

Minutes of a Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cannards Grave Road, Shepton Mallet BA4 5BT, on Tuesday, 26 March 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Theo Butt Philip (Chair)

Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Cllr Andy Kendall

Cllr Emily Pearlstone

Cllr Leigh Redman

Cllr Mike Stanton

Cllr David Fothergill

Cllr Graham Oakes

Cllr Faye Purbrick

Cllr Tony Robbins

Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Mark Healey

Cllr Liz Leyshon

23 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

There were no apologies received. However, Councillor Mark Healey attended the meeting remotely.

24 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

The committee agreed to a change in the minutes under item 18. To note that there were two abstentions when signing off the Pay Policy Statement. The committee then resolved that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 9 January 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

25 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no declarations of interest declared.

26 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no public questions brought to the committee.

27 HR Policies - Agenda Item 5

The Chair invited Sarah Welland HR Policy and Projects who introduced the report. She explained that Members were being asked to consider the report and approve the following policies below:

- Carer's Leave Policy
- Home Working Policy

There was a discussion and members received reassurance on the following points:

- The criteria of receiving carer's leave.
- The responsibility as an employer to initiate carer's leave.
- The potential for a small financial cost the council by approving the policy in regards potentially the need to recruit agency staff if a large number of staff in one team are to use the scheme.
- Engagement and raising awareness of the scheme.
- The number of Council staff who may have care responsibilities.

After discussing the policy and report the members of the HR Committee proposed that the wording be amended in the reason for recommendations to note that there may be small financial costs to by allowing this policy. Following the agreement to the amendments the committee agreed to formally approve the new Carer's Leave Policy. Councillor Redman proposed and Councillor Chilcott seconded.

Sarah Welland introduced the second report to be approved which was the Home Working Policy. There was a discussion and Members raised the following points:

- Clarification on the difference between an employee requesting to work from home via flexible working request and an employee who is contracted to work from home.
- The number of employees who are contracted to work from home and have their home as their work base. This is only three employees in Somerset Council.

After these points were raised it was agreed that the home working policy be deferred until the next meeting due to take place on 10 July.

Sarah Welland continued on with the report which included a number of policies for information only. The Committee were asked to note the following reports:

- Volunteering Policy
- Reservists Policy
- Career Breaks Policy
- Relocation Policy

There was a discussion around the four policies and Members received reassurance on the following points:

- The increase in numbers of staff volunteering.
- Improvement of engagement in volunteering.
- The payment reservists receive from the army.
- The inclusion in the policy of on call firefighters, coast guards and other on call emergency staff that may work for The Council.
- The use of relocation packages for hard to recruit posts.
- How the relocation package compares to other local authorities and private sector organisations.
- How to attract staff to Somerset Council
- The comparison of our career break policy to other local authorities
- The support offered to the employee to return to the workplace.

RESOLVED. The Committee noted the Volunteering, Reservists, Career Break and Relocation Policies.

28 Update on Staff matters - Agenda Item 6

The Chair invited Dawn Betteridge, the interim service director of workforce to provide an update on staff matters which included agency spend and a vacancy update and the following points were noted:

- Somerset Council are currently spending around £11.6 million on agency staff.
- The intended plan to reduce agency spend to around £5 million a year in future years.
- The use of Market Factor Supplements (MFS) to recruit staff.
- The importance of staff engagement and retention to reduce vacancies.
- Pay and grading structure needs to be amended and fit for purpose.
- The use of the contract with Matrix to reduce agency costs.
- The difference between agency and non-agency staff salary for particular posts.

- 201 vacancies have been removed from the structure as unbudgeted.
- 437 vacancies have been identified as budgets.
- 278 vacancies are being actively analysed by finance.
- 236 positions are filled by agency staff.

There was a discussion and members received reassurance around the following points:

- The report from Matrix and the inclusion of social workers and planners.
- High numbers of agency staff in adult social care and planning
- Disenfranchisement of current staff and low morale.

RESOLVED. The committee noted the update on staff matters.

29 Work force update - Agenda Item 7

The Chair invited Dawn Betteridge, interim service director of workforce. To give an update of work force matters. The following points were raised:

- Workforce reduction and restructuring
- The pausing of LGR restricting since December 23.
- BAU workforce priorities
- Employee engagement
- Celebrating Success
- Launch of VR scheme on 9 February 24. Closed 24 March 