human Resources would consider the points raised in the paper and respond as appropriate.

33 Work Programme

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

34 Bristol City Council Apprenticeships Service

The Committee received a report of the Head of Service (Employment, Skills & Learning) which gave an update on progress with developing the Bristol Apprenticeships offer, levy funding and joint working needed to embed apprenticeships as a primary source of staff development and training aligned to workforce planning. Committee Members were invited to support the Service by promoting apprenticeships in the City Council, local schools, and through the Levy Sharing scheme.

Key facts emphasised in the report were –

1. There had been 121 fully registered Apprentice starts April to October 2021 and 35 others had commenced, placing the Council on target to achieve the Public Sector Duty of 221 starts and in a good position to achieve the stretch target of 250.
2. The 'On Site Bristol' programme had seen record numbers of apprenticeship starts this year, with 159 places confirmed, this was an increase of 85% compared to 2020.
3. 98% of total levy contributions had been spent this month, it was anticipated that next month would see a slight correction, however the underlying increasing trend continued and the predicted spend for the next 12-months now exceeded £1.01m.



4. There had been zero levy expiry this month.

Following discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised/clarified:

1. Levy Sharing was the Council's money that was also shared with other organisations eg to support career coaches and other relevant work in the City.
2. Spend was targeted at small to medium sized employers (SME's) and voluntary organisations as this made up the largest sector in the Bristol economy. Every effort was made to incentivise small businesses to take on an apprentice.
3. Members could provide support with promoting apprenticeships in the City Council and local schools, and through the Levy Sharing scheme, one way this could be accessed was via the Council's 'Bristol Works' programme which was part of the Bristol Learning City Partnership to build a unique collaboration between employers, learning providers, and local communities to develop a skilled local workforce.
4. Regarding retention of unused Levy funds, members were advised that despite attempts to achieve this, the Government remained steadfast that there would be no changes to its current policy. The Chair offered to write to the Government, on behalf of the Committee, to attempt to make progress on this.
5. There continued to be a disparity with many Council departments regarding the creation of opportunities at a rate equal to 2.3%, however maintained schools continued not to engage with the scheme. It was not possible under current protocol to engage with Academies.
6. In May 2022 there would be a major launch by the Mayor of a new scheme called 'Building Bristol' this could enable more opportunities for apprenticeships, not just in the construction industry but also in wider fields of work. Contracted Companies could assist with finance and liaise with schools, a new post was being created to lead on this work.
7. Having regard to the disparity in the number of male dominated positions in the Growth & Regeneration department, members were advised that this would be addressed through succession planning to identify these and other positions within the organisation to correct such imbalances.
8. It was emphasised that COP26 provided a significant opportunity for both the apprenticeship scheme and the upskilling of the wider workforce. It was suggested that the committee's report be sent to the Council's Cabinet members so that greater attention could be given to it, the Chair agreed to this.
9. Members requested that the apprentice scheme be added to the Work Programme for a future meeting so that more time could be given to consider it. Any questions that individual members had for the Head of Service (Employment, Skills & Learning), the Apprenticeship Manager and Cabinet members, could be done informally outside of this meeting, this was agreed.

Resolved - That the update on the progress of the Council's apprenticeship provision for departmental staff, and staff employed within maintained schools, be noted.



35 Health Safety & Wellbeing Annual Report

The Committee received a report of the Head of Safety, Health and Wellbeing updating on the corporate arrangements for how health, safety and wellbeing were being managed, providing assurance on key areas of work, and setting out the improvement plan for 2021-2022.

Key facts emphasised in the report were –

1. Roles and responsibilities for health and safety regarding proper governance and accountabilities had been revised to ensure that they were fully understood and discharged.
2. A new Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy had been implemented.
3. Information on the Accident and Incident Data and Enforcement Activity from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 2020-2021 was provided.
4. The audit programme for 2020 had been completed.

Following discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised/clarified:

1. Concern was expressed about an increase in the reported numbers of violent and aggressive incidents toward council employees. Members were advised that early investigations suggested that this behaviour primarily took the form of verbal abuse. However, the issue of how this was perceived by the recipient was important. It was noted that any level of negative behaviour could be reported, this would enable a clear understanding about what was occurring.
2. Members raised several issues relating to fire safety, self-harming, suicide, and wider mental health issues. It was agreed to follow these up outside the meeting for further in-depth discussion.
3. Members were assured that the HR team were looking into any cases of violence and would seek every opportunity to promote greater tolerance amongst all colleagues and the public, this would include looking at cases that could be described as 'near misses' so that all opportunities to reduce incidents could be maximised.

Resolved - That the corporate arrangements for health, safety and wellbeing be noted.

36 Staff Led Groups Annual Report

The Committee received a report from the Head of Equality & Inclusion updating members on the progress, activities, spend and governance of staff led groups since their terms of reference were refreshed in July 2020.

