

HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the HR Committee held in the Wyndham Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Wednesday 29 March 2023 at 14.00.

Present: Cllr L Leyshon (Chair), Cllr A Dingwall, Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr A Kendall, Cllr V Keitch (substitute), Cllr C Payne (substitute), Cllr L Redman, Cllr M Stanton, Cllr S Wakefield.

Committee members attending virtually: Cllr S Ajula and Cllr T Robbins.

Other Members attending virtually: Cllr M Kravis, Cllr M Lovell, Cllr F Purbrick and Cllr P Seib.

32.Apologies for absence – Item 1

Cllr G Oakes, Cllr E Pearlstone (sent substitute), Cllr T Robbins, Cllr D Rodrigues (sent substitute).

The Chair noted that from the 1 April and the advent of the new Somerset Council it was possible there could be a realignment of the portfolios for each Executive Lead Member, meaning this might be her last meeting as Chair of the Committee.

33.Declaration of Interest – Item 2

Cllr Leyshon, and Cllr Kendall declared a personal interest as members of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

34.Minutes from the previous meeting held on 21 February 2023 – Item 3

The Committee agreed the minutes were an accurate record of the previous meeting.

35.Public Question Time – Item 4

There were no petitions presented or questions/statements asked by members of the public.

36.GR Policies for Approval – Item 5

The Chair invited the Service Manager - HR Policy and Projects, to introduce the report and Members were reminded that policies for the new Somerset Council requiring approval had been submitted for such where there had been a change resulting in a direct impact on terms and conditions.

The Committee noted that as part of the transition work for the new Council, any employment policy which met one or more of the criteria set out in the report would be brought to Members for approval. A significant impact to any of the District Council's existing policies had been 'flagged' for the Committee's awareness and all other policies had been approved via delegated authority, by the Director of Customers, Digital & Workforce.

Members attention was drawn to Appendix 1 of the supplementary report, and based on continuation of the agreed criteria and process, the following policies that set out procedure and process were shared with the Committee for information only: Equal Opportunities, Additional Leave Purchase Scheme, Redeployment, and Sickness Absence (process only). Those policies had been reviewed, in the same way as others, to refresh and keep them flexible after collaborative work by the 5 HR teams.

There was a brief discussion about the purchase of additional leave including how it worked in practice work so that the cost could be spread and it was noted that although this was an option it had not been utilised by many staff. Regarding redeployment it was noted that this was explaining a process and was not part of employees contractual arrangements; suggestions were made about the process map that explained the policy.

It was noted that 2 policies deferred at the last meeting had been updated to include the comments and feedback from Members. Attention was drawn to the grievance policy and it was explained that the informal process had been amended to include the need to speak to the employee against whom a complaint is made and the sharing of notes. The formal process of the policy had been updated to include:

- The manager can proceed without an investigation based on the information they have to hand.
- A statement to clarify that at any time, if evidence supports, it may be appropriate to change to another policy, e.g. Evidence of bullying is discovered and therefore it becomes a disciplinary issue,
- 'Panel' has been replaced with 'grievance meeting' to be conducted by the line manager / manager's manager or appropriate senior manager with a HR Advisor.
- A streamlined process to be followed in the grievance meeting, and a link provided to available guidance.
- A statement to explain the responsibility of the manager to ensure the employee against whom a complaint is made has appropriate feedback about the grievance meeting.

Regarding the Appeals Policy and how the process would work the following updates were explained:

- Clarification of posts covered under the constitution and for whom advice must be sought from the Service Director – Workforce.
- Clarification that the Officer Appeals Committee hears dismissal appeals, and that Committee is made up of Members (removal of reference to the term Member Appeals).

- Removal of reference to 'panel' and replaced this with 'committee' when referring to appeals under the Officer Appeals Committee.
- Amendment of paragraph regarding the recording of hearings to state only in limited circumstances and our obligations to comply with data protection.
- References to days be changed to working days rather than calendar days, to align with other policies and clarify the process.

The Committee agreed to approve the grievance policy and the appeals policy for use in the new Somerset Council with effect from 1 April 2023.

37. Early Careers Strategy – Item 6

The Chair invited the Young People's Strategy Lead to provide an overview of the Early Careers Strategy for the new Somerset Council, noting that it was an information item with comments from Members being welcomed.

