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Bristol City Council Minutes of the Human Resources Committee

16 February 2023 at 5 pm



Members present:

Councillors: Lesley Alexander, Kerry Bailes, Sarah Classick, Richard Eddy, Lorraine Francis, Farah Hussain, Tim Wye.

Officers in Attendance:

Stephanie Griffin (Director Workforce & Change), James Brereton (Head of Human Resources), Christina Czarkowski-Crouch (Head of Safety, Health and Wellbeing), Steve Gregory (Democratic Services Officer), Louise deCordova (Democratic Services Manager).

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

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

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Councillors Amirah Cole, Mohamad Makawi.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

- a) Minute no. 6 first bullet point South Bristol Reablement Centre should read East Bristol Intermediate Care Centre.
- b) Minute no. 6 last bullet point last sentence should read 'It was the goal of the council that post reductions would be achieved through the deletion of vacancies and the use of 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.'

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

Matter arising

Minute no.5 - Defence Employer Recognition Scheme - the Director Workforce & Change informed members that a bronze award had been achieved, members welcomed the update.

Minute no. 4 - Strategic Transport and Urban Design team – it was noted discussions were underway but anticipated they would be concluded by 31 March 2023, after which a business case would be prepared ahead of consultation with staff. Committee noted possible conflict with Full Council budget setting on 21 February 2023. Confirmed that no compulsory redundancies were planned but this could not be guaranteed. Members requested a future update on the planned review of non-statutory services.

5. Public Forum

None received.

6. Trade Union Forum

The Committee received and noted the following items –

1. Two questions, and HR response to them, from GMB regarding the 'Real Living Wage' and South Bristol Rehabilitation Centre. No supplementary questions were asked.
2. A statement from Unison regarding Workforce, Contingent Workforce, The Council's Pay Policy Statement.
3. A verbal submission from GMB regarding South Bristol Reablement Centre, Attendance Policy, TU facilities time, Health Management. The Head of HR confirmed that the issues raised would be looked into.
4. Following further discussion, the Head of HR endorsed the statement from the service that they aim to redeploy staff into suitable alternative roles within the council.

(The Trade Union submission is available on the Council's website).

7. Work Programme

Members noted the updated Work Programme for 2022/23.

8. Budget Savings - update

The Committee received an update 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.

Members were informed that following public consultation on budget saving proposals, including consideration by Cabinet in January, the Mayor's budget proposals would be considered by Full Council at its annual budget meeting on 21 February 2023.

Communication and consultation with the workforce, trade unions and staff led groups would continue to give staff the opportunity to discuss the proposed changes and how they might affect them or their teams.

The Council continued to provide support to staff through the period of change, which included -

1. Staff concerned about the changes could continue to speak to their line manager in the first

instance.

2. The Health and Wellbeing team offered wellbeing support sessions for colleagues individually or as a team to talk through any concerns about change, in person or remotely.
3. Wellbeing sessions were offered to help with stress risk assessments.
4. Help was being offered regarding interview skills and, if redeployment was not an option, information was provided about training and local employment opportunities via DWP.
5. Staff were able to access a range of online resources via the staff intranet site and the Employee Assistance Programme, free of charge, to speak to a trained counselling practitioner at any time. The service was confidential, and colleagues would not be required to speak to their line manager or ask for a referral. The EAP also had an online portal which was a free and confidential service with information, advice, and support on a range of topics such as stress, mental health, debt, and legal issues.

Arising from members questions the following points were clarified –

6. More information regarding loss of staff and affected service areas would be included in a future report to the committee during the next budget cycle.
7. The council would seek to use vacancies and redeployment to avoid redundancies where possible
8. The HR Dashboard would be shaped to help identify future trends as part of workforce planning.
9. Feedback from staff leaving the Council was collected confidentially via an online exit survey, and in some cases through line managers. A thematic report would be brought to a future meeting to provide some analysis of the reasons employees leave.

Resolved – that the report be noted.

