

## **EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Friday, 6 March 2020 at 1.30 pm in the Executive Meeting Room, Floor 3, The Guildhall, Portsmouth

### **Present**

Councillor Ben Dowling (in the chair)  
Councillor Darren Sanders  
Councillor Lynne Stagg  
Councillor Linda Symes  
Councillor Luke Stubbs  
Councillor Cal Corkery

### **Officers Present**

Rochelle Kneller, Assistant Head of HR  
Natasha Edmunds, Director Corporate Services  
Peter Baulf, City Solicitor

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (AI 1)**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the evacuation procedure. Introductions were made round the table.

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Vernon-Jackson and Councillor Lynne Stagg is attending as his Standing Deputy.  
Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Donna Jones and Councillor Luke Stubbs is attending as her Standing Deputy.  
Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Matthew Atkins and Councillor Linda Symes is attending as his Standing Deputy.  
Apologies for absence were also received on behalf of David Williams, Chief Executive.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS (AI 2)**

There were no declarations of members' interests.

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2019 (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

#### **4. SICKNESS ABSENCE QUARTERLY REPORT (AI 4) (TAKE IN REPORT)**

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report explaining the background as set out in section 3 including the difficulties encountered in trying to compare data in a meaningful way given the constraints outlined. The LGA figures had been used to give the average of 8.8 days sick per person per year but this did not take into account variations for example in size or type of local authorities.

The average days of sickness absence at PCC had increased slightly but this was not unusual for the time of year and a data check carried out last week had shown that the levels of absence were on a downward trend. The appendices provided were in response to members' requests at previous meetings.

Members' attention was also drawn to the numerous Wellbeing Campaigns that had been introduced as set out in section 4 of the report.

During discussion

- It was confirmed that Coronavirus was likely to skew sickness absence figures. HR had asked for three new categories to be added to the sickness absence recording so that this could be monitored. The new categories are self- isolation, self- isolation but working from home, and contracting Coronavirus. Members asked that details of Coronavirus should be included in the next quarterly report.
- Members commented that appendix 3 showed lower than expected figures for psychological stress. HR said the reason for this was that recording psychological stress separately had been introduced part way through the year so was not yet a true reflection, but would be in future.
- Members accepted that data on the average number of sickness absence days had been difficult to obtain for the reasons set out in the report. However members considered that the figures taken from the LGA data made it difficult for them to accurately assess whether absence levels in PCC were a matter for concern or not. HR said that discussions with Southampton City Council and Brighton and Hove Borough Council which were reasonably comparable with Portsmouth City Council suggested that sickness absence here was in line with their experience.
- Members suggested that data could be requested from Wakefield as they have data relating to key cities. HR agreed to seek ways of obtaining data from authorities that were more closely comparable to Portsmouth City Council.
- Members requested clarification on the data included in the last appendix which HR agreed to provide.
- Natasha Edmunds said that work was being done on the age range profile at PCC and confirmed she would circulate this to members when available.

A discussion took place about the recommendation for the Committee to consider what they wanted to do about agreeing the corporate absence target for the organisation

- In response to a query from the Chair, Natasha Edmunds said that sometimes having a target for sickness absence had unintended consequences as it was sometimes interpreted to mean that taking that number of days sick was acceptable.
- In response to a suggestion that attendance should be rewarded, HR advised that this could be divisive because of issues such as maternity leave, disability etc, but agreed to check with other authorities to see if there was anything that seemed to increase attendance that could be introduced here.

It was

Proposed by Councillor Darren Sanders

Seconded by Councillor Luke Stubbs

that the existing target should remain unchanged.

Following a vote, this was LOST.

It was

Proposed by Councillor Ben Dowling

Seconded by Councillor Linda Symes

that no corporate absence target should be set for the organisation.

Following a vote, this was CARRIED

**RESOLVED that Members**

- (1) Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism**
- (2) Note the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance.**
- (3) Agreed that there should be no corporate absence target set for the organisation.**

**5. FOUNDATION LIVING WAGE (AI 5)**

**(TAKE IN REPORT)**

The Chair suggested that items 5 and 6 be taken together but for ease of reference, they have been kept separately in the minutes.

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report explaining that this was brought to the Committee annually. The background is set out in section 3 of the report. As mentioned in section 4 of the report, the cost of living increase amount is not yet known so costs to the Council of paying the Foundation Living Wage (FLW) amount are also not yet known but figures were given on the assumption that the cost of living increase would be 2%.

During discussion

- It was confirmed that with regard to TUPE'd in staff, the FLW is paid as a top up in 12 instalments and is non-consolidated.

- It was confirmed that the report only covers employees of the City Council - not those who are employed directly by contractors of PCC. This was more an issue for procurement, but members asked that an information report be brought to Employment Committee about becoming an accredited FLW employer.
- It was confirmed that the majority of schools had adopted the FLW.

**RESOLVED that Members**

- (1) **Noted that the Foundation Living Wage for 2020 has been set at £9.30 per hour.**
- (2) **Noted that the effect of the 2020/21 national pay award is unknown and therefore based on current information, spinal column points 1 & 2 is lower than Foundation Living Wage**
- (3) **Agreed that Officers report to members, on an annual basis, the revised FLW rate and the implications of this on the council's pay structure**
- (4) **Requested a report to be brought to the Committee on the process and steps required to become a Foundation Living Wage accredited employer**

**6. PAY POLICY STATEMENT (AI 6)  
(TAKE IN REPORT)**

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report explaining that this was an annual report and had to be approved by Full Council and published on the website by 31 March 2020. Section 3 sets out the background to the report.

During discussion

- It was confirmed that information on market supplements was contained in section 4 of the Pay Policy Statement. Members agreed after discussion that it would be useful to request that a report be brought to the Committee providing more information on the use of market supplements
- It was confirmed that the pay structure sits with the head of paid service, David Williams and that a wholesale review was last carried out around 10 years ago.

**RESOLVED that the Committee**

- (1) **Approved the Pay Policy Statement attached as Appendix 1, to go forward for approval by the Full Council prior to 31 March 2020.**
- (2) **Subject to Employment Committee approval to continue to pay the Living Wage Rate as recommended by the Living Wage Foundation, that Members approve a revision in the report and Appendix 1 to reflect the Living Wage rate increase to £9.30 per hour with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and for this to be published prior to the deadline date of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**
- (3) **Requested a report to be brought to the Committee on the use of market supplements at Portsmouth City Council**

## **7. EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY (AI 7) (TAKE IN REPORT)**

Natasha Edmunds introduced the report. She explained that

- Just under half of employees had responded to the survey.
- By and large there had been improvements since the survey was last done
- There had been a slight decrease in the number of staff who believed their work made a positive difference
- Staff were more positive about their work/life balance
- The survey responses to the questions about whether the Council manages change effectively and whether the Council listens and responds to staff comments, received the lowest number of positive responses

There were some gaps in the survey given that just over half of employees had not responded so their views could not be included.

The survey provides a snapshot in time. Each directorate has been provided with their specific results and produce action plans to address the findings. However there is no corporate reporting.

The intention for the future is to

- Look at the survey design - evidence shows that the longer a survey is, the less likely employees are to complete it
- Include questions about levels of engagement as evidence suggests that the more engaged the staff are, the more likely they are to be motivated and certain statistics such as sickness absence levels tend to decrease.
- Try to capture information about protected characteristics so that PCC can react positively to those findings.

During discussion

- It was confirmed that the complete results of the survey were included on the Intranet
- With regard to the action plans prepared by each directorate, there is no requirement at present to share these across other directorates but the Director of Corporate Services said she was hoping to change this. She committed to include in the future surveys section of the action plan a commitment to look at all feedback from the various directorates centrally.
- For Corporate Services there are meetings to discuss and co- produce the action plan.
- The reduction in positive responses in relation to flexible working could be as a result of the relevant technology not being available to support it or it could be down to the attitude of some managers. A meeting is due to take place with directors next week to look at increasing flexible working.

- In the summary, it was confirmed that the percentage findings relate to all the responses received - not by directorate. Each director has their own responses though.
- With regard to how PCC can make its staff feel valued, it was confirmed that feedback is very important. One of the factors in low participation in surveys is that it suggests staff don't feel they will be listened to or that their views won't be acted upon. Transport have already developed a set of organisational values to help with this as have Adult Services and the Council is looking to extend these across the Council.

## **RESOLVED that Members**

- (1) Note the findings of the survey**
- (2) Note the actions being undertaken to address issues raised**
- (3) Note the actions being taken for future surveys**

### **8. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT (AI 8) (TAKE IN REPORT)**

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report explaining that The Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations came into force in March 2017. The regulations applied to all employers with 250 or more employees on the snapshot date of 31<sup>st</sup> March (for Public Sector employers). Therefore, the authority is required to publish its gender pay gap for each year and publish this information on its website, and on the central Government website, no later than 30<sup>th</sup> March of the following year.

The National context is set out in section 3 of the report. Members had previously asked for additional information - a breakdown of the workforce profile by age, gender and whether full time or part time - and this had been included in the appendix to the report. The negative values indicate the extent to which females earn, on average, **more** per hour than their male counterparts

The City Council is trying to focus more broadly than the gender pay gap to include trying to avoid discrimination against those with protected characteristics.

During discussion

- The table at 3.3.7 showed that 20.12% of females in the 22-29 age bracket earned on average more per hour than their male counterparts but it was not possible to say whether that was as a result of females being better qualified or as a reaction to the pay gap as that data was not currently collected.
- In light of the tables showing that females earned on average more per hour than their male counterparts, members agreed that the wording of the action plan at point 13 should be amended to reflect the evidence collected. There should not be an emphasis on attracting female applicants as opposed to male applicants, but on trying to attract a diverse range of applicants. This was agreed. The first column of the action plan at point 13 to be amended to read "*Continue to find ways to maximise the number of applications from a diverse range of*

*applicants. Closer working with universities and schools to promote traditionally male dominated careers to all genders"*

- A discussion took place about the information given in section 3.6 of the report. It was confirmed that PCC does not make bonus payments as such - these are honorarium payments. Members said that the report shows that certain issues need more work to be done in order to address them. Currently the work force is disproportionately older, disproportionately female and disproportionately part time. There seems to be issues re pay gaps in certain areas and there does seem to be a need to do more work to identify why there is a reverse pay gap in the 22 to 29 age range.
- One member commented on the national policy. He said that positive discrimination in favour of women is widespread but in fact many men are discriminated against and are not treated fairly.

Natasha Edmunds said that the purpose of doing the workforce profile work is to get a greater level of granularity. Currently there are no statistics around the applicants for jobs. She said that there is a need to attract applicants from a broad spectrum of the labour market and the work that is underway should inform action plans to encourage applications from a diverse group of people.

In response to a query about information being fed back nationally, it was confirmed that there are currently only 2 categories - male or female. PCC is asking that this be looked at in future in case further categories are needed. It was confirmed that staff do have the option of "preferring not to say" when asked questions about their gender.

**RESOLVED that the Employment Committee:**

- (1) Noted the key findings of the Gender Pay Gap Report 2019 (Appendix 1).**
- (2) Agreed the action plan as set out in Appendix 1 of the Gender Pay Gap report subject to the amended wording in item 13.**

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Chair