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Bristol City Council Draft Minutes of the Human Resources Committee



27 April 2023 at 5 pm

Members present:

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Steve Pearce (Avon Pension Fund committee member)

Officers in Attendance:

Stephanie Griffin (Director Workforce & Change), James Brereton (Head of Human Resources), Mark Jefferson (Reward and Analytics Manager), Lorraine Howells (People Operations Manager) Sana Khan (Apprenticeships Team Leader), Steve Gregory (Democratic Services Officer).

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 Councillor Amirah Cole and Councillor Mohamad Makawi.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes

Resolved – that the Minutes of

1. 16 February 2023.
2. 1 March 2023 (extraordinary meeting).

be agreed as a correct record.

5. Public Forum

None received.

Under this item the Chair allowed Councillor Richard Eddy to raise an issue regarding the Council's Policy on allowing staff back into buildings to work. The current arrangement of booking desks in advance was brought in under the Covid restrictions and Councillor Eddy had been made aware of some problems associated with this.

Councillor Eddy requested that an update be brought to the HR Committee AGM in July 2023 so that members could consider the rationale of continuing the policy particularly in the light of covid restrictions no longer being necessary. **Action: Director Workforce & Change**

6. Trade Union Forum

A late statement was allowed by the Chair and members of the committee from Jeff Sutton GMB, presented by Councillor Tim Wye, regarding the transfer of security and cleaning staff from Bristol City Council to the Bristol Waste Company and the issues that had arisen from this. The GMB raised specific concerns and asked that the whole process be reviewed and investigated.

After further discussion the Chair agreed to write to the Chair of OSMB to raise the issues for further scrutiny and to feedback its findings to HR Committee on progress. **Action Councillor Francis**

7. Work Programme

Members noted the updated Work Programme for 2022/23.

8. Apprentice Annual Report 2023

The Committee received a report from the Director Workforce and Change providing an overview of the achievements and challenges in relation to apprenticeships within the Council.

The Head of HR informed members that in 2022 the apprenticeship team had moved from Education, Skills and Learning to the Human Resources service.

1. The hiring process has been modified to ensure that apprenticeships were proactively considered instead of or alongside open recruitment.
2. Members were advised that between 31st March 2022 and 31st March 2023, 128 new apprenticeships had started at Bristol City Council, contributing to the total of 834 apprenticeships which had started since May 2017.
3. The workforce for BCC was currently 6,233 with 525 new employees and 3,106 for maintained schools with 889 new employees. The Apprenticeship Levy expiry for the last 12 months stood at £81k. There were currently 60 apprenticeships in the pipeline, which were due to go live in the next quarter.
4. The recruitment controls put in place in 2022 had led to a suppressing of the number of new recruits as apprentices. In addition, uncertainty resulting from the required budget savings had led to a decrease of apprenticeship uptakes amongst BCC employees. However, in the last quarter there had been a significant rise in apprenticeship enrolments.

5. Since May 2017 BCC had contributed over £6.57 million to the Levy, which had generated a government top up of £642k, providing a total input of £7.21 million. To date, £3.6 million had been spent and there was a further £1.055 million projected minimum spend over the coming year. It was intended to increase spend to approximately £109k per month and fully utilise annual contributions which required an increase in new starts to approximately 240 per annum or an average of circa 350 staff on programme at any one time.

Arising from members questions the following points were made/clarified –

1. Future reports would contain a more detailed breakdown of apprentices by age.
2. Recruitment processes included close working with the HR team to make apprenticeships part of the mainstream recruitment process including working with outside employment agencies.
3. An Apprenticeship Stakeholder Group had been set up to work with trade unions, staff-led groups, apprentice ambassadors and departmental representatives. The Group met regularly, and its findings were fed back into the planning and development of apprenticeships and the Talent and Development Steering Group. An apprenticeship data and performance dashboard was also being developed.
4. Risk of losing levy funding was ongoing and although efforts were made to reduce the loss, it was important to ensure that the drive for an increase in apprenticeships is accompanied with the right level of support for them.
5. The Council currently has about 200 vacancies, over a wide range of services, that were sometimes difficult to fill, and apprenticeships was one way to alleviate this. It was considered that this would not be inconsistent with the need to redeploy staff that were at risk of redundancy in other services.
6. Utilising the apprenticeship scheme would also help with the retention of staff by enabling a 'grow your own' working environment.
7. Important that the council deploys a variety of methods for applying for apprenticeships and jobs, so that a diverse range of potential employees have an equal opportunity to apply and not face barriers to inclusion.
8. It was noted that approximately 70% of apprentices had been retained by the Council at level 3 and 4, more work would be done to raise this.
9. It was noted that the Levy did not include support for ongoing mentoring costs, only for training. The Head of HR said that other ways of mentoring could be considered within the workforce.

