

## **EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Monday, 11 March 2024 at 5.00 pm at the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Portsmouth

### **Present**

Councillor Stuart Brown (in the chair)  
Councillor Darren Sanders (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Dave Ashmore  
Councillor Charlotte Gerada

### **Officers Present**

Natasha Edmunds, Director Corporate Resources  
Rochelle Williams, Assistant Director HR  
Jeremy Underdown, Head of Facilities Management

#### **5. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)**

No apologies had been received. Councillor Cal Corkery tendered his apologies after the meeting as he had been caught in traffic following an accident on the M27.

#### **6. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)**

There were no declarations of Members' interests. For transparency Councillor Charlotte Gerada informed those present that she is a member of Unite and GMB union.

#### **7. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2024 (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.**

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chair altered the order of business to hear Item 6 - Annual Health and Safety report first. For ease of reference, the minutes remain in the order presented on the agenda.

#### **8. Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 (AI 4)**

Rochelle Williams, Assistant Director HR, introduced the report and informed the Committee that the Council is required by section 38(1) of the Localism

Act 2011 (openness and accountability in local pay) to prepare a Pay Policy Statement. A Pay Policy Statement must articulate the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff, Chief Officers and its lowest paid employees.

The Assistant Director HR explained that the Pay Policy Statement reaffirms the council's commitment to pay all direct employees the Real Living Wage and confirmed that following her appointment last year, the new Chief Executive is pay a 'spot salary' within a fixed salary range with no incremental progression as a result of seniority, experience or performance.

The Assistant Director HR informed Members that the Pay Policy Statement must be approved by Full Council no later than 31 March of each year, prior to the financial year to which it relates and be published on the council's website. It is intended that full Council will consider the Statement at its scheduled meeting on 19 March 2024.

There were no questions.

**RESOLVED that the Employment Committee approved the Pay Policy Statement attached as Appendix 1, to go forward for approval by the Full Council prior to 31 March 2024.**

## **9. Sickness Absence – Bi-annual Report (AI 5)**

Rochelle Williams, Assistant Director HR, introduced the report and explained that it set out the levels and causes of sickness absence across the council and the actions being taken to improve attendance and promote employee health and wellbeing. She noted that sickness absence levels are now at their lowest since November 2021, with psychological reasons, virus and gastrointestinal reasons being the most prevalent. Musculoskeletal absences have continued to be reported in three categories in this report for consistent reporting and the new method of recording this category will take effect from the next report. Heart disorders and cancers have increased and several campaigns to encourage screening and early detection have been run. The Employee Assistance Programme - Vivup - now includes an online GP service and wellbeing platform to help reduce sickness absence.

### Members' questions

In response to questions, officers clarified that:

- In line with guidance, the council does not ask staff to test for covid-19; but if they report a positive test it is recorded as the reason for sickness absence otherwise it will be recorded as a respiratory illness.
- All staff suffering from a contagious illness are encouraged to work from home or take appropriate steps to protect others if their presence in the office is required.
- Whether musculoskeletal absences are sustained at work or elsewhere is not recorded as part of this piece of work, but if it was because of an accident at work, it would be recorded in Health & Safety data.

- Vivup is still in its early days, and the council is collecting data on its usage and the popularity of different services offered. Data will be available for analysis in the coming months.
- The online GP service, available to staff through Vivup, is also available to family members of staff and alongside a free Will writing service has proven to be a very popular Vivup benefit.
- The council runs campaigns relating to women's health including the menopause and will consider a suggestion by Councillor Gerada to extend this to miscarriage and undiagnosed endometriosis.

#### Members' comments

Councillor Gerada welcomed the launch of the online GP appointment scheme, not only as a means of reducing sickness absence but also as a valuable employee benefit.

Councillor Sanders proposed a change Recommendation 1 s that rather than reading "Note the change in absence levels across the organisation", it would now read " Welcome the reduction in overall absence levels across the organisation". This was agreed by the Committee.

#### **RESOLVED to:**

- 1) Welcome the reduction in overall absence levels across the organisation.**
- 2) Note the levels and causes of sickness absence across the council and by directorate.**
- 3) Note the activities and interventions undertaken to support attendance and improve health and wellbeing.**

## **10. Annual Health and Safety Report 2023-2024 (AI 6)**

Jeremy Underdown, Head of Facilities Management, introduced the report. He informed members that the report updated the interim report presented at the Committee meeting held on 30 November 2023. The Committee had agreed on 30 November that presenting the annual report in March would better reflect the annual reporting period and delivery against the action plan.

The Head of Facilities Management noted that the annual report includes additional information about fire training requested by Members in November and provides reassurance that Portsmouth City Council is complying with health and safety legislation and is ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of those affected by the council's activities. He explained that the action plan for the coming year removes items considered to be 'business as usual' and instead focuses on a number of key themes of identified risk or opportunities for service improvement. This year the digitisation of the interaction between the Health & Safety service and the rest of the council, and the delivery of an audit programme to maximise the efficient and effectiveness of the service will be its biggest challenges.

There were no questions.

The Committee noted the information contained in the report.

## 11. Gender Pay Gap Report 2023/24 (AI 7)

Rochelle Williams, Assistant Director HR, introduced the report and informed members that it presents the outcomes of the statutory Gender Pay Gap 2023/24 analysis and helps ensure that the Council can fulfil its statutory obligations in respect of the Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations. The report includes an action plan to build on the council's inclusive working practices which aim to continue to reduce the gender pay gap. Following a previous request by the Employment Committee the report now includes a breakdown of the workforce profile by age, gender and whether full time or part time in Appendix 1. The Assistant Director HR confirmed that the council's gender pay gap is lower than the national average and there are robust policies in place to ensure that employees are paid equally for jobs of equal value.

The Assistant Director HR informed Members that unlike the gender pay gap, organisations are not legally required to publish their Ethnicity Pay Gap. The council is committed to ensuring equality across its workforce, and is continuing to review and improve workforce data held in relation to ethnicity with a view to including Ethnicity pay reporting as part of future Gender Pay Gap Reporting.

### Members' questions

In response to questions, officers clarified that:

- The information included in the report is statutory and 'bonuses' in this case includes payments such as long service awards and one-off honorariums. The council does not pay bonuses and it has robust mechanisms in place to ensure any payments are applied to all relevant employees equally.
- The overall number of people working full time has increased although there has also been an increase in employees working full time hours flexibly, for example, compressed hours or 9 day fortnights as this helps protect pensions.
- Men have equal rights for parental leave although many men have not been taking it.
- HR is implementing a new recruitment system which encourages managers to promote flexible and hybrid working as an integral part of the recruitment process. These included family friendly options for all genders to access.

Natasha Edmunds, the Director of Corporate Resources, commented that as of 2022, 35% of the council's employees work part time and there are many different working patterns operating across the workforce. She added that the 2022 data is available on the council's website at [Employment category - Your City, Your Say survey research \(portsmouth.gov.uk\)](https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/employment-category-your-city-your-say-survey-research) and this information will be updated later in the year.

### Members' comments

Councillor Sanders commented that the gender pay gap (both mean and median) have reduced over the past two years and this was pleasing and showed the organisation was travelling in the right direction. He expressed support for the council's recently published Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

The Chair noted that the council is confident that anyone doing work of equal value will receive the same pay and that the remaining gender gap is due to the type of roles the high number of women employed by the organisation undertake. The Director of Corporate Resources agreed, and commented that women are more likely to work part time.

The Committee noted the information contained in the report.

## **12. Workforce Trend Analysis (AI 8)**

Rochelle Williams, Assistant Director HR, introduced the report and explained that it follows a request made by the Committee at its meeting on 30 November 2023 for a detailed workforce analysis on turnover, actions arising, age profile and succession planning.

The Assistant Director HR informed members that the Directorates with the highest turnover of staff were Economy, Planning and Transport (EPT), Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services, Public Health, and Children, Families and Education. She explained that Public Health was a small team and recorded turnover related to 4 people leaving the organisation and turnover in culture and leisure was impacted by fixed term and seasonal workers. Within EPT and children's services it was of concern that people were leaving for career development reasons or those relating to work life balance and other family reasons. The organisation was experiencing issues recruiting and retaining employees, partly because of competition with the private sector on pay as it is unrelated to market pay. This combined with an aging employee demographic meant the council was facing a number of challenges though she noted that the Local Government Association has commented that all local authorities are battling talent shortages alongside recruitment and retention issues.

The Assistant Director HR informed Members that work to promote the council's employee values proposition including hybrid working, the pension scheme, work life balance, sick pay, annual leave and working hours was underway.

### Members' questions

In response to questions, officers clarified that someone leaving a job role and starting another within the council would 'count' as a leaver and a joiner.

The Director of Corporate Services commented that 50% of council employees are also local residents and are therefore invested in what the council delivers by way of its services.

Members' comments

Councillor Sanders noted that pay which is unrelated to market pay puts the council in a difficult situation and it needs to plan for the future.

Councillor Ashmore noted the effort the council is putting in to support employees including through the Employee Benefit Scheme, providing flexible and hybrid working which support a better work life balance.

Members asked that the report be repeated and presented to the Employment Committee annually.

The Committee noted the information contained in the report.

The meeting concluded at 5.42 pm.

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Councillor Stuart Brown  
Chair