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Bristol City Council Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

15 December 2022 at 5 pm



Members present:

Councillors: Kerry Bailes, Amirah Cole, Sarah Classick, Richard Eddy, Lorraine Francis, Tim Wye.

Officers in Attendance:

Stephanie Griffin (Director Workforce & Change), James Brereton (Head of Human Resources), Mark Jefferson (Reward and Analytics Manager), Steve Gregory (Democratic Services Officer)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

1. The Chair welcomed all parties to the meeting and introductions were made.
2. Members agreed to take agenda item 10 as the first substantive item for this meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Councillors Lesley Alexander, Farah Hussain, Mohamad Makawi.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting (including the exempt extract)

Resolved – that the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 September 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

Matter arising

Closure of South Bristol Rehabilitation Centre.

The Head of HR confirmed that information from the “lessons learned” sessions had been received and shared with those involved in the change process, facilitated by the programme manager. Unfortunately, due to the pressure of other priorities it had not been possible to assimilate the information into a report and to check with key stakeholders that it correctly represented the facts/issues. Therefore, it was not possible to bring a report to this meeting.

To progress this, members were informed that they could add the item to the agenda for February’s

meeting or receive a draft paper beforehand with the option of arranging an extraordinary HR Committee meeting. This would be confirmed after the meeting. **Action: Head of HR**

Head of HR also undertook to share, when possible, updates with members and TU representatives regarding the proposed reduction of up to 100 jobs from the council's Strategic Transport and Urban Design teams with the former group having to apply for 30 newly created posts within the West of England Combined Authority. **Action: Head of HR**

5. Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (Agenda item 10)

The Committee received a report of the Head of Executive Office regarding an application for the Armed Forces Covenant Bronze Award as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to supporting the Armed Forces and to develop an implementation plan to progress towards becoming a Silver Award employer by November 2023.

Councillor Helen Holland Cabinet Member (Adult Social Care and Integrated Care System) was also in attendance to speak to the report.

Members were being asked to consider joining the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and to apply for the Armed Forces Covenant Bronze Award as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to supporting the Armed Forces across the scope of its work, to support members of the armed forces, veterans, and the wider armed forces community both need to in the workplace and the City of Bristol.

Consideration would need to be given to the contractual status of any HR policies implemented to reflect the requirements of the schemes and to enable a 'one stop shop' approach making it easier for Armed Forces members to access the scheme.

Members noted that the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme operated in a similar way to the Disability Confident employer scheme, which was co-ordinated through the Workforce and Change division as part of the Council's approach to employer branding and employee engagement. There were no contractual implications for employees, though the HR work required to achieve and maintain higher awards would need to be considered and prioritised in the context of the Council's financial challenges.

Resolved –

- 1. That a formal application be made for the Armed Forces Covenant Bronze Award, as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to supporting the Armed Forces.**
- 2. That an implementation plan to progress towards becoming a Silver Award employer by November 2023 be developed.**

6. Public Forum

A set of four questions regarding South Bristol Rehabilitation Centre and one written statement regarding issues relating to agenda items 8 and 11 were submitted by GMB. The response to the questions and the content of the statements were noted by members of the committee. *(The full transcript of the public forum items is available on the Council's website).*

In accordance with the Council's standing orders supplementary questions were asked as below –

Supplementary to Q1 – Regarding the investigation findings into the closure of South Bristol Rehabilitation Centre being brought to the HR Committee February meeting, the GMB said that they would like this sooner and the information to separate out the Lesson Learned from other issues. GMB also requested to see the notes from meetings on this matter and asked why they had not been received.

The Head of HR explained that the delay in making the notes available might be down to the Project Manager being unavoidably absent, he undertook to chase this up after the meeting. **Action: Head of HR**

Supplementary to Q4 – GMB had met senior management and had had been advised there were no vacancies but now see there were a significant number, and they were now being advertised, why was this as they met recently in November? Head of HR undertook to find out why this happened. **Action: Head of HR**

A verbal statement from Tom Merchant UNISON was then allowed by the Chair, and members of the committee, the key points raised were –

- If SIRONA took over the running of SBRC then trade union members would be balloted for strike action.
- Alternatives to compulsory redundancy must be considered such as voluntary severance or early retirement options.
- SLG's were also concerned and had approached UNISON for legal advice even though not members, asked if the Council could assist with this including giving time off to attend meetings. Disabled staff were particularly vulnerable. The Director Workforce & Change agreed to provide assistance. **Action: Director Workforce & Change**
- Museum staff had reported their concerns about council budget cuts and potentially deleting 34.5 fte museum posts but had not received any information about which posts would be affected, better consultation was needed.
(Councillor Amirah Cole and Councillor Richard Eddy left the meeting at this point)
- Rowena Hayward GMB referring to the potential 300 redundancies suggested by the Council in order to achieve its budget reduction target asked members of the committee to be aware of past experiences when reducing posts and exercise caution about letting experienced staff leave the council to the detriment of council services. The Head of HR confirmed that lessons had been learnt and would be factored into any restructuring proposals. It was the goal of the council that post reductions would be achieved through voluntary severance/early retirement/redeployment and this process would include respectful and sensitive consultations with the trade unions and staff to find positive ways forward.