Members heard that the new strategy had built on the current work ongoing within all 5 organisations to utilise the strong programmes already in place. There had been cross-organisation representation/involvement in the development process that had resulted in a change from the 'Young People Strategy' to an 'Early Careers Strategy'.

The Strategy linked with the local government business case as it would focus on improving outcomes for 16-24 year olds as it would see the Council continuing to invest in Somerset/the young people of Somerset. This would be important as when compared to the rest of the South West, the County underperformed against six major economic metrics.

An overview was provided of the timeline to progress the strategy which had included key stakeholders attending the Young Employees Conference and launching the new Somerset Council Young Employees Network. The 5 maintain priorities were explained as:

1. Improving engagement with schools – maximising impact;
2. Using data to drive our decision making – proactive succession planning;
3. Maximising the full range of opportunities to support young people;
 - Work Experience and T-Levels
 - Apprenticeships
 - Paid Internships
 - Graduate Programmes
 - Pathway to Employment (P2E)
4. Investing in retention initiatives, creating more than just jobs – such as the Young Employee Network;

5. Promoting inclusivity and diversity whilst championing young people's work – build on success of specific programmes.

The Strategy would be launched in April and there would be an information and awareness session for managers. It was noted there were over 300 apprentices employed within the Council across a broad spectrum of competences and this had proven to be a successful way of 'growing our own' talent and improving retention rates. It was confirmed that care leavers applying for a job were guaranteed an interview and the promotional work in Somerset schools was a good way of highlighting employment opportunities.

It was noted that 'journey cards' would be produced that would highlight to young people the variety of career and the variety of the jobs on offer and it was noted that a current District Council employee that had started on the Youth Training Scheme had recently secured a Tier 3 post.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the informative and interesting presentation and looked forward to the journey cards being produced.

38. LGR Update – Item 7

The Committee received a verbal update from the Director of Customers, Digital and Workforce – Chris Squire as the Lead Officer of the LGR People Workstream:

- Following the culture workshops at which over 500 people had participated some of those members of staff had become culture navigators and this work would continue to develop programme activities to include diversity and inclusion activities and the digital culture.
- Support would continue to help with Equality Impact Assessments required for decision reports.
- Reviewing of training materials via e-learning platform, the Learning Centre.
- Equality Diversity report and requirements for the component organisations to be completed.
- Health and safety policies and training materials were being progressed to ensure high risk areas were adequately addressed and there would be a piece of work conducted in tandem with the internal auditors.
- Well being and supporting different ways of working and dynamic working strategy had been completed and the issue of staff parking was being considered to ensure alignment.
- Support would be provided for those at risk of redundancy from April onwards.

- Single Learning Management System would be ready from 1 April as were corporate induction materials.
- Following on from the Tier 2 and Tier 3 recruitment (involving over 300 people), work would begin on Tier 4 restructuring and recruitment in the Spring.
- The work on recruiting the single Tier 3 post yet to be filled would be progressed and would follow the same procedure/process and it was noted that the new Tier 3 cohort comprised 6 County Council employees and 7 from the District Councils.
- Payroll transfers had been successful, with other SAP structure and alignment issues being resolved. An interest-free loan would be available to support staff experiencing problems arising from a change of pay date.

The Committee commended the comprehensive work undertaken as part of local government reorganisation by all staff, especially those in the HR teams across all 5 councils.

41. Dates of future meetings – Item 8

Members noted the dates proposed for future meetings of the Committee in the Somerset Council, that would be held on Tuesdays at 2.00pm: 10 May 2023, 11 July 2023, 10 October 2023, 9 January 2024 and 9 April 2024.

42. Any other urgent items of business – Item 9

After ascertaining there were no items of urgent business the Chair thanked all those present for attending and reflecting that it might be her last meeting as Chair of the HR Committee said that she had greatly enjoyed working with all Members and Officers on a range of HR matters since May 2022. All of the many achievements and milestones reached to bring about local government change in Somerset would not have been possible without the considerate and effective HR teams of the 5 Councils and she formally recorded the thanks and admiration of the Committee.

The Director for Director of Customers, Digital and Workforce in response thanked Cllr Leyshon for her support of all local government staff during what had been a period of unprecedented change in preparation for the new Somerset Council.

The final Committee meeting held by Somerset County Council closed at 15.50.