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Bristol City Council

Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

19 December 2019 at 10 am



Members Present:-

Councillors: Harriet Bradley, Richard Eddy, Gary Hopkins, Ruth Pickersgill, Paula O'Rourke and Jon Wellington

Officers in Attendance:-

John Walsh (Director: Workforce & Change), Mark Williams (Head of Human Resources), Mark Jefferson (Analytics Adviser), Steph Griffin (Head of Internal Communications & Organisational Development), Elouise Wilson HR Talent and Resourcing, Steve Gregory (Democratic Services)

Also in attendance:

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 Councillor Jeff Lovell. In the absence of the Chair the Vice Chair, Councillor Paula O'Rourke, chaired the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved – that the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 September 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. Public Forum - Question

Name	Subject
Rob Butler Vice Chair, Corporate Safety Committee Corporate Safety Representative (Unite)	Employee engagement survey – update Agenda item 8 – additional documents

Question *'In page 32 of the survey progress update, one of the local action plan themes states that stress risk assessments will be undertaken for 'high-pressure roles'. Please can a more accurate definition be provided for what is considered to be a high-pressure role?'*

Answer

'All services were provided with a breakdown of the survey results to team level. Since then, they have all been developing local action plans to address any issues that have been identified for their area.

The report gives a summary of the main themes from across these action plans and provides some examples of the actions the teams are taking.

Some teams have identified a need to encourage staff who are feeling excessive work place pressure to undertake a stress risk assessment. This will help identify actions that can be taken to reduce the risk and sign-post to the support that is in place, such as the Employee Assistance Programme or resilience workshops.

The reference to high-pressure roles in the report just means where individuals or teams have identified that they are feeling excessive work place pressure and there is not a specific role definition.

Stress risk assessments form part of our overall health and wellbeing support for all staff, regardless of role. The HSE have highlighted that work in the public sector is an area of the economy where work related stress is more prevalent. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf>

Steph Griffin - Head of Internal Communications & Organisational Development'

Supplementary question

Q1 - Why is it only some teams are being encouraged to undertake stress risk assessments?

A1 – All teams are actively encouraged to undertake stress risk assessments and there is plenty of support and training available. This report pulled out the main themes from the employee survey local action plans, and some teams had referenced stress risk assessments in their action plans, it's not to say that the others are not doing it.

6. Work Programme

The Work Programme for 2019/20, as amended by the Head of Human Resources, was noted. Members considered including the Dashboard report on the Work Programme, after discussion it was agreed that the Dashboard be circulated to members prior to the next meeting and if members had any specific questions or points to raise they could be considered at the next HR Committee meeting.

At this point of the meeting Councillor Eddy asked about the status of Councillor Harriet Bradley sitting as a member of the HR Committee following her recent suspension by the Labour Party. The Proper Officer representative confirmed that Councillor Bradley remained a councillor and was therefore able to discharge her duties as an elected member of council and as a member of the Human Resources Committee.

7. Employer Brand and Recruitment

The Committee received a report outlining the Council's ambition to become an employer that people would be proud to work for and which delivered its priorities to high standards. The Council's Organisational Improvement Plan set out actions that were already underway and further actions that support the progress of other objectives including the Council's 'Our Brand and Recruitment' Action Plan, which was one of the six workforce themes within the Organisational Improvement Plan.

Comments made by members–

1. Important to have checks and balances when appointing/employing people;
2. Important not to reward poor performance;
3. Encourage greater inclusion for example working class areas in both south and north Bristol;
4. Avoid a punitive approach for poor performance and rely more on robust performance management to resolve issues;
5. Diverse interview panels were essential to ensure fairness and equal opportunity;
6. Salary levels were sometimes below market rates leading too difficult to recruit 'hot spots';
7. Lower paid roles needed more help regarding flexible working hours and to be made aware of this as early as the selection and interview stage;
8. Query if traditional reference checks were necessary given that more 'fluid' career paths were now more common;
9. An audit on how both psychometric and practical tests were successful at recruiting the right people would be useful;

The HR Talent and Resourcing officer confirmed that all the points raised were being addressed. Recruitment in particular accessed various means including social media and improved advertising via 'selling points'. Diverse panels were now the mainstream and it was very rare for this not to be the case, noted that the diversity of some panels might not be obviously visible.

Difficult recruitment areas relating to pay were being specifically worked on emphasising the Council's many advantages as an employer, including flexible working hours/arrangements, excellent pension scheme, work life balance, agile working and job security.

Standard employment references were still required for external applicants however there was greater flexibility built in eg, if a previous line manager could not give a reference someone else in the organisation would be acceptable. There was greater flexibility for internal applicants;

A report would be made to a future HR Committee about the success status of both psychometric and practical tests regarding the recruitment of the right people, noted that psychometric tests were only done at the top tier level;

Members were reminded of the Council's six month probation period which was a robust mechanism to identify and resolve any early problem areas.

During the above discussion Councillor Pickersgill said she felt that some members might think people in the south Bristol were stupid. Councillor Eddy then made reference to the Shadow Foreign Secretary's recent alleged comment about 'stupid' people. Councillor Pickersgill felt strongly that this comment was not relevant to the discussion at this meeting and asked that her view be formally recorded.

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

8. Progress report - response to 2019 staff survey findings

The Committee received a progress update regarding the Council's Employee Engagement Survey 2019 which took place during March 2019 and had a 51% response rate. Detailed analysis of the results had taken place

and Focus groups had looked at council wide themes of wellbeing, recognition, physical workplace and senior leadership visibility.

Employees had been kept regularly updated on actions taken and another survey was planned for March 2020 which would continue to measure ongoing progress.

Comments by members and responses made –

1. Noting only 28% of staff who had responded felt that senior managers listened to them, a member asked if communication was part of the issue. Head of Internal Communications & Organisational Development acknowledged this point citing that this area had been identified and that measures were in place to mitigate such as improved leadership visibility especially at off site locations;
2. A member asked if there was evidence that senior managers generally were doing more to improve communication with staff. Head of Internal Communications & Organisational Development stated that further breakdown was necessary to achieve this and emphasised that this was the first survey of its type that had been done for some time and that information of this type would take some time to reach clarity;
3. Members were informed that a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) were embedded in the process and updates would be reported to the HR Committee in due course;
4. Members were assured that the findings of the survey were being taken very seriously and that there was a continuing two way dialogue with managers and staff to ensure that real improvements would be made;
5. Managers had been given positive feedback in respect of a steer for action plans regarding disabled members of staff and diversity issues;
6. Noting concerns raised by members about some aspects of agile working the Head of Internal Communications & Organisational Development emphasised that staff focus groups were being fully engaged in the process of resolving problem areas such as disabled staff accessing chairs and desks and for older staff carrying electronic equipment around the workplace;
7. Some concern was expressed about middle managers not having enough authority to make decisions without senior management involvement regarding Councillor's local ward business. Members were assured that this was being looked into.

Resolved – that progress made too date be noted.

11. Exclusion of the Press and Public

That under s.100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it (they) involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph(s) 1 (respectively) of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Act.

12. Appointment of Executive Director: Growth and Regeneration - Induction and hand over of arrangements update - verbal report of Director of Workforce and Change

The Director of Workforce and Change advised members of the current situation in respect of the arrangements

relating to the recent appointment of the Executive Director: Growth and Regeneration and confirmed that the handover process was now complete.

The meeting ended at 11.20 am

CHAIR