Resolved – that the report be noted.

9. Avon Pension Fund annual report

The Committee received an information report of the Avon Pension Fund for the financial year 2021/22. Councillor Steve Pearce (BCC representative on Avon Pension Fund Committee) presented the annual report.

In summary -

1. Covid restrictions were now easing across the UK however current situation in Ukraine and the worldwide repercussions would have an impact on the Fund as trade and asset values were impacted by sanctions and geopolitical tensions. To mitigate this the Risk Management Strategy had been

strengthened during the past year and should provide some protection to significant falls in asset prices and rising inflation.

2. The medium to long term outlook which played into the 2022 valuation and investment strategy review looked to be far more challenging, with increasing concerns around inflationary impacts.
3. Operationally the Fund had mixed success during the Covid isolation period with the Investment Strategy able to move ahead more easily and completing the transition of assets to Brunel, expansion into private markets and renewables whilst making significant moves to combat climate change.
4. The administration service however continued to face a number of challenges to manage business objectives with a combination of staff turnover and difficult operating conditions impacting performance.
5. There were positive signs this had now turned a corner particularly with teams now able to operate more frequently in an office environment.

Arising from members questions the following points were made/clarified –

6. The Fund undertook significant member engagement, which informed the strategic direction of the investment strategy. In November a member survey showed that respondents were generally supportive of the current approach, acknowledging climate change as a financial risk best managed by the integration of variable factors and effective stewardship.
7. Regarding member surveys about the investment strategy, members were reminded that the BCC Chief Executive wrote to the Avon Pension Fund on behalf of the HR Committee last year to request involvement in designing future surveys. A response was received from the Avon Pension Fund about collaborating with finance officers, although there has not been a recent update.
(Councillor Eddy left the meeting at this point)
8. There was a dichotomy regarding investment in that directing investment to renewables too soon could mean that the APF would lose out on financial gains from oil investment which itself would enable future funding in renewable energy.
9. Another presentation to elected members about investment choices would be organised by Councillor Steve Pearce to explain what the APF does for both the employer and members of the fund.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

10. HR dashboard Recruitment and Retention

The Committee received a report of the Director Workforce and Change updating the Committee on the Council's latest data from the HR dashboard and employee experience surveys and illustrated key trends alongside other information on recruitment and retention. The details of this were as set out in paragraph 4 (a-m) of the report.

Key trends from the HR Dashboard including information on recruitment and retention were:

1. The council's headcount had reduced by 5% over the 12 months up to 31 March 2023 and the council's number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions had reduced by 4%.

2. The average number of working days lost due to sickness absence had increased by 4% over the same period.
3. Turnover within the council had remained broadly the same over the last 12 months at 16%.
4. In terms of the proportion of short-listed applicants and job offers for under-represented groups, the council is below the city's working age population comparator for young people (16-29) and racially minoritised communities. The council is above the population comparator for job offers to Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB), female and disabled applicants.
5. The Council's employee experience survey for starters indicated that 97% of new starters agreed that they were happy in their job and 95% felt able and supported to be themselves in the workplace. 11% did not agree that they had the equipment to do their work effectively.
6. 47% of new starters identified career development as the main reason for joining the Council. 17% identified an interest in the public sector as their main reason.
7. The Council's employee experience survey for leavers indicated that 76% of leavers agreed that they felt able and supported to be themselves in the workplace and 72% felt they were treated fairly as an employee. 21% did not agree that they were listened to and 20% did not agree that they were happy in their job.
8. 33% of leavers identified career development as their main reason for leaving the Council. 13% identified personal reasons. 31% of leavers had worked for the Council for over 10 years.

Arising from members questions the following points were made/clarified –

9. Information about geographic locations of applicants was available and would be included in future reporting as it was recognised that social mobility needed to be encouraged wherever possible.
10. Information about grading structures and what type of jobs were being applied for would be included in future reporting.
11. Recruitment and retention was recognised as being of vital importance going forward and more detailed planning for how this could be improved would be a key facet of the forthcoming refresh of the Workforce Strategy.
12. Career development was recognised as a reason to both join the council and to leave at some point. Members were informed that this was being actively looked at and that meetings with trade unions and staff led groups were being held to explore options, this includes more emphasis on secondments, talent development, steering groups, reverse mentoring, and project work.
13. More work would be done to understand why staff leave the council including a look at the age profile of leavers.

Resolved – that the report be noted

The meeting ended at 6.45 pm

CHAIR