

## **EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday, 22 September 2020 at 1.00 pm as a Virtual Remote Meeting.

### **Present**

Councillor Ben Dowling (in the chair)  
Councillor Donna Jones (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Matthew Atkins  
Councillor Cal Corkery  
Councillor Darren Sanders  
Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE

### **Officers Present**

David Williams Chief Executive  
Natasha Edmunds, Director Corporate Services  
Rochelle Kneller, Assistant Director HR  
Shaun Tetley, Payroll and Pensions Manager  
Sue Page, Finance Manager  
Meredydd Hughes, Assistant Director of Buildings, Housing, Neighbourhood  
and Building Services  
Katie Bale, Health & Safety Manager

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

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of members' interests.

#### **11. Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 March 2020 (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

#### **12. Trade Union Facilities Time (AI 4)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report explaining that The Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations were introduced as part of the Trade Union Act 2016. These regulations place a legislative requirement on "relevant public sector employers" to collate and publish, on an annual basis, a range of data on the amount and cost of facility time within the Council.

She said that the Council previously funded 1 FTE trade union official for each union at a total cost of £75,000 per annum. In April 2017 this funding was

halved to £37,500 per annum. This was reviewed and increased to £75,000 (not £75,500 as mentioned in the report) with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. The reference period is from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 so does not yet take into account the latest increase in funding.

During discussion

- A query was raised as to whether it would be possible to vary the way in which some data were presented as many unionists spend around 7% of their time on union facilities work but they are all bundled into the 1-50%.bracket in the table. Perhaps the table could be broken down into deciles? Otherwise it is misleading as grouping them all in the 1-50% range may suggest members are spending more time than they actually are. Rochelle Kneller explained that the format of the reports and the tables is dictated by central government. However, it was agreed that a further breakdown of the figures would be prepared and sent to members and could be attached to the minutes.
- With regard to the secondment funding and the agreement to reinstate the previous amount, Rochelle Kneller confirmed that this had now been resolved

**RESOLVED that Members**

- (1) Noted the data in Appendix 1 and the fact that the Appendix will be the report published on the PCC website and the Government maintained website currently being developed by the Cabinet Office**
- (2) Noted that the data will be included in any relevant Annual Report and Accounts that are published by PCC.**

**13. Sickness Absence (AI 5)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report advising that the sickness absence levels were the lowest they had been for some time. Although it is a little early to draw definite conclusions, there does seem to be a correlation (taking into account comments made in the Employee Opinion Survey) between the improvement in sickness absence levels and flexible and home working. Section 3 of the report shows this quarter's sickness absence figures compared to the last quarter (June 2020):

Appendix 1 shows absence levels by directorates for the period from September 2019 to September 2020.

Appendix 2 shows a summary of reasons for sickness absence for the last year.

There has been a heavy focus on wellbeing and all the work being done on that is included in the report in section 4. The aim is to reach as many people as possible and the Employee Opinion Survey comments suggested that employees were appreciative of the initiatives.

Members commented that the decrease in sickness absence is welcome and quite surprising in the midst of a pandemic and this could be as a result of increased flexibility and home working. However, there are some areas where the changed working arrangements present challenges and there is a

need to make sure that work is being fully completed as there are backlogs in some areas.

**RESOLVED that Members**

- (1) Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism**
- (2) Noted the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance.**
- (3) Noted the additional wellbeing activities specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.**
- (4) Noted the reduction in absence levels across the organisation**

**14. Reward and Recognition (AI 6)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report and advised that discussions on this matter had been ongoing with the trades unions. There had been a very positive response to the Covid 19 pandemic from staff and the wider community and the recommendations reflect the desire to recognise the contribution made by the whole community. Guidance about what can be done and when would be taken from public health colleagues.

The huge financial implications of Covid 19 mean that any reward and recognition has to be affordable. In addition the City Council has to be in line with those with whom we have been working in partnership such as other authorities and the Health Service. She added that matters had evolved since the recommendations in the report were drafted and agreed that there were timing issues to be addressed.

The Chair advised that a deputation had been received on this item from Unite the Union and this was read out and can be heard in full by accessing the recording at the following link

<https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785/employment-22sep2020>

The Chair thanked Unite the Union for their deputation

During discussion the following matters were raised

- In response to a query about whether it is possible to recycle job retention scheme money as suggested in the deputation, David Williams said he would need to investigate this with the unions and would come back to the committee about that.
- David Williams also advised that the Honoraria Scheme was not designed for situations such as Covid 19 so would not be appropriate to use.
- David Williams expressed his sincere thanks to all staff across the Council and said their response had been phenomenal. However, he said that trying to pick out some staff to reward and not others would be divisive as staff are interdependent. He expressed pride in the achievements of staff. He also said that everyone needs to recognise that we are nowhere near the end of this crisis.
- Members of the committee agreed and consideration and discussion then took place about changing the recommendations in the report and suggestions were made about alternative ways of recognising and rewarding people.

