

HR Policy Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the HR Policy Committee held on Monday 18 September 2017 at 2.00pm in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

Councillors (Committee members present):

Cllr Groskop (Chairman)
Cllr Chilcott
Cllr Ham
Cllr Leyshon
Cllr Oliver

Apologies: Cllr Redman

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the first meeting of the Committee in the new quadrennium.

2 Declarations of Interest– agenda item 2

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 Public Question Time – agenda item 3

3.0 The Chairman noted that a member of the public had indicated they wished to ask some questions and she invited Mr Nigel Behan, of the UNITE Trade Union, to speak and he asked the following:

Firstly what lobbying will SCC undertake regionally and nationally to secure the means to provide pay rises in Local Government that are not real term pay cuts? and what steps and measures will be taken by SCC to inform the LGA of the difficulties of recruitment and retention in Local Government?

Secondly he noted there was a SW regional “Green Book” meeting on Wednesday which, amongst other issues, would be considering pay in Local Government – what contributions would SCC make to the discussion?

Lastly he asked what strategies, plans and actions were being considered to make SCC an employer of choice?

3.1 In response the Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR & OD) Director spoke about the activity being undertaken by the Council on various fronts to lobby, which included Officers being part of a national group looking at pay spine points and Cabinet Members engaging with Ministers and civil servants to make the case for greater funding. The Council was committed to working with a variety of partners including other local authorities to maximise the influence on the government. The Council was also committed to working with other Local Authorities to address various issues concerning employment across the sector.

On the topic of making the Council an attractive employer it was stated that the Council had made good progress in recent years to improve the overall offer for employees, including staff reward schemes and initiatives with other agencies. The Council was interested to learn from its employees and ran regular staff surveys and also the Learning and Development

website saw staff completing around 1,000 modules each month. The Council had also had success with its apprenticeship and graduate schemes and the Director was personally very interested in transforming the culture within the Council and seeking improvements.

The Chairman thanked Mr Behan for his questions and the Director for his responses, and she encouraged the Trade Unions to seek greater engagement amongst staff and to utilise available training options.

4 Pay Review in Somerset – agenda item 4

4.0 The Committee considered this report, introduced by the Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR & OD) Director that set out the current position regarding pay negotiations in Somerset. There was a question about the Appendix to the report and the number of staff the Council employed at each pay/spine point and it was agreed to circulate this answer to Members of the Committee.

4.1 It was reported that appropriate pay provisions for staff are fundamental to the delivery of the Council's objectives and services as set out in the County Plan. Members noted that Council operates a 17 grade pay structure and that grades from 17 up to 9 contain a number of pay increments. In addition grades 8 and upwards, contain a single pay point per grade. Overall the Council's Pay and Grading structure incorporates National Pay Points up to spinal column point 44 and locally determined pay points above.

4.2 Attention turned to the requisitioned item raised at the July Council meeting that asked the Committee to review the level of staff pay awards and report its findings to the November Council meeting. It was reported that annual pay awards were determined by national agreement and the National Joint Council consisted of the Trade Unions that represented the employee side and the Local Government Association (LGA) for the employer side.

4.3 Members noted that each year the Council agreed a Pay Policy Statement which confirmed its policies on staff pay and reward and it would also consider any recommendations from the Committee. As part of this annual process Committee members keep under review the impact of national pay bargaining on the advice of officers. As part of these reviews the Council had considered previously and decided not to withdraw from national pay bargaining.

4.4 There was a question about the on-going pay spine review because it would not be fit for purpose once the National Living Wage reached the £9 per hour mark in April 2019. It was stated that work was underway to manage the bottom points that would fall below this level and also the differentials throughout the spine that recognised the differing levels of responsibility that employees undertook.

4.5 In response to a question it was stated that the Council is represented on the national group run by the LGA. This was judged to be advantageous as

if the Council's pay spine points did not match the national picture, there would be significant work involved in formulating and agreeing a bespoke Somerset version whilst also meeting equalities requirements.

- 4.6 There was a discussion about the merits of remaining as part of the national bargaining arrangements and it was stated that remaining part of the national pay arrangements would allow the Council to benefit from the collective resource allocated to the process which took into account the appropriate consultation requirements, legal considerations and financial modelling.
- 4.7 Members then noted that there would be significant implications involved in withdrawing from the national pay arrangements. The key implications of such a move would be securing the necessary dedicated resources to manage the negotiation process; legal considerations related to the decision making; and balancing pay against jobs within the budget i.e. more jobs at lower pay or less jobs at higher pay. In summary it was noted that the risks associated with the current system were known and manageable. Any changes to the current system would need to be carefully considered to ensure the Council was not exposed to unnecessary challenge from an equalities perspective, did not commit to an unaffordable pay system and had sufficiently robust systems in place to manage any new elements.
- 4.8 The Committee agreed having carefully considered the current arrangements that the most effective way currently to ensure that the Council had adequate staff pay awards and was protected from challenge and met its obligations appropriately would be to remain part of the national bargaining arrangements. This would also help to ensure that the on-going pay spine review reflected national arrangements.

5 **Disclosure Policy** – agenda item 5

- 5.0 The Committee considered this report about the proposed Disclosure Policy that would consolidate the Council's current guidance and processes in relation to the disclosure of criminal records. It would also complement and expand on the current Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy, which set out the circumstances in which the Council would be allowed by law to request full criminal disclosure.
- 5.1 Members heard that the new policy explained how the Council would make effective use of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in recruitment to safeguard the children and vulnerable adults who access services. It would also outline how the Council will comply with the Cabinet Office Baseline Personnel Security Standards for employees that access the Public Services Network.
- 5.2 In response to a question it was stated that the policy also provided an explanation of eligibility and the different types of disclosure and checks against 'barred lists' and when they should be used, expectations of employees whose post would be covered by DBS eligibility criteria and

procedures for dealing with disclosure checks and disclosure certificates.

- 5.3 It was reported that over the last decade there had been many changes in the legislation and that the Council had complied with these through the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy and by constantly updating its processes and guidance. Over recent years the scale of change had stabilised and it therefore was an appropriate time to consolidate current guidance and processes into a formal policy not least because the DBS would be commencing compliance inspections.
- 5.4 In response to a question it was noted that the Disclosure team comprised 4 employees and the Council, as a registered body, acted as an umbrella body for other external organisations to administer DBS checks. It was noted that the Council charged £12 per application; this amount was felt appropriate to recover costs and ensure an efficient service was provided for those organisations wanting to process their applications.
- 5.5 The Committee agreed to accept the new Disclosure Policy.
- 6 **Any other urgent items of business** – agenda item 6
- 6.0 The Chairman thanked those present for attending the meeting.

The meeting closed at 2.45 pm

CHAIRMAN