

# HR Policy Committee

Minutes of a virtual meeting (held under the Coronavirus Regulations 2020) of the HR Policy Committee held on Tuesday 22 September 2020 at 2.00pm

## **Present:**

Cllr M Chilcott (Chair)  
Cllr A Groskop  
Cllr P Ham  
Cllr L Leyshon  
Cllr L Redman

## **Other Members Present:**

Cllr T Munt

## **Officers Present:**

Mr C Squire - Director of HR & Organisational Development  
Mrs V Hayter - Strategic Manager, HR Business Relations

### 17. **Apologies for Absence** - agenda item 1

Cllr William Wallace.

### 18. **Declarations of Interest** - agenda item 2

Reference was made to the following personal interests of the members of the Regulation Committee published in the register of members' interests which was available for public inspection via the Committee Clerk:

Cllr Philip Ham – Mendip District Council  
Cllr Liz Leyshon – Mendip District Council

Cllr Leyshon declared a personal interest by virtue of receiving a local government pension.

### 19. **Minutes** - agenda item 3

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2020 were signed as a correct record.

20. **Public Question Time** - agenda item 4

There were no public questions, statements or petitions.

21. **Changes to Adoption and Fostering Policies** - agenda item 6

The Committee considered a report by the Director of HR & Organisational Development setting out proposed amendments to the County Council's adoption and fostering policies to allow employees additional paid leave to attend the training, assessments and meetings required to become an adoptive parent or foster carer.

The proposals were intended to support the corporate aims of the County Council to increase the number of adoptive parents and foster parents in Somerset while balancing this with the business need to deliver essential services.

The Committee welcomed the proposals which would help to support and encourage staff making a commitment to adoption and fostering and suggested that they could be shared with colleagues in other public bodies.

**RESOLVED:** to adopt the proposed amendments set out in the revised adoption and fostering leave policies appended to the report.

22. **Workforce Planning Policy** - agenda item 7

The Committee considered a report by the Director of HR & Organisational Development setting out a proposed new workforce planning policy.

The policy identified the principles of workforce planning, signposted managers and employees to useful policies, procedures and toolkits to support effective planning and provided transparency for employees on how workforce planning was undertaken by the County Council.

The report covered principles, responsibilities and policy in practice relating to: recruitment and retention; learning and development; succession planning; talent management; and workforce information and establishment control which were explained by the Director.

Discussion points included the importance of:

- the new workforce planning policy and the good practices therein becoming firmly embedded throughout the County Council
- being able to recruit and retain key staff

- staff surveys and independent exit interviews
- there continuing to be an early opportunity for disaffected members of staff to raise matters of concern with someone other than a line manager.

The Director referred to:

- the increasing number of apprentices being recruited (social workers and other key staff) and the high proportion being retained by the County Council
- the possible introduction of a minimum length of service for staff taking degree level vocational qualifications.

Members were assured that there would continue to be a strong focus on the wellbeing and retention of staff.

**RESOLVED:** to adopt the proposed new workforce planning policy set out in the appendix to the report.

### 23. **Restriction to Public Sector Exit Payments** - agenda item 8

The Director of HR & Organisational Development referred to the recent publication of The Restriction of Public Sector Exit Payments Regulations 2020 bringing into force the exit payment cap legislated for in the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act, 2015. The cap was currently set at £95,000 (with no provision for it to be index-linked and all payments related to the exit being included within the scope of the cap).

The Government expected pension schemes, employment contracts and compensation schemes to be amended in line with the introduction of the cap. Further guidance and directions on the operation of the cap and an implementation date were awaited

The Local Government Association had raised concerns about matters including:

- the timing of the regulations - if as expected they were introduced before Government changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme, this could create confusion and increased legal risks and costs for local authorities, inhibit authorities' capacity to complete reorganisations or redundancy exercises and lead to employees continuing to receive full pensions despite the cap
- employees within the scope of the regulations could be earning far less than the Government had suggested

- the regulations inhibiting pension access for some employees earning considerably below the UK average
- the bureaucratic and inefficient nature of the discretionary exemptions process.

During discussion, the Director of HR & Organisational Development noted work to ensure the County Council's business case for the 'One Somerset' unitary option had taken into account the effects of the Restriction of Public Sector Exit Payments Regulations 2020.

The Committee noted the position.

24. **Pay Update** - agenda item 9

Further to the rise in the National Living Wage (NLW) to £8.72 with effect from 1 April 2020 and the Unions' pay claim, the Director of HR & Organisational Development reported that the 2020/21 pay award for Green Book staff had been agreed in August. This involved a flat rate increase of 2.75% for all grades and an additional day's leave for those staff on Grades 17 - 13 who had less than 5 year's service (i.e. those with the lowest leave entitlement). The salary increase, together with back pay due from 1 April 2020, would be included in the September salary payment.

The Director reported that the lowest point on the new pay scale equated to £9.25 per hour which was significantly above the £8.72 NLW wage.

The Director referred to the County Council's policy whereby determination of any salary/cost of living progression for the Chief Executive and members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) was reserved to the HR Policy Committee and accordingly asked the Committee to determine whether the 2.75% pay award should be applied to all officers in Grades 1 -3 (Chief Officers), in line with past practice.

**RESOLVED:** that consideration of the proposed application of the 2020/21 pay award to officers in Grades 1 - 3 be deferred pending the publication of a formal, written report and its consideration at a Special Meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 30 September 2020 (9.00am).

25. **Overview and Update** - agenda item 5

The Director of HR & Organisational Development gave a presentation on 'Full-scale Workforce Mobilisation at Lightning Speed - Compassion and Data' undertaken in response to the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic.

The presentation covered:

*A 'call to arms'* - the first few days; Chief Executive's call to managers to support redeployment to maintain the delivery of critical services; appeal for volunteers for redeployment to nursing homes, registration service, distribution of PPE, ICT and homeworking kit; management systems for monitoring staff attendance and utilising availability and skillsets for redeployment; appeal to furloughed hospitality workers; keys to rapid mobilisation of Adult Social Care and provider workforce; involvement of Trade Unions; Chief Executive's personal appeal had produced results

*'We've got your backing'* - the importance of being and being seen to be on the side of staff; summary of HR activities and Working Well initiative

*Did it work and how did it feel? What staff say* - 90% of staff agreed that the County Council had adapted to meet business need and believed that they had been kept well informed throughout the pandemic; staff comments were very positive.

Discussion points included:

- the exemplary level of co-operation, adaptation and goodwill shown by County council staff during the Covid-19 emergency
- the wide range of valuable Working Well initiatives which had been a main focus for HR & OD staff covering: social activities; physical health and fitness; mental health; and time away from the computer screen etc
- the difficulty of sustaining these intensive activities in the longer term and the establishment of several focus groups on welfare provision and other areas as a way forward
- future models for more flexible working following the epidemic including hybrid working i.e working from both the office and home
- virtual training and offsetting the loss of interaction flowing from office-based working
- the reintroduction of a regular online briefing for all county councillors
- the presentation being made available to all members.

The Chair commented on how proud she was of the continuing, magnificent response by the County Council's workforce to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and Committee members joined her in expressing their appreciation for the hard work being undertaken by staff to maintain vital services during this difficult period.

26. **Any Other Business of Urgency** - agenda item 10

There was no urgent business.

(The meeting ended at 4.00pm)

Chair