

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the HR Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 2.00pm

Present: Cllr L Leyshon (Chair), Cllr A Dingwall, Cllr E Pearlstone, Cllr L Redman, Cllr M Stanton, Cllr T Butt Philip (substitute for Cllr Robbins), Cllr M Chilcott (substitute for Cllr Rodrigues, Cllr D Johnson (substitute for Cllr Kendall), Cllr S Osborne (substitute for Cllr Aujla), Cllr P Seib (substitute for Cllr Wakefield), Cllr H Shearer (substitute Cllr Oakes).

Other Members present: Cllr T Deakin

Committee members attending virtually: Cllr S Wakefield (in person then virtually)

Other members attending virtually: Cllr M Lovell, Cllr T Munt, Cllr R Woods

Absent: Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr M Healey

The meeting started at 2.15pm (delayed start due to overrun of previous meeting).

1. Apologies for absence

Cllr S Aujla (substitute Cllr Osborne), Cllr A Kendall (substitute Cllr Johnson), Cllr G Oakes (substitute Cllr Shearer), Cllr T Robbins (substitute Cllr Butt Philip), Cllr S Wakefield (substitute Cllr Seib), Cllr Rodrigues (substitute Cllr Chilcott), Cllr M Rigby - Lead Member.

2. Declaration of Interest

- a) Cllr Leyshon and Cllr Kendall declared a personal interest as members of the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- b) Cllr Dingwall declared his recent membership of Westonzoyland Parish Councils.

3. Public Question Time

There were no public questions, statements, or petitions.

4. Organisational Change Principles for Appointments to Somerset Council

The Committee received a report from the Lead Officer, Director of Customers, Digital and Workforce – Chris Squire.

The following points were highlighted:

- The enormity and importance of the organisational change of Local Reorganisation (LGR).
- Draft proposals were the result of much consultation and the required level of high transparency to bring five organisations (management and teams) into one new authority.

- A set of principles, as agreed with staff representatives and chief executives, and shared with the five senior leadership teams (SLTs), would govern the process of restructuring change. These principles will run through all stages including the upcoming tier 2 and 3 recruitment and later changes.
- Proposals will be shared for the fourth time with Trade Unions this week.

The following comments were made, and questions asked:

There was a request for greater clarity of point 3.2.6 in the final report and it was suggested the wording 'designated appointee' would give greater clarity. It was asked if all tier 2 appointments would be from existing employees and if not, if there was sufficient time to recruit externally. In response it was stated that there were no assumptions about the origins of post-holders as internal, external, and temporary arrangements would all be considered.

It was asked if consideration could be given as an alternative to the phrase 'slotting-in'; strengthening the point about internal recruitment ahead of external to reassure staff and to highlight the employment opportunities of LGR; re-iterate the issue of trade union involvement by removing 'initial' from 3. 1. The Lead Officer accepted those comments and highlighted the need for respect on both sides.

It was asked if there would be support, such as re-employment skills, for employees who will not have a positive outcome from the LGR process. In response it was confirmed this would be put in place, including mental health support, and details will be brought to a future meeting of the committee.

It was requested more information be provided on redundancy as well as detailed information on risk, as identified by the LGR Implementation Board, and the oversight was acknowledged and would be remedied.

Clarification was sought on who owned the Key Principles of Organisational Change document. In response it was explained it would be a joint document agreed by the five Chief Executives. Following consideration by this Committee, the report will then go to the Programme Board.

It was suggested that authority is given to the Director of Customers, Digital and Workforce and the Chair of this Committee to finalise the report.

It was asked if staff outside of a trade union have a voice in this process and it was noted there was a statutory requirement to consult all employees affected as well as trade unions; the document had not been sent to all 5000 employees.

It was noted that revisions resulting from the meeting would be presented to the Programme Board and reported back to the next meeting of this Committee.

The Committee reviewed the Organisational Change Principles and commented on some aspects and noted that the Principles are not 'policy', however they are an overarching framework to inform organisational change processes.

