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Bristol City Council Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

7 March 2019 at 10 am



Members Present:-

Councillors: Jon Wellington (Chair), Richard Eddy, Gary Hopkins, Ruth Pickersgill, Jo Sergeant, Clive Stevens

Officers in Attendance:-

Mark Williams (Head of Human Resources), John Walsh (Director: Workforce & Change), Mark Jefferson (Analytics Adviser), Steph Griffin Head of Internal Communications and Organisational Development, Jane Taylor (Head of Service: Employment, Skills & Learning), Darren Perkins, Apprenticeship Manager, Steve Gregory (Democratic Services)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

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

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Harriett Bradley and Paula O'Rourke. Councillor Clive Stevens substituted for Councillor Paula O'Rourke.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved – That the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 January 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the inclusion of 'It was noted that the Mayor was responsible for the appraisal of the post of Executive Director of Resources and Head of Paid Services', in Minute No. 8, point 6 of discussion/question session.

Matter arising – Minute No.12 Appointment of Executive Director – Growth & Regeneration

The Chair confirmed that he and the Director Legal and Democratic Services had written to the Head of Paid Service requesting that the post of Executive Director – Growth & Regeneration be advertised for recruitment and that a letter had been received in response which set out proposed actions, namely –

Over the next few weeks the Council would be engaging with specialist recruitment consultants to take some market soundings before moving forward again with a permanent recruitment process. It was anticipated that recruitment would take place in June/first part of July.

A report detailing progress would be submitted to the HR Committee on 9 May 2019. A copy of the letter would be circulated to HR members.

The Chair also confirmed that this matter was raised with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Independent Member of the Audit Committee and it was agreed that it would be considered in the coming months. A member emphasised the need for clear definition and defined pathways regarding the types of employment/procurement processes and how the Council would manage this eg, employees, interims (including temporary workers, experts, managerial) and consultants.

5. Public Forum

None received.

6. Work Programme.

The Work Programme was noted.

7. Apprenticeships and Levy report

The Committee received and considered a report about the latest Apprenticeship Team progress to date in relation to apprenticeship expansion in line with public sector duty and through use of the Levy fund. It was emphasised that to fully spend the BCC Levy it was essential to increase the monthly spend from £34K to circa £80K.

A presentation was also given to Members, arising from this the key points emphasised were –

1. Since May 2017 a Levy fund of 0.5% of the Council's salary bill had been transferred to a £1.9M digital account, after two years any unspent funds would be returned to HM Treasury;
2. By 2020 it was anticipated that 2.3% of BCC staff would be on apprenticeship programmes;
3. Nationally uptake had shifted from level 2 to levels 4-7 which had meant a 2% fall in the 16-19 age groups. It was not entirely clear why this had happened but it was likely that organisational challenges had a role to play;
4. Of the 185 apprentices recruited 66% were existing staff members and 34% were new recruits;
5. At current rates of apprenticeship recruitment the Council would be at risk of an 8.4% (£160K) retention in 2020;
6. There was a disproportionate take up amongst locally managed schools and nurseries which in itself was not good for the Levy fund;
7. The possibility of apprentice to head teacher route could be explored further;
8. Important that children in care, specifically those with special needs, were actively encouraged to participate in the apprenticeship process. Information on uptake to be shared with Corporate Parenting Panel;
9. People with transferable skills were being specifically targeted to participate;
10. All efforts would be made to ensure that 'clawback' of Levy funding would be avoided.

Resolved –

- 1. That the progress to date be welcomed and that the Top 10 Actions to achieve maximum Apprenticeship Levy spend be endorsed;**
- 2. That the Chair write to Councillor Cheney on behalf of the HR Committee urging him to implement the Top 10 Actions as soon as possible.**

8. Performance Management

The Committee received a report and a presentation updating the Committee on the work underway to build a strong performance culture in the organisation.

Key points clarified/emphasised were –

1. Responsibility for the setting up of the process lay with line managers however it was a two way process and staff had a significant input also as it was important not to be seen as a tick box exercise;
2. Data would be available regarding take up and compliance although the content of the performance review itself would be confidential.
3. It was anticipated that non take up would be avoided as the system was easy to use online. Regular monitoring would indicate areas with low take up and where extra support could be targeted.
4. Effective performance management was through regular monthly one to ones, however only the six month and yearly session would need to be formally signed off;
5. If staff felt that they had been unfairly treated in their performance review, they would be encouraged to escalate this and to raise this through the staff feedback survey process;
6. All employee data would be strictly confidential and managers would not be able to edit the employees comments on the performance review form.

Resolved – that progress to date be noted.

9. Time to Change Employer Pledge and Action Plan

The Committee received a report setting out a challenging and ambitious plan of action to become a council that people were proud to work for and which delivered its priorities. The Council had signed the 'Time to Change Pledge' on 6 February, 2019. The Committee was informed that one of the six workforce themes within the Organisational Improvement Plan was health and wellbeing and 'Time to Change' would support the first set of actions to progress this theme.

Key points clarified/emphasised were –

1. A Health & Wellbeing Manager had recently been recruited to drive the Action Plan forward;
2. Cultural change was vital to the Plan's success which included political will at all levels in the organisation;
3. Customer Care was an essential part of the Plan as that was the fundamental role of all staff within the Council;
4. The Council's Employee Access Programme had an important role to play in this process including stress risk assessments as part of the overall 'journey';
5. Acknowledged that this would be a big task as the Council was a large organisation and had endured years of austerity contributing to workforce stress and mental health issues;

6. School teachers would remain under the auspices of their respective governing bodies;
7. Setting up of 'Champions' was being looked at for those employees looking for alternative ways of accessing the process.

Resolved – that the Action Plan be endorsed and the report be noted.

10. Employee Relations issues

The Committee received a verbal report regarding an ongoing employee relation issue that had been reported in local media.

Significant points highlighted were –

1. The Council had not known what was going to be published in the BEP regarding allegations made. Information was received at the end of November 2019;
2. The incident had made it really difficult for all people involved or associated with it as well as the wider council staff;
3. Serious issues had been raised and these were being actively addressed;
4. There was a serious focus on the quality of leadership and our Organisational Improvement Plan also highlights the priorities in relation to Diversity and Inclusion;
5. The report did not include any information about what the Council was doing or the positive steps being taken to address long standing issues;
6. Steps being taken included relaunched Staff Led Groups (SLGs);
7. A list of complaints had been received from the BMEG Staff Led Group. Attempts had been made to contact all complainants (some had left the Council), some people had not responded to the Council's attempts to contact them;
8. To date 20 of the cases had been resolved;
9. Council policies were under review although it was acknowledged that the implementation and operation of policies by managers was equally important;
10. Allegations of institutional racism had been made and were being thoroughly investigated;
11. Cultural issues would be tackled and solutions sought;
12. It was firmly acknowledged that this was an issue that was long term and would need to be addressed accordingly.

At 12.00 the Chair had to leave the meeting. A nomination for Councillor Jo Sergeant to chair the remainder of the meeting was made and agreed by members.

The Committee was advised that an update report would be put to the 9 May 2019, Human Resources Committee meeting.

At the end of the debate members suggested reading of two books regarding institutional racism. They were 'Natives : race and class in the ruins of empire - Akala' and 'Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race - Reni Eddo-Lodge'.

Meeting ended at 12.05

CHAIR