7. Trade Union Forum

One written statement was submitted by GMB regarding Real Life Wage issues. The content of the statement was noted by members of the committee. *(A full transcript of the trade union item is available on the Council's website).*

Regarding the latest NJC pay award there was a difference in the implementation date compared with the implementation date of the new Living Wage Foundation rate, the Head of HR explained that this issue was the same for every employer and any change to this approach could be included in the Pay Policy Statement that the HR Committee recommends to Full Council. This would be subject to advice

from the council's finance team.

Steve Mills UNISON made a short verbal comment about the proposed closure of St Barnabas School and its implications for staff and jobs at the school and asked that HR work with the trade unions for a positive outcome.

8. Work Programme

Members noted the updated Work Programme for 2022/23.

Following a request from a member the Director Workforce & Change agreed to include an update on the workforce implications and potential redundancies (voluntary or compulsory) as a result of the Council's 2023/24 budget saving proposals.

9. Potential Workforce Implications of the 2023-24 budget saving proposals

The Committee received a report of the Director: Workforce & Change and Head of Human Resources on the potential workforce implications arising from the Council's 2023/24 budget saving proposals.

Key points highlighted were –

1. The council was currently consulting the public on a range of budget saving proposals to balance a budget gap. This would require a review of the staffing structure in some teams and a reduction in number of posts. Heads of Service briefed staff on the 2023/24 budget saving proposals before the public consultation commenced.
2. Workforce consultation continued as necessary in relation to savings approved in the previous year's budget and for any changes required by local issues (eg, pressures within existing service budgets).
3. There was a proactive emphasis on supporting staff through this, with opportunities to talk to line managers, use of drop ins, health, and wellbeing workshops, supporting people through change, proactive redeployment, and job application support, and encouraging building greater resilience within teams.
4. Provisional estimates indicated up to 300 redundancies (voluntary or compulsory) were possible. The spread of redundancies across and within directorates, services and teams would be variable depending upon the availability of vacancies that could be deleted and turnover rates.
5. The number of redundancies would be minimised through the deletion of vacancies arising from natural turnover, the use of the Succession Planning Policy (as appropriate) and the return to a proactive approach to redeployment.

6. Where approved by Full Council and/or Cabinet as required, savings that had a workforce impact would be subject to consultation and selection processes as set out in the Council's Managing Change Policy.
7. An Equality Impact Assessment had been prepared and would be supplemented by local assessments as appropriate. Staff outcomes would be monitored, and any concerns highlighted.

Members were given assurances that it was fully recognised how difficult this process would be for staff and that every opportunity would be maximised to keep staff fully informed of how the restructuring process was progressing. Local Managers would be encouraged to continue having discussions with staff even when there might be nothing specific to update on in their areas to ensure that regular and consistent communication was maintained.

Resolved – that the report be noted.

10. Update on Council Wide Change Programmes

The Committee received a report of the Head of Human Resources on the progress of two council-wide change programmes.

Key points highlighted were –

1. The Common Activities Programme would formally close in December. Ownership of the remaining activities and savings still to be banked would transfer to the relevant directors at programme closure.
2. Responsibility for ensuring the principles of the programme continued to be adhered to, was being formally transferred to the Human Resources service.
3. The Management & Capacity Review was currently on track to deliver the £5.5m of required savings in 2023/24 through a combination of approving succession planning applications, deleting vacant positions, and restructuring the director team. The programme would close once the savings had been achieved.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

11. HR Dashboard and Sickness Review

The Committee received a report of the Head of Human Resources and Reward and Analytics Manager giving an update on the trends in relation to sickness absence.

Key points highlighted were –

1. Current average working days lost in the council was 10.1 per employee.

2. Absence levels remained within the median of authorities reporting % of days lost due to sickness for all English single tier local authorities.
3. Continuing to reduce sickness absence and supporting employees to return to work remained key priorities of the Council.

Arising from members questions the following points were clarified –

1. The link between changes to the organisation and employee stress was largely anecdotal but this was looked at closely wherever possible to identify patterns or trends.
2. The highest sickness absence rates were found in Adult Social Care and Housing & Landlord teams. It was hoped that the ongoing proactive work to reduce sickness rates and support staff in these areas would make inroads into it over time.
3. Stress and anxiety were the most common cause of sickness absence with musculoskeletal issues second. It was hoped that regarding the latter, improved training could potentially reduce sickness absence rates.

Resolved – that the report be noted

The meeting ended at 7pm

CHAIR