5. Approval Process for Somerset Council Employment Policies

The Committee received a report from the Service Manager HR Policy and Projects and Strategic Manager – HR Practice.

The following points were highlighted:

- The report is a proposal for approving new employment policies for the new Council.
- 25 priority policies have been identified and were currently being worked on, to include comparison of existing policies across the five authorities.
- Agreement on the process for approving new policies would be required either option 1 – all policies to come to the Committee for approval or option 2 – only policies that differ significantly from the original SCC policy or were otherwise contentious, to be brought to the Committee, for example, where this relates to:
 - a contractual arrangement
 - a cost implication
 - where trade unions have not reached a consensus.
- All other policies would be approved by delegated authority.
- Proposal is to move to monthly meetings to consider these policies that require Committee consideration.

The following comments were made, and questions asked:

Clarification was requested on the definition and threshold for significant change. It was explained that this would be determined in consultation with the Sub-Workstream Lead and trade unions in conjunction with working groups.

It was asked if the other non-priority policies would be completed before Vesting Day. It was noted those would be ranked for completion in terms of those most used such as the Sickness Absence Policy and that, as the continuing authority, reference would be made to the existing SCC policy, although former-district employees would be covered by TUPE.

It was asked if Democratic Services has the capacity for additional meetings and Members were reassured the need would be met and that team had been enhanced with colleagues from the district councils.

It was suggested that all Service Managers should be informed as soon as possible that they could request more staff resources to address additional workload pre-Vesting Day. In response it was noted that staff were under pressure to meet

numerous deadlines and that a 3–5-year programme was being condensed into a shorter timeframe and all colleagues were credited for their commitment to this task.

It was noted that the new policies would be Somerset Council policies and not SCC policies, and all staff should have access to those as soon as possible. The Chair suggested that a summary of the Committee's work be sent to the LGR Comms Team to reassure staff about the breadth of work currently being undertaken.

Strategic Manager - HR Practice, Sari Brice was introduced and she explained that there were large cost implications on the Mid Term Financial Plan (MTFP) from the different pay rates between the five authorities which would impact on redundancy, both statutory and voluntary, and the different multipliers used. The five authorities also use different mileage rates.

It was asked if the proposal of monthly meeting could take place online and the Chair explained that meetings had to take place 'in-person' to comply with legislation, that did not allow decision making meetings to be held virtually.

The Committee agreed Option 2 (as set out in the report); the proposal set out a process for approving new employment policies, using clear criteria to determine the appropriate route for approval.

8. Proposal for monthly meetings of this Committee.

The Chair suggested and Members agreed to consider this agenda item next. There was a brief discussion on the necessity of scheduling additional meetings of the Committee, on a monthly basis.

The Committee agreed to increase the frequency of meeting to monthly and additional dates would be circulated as soon as possible. It was also suggested that internal communications regarding LGR be increased.

6. Culture Workshops – Round One Report

The Committee received a report from the Director of Customers, Digital and Workforce as the Lead Officer.

The following points were highlighted:

- An analysis of the recent Culture Workshops to help address the challenge of setting the culture for the new authority.
- The workshops had opened a conversation with employees of all five districts to set the 'feel' of Somerset Council and determine 'how we will do things' and what was not wanted.
- A sub-workstream called Culture and Behaviours would be established.

- In total, 485 employees attended the workshops which were either held face to face or virtually, as a hybrid format was not deemed appropriate.
- 2500 comments were received which were categorised into 100 themes. A strong theme was concern over ways of working and communication.
- Staff felt strongly protective over 'dynamic working strategies' which had been discussed at length with trade unions. Other concerns related to managers listening to employees, wellbeing and general kindness in the workplace which would be fed into the overall People Strategy.
- Phase two of this work would concentrate on ways to enact what staff want and would include further workshops to help draft the new Corporate Plan and 50 Culture Navigators would be recruited to enable this work to take place and to assess staff feelings on the ground.