- Members were reminded that Council had already agreed that a Coronavirus Civic Award would be awarded in May 2021 (or when safe to do so)

It was proposed by Councillor Ben Dowling  
Seconded by Councillor Darren Sanders

That the original recommendations in the report be replaced by the following  
"That Members

- (1) Recommend that PCC looks at how it celebrates publicly the outstanding services and efforts that council officers are continuing to make during the ongoing pandemic
- (2) Request a report to come to the next Employment Committee on reward and recognition as a whole across the City Council and the systems that are in place
- (3) Request further investigation into a variety of options for reward and recognition in relation to efforts made as a result of the pandemic, not discounting arranging an awards ceremony when it is safe to do so."

These were agreed by assent.

#### **RESOLVED that Members**

- (1) Recommend that PCC looks at how it celebrates publicly the outstanding services and efforts that council officers are continuing to make during the ongoing pandemic**
- (2) Request a report to come to the next Employment Committee on reward and recognition as a whole across the City Council and the systems that are in place**
- (3) Request further investigation into a variety of options for reward and recognition in relation to efforts made as a result of the pandemic, not discounting arranging an awards ceremony when it is safe to do so.**

#### **15. Health and Safety Information report (AI 7)**

(TAKE IN REPORT for information)

Meredydd Hughes presented the report which comes to this Committee annually to update it on Portsmouth City Council's Health and Safety performance. This report covers the period from 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020.

Mr Hughes then introduced Katie Bale, the recently appointed Health & Safety Manager. He thanked the Health & Safety Team for all their work over the last 18 months.

Mr Hughes advised that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have actively engaged with Portsmouth City Council during this reporting period, via planned UK interventions, unannounced site inspections (building sites/refurbishment projects managed by the council), telephone/email queries (associated with RIDDOR/Non RIDDOR accident reports and customer complaints/queries) - all of which resulted in favourable outcomes confirming

compliance with law and Portsmouth City Council's positive approach to health and safety management.

Although the Covid 19 pandemic began at the end of this reporting period and will be reported on more fully next year, the Health & Safety Team has proactively engaged with internal and external stakeholders to meet the new challenges and is continuing to do so.

Appendix 1 summarises the work undertaken during 2019/20.

Appendix 2 shows the Action Plan 2020/21.

Mr Hughes advised that part of the new Health & Safety Manager's role will be to build on and amend the Action Plan and next year's report is likely to be in a different format.

The Chair thanked Mr Hughes for his report and welcomed Katie Bale to the City Council on behalf of the Committee.

During discussion

- It was confirmed that before the pandemic, the Health & Safety team engaged with unions as part of the health and well-being forum quarterly meetings. Since the pandemic these meetings were initially held weekly, then every fortnight and are now monthly and are attended by the Unions, Facilities and Human Resources. The meetings are very useful as all parties are updated and plans can be shared. Working relationships within the group are very good.
- A great deal of interim guidance has been produced with the involvement of the unions which has been helpful and also many risk assessments.
- Members were pleased about the positive outcomes that have resulted in these groups working so well together.

**RESOLVED that the Committee**

**(1) Noted the 2020/21 H&S Team Corporate action plan**

**(2) Noted the appointment of the new Health and Safety Manager and endorsed the opportunity for the manager to review the annual health and safety reporting requirements for the Employment Committee**

## **16. Foundation Living Wage Accreditation (AI 8)**

(TAKE IN REPORT)

(The Chair agreed to vary the order of the agenda so that this item was debated immediately after item 4 but has been kept in its original place for ease of reference.)

Rochelle Kneller introduced the report and explained that PCC has confirmed its commitment to paying all its directly employed staff the Foundation Living Wage (FLW). The committee also asked for PCC to look into becoming an

accredited FLW employer. This means that all PCC's contractors and their contractors have to pay the FLW. This work has not progressed as quickly as had been hoped owing to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Natasha Edmunds explained that some work had been carried out from a procurement point of view, but PCC would need to assess more than 650 contractors. Also the likelihood of costs being handed on to the council to pay is high. Costs for the Residential and Domiciliary Care contracts alone are expected to increase by an estimated £2m.

Once the assessment of the 650 contractors had been carried out, the changes would be applied at the point of renewal or re-tender - so there would not be an immediate effect. Currently contracts are typically awarded for 3 years with an option to extend for a further 2 years but this is moving to awarding contracts for 5 years. PFI contracts are over much longer periods and would be difficult to renegotiate on the cost base. Costs are likely to be substantial and would have budget implications. Currently the capacity of those PCC would have to contact is being taken up mainly by Covid related matters and they may not be able to respond quickly.

