

Minutes of a Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held in the Wyndham Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY, on Tuesday, 10 October 2023 at 2.00 pm

**Present:**

Cllr Theo Butt Philip (Chair)

Cllr David Fothergill

Cllr Mark Healey

Cllr Faye Purbrick

Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Cllr Emily Pearlstone

Cllr Tony Robbins

Cllr Henry Hobhouse (substitute)

**1 Apologies for Absence** - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors Andy Kendall, Graham Oakes and Leigh Redman.

Cllr Stanton joined the meeting remotely.

**2 Minutes from the Previous Meeting** - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

**3 Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 3

There were no additional declarations of interest.

**4 Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

The Chair noted that there had been no public questions submitted.

**5 Approval Process for Somerset Council Health and Safety Policies** - Agenda Item 5

The Chair, invited the Service Manager – Corporate Health and Safety to introduce

the report and he provided a presentation of a range of Health and Safety policies for Somerset Council for the Committee's approval.

- The Committee was shown how to access the Intranet Site and a background was provided of Health and Safety processes that had been undertaken to prepare the policies contained in the report.
- It was explained that a Health, Safety and Wellbeing Steering Group had been established and was chaired by the Health and Safety Champion. The Group's function would be to monitor the Council's Health and Safety policies, debate significant Health and Safety issues to ensure that the Council provided a workplace conducive for staff wellbeing. The Group would oversee 5 Boards that had been set up to ensure that Health and Safety risks were managed effectively across the directorates.
- A diagram was displayed of the Health and Safety and Well-being management framework.
- It was noted that the Somerset Council policies had been adopted from the former County Council and four District Councils (Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West & Taunton, and South Somerset) and work had been undertaken to review and update those to a single set of Health and Safety policies.
- The Statement of Intent was outlined and Members noted that it committed Somerset Council to ensuring the provision of a workplace where employees felt safe, supported, and free to raise concerns and feel included regardless of race, religion, gender, political beliefs, or abilities. As the most senior individuals in the Council, the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council have signed the Statement of Intent.
- The Statement of Intent also outlined the Council's commitment to undertake its business operations in a way that prevents injury or illness to employees, visitors, contractors, and the public who may be impacted by Council operations and activities.
- The Working Safely at Height Policy outlined the Council's commitment to ensuring compliance with the Working at Height Regulations 2005. In doing so, the policy clearly defined responsibilities placed on employees across all levels of the organisation.
- The Safety Action Notice Policy set out the approach for how the Council

would administer and take action to address identified or reported noncompliance, hazards, or serious risks to Health and Safety.

- The New and Expectant Parents Policy set clear responsibilities to manage and reduce risk and help enable new and expectant parents at work.
- The Confined Spaces Policy was a new policy as during the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Health and Safety Service identified a need for this policy owing to activities undertaken by operational teams transferring from predecessor district organisations.
- The Working Outside in the Sun and Extremes of Heat and Cold Policy would replace the Sun Protection Policy.
- The Water Assets Policy is a new policy as during the Local Government Reorganisation process it had been noted a water assets policy would ensure the Council had clearly defined procedures for their management and the management of employees who may work near the Council's water assets.
- The Biological Agent (Infection Control and Blood-Borne Virus) Policy was an update of the current Blood-borne virus policy.

There was a discussion and the following points were raised: how the Committee makes amendments to the policies before approving; the use of word of ensure throughout the policies; the statement of intent not being presented to the last meeting; the responsibilities of employers and employees around health and safety; the processes of third party contractors; the policies that were linked together to enable processes to take place; expectant parents liaising with employers about pregnancies; breastfeeding to be acceptable anywhere in the organisation; the importance of having a policy for working in confined spaces and ensuring qualified people were carried out such jobs; relevant policies had been reviewed by colleagues in public health.

The Service Manager of Corporate Health and Safety explained to Members the link between policies and the approach that would be taken; explained the process if the Committee made an amendment to policies; the work undertaken between the former Councils and amending those policies in a transparent and robust way for Somerset Council.

The Director of Strategy, Workforce and Localities advised the Committee that he would work with the Service Manager - Corporate Health and Safety to review some of the wording contained in some policies, such as the word 'ensure'. The Service

Manager – Corporate Health and Safety undertook to consider that appropriate assessments and checks of contractors were reviewed as part of the procurement exercises.

The Committee, having considered and discussed the reports, agreed to:

- Approve the Somerset Council Health and Safety Statement of Intent Policy;
- Approve the Somerset Council Safety Action Notices Policy;
- Approve the Somerset Council Confined Spaces Policy;
- Approve the Somerset Council New and Expectant Parents Policy;
- Approve the Somerset Council Working Safely at Height Policy;
- Approve the Somerset Council Biological Agent (Infection Control and Blood-borne Viruses) policy;
- Approve the Somerset Council Water Assets and Working Outside in the Sun and Extremes of Heat and Cold;
- Give delegated authority to the Corporate Health and Safety Unit to publish and update guidance documents when necessary.

## **6 Workforce update - Agenda Item 6**

The Chair, invited The Director of Strategy, Workforce and Localities to provide an update and the following points were noted:

- A general workforce update was outlined and this included recruitment opportunities arising in those services areas going through restructuring.
- It was noted that a Head of Operations post, a Customer Insights post and a Head of Regulatory Services were currently going through the recruitment process, and were open to expressions of interest.
- A process of creating business cases for individual service structures was ongoing across the Council.
- There would be a thorough evaluation and recruitment process and the redeployment pool could be utilised by unsuccessful employees.
- The Strategy, Workforce and Localities area had significant challenges due to its current functions having previously been split across all of the 5 former Councils and a thorough systematic review would ensure all areas were appropriately consulted on.
- It was explained there were a significant number of vacancies recorded on SAP and a review was being carried out to ensure the current number (1362) was accurate.
- Final steps on reviewing policies and procedures associated with Recruitment Protocols, Redundancy Procedures and suitable alternative employment were being progressed.

There was a discussion and the following points were raised: the ongoing uncertainty for many staff concerning recruitment/retention and restructure as there appeared to be a number of staff leaving due to this. Reviewing the number of vacancies showing on SAP and how this could be mitigated in future.

The Interim Director of Workforce was introduced and she informed the Committee of her previous work experience, including recently undertaking a number of senior leadership roles such as Interim Assistant Director People Services at Birmingham City Council and Interim Talent, Transformation and Inclusion Director at Hammersmith and Fulham Council. She noted her commitment to the Council and looking forward to using her knowledge and skills to ensure the workforce was fit for purpose.

The Director of Strategy, Workforce and Localities informed the Committee that the Council's senior leadership team had been concerned about staff leaving and the Council and they were committed to providing clarity and communications for all staff. He noted that the SAP vacancy issue was complicated as it involved migrating data and checking data quality.

The Chair, after ascertaining there were no other items of business, thanked all those present for attending and closed the meeting.

**(The meeting ended at 3.50pm)**

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**CHAIR**