9. South Bristol Rehabilitation Centre

The Committee received a report of the Director: Workforce & Change and Head of Human Resources in response to the committee's request for more information about the closure of the South Bristol Rehabilitation Centre in 2022.

Follow up sessions with stakeholders had offered insight and some lessons learned on how the programme. These included –

1. Meetings of managers, staff and trade union representatives held virtually enabled information to be shared consistently across the workgroup, though it was recognised that some staff appreciated face-to-face meetings where it could be easier for more voices to be heard. Keeping staff informed between meetings by e-mail.
2. Staff were kept informed between meetings by e-mail updates.
3. Ward Councillors should be informed of progress where there was a direct affect in their ward area.

4. Staff to be encouraged to participate in developing options for future services.
5. Options such as TUPE and secondments required robust exploration with support services prior to discussion and proposal formulation.
6. Important to clarify and where necessary reassure staff about potential transfers and what would or would not change as a result.
7. Any changes must be contextualised to avoid staff feeling misunderstood or undervalued.
8. All consultations should be fully informed and transparent to ensure staff feel valued and engaged.
9. Implementation planning must be robust whilst allowing some flexibility to adapt to changing events.
10. Change affected all levels of staff, and this needed to be recognised to ensure that support could be fully provided.
11. Where a reduction in staff levels was likely leaders of change had an essential duty to ensure what options were available to staff and reasoning behind them.

Arising from members questions the following points were clarified –

12. It was important that Ward Councillors were kept fully informed of events and to make sure they felt connected with the process.
13. Greater staff involvement would mean managers engaging very early in the change process, this would not necessarily include specific details but enough information so that all would be clear about how any proposed changes might affect them.
14. It was vital to recognise that the team culture played a large part in the progress of change.
15. A request that the lessons learned be shared with the Integrated Care Board.
16. The recommendations would be incorporated into the council's good practice guidance on managing change.
17. Financial savings contributed to the council's medium term financial plan savings.
18. The TUPE process should be clear and unambiguous.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

10. Health Safety & Wellbeing Annual Report

The Committee received a report of the Head of Safety, Health & Wellbeing regarding corporate arrangements for how health, safety and wellbeing was managed to provide assurance on key areas of work and the improvement plan for 2023/24.

Key points highlighted were –

1. There was continued review of roles and responsibilities for health and safety to ensure that governance and accountabilities were properly understood and discharged.
2. Progress had been made regarding in achieving the actions in the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy including the management of stress, Reasonable Adjustments, Violence and Aggression and Asbestos Management.
3. The report provided information on information of Occupational Health Data and Training Data 2021-2022.

4. The report outlined the work to revise and implement the Corporate Health and Safety Monitoring System (CHaSMs), these changes incorporated actions from the internal Health and Safety Audit.
5. There had been no enforcement actions taken last year.
6. The plan outlined the key areas of work and outcomes for 2023-2024.

Arising from members questions the following points were clarified –

7. Asbestos in buildings was an ongoing issue and dealing with it was about management and mitigation in line with regulations. Removal of asbestos is not always necessary, decisions were based on whether keeping it in situ and manage it was based on whether it was in good condition and doesn't present a health risk. There was a service plan that set out the key areas of work for the coming year.
8. All council buildings and schools had received bespoke surveys for asbestos and management plans were in place to ensure safety by supporting local managers and school caretakers who undertook monthly inspections of buildings, this was proactively supported to ensure ongoing awareness.
9. Support for staff in relation to the current financial challenges was proactive and a new post to focus on the wellbeing of staff had recently been created. This was in addition to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and one to one meetings with line managers.
10. In future the Corporate Health and Safety Plan would include additional areas of work relating to violence and aggression, heatwave planning and fire safety arrangements. The latter involved a separate stakeholder board meeting with the Avon Fire Authority, as it was important to work collaboratively.

Resolved – that the report be noted

11. Contingent Workforce update

The Committee received a report of the Director: Workforce & Change and Head of Human Resources updating the Committee on the Council's use of agency workers.

