

HR POLICY COMMITTEE (VIRTUAL MEETINGS FROM JUNE 2020 DUE TO CORONAVIRUS)

Minutes of a Meeting of the HR Policy Committee (virtual meetings from June 2020 due to Coronavirus) held in the Library Meeting Room, Taunton Library, on Tuesday 21 January 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present: Cllr M Chilcott (Chairman), Cllr A Groskop, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr L Redman and Cllr W Wallace.

Other Members present:

Apologies for absence: Cllr P Ham

7 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations made.

8 Minutes from the previous meeting - 21 January 2019 - Agenda Item 3

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting were correct and the Chair signed them.

9 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

The Chair referred to questions received from Mr Nigel Behan, of the Unite trade Union, that related to Item 7 Pensions Discretion

Q1 Has the Council compiled data, to date, on the application of Discretion by service area, grade, gender etc so as to ensure "discretion" is applied fairly and appropriately?

Q2 Will an Equality Impact Assessment be conducted to accompany these proposals (and reviews and monitored etc.)?

Q3 It was noted (in Our Somerset - 2nd January 2020) that "The Officer Code of Conduct is intended to be considered at HR Policy Committee during January ahead of its planned adoption in February 2020." It was discussed at the Constitutions and Standards Committee on 8th January but does not appear on the Agenda of this meeting. Will it be discussed at the next HR Policy Committee?

The questions were noted and it was agreed that a written response would be sent to Mr Behan.

In response to Question 1 it was explained that Flexible retirement became an option in 2007 and data had been collected since 2014. In 2016 and 2019 the Council had not declined applications. There had been no more than one application declined in other years. There were no discernible/identifiable

trends around the service area/grade and/or gender. 2014 had seen 30 applications with 1 declined, with 8 applications last year.

In response to Question 2 it was explained that these were introduced after the introduction of the flexible retirement policy. This had not subsequently been revisited and to date there had not been an issue to cause concern.

Regarding Question 3 it was noted that a supplementary agenda for the meeting had been published which had included a for information agenda item regarding the Officer Code of Conduct.

10 **Pay Policy Statement 2020-2021 - Agenda Item 5**

The Committee considered this report that set out proposed amendments to the Pay Policy Statement (PPS) for 2020/21. It was noted that the amendments were minor and mainly related to date changes.

In response to a question it was stated that the Local Government Association (LGA) had undertaken a series of regional briefings in September 2019 and found that most Councils had budgeted for 2% pay rises although a few had budgeted up to 3%. Somerset had budgeted for 2.75% to match the Teachers pay rise agreed earlier in 2019 and concerns were expressed nationally about the affordability of more than 2%. It was further noted that the minimum wage stood at £8.72 p/hr and the lowest rate paid by the Council was £9 p/hr. Staff pay award negotiations were ongoing.

An overview was provided on the Council's current mental health policy, and well-being strategy, and the current quarter had been dedicated to 'every mind matters', to help raise awareness of mental health issues and to encourage openness and conversation about it to help everyone involved. It was noted Elected Memembrs had many conversations/experiences that could led to mental health issues, and it was asked if things available/provided for staff be replicated for Elected Members and the Director agreed to consider this issue.

The Committee agreed unanimously to:

1. To recommend the Council to approve the Pay Policy Statement for the Council for 2020-21, attached as Appendix A to the report, to have effect from 1 April 2020;
2. To note the revised National Living Wage rate from 1st April 2020
3. To note the proposals from the staff side tabled on 24 July 2019;
4. To give consideration to the Grades 1-3 pay increase in relation to the national Green Book pay negotiations which were expected to resume early in 2020 – and for those to be considered at a future meeting.

11 **Officer Appeals Policy - Agenda Item 6**

The Committee considered this report that set out proposed amendments to the Member Appeals Procedure. The amendments were generally minor and mainly relate to clarification of responsibilities. The only significant change related to the re-ordering of the procedure so that to the employee or their representative set out their grounds for appeal first.

There was a brief discussion of the proposed changes and it was explained that a letter to the appellant would provide reasons for the decision and a full note of the meeting (not verbatim but approved by both parties) would be provided to enable understanding and enable further action. Appellants would also be provided with the policy in advance to ensure they understood how the process worked.