Gaining Living Wage Foundation accreditation typically takes around 3 years. Natasha Edmunds suggested that an initial piece of work should be carried out to understand fully the financial implications.

Two deputations had been received which were read out.

The first was from Unite the Union.

The second was from Sue Mullan on behalf of the Hampshire Equality Group.

The deputations can be heard in full at the following link

<https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785/employment-22sep2020>

During discussion

- The committee agreed it would be useful for a working group to be set up to work on gaining accreditation as a Living Wage Foundation Employer and that the committee would make a recommendation to Cabinet to that effect.
- A member expressed disappointment that PCC had not already contacted all the organisations where we have a contract to ask what the real effect would be of moving to the foundation living wage with everyone involved being paid for by PCC. The member hoped that this piece of work could be moved forward quickly to obtain the information needed so that progress could be made on actual information rather than supposition. Another member suggested it was likely that the Covid 19 pandemic would mean that resources are likely to be stretched and that organisations would be unable to respond as quickly as usual.
- It was agreed that an update on progress made towards becoming a Living Wage accredited employer would be included on all Employment Committee agendas until PCC had achieved accreditation.
- The committee agreed that the aspiration to become a Living Wage accredited employer was good to have, but had differing views on whether it would be affordable.
- It was confirmed that accreditation could be given if there is a clear road map towards ensuring contracts will be renegotiated.

Following discussion, the committee agreed recommendations 1 - 4 of the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Darren Sanders, seconded by Councillor Vernon-Jackson to add recommendation 5 to say

**"The committee recommends to Cabinet that a Working Group is established setting out a more accurate cost and timetable to become a Living Wage Accredited Employer"**

As an amendment it was proposed by Councillor Jones, seconded by Councillor Atkins

that additional wording be added to the end of the proposal **" with their report completed by the end of January 2021 in time for the budget."**

Councillor Sanders agreed to subsume that wording into his original proposal.

It was proposed by Councillor Vernon-Jackson seconded by Councillor Darren Sanders to add recommendation 6 to say **"That the City Council reaffirms its intention to become an accredited Living Wage Foundation Employer"**

Upon being put to the vote, each of the proposals was CARRIED

**RESOLVED that**

- (1) The committee noted the requirements associated with becoming an accredited FLW employer**
- (2) The committee noted that to become fully accredited, there is a requirement for the Council's contractors and their sub-contractors to pay their employees the FLW, which would likely be passed on to the Council**
- (3) The committee noted that to quantify the likely cost, a detailed review of over 650 contracts would need to be undertaken which could include writing to contractors and sub-contractors to determine the extent to which adopting the FLW would lead to a pass through of costs**
- (4) The committee noted that some of the contracts most likely to be affected are in the Care Sector and it is estimated that the uplift in cost for Residential and Domiciliary Care would amount to circa £2m per annum, which is currently beyond the cash limit for Adult Social Care**
- (5) The committee recommends to Cabinet that a Working Group is**

**established setting out a more accurate cost and timetable to become a Living Wage Accredited Employer with their report completed by the end of January 2021 in time for the budget.**  
**(6) The City Council reaffirms its intention to become an accredited Living Wage Foundation Employer.**

**17. Employee Opinion Survey (AI 9)**

(Councillor Jones apologised for having to leave at this point)

(TAKE IN REPORT information only)

.Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services, introduced the report. She explained that it had not been intended to hold another Employee Opinion Survey so soon after the last one, but it was important to engage with staff to gauge response to the impact of Covid 19.

The report advises members of the results of the Employee Opinion Survey (the survey) undertaken during May and June 2020 about the impact of Covid 19 and actions being taken by PCC as a result of the findings.

She advised that the response rate was 56% which is one of the highest in recent years. She highlighted some of the key findings.

- 81% of respondents felt proud to work for the City Council
- There was a high level of confidence in leadership at all levels
- Respondents felt supported and said there was clear work direction.

Responses to questions about Inhibitors to productivity included

- IT equipment, such as needing additional screens, keyboards etc
- General equipment related to home working such as chairs
- Anxiety relating to the pandemic
- Changes to working practices as a result of the pandemic

However overall the responses were mainly positive.

The final section of the survey asked what respondents considered PCC should be focusing on. Responses are included in section 6 of the report.

During discussion

- Members said they were impressed by the response figures and the confidence in leadership. They were also pleased with the positivity across the Council and collaborative working.
- Members noted the work that has been done to ensure that the Civic Offices is a good and productive working environment
- Members noted that the IT investment prior to Covid 19 has paid off hugely enabling flexible working.

**RESOLVED to note the survey findings and actions being taken.**

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting concluded at 2.45 pm.

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Councillor Ben Dowling  
Chair