Key points highlighted were –

1. Agency workers were an integral part of the Council's workforce as they provided short-term cover and specialist input to services as and when required.
2. During 2021/22, the Council spend on agency workers was £11.7m managed by Guidant, the council's service provider. The total pay bill for 2021/22 was £260m with agency staff being 4.5% of the pay bill. Members were reminded that the total agency spend included agency fees and was not solely monies paid to agency workers.
3. Spend on agency workers had reduced by 10% since 2018/19 and 7% since 2020/21.
4. Spend in Growth & Regeneration increased by 27% since 2018/19, People increased by 46% and Resources reduced by 34%.
5. Work continued on talent development to encourage more people into a career with the council, this included increased recruitment of apprentices and supporting colleagues with career development

pathways and addressing diversity gaps particularly regarding employment of younger people.

6. Increased focus on redeployment would allow some agency assignments being ended and would give rise to continuing employment opportunity to those at risk of redundancy.

Arising from members questions the Head of HR agreed to provide information on day rates and a breakdown of data on roles in the establishment.

Members noted that sub-contracted employees were not included in the scope of this report.

Resolved – that the report be noted

12. Pay Policy Statement for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

The Committee received a report of the Director: Workforce & Change and Head of Human Resources to consider the Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24.

Members noted that the Localism Act 2011 required local authorities to agree and publish a pay policy statement annually before the start of the financial year to which the statement related.

The Head of HR clarified the following points –

1. That the minimum salary figure of £19,100 (based on a full-time week of 37 hours) stated in paragraph 4a of the Pay Policy draft statement (Appendix A) was an error and should be £21,039 pa as shown in paragraph 7 of the cover report.
2. At its meeting of 17 March 2022 Full Council approved the following addition to its Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23: “The Council policy is that the pay of the highest paid employee should be no more than 10 times that of the lowest full time equivalent paid employee.” This clause was to be reviewed annually and the Committee was being asked to consider this for its Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24.
3. The draft statement explained the Council’s pay policies for its highest and lowest-paid employees. Employees of the Council meant those individuals who had a formal contract of employment with Bristol City Council. It therefore excluded agency workers and officeholders.
4. Government guidance was clear that decisions on pay policies should be made by councillors. Bristol City Council was committed to making sure that all councillors had a say on how pay decisions were made, especially for its highest-paid employees. To achieve this, the Statement was reviewed every year, the Mayor consulted, and any proposals made were taken into account. The mechanism for this was that the draft statement was considered by the Human Resources Committee and then considered by full Council.
5. The Council’s current top to lowest salary ratio was 8.93:1 and was within the Council’s declared policy that the pay of the highest paid employee should be no more than 10 times that of the lowest full time equivalent paid employee.
6. The draft statement might need to be updated following an announcement of national pay awards.

The Committee debated the draft statement and Councillors Richard Eddy and Lesley Alexander clarified that they would not be voting in favour of the policy at Full Council.

(Councillors Richard Eddy and Lesley Alexander left the meeting at this point, 6.30 pm)

After further debate a majority of the remaining five committee members present expressed an interest in favour of deferring a decision on the Pay Policy Statement pending further discussion.

The Committee was reminded of its responsibility to make a clear recommendation to Full Council to adopt the Pay Policy in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 which required local authorities to agree and publish a pay policy statement annually before the start of the financial year to which the statement related ie, 1 April 2023.

Members present acknowledged the limited time constraints and agreed that if a date could not be arranged for an extraordinary meeting, within the necessary time scales, that the draft Pay Policy Statement 2023 – 2024, must be approved as set out in the report.

On being put to the vote there were four in favour of deferral and one against.

Resolved –

- 1. That the recommendation to Full Council to approve the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24, to take effect from 1 April 2023 be deferred pending further discussion.**
- 2. That given the statutory requirement to approve the Pay Policy Statement, if an extraordinary HR Committee could not be arranged within the necessary time scales, then the draft Pay Policy Statement 2023 – 2024, as set out in the report, be approved.**

The meeting ended at 6.47 pm

CHAIR