Members were reminded that staff led groups had played a key role in supporting corporate processes such as:



1. Positive Action policy and toolkit.
2. Equality and Inclusion Strategic Leadership Group and Directorate meetings.
3. The review under the Equality Framework for Local Government.
4. Talent Development Steering Group.
5. Equality and Inclusion learning and development working group.
6. National Staff Network Day.
7. Equality visibility in the workplace working group.
8. Diverse Voices feedback group.
9. Corporate Strategy feedback group.
10. Equality and Inclusion calendar.
11. Sharing job opportunities/surveys/information/events with their membership.

Following discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised/clarified:

1. SLG's were actively encouraged in the council and had an opportunity to be proactive. Each group had its own work programme and networks and put out regular messages via the council's communication channels, such as bulletins and blogs. They were supported to carry out self-assessments such as disability confident employer status.
2. It was noted the council would do whatever it could to promote greater engagement and support to proposals/suggestions by SLGs wherever possible, but members were reminded that some aspirations would sometimes be limited by lack of resources and would need to be prioritised against the existing agreed equality and inclusion work programme.
3. Members would be invited to join an informal meeting with HR Committee members, and these would be with SLG Chairs and not all SLG members.

Resolved – that the activities of staff led groups since their terms of reference were refreshed in July 2020 be noted.

37 2021 Employee Engagement Surveys

The Committee received a report from the Head of Internal Communications and Organisational Development updating members on the results of the employee surveys and engagement during 2021, and the actions that were taken as a result.

Key facts emphasised in the report were –

1. During the last 18 months, the issues affecting the Council's workforce had changed, and their needs continued to evolve.
2. For 2021, instead of the usual annual survey, that Council had undertaken a short pulse surveys on topical issues, this had enabled the Council to respond quickly and put the appropriate support in place.



3. The Council had responded to colleagues' feedback and introduced a range of new measures to give both support and guidance.
4. An open and regular dialogue was kept with the workforce on a range of topical issues such as the Council's Covid response, changes to the workplace, the draft corporate strategy and the council's financial position.
5. A recent internal audit on workforce management had provided an overall opinion of reasonable assurance, and a substantial level of assurance in respect of employee engagement.

Following discussion and in response to Members questions the following points were raised/clarified:

1. Members were assured that employees would be given further support arising from the recent Omicron surge of infections.
2. Comparison data for 2021 surveys against previous employee surveys (not including covid specific questions) would be e-mailed to HR members.
3. Employee performance appraisal process involves, firstly by employee self-appraisal then an appraisal discussion with the line manager, followed up by an agreed development plan. The formal appraisal was expected to be done twice a year and supported by regular, informal one to one conversation's between an employee and their line manager throughout the year.
4. Comparison with core cities regarding performance and development would be included in the analysis of the staff survey next year.
5. Mental health and stress related ill health had increased and in part this reflected the wider impacts of the pandemic on society. Noted that this was not always easy or simple to address solely from an employer perspective.

Resolved – That the results of the employee surveys and engagement during 2021, and the actions that were taken, be noted.

38 COVID Recovery and Update

The Committee received a report from the Head of Human Resources updating members on the COVID-19 workforce and return to workplaces work that had taken place since the last meeting of the Committee on 23 September 2021.

Members noted that –

1. Social distancing measures in workplaces and a requirement to wear face coverings when moving around would remain in place and would be reviewed again in March 2022. The review would consider the latest infection rates, the advice of the city's Director of Public Health and our obligations to our employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act.



2. The risk of exposure to COVID-19 remained high in workplaces especially given the Omicron variant. Risks would continue to be managed in accordance with current best practice guidance from the Health and Safety Executive.
3. There was now more working from home due to the Omicron variant however staff who needed to come into the office would be fully supported.
4. Staff were kept fully informed of any changes via regular staff bulletins both electronically and where necessary with paper copies via line managers.

Resolved – That the COVID-19 workforce and return to workplaces work that had taken place since the last meeting of the Committee on 23 September 2021 be noted.

39 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. The report provided an update on current HR policy consultations, national pay negotiations and the Senior Coroners Pay Settlement.

Key facts emphasised in the report were –

1. The most significant consultation had related to reforms to the Council’s Travel Policy. There had been a wide-ranging consultation and the final proposals were subject to a period of consultation with stakeholders which ended on 10 December 2021. A new Travel Policy would be introduced with effect from 1 April 2022. Members were assured that the Council would continue to engage with the Trade Unions if there were any further concerns and confirmed that a range of travel options would be put in place before changes were made to the facility to claim mileage.
2. A COVID-19 Vaccination Policy was now in place which complied with the legal requirements for those working in Registered Care Homes to be fully vaccinated, this came into force with effect from 11 November 2021. The regulations would be extended to Care Quality Commission regulated activities from 1 April 2022.
3. The National Employers had made a final pay offer of 1.75% from 1 April 2021. The GMB, UNISON and UNITE were currently balloting their members on taking Industrial Action.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 7.00 pm



CHAIR _____

