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Bristol City Council Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

30 April 2020 at 10 am



Members Present:-

Councillors: Harriet Bradley, Margaret Hickman (sub. for Councillor Lovell), 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 and Reward Manager), Steve Gregory (Democratic Services)

Also in attendance: Executive Director of Resources & Head of Paid Services; Executive Director of Growth & Regeneration (for agenda item 10 only)

1. Election of Chair

The Committee noted that Councillor Jeff Lovell had resigned as Chair of the Human Resources Committee with immediate effect. Members of the Committee were therefore requested to give nominations, for the Chair, for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.

Only one nomination was given -

Resolved – That Councillor Jon Wellington be elected as Chair of the Human Resources Committee for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.

2. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed all parties to the meeting and introductions were made. The Chair set out the process with regard to the meeting being a virtual one via Zoom technology.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Jeff Lovell, who was substituted by Councillor Margaret Hickman, and Councillor Richard Eddy, no substitution.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved – that the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 March 2020 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising –

1. The Committee was advised that responding to COVID-19 situation had significant implications for the workload of the HR Leadership team and this meant that some aspect of the work programme for the team had to be re-prioritised and that actions arising from the last meeting had not yet been completed, Members acknowledged this;
2. Progress regarding Disability Equality training would be communicated to members after this meeting.

6. Public Forum

None received.

7. Covid 19 - Workforce Implications

The Committee received an update on the workforce implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the organisational response that had been made. Members were informed that COVID-19 had been the most significant incident the Council had to manage in living memory to which it had responded to quickly and effectively.

Members were advised that –

1. Council employees had experienced sickness absence due to COVID-19 and some had to self-isolate;
2. Some employees were shielding as they were in the high risk group;
3. Testing was available and being prioritised for key workers who were self-isolating or symptomatic with COVID-19;
4. Comprehensive advice to employees, volunteers and managers on how to manage the health and safety implications and risks of exposure to COVID-19 was in place and being updated regularly in line with national advice;
5. A number of employees had already been redeployed from their normal jobs to support the organisational response to the Pandemic;
6. A casual worker retention scheme had been proposed to support casual workers whose monthly pay had ceased or diminished as a consequence of some services being scaled back or closed and 387 of staff had been invited to join the scheme;
7. Large numbers of staff had been enabled to work from home very effectively at short notice and building on that experience other rapid changes were being made in the Council's organisational plans;
8. The Council's HR policies and procedures had in some instances been relaxed to support both colleagues and managers in response to the Pandemic;
9. The Council had been working closely and positively with the Trade Unions to ensure a collective approach to dealing with any problems.

The Committee thanked officers for their exemplary work and actions during what was an exceptionally difficult time. Members then commented and asked questions, arising from discussion the following points were made/clarified –

1. With regard to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) the Committee was assured that the Council was working closely with care workers and other frontline teams to ensure that the supply of PPE was

maintained and that the quality was at as high a standard as possible and was fully in line with current national and international regulations;

2. The Council's HR policies and procedures had in some instances been relaxed to support both colleagues and managers in response to the Pandemic. This included greater flexibility for Agile Working and child care/home education requirements and relaxation of policy in relation to emergency carers leave and sickness absence related to COVID-19. Detailed FAQ'S were also available to give guidance to staff;
3. Testing for employees in key worker roles with COVID-19 symptoms and those that were self-isolating commenced with effect from 20 April 2020. Testing was being prioritised for colleagues in health and social care roles. Testing wherever possible was something that was also being considered in line with public health advice;
4. Currently, the national advice was that the Furloughing of employees was not an option open to local government so the Council's policy during the crisis had been to redeploy staff wherever it was possible and practical to do so;
5. COVID 19 was now reportable in defined incidents under the Health & Safety legislation Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR);
6. Concern was expressed with regard to PPE and whether the regulations as they currently stood were sufficient following the Governments downgrading of the risk classification. It was suggested that HR write to Trade Unions to ask their view about PPE and if it was fully adequate for their members. The Committee agreed to this; **Action: Chair/Head of HR**
7. Responding to COVID-19 had been very positive and had enabled services to adapt to changing circumstances rapidly and large numbers of staff had been able to work successfully from their homes using current technology work devices. Research would be undertaken to build on and develop best practice as the Council moved forward, with a commitment to new ways of working;
8. The predicted extra cost to the Council of £82m in respect of the COVID 19 crisis would not affect workers on the Job Retention scheme as it was anticipated that additional central government funding might become available. The actual costs of the Job Retention scheme would be better known after the first month of operation. As this shortfall in funding was an important concern work on this was ongoing with central government;
9. Staff on job retention had been informed that the scheme would continue until the service continues its normal activity as the Council was not constrained by a time limit, as was the case for Furloughed staff in the private sector. The scheme required staff to sign in regularly and be available for work/redeployment as required.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

8. 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) 2 (respectively) of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Act.

9. Exempt Staffing Matter

The Committee was informed that following recent peer review challenges, at Bristol City Council, by the Local Government Association a proposal seeking to make some changes to the Council's senior officer structure had been drawn up and were as set out in the accompanying report.

Following consideration by Members it was -

Resolved – that the recommendations as set out in the report be approved.

10. Exempt Staffing Matter

The Committee was informed of the contractual arrangements that had been made and implemented in respect of a number of major projects and initiatives within the Council's Growth and Regeneration portfolio and the required staffing arrangements to ensure continuity and consistency with ongoing project work.

The Committee was informed that, going forward, a decision had been made to procure a Strategic Partner to enhance the delivery capacity of the Council in its project work in the future.

Following further discussion Members requested to have further information on the Council's strategic/major projects and initiatives within the Growth and Regeneration portfolio, this was agreed.

Action: Executive Director of Growth & Regeneration

Resolved – that the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.50 am

CHAIR