

# Bristol City Council

## Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

2 February 2017 at 10.00 am



### **Members Present:-**

**Councillors:** Helen Godwin (Chair), Paula O'Rourke (Vice-Chair), Kye Dudd, Richard Eddy, Gary Hopkins, Mike Langley and Jo Sergeant

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

Sandra Farquharson (Interim Head of HR), Mark Williams (HR Business Partner), James Brereton (HR Adviser) and Louise deCordova (Democratic Services Officer)

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

The Chair led welcome and introductions.

### **2. Apologies for Absence**

None received.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

#### **The Committee RESOLVED:**

**To agree the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.**

### **5. Chair's Business**

The gratitude of elected members for Richard Billingham's contribution to the Human Resources Committee as Service Director HR & Workplace was noted.

Sandra Farquharson's role as the Interim Head of HR was noted.



On request from Cllr Eddy, and endorsed by the Chair, officers were asked to provide a briefing note outlining the correct procedures to be followed by the Council's Selection Committee, to be circulated to Committee members ahead of the Full Council's meeting on 21 February.

## 6. Public Forum

The Committee noted Public Forum statements as follows: (a copy of the statements has been placed in the minute book, accessed via Democratic Services).

- a. Wendy Weston – GMB
- b. Steve Paines – Unite

The Chair advised that each submission would be taken just before each item concerned.

## 7. The Council's Pay Policy Statement 2017/18

The Committee received a report of the Interim Service Director Human Resources, Change and Communications and considered the public forum statement submitted by Unite in conjunction with this item. The Committee was asked to recommend the Pay Policy Statement 2017/18 be approved by the Full Council.

The HR Business Partner summarised the significant issues in the report. In response to members questions the following points were raised:

- a. It was noted that the proposal not to progress the pay of Service Directors could affect the Council's ability to recruit and retain skilled managers, and should be recognised as a risk.
- b. It was noted that the current pay proposals were in line with current market rates and aligned with provisions explicit in the Corporate Strategy considered by Cabinet. It was noted that in circumstances where the need to recruit specialist skills required enhanced payments, any proposals for a Market Pay Supplement would be brought to the Committee for approval.
- c. Officers were in discussions with the trade unions to understand the full cost implications of developing a new pay structure. An April 2018 implementation was proposed.
- d. It was noted that restrictions on exit payments had not yet been enacted by the Government. Once in force, any severance proposal which exceeded the cap would need a waiver approved by the Full Council.
- e. It was noted that a change in the law which comes into force from 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017 would require payments to contractors to be subject to PAYE rules. This was a significant change which was likely



to have a big impact on the market and could reduce the costs of employing specialist interim managers on short term contracts.

- f. It was noted that any proposed bonus paid to the Chief Executive would be calculable on annual basis based on performance, but would not be payable until the end of the contract.
- g. The pay policy should note i) the Council's commitment to the Living Wage Foundation; ii) the proposal to progress the pay structure for April 2018; iii) identification of the risk associated with the pay freeze for Chief Officers. **Action: James Brereton**

**The Committee RESOLVED:**

**To recommend the Pay Policy Statement 2017/18 be approved by the Full Council as outlined in the report, subject to the comments and actions arising.**

## **8. Pay of the Senior Coroner**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Service Director Human Resources, Change and Communications and considered the public forum statement submitted by Unite in conjunction with this item. The report informed the Committee of the current situation regarding the pay of the Senior Coroner and sought approval for payment of a Market Pay Supplement whilst the outcome of national discussions was awaited.

The HR Business Partner summarised the significant issues in the report. In response to members questions the following points were raised:

- a. Concern was raised that the pay settlement of a senior post had been frustrated by discussions nationally since May 2009.
- b. It was noted that the Avon coronial area was one of the largest in the country. The formula which set out how each of the four partner authorities contributed to the cost of the post was based on an unwritten historic agreement that considered population size as at the time of local government reorganisation in 1995/96.

**The Committee RESOLVED:**

**To approve the payment of a Market Pay Supplement whilst the outcome of national discussions was awaited as outlined in the report.**

## **9. Use of Agency Staff**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Service Director Human Resources, Change and Communications and considered the public forum statements submitted by GMB and Unite in



conjunction with this item. The report updated the Committee on the Council's progress towards getting better value from its use of agency staff. The Committee was asked to note the report.

[Sandra Farquharson joined the meeting and introductions were made].

The HR Business Partner summarised the significant issues in the report. In response to members questions the following points were raised:

- a. It was noted that there was a role for agency staff within an employer of the Council's size. There was agreement that long-term agency staff (eg. those in post for 12 months or more) should be on employment contracts with the Council direct. A member commented that employing agency staff for more than 52 weeks was poor employment practice. Concern was expressed that the Council should not make permanent staff redundant whilst employing long-term agency staff as it did not make financial sense.
- b. It was noted that action had been taken by the Council to reduce agency spend. It was also noted that the new tax regime from April could see specialist managers employed on fixed term contracts rather than through off-payroll means, which could result in reduced costs.
- a. Members referred to Para.9 in the report and noted that the new law could have a huge effect on ICT. It was recognised that in the area of social work there were significant external issues that needed addressing. In response to concerns that the Council was not employing and training its own Housing Officers and Customer Services staff, it was noted that there had been significant changes in requirements for the services after a great deal of structural change. It was further noted that these roles had been covered by agency staff in anticipation of the expected closures of Customer Service Points.
- b. It was noted that with the recent technological developments in the Council, a broad range of specialist ICT skills had been required to meet the needs of the transformation. A question was raised over how the Council ensured best value from spend on ICT contractors and whether there was an opportunity to train in-house staff to meet the needs of the organisation going forward.
- c. Members agreed that it was important to have a strategic understanding of where the organisation wanted to be. Concern was raised that services may require more support with their recruitment processes. Members were particularly concerned that some services were making the decision to employ agency staff at a higher cost than developing existing staff. It was noted that the Council needed to be forward thinking about what was needed and develop an approach to recruitment and selection that would achieve that.
- d. The point was made that in areas where there are national skills shortages, agencies were sometimes the best (or only viable) way to meet the challenge and attract individuals to the Council. It was noted that there was an opportunity to do things differently in recruitment including consideration of options to manage bank recruitment in-house and to make more of the



Council's "employer brand". Officers to arrange for a report on the Council's recruitment processes to be provided to a future meeting of the Committee, to include an honest assessment and ideas for improvements. **Action: James Brereton**

- e. Members referred to Para.11 and asked officers to include the numbers of agency staff per directorate, the agency commission range versus the cost of employing casual staff direct, and asked for this report to be a standing item for the committee to enable progress to be tracked. **Action: James Brereton**
- f. Members felt it beneficial to scrutinise the use of agency at Committee and was part of a range of human resources issues that were interrelated such as the use and affordability of specialist skills, addressing the challenges posed by the pay structure and how the Council responds to pay in areas such as social work.
- g. A member asked what could be done to mirror the benefits that employees received from agency work, such as offering fixed term contracts, to offer an agency style relationship without paying agency costs. A member suggested it might work like an in-house agency similar to the "bank" recruitment operated by hospitals. It was noted that the Council already operated "bank" arrangements, mostly in areas where statutory minimum standards of cover needed to be maintained.
- h. Officers were asked to provide a report to Committee that explains the role of the Guidant contract, including what they are doing to drive best value both for the Council and for casual workers. **Action: James Brereton**

**The Committee RESOLVED:**  
**To note the report and the comments and actions arising.**

Meeting ended at 10.55 am

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