The Committee unanimously agreed the amendments in their entirety.

12 **Pensions Discretions Policy - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee considered this report that provided details on a number of proposed amendments to the Council's Pensions Discretions Policy. There was a brief discussion of the report and an explanation of the 85-year rule was provided, meaning the combination of age and length of service for an individual.

There was a discussion about flexible retirement and it was noted it was already offered and used however the requirement had to be specific about the period and the reduction should the offer be taken up, and agreement on the expectation it would happen. In allowing the Flexible Retirement discretion the Council was required to state the minimum requirements in its Discretions Policy.

The Committee agreed, unanimously to:

Adopt the Flexible Retirement amendments/additions to both the discretions policy and flexible retirement policy;

Not apply the 85-year rule discretion to deferred benefits and update deferred pensions policy to reflect this;

Include discretion on employee contribution bands; and to

Review how /when to make future updates.

13 **Overview and Update - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee received a wide ranging overview of the work of the HR and OD team and how they worked to improve positively on service outcomes within budget for a range of statutory activities and mandatory activities.

An overview was provided of a number of projects that demonstrated a commitment to improving the Council so that it would become an employer-

of-choice and offered improved support for colleagues as they experience different 'stages' in their lives. Examples of this activity in 2019-20 included: Menopause Cafes and guidance for staff & managers; Time to Talk day; Signing of Domestic Abuse Charter with trade unions; Yammer 'shout-out' days – praise for colleagues; Young People's Conference (January 2020); Pensions' and staff benefits' roadshows.

It was noted that the budget for the HR-OD service area had been reduced by 40% since 2015 and this has necessitated a number of changes, in terms of delivery of services, but also reductions in spend on areas such as learning & development. The service relies on income generation from external clients, with over £1 million generated and in practical terms, this covered the cost of HR Administration & Payroll services to SCC.

The service has delivered its savings targets since 2015 and over-delivered in the subsequent years. This has resulted in pressures within the service and what it could deliver, however the Director stated he was confident that those risks were managed appropriately. If additional resource was required to support organisational priorities, then this will be procured accordingly based on business-cases requirements.

In response to a question it was noted that the principle risk the Director was concerned about was the development of staff at the Council, to provide attractive & fulfilling careers, to enable and support transformation and service area priorities and to minimise succession planning risks. The establishment of a 'Workforce Reserve' would help to mitigate this, enabling focused development of staff that would be overseen by the Workforce Boards for each service area.

There was a brief discussion about the new corporate logo and the Committee welcomed the new logo and noted that was an 'in-house' design and they asked for their appreciation and thanks to be forwarded to the officer and their team. The Chair of the Committee thanked the Director for his interesting and informative overview and noted that there was lots to be proud of and it was good to note all that was done for Council staff.

14 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 9

There were no other items of business in addition to those noted on the supplementary agenda.

15 AOB - Officer Code of Conduct - Agenda Item 10

The Committee received this report, for information, as it had recently been approved by the Standards and Constitution Committee. The report provided details of the Officer Code of Conduct which helped employees support the

Council's aim to provide high quality services fairly and efficiently in line with its values of listening, responsibility, trust and respect.

It was noted that the Code would apply to all Council employees (except school staff who are subject to their own requirements) undertaking their duties on behalf of the Council and when representing the Council on external boards, committees, etc. The Officer Code of Conduct was noted.

There was a brief discussion concerning protocol about recording of meetings, particularly malicious recording and the subsequent use of recordings. The Governance Specialist undertook to raise this issue with the Council's Monitoring Officer.

16 AOB - Future of the HR Policy Committee Discussion - Agenda Item 11

The Chair of the Committee invited the Director of HR and OD to update the Committee and he explained that discussions were on-going, as part of the Council's transformation agenda, which included a revised format for the Scrutiny function, and was also considering the most appropriate format for HR and OD matters.

There was a brief discussion and Members requested that the Committee hold meetings only when it had items to consider and not hold meetings for meetings sake. It was noted that neither the Audit Committee or one of the Scrutiny Committees would be a suitable arena for HR and OD matters, as authority to consider those items had been devolved from Full Council to the Committee.

It was suggested and agreed that an update report on this topic would be brought to a future meeting.

(The meeting ended at 3.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN