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EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Employment Committee held on Tuesday, 23 November 2021 at 12.00 pm at the Council Chamber - The Guildhall

Present

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE (in the chair)
Councillor Simon Boshier (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Cal Corkery
Councillor Lewis Gosling
Councillor Darren Sanders
Councillor Jeanette Smith

Officers Present

Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services
Andy Biddle, Director of Adult Social Care
Peter Budd, Assistant Director of HR
Richard Lock, Procurement Manager
Susan Page, Finance Manager

21. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

No apologies for absence had been received.

22. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Cal Corkery declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in all items as he was a member and paid official of a union.

Councillor Jeanette Smith declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in all items as a paid official of Unison.

23. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 (AI 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 September 2021 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

As matters arising the committee requested:

- (i) A report without a defined recommendation be considered at a future meeting in respect of exploring best practice for member involvement in the recruitment of Assistant Directors; and
- (ii) Regular information reports be produced on recruitment to senior posts, market conditions and any particular challenges to recruitment.

24. Living Wage Accreditation - Progress Update Report (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services and Richard Lock, Procurement Manager, introduced the report which updated the Committee on progress made towards becoming an accredited Living Wage employer.

It was proposed that a special meeting of the Employment Committee be held in January 2022 to enable time for a full financial appraisal to be undertaken incorporating the announcement made the previous week by the Living Wage Foundation that the Real Living Wage would increase to £9.90 from April 2022.

From a procurement perspective the committee was advised that engagement with suppliers had been undertaken with a particular focus on adult social care. 40 responses had been received from the 200 suppliers contacted, half of whom seemed to already be paying the current living wage of £9.50 despite most not being accredited Real Living Wage suppliers.

The feedback received from suppliers indicated that they would generally support the Real Living Wage but due to existing financial pressures would condition that any increased costs would be covered by the council. There were also concerns about a two-tier workforce, as a number of suppliers also had contracts with Hampshire County Council who had not indicated that they were considering implementing the Real Living Wage.

Suppliers did however see the benefit with the recruitment, morale and retention of staff and some savings could potentially be realised if these factors reduced the reliance on agency staff.

The next step was to complete the financial analysis currently underway with the data received and factoring in the increase of the Real Living Wage to £9.90 from April 2022.

Andy Biddle, Director of Adult Social Care, explained the Government's Care Cost Cap which from October 2023 would enable private individuals to approach local authorities to access care at local authority rates. This national context was a concern as it in itself could threaten the viability of some providers and increase care costs. This would be in addition to the budget pressures that implementing the Real Living Wage would generate.

In response to questions the committee was advised:

The handing back of contracts was not a lot as large a problem in Portsmouth as other areas. Portsmouth City Council had seen one small provider exit and two had handed some elements back.

The figure of £3.2 million in the previous report had been based upon a real living wage of £9.50. Costings for the new real living wage of £9.90 had not yet been undertaken.

Officers agreed to find out the number of recently awarded contracts where the supplier had committed to paying the real living wage, however all contracts had a social value score and the suppliers' awarded contracts for the new cruise terminal had all committed to paying the Real living Wage.

Should the Council commit to the Real Living Wage it was not believed that this would impact on the weekend overtime rate. The Council would also not be committed to recompense suppliers for maintaining the differential between those benefitting from the uplift to the Real Living Wage and those in more senior positions. It was recognised that this might cause issues as it could bring the carers salaries close to the salaries of supervisors.

During discussion, it was requested that the peer review include Cornwall Council, Lancashire County Council and London Borough of Hounslow Council.

The committee was keen for the Council to achieve Real Living Wage accreditation, however acknowledged the financial pressures and the need to be realistic about budgets.

Following the discussion it was RESOLVED that:

- (i) A special meeting of the Employment Committee be held in January 2022, with an informal briefing prior to allow for a detailed financial analysis to be completed so the financial impact of seeking accreditation from the forthcoming financial year can be understood; and**
- (ii) the update be noted.**

25. Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report (AI 5)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Peter Budd, Assistant Director of HR introduced the report which updated the committee on the levels of sickness absence across the council and the actions being taken to manage absence and promote employee wellbeing.

The committee was advised that the sickness absence had decreased slightly in the past quarter, with an average of 9.03 days per person per year. Long term sickness had decreased slightly, whilst short term sickness had increased slightly. Psychological issues were the highest reason for sickness absence with Coronavirus second.

The committee was pleased to see a decrease, although noted that hybrid working was likely to be a contributory factor and there was a risk that employees continue working rather than resting if unwell.

Concern was raised that 2,076 days had been lost due to work related psychological reasons and in response the measures that the council had

implemented to address this were detailed. These included an increase in the number of Wellbeing Champions and an enhanced training offer for managers and supervisors on managing wellbeing in a hybrid team.

RESOLVED that the Employment Committee:

(i) Continues to monitor sickness absence and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism.

(ii) Notes the additional wellbeing activities specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic; and

(iii) Notes the change in absence levels across the organisation.

26. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Chairman noted that this and the subsequent reports on the agenda had been included on the agenda for information and would be considered by the Cabinet Member for Communities & Central Services at an upcoming Cabinet member decision meeting.

RESOLVED that the Employment Committee noted the contents of the report and endorsed the planned activity to enhance and embed the council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

27. Workforce Profile (AI 7)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The committee considered the report which presented the workforce profiles for 2019 and 2020 and outlined how this data would be used going forward.

In response to questions the committee was advised that the Gender Pay Gap report would be published as usual in March and would include demographic data about the workforce. In respect of the low number of BAME employees and employees with disabilities working at the council the committee was advised that work was underway to understand whether there were any barriers to employment which needed to be addressed.

RESOLVED that the committee noted the contents of the report, the attached workforce profile, the key actions and next steps.

28. Future Working Arrangements (Connectivity Project) (AI 8)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services, introduced the report which provided an update on the emerging Connectivity Programme that was tasked with delivering projects to support and enable the council's new ways of working.

The Connectivity Programme had a focus on modernising technology and phase one related to changes to the Civic Offices to standardise IT and office equipment, the implementation of a resource booking system and the implementation of hybrid meeting rooms.

In response to questions regarding the process and the governance around the allocation of the £1.3m funding for the project it was explained that this money was a grant from the Department for Health & Social Care Contain Outbreak Management Fund and had been secured via the Public Health Protection Board.

RESOLVED that the committee:

- (i) **Noted the progress made to date and the upcoming work that will be delivered by the Connectivity Programme.**

The meeting concluded at 1.47 pm.

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE
Chair

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