The following comments were made, and questions asked:

- It was stated that when communication were optimised, engagement levels would also be optimised.
- It was noted that qualitative responses were very important and that the Council's SLT and the Executive consider those responses and read the feedback. It was suggested if Members could attend a culture workshop.
- It would be important to consider non-9-5 work pattern roles as there was much flexibility in other sectors; it would be imperative to follow up any suggestions of bullying very rapidly; and that the impact of the menopause on the wider workforce should not be underestimated. In response it was confirmed the Council was mindful of the effect of the menopause and it would be significant to the wider workforce, particularly as the average age of an SCC employee was 45-46 years and that 73% of the workforce were female.
- It was asked how effective anti-bullying policies and practices are currently and in response it was confirmed they were hugely important and would continue to be so in the Council.
- It was stated that it was important to continue to listen to the workforce after 1 April 2023 and this should be an ongoing process and it was confirmed it would be imperative to set the culture from April 2023.
- It was noted that the new Council should also be mindful of the wellbeing of councillors as well as employees and there was significant pressure on both Members and Officers that would extend beyond April 2023.
- There was a question about what was being done with regard stress management, particularly in services experiencing staff shortages. It was explained that much being done and would continue to help build a positive work environment to combat all undermining behaviours. All Members were encouraged to join the process to aid understanding of the pressures that

both staff and Members were under to achieve the best outcomes for the Council. The Officer stated that on the completion of work in B Block there would be a continuation of dynamic working strategies to include hybrid working with particular regard to new staff and young employees. The work of the Economy Community Infrastructure (ECI) team in developing the Workforce Strategy as a planning resource and the work already undertaken as part of this with Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care with lessons learnt would be applied to the wider organisation. Work would be undertaken to identify how to retain good staff through pay and reward, as well as career progression schemes.

- There was agreement that the new authority should be a learning organisation.

The Committee accepted the report and welcomed the approach to continue staff engagement.

7. People Workstream Progress

The Committee received an update via a presentation from the Director of Customers, Digital and Workforce.

The following points were highlighted:

There are a number of sub-workstreams or programmes within the People Workstream:

- Behaviours & culture.
- Organisational development through development of a single learning management system.
- Organisational design with initial SLT consultations already taken place.
- Payroll & HR management with single payment system (Mendip & Sedgemoor District Councils will be included from end October), move to a single finance system in MS Dynamics, and replacement system for SAP.
- Senior Management Appointments & Recruitment.
- Staff Terms & Conditions.
- TUPE and organisational change.
- Wellbeing and Ways of Working through the Dynamic Working Strategy, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance, rapid access to physio and the Wellbeing Strategy..
- Diversity and Inclusion including overseas workers.
- Health and Safety with policies considered by trade unions.
- Single recruitment system.

It was asked if there would be an Older People's Strategy alongside the Young People's Strategy, for employees in their 50s, 60s and older who are in the workforce. In response it was stated that the attractiveness of Somerset as a workplace should be emphasised in the recruitment process as well as physiological issues associated with homeworking.

It was asked if a report/update on the first meeting of the Equalities and Diversity Committee could be brought to the a future committee meeting.

It was asked if lunchtime health activities for staff could be re-introduced and in response it was acknowledged that many of those had ceased during the pandemic but could be re-started as more staff returned to the office as B Block reopened.

The Committee accepted the presentation, noting the enormity and complexity of the LGR process.

9. Exclusion of the Press and Public

It was agreed that under Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted, there would be a likelihood of disclosure to them of exempt information of the following description:

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

This was proposed by Cllr Shearer and seconded by Cllr Dingwall. There were no objections. There were no abstentions. All remaining members voted in favour of the proposal and the motion was carried to exclude the press and public for the remainder of the meeting.

10. Proposed Process for Tier 2 and 3 Appointments to Somerset Council

The Committee considered the report and approved the proposed process for tier 2 and 3 appointments.

11. Any other urgent items of business

There were no items of urgent business.

Meeting closed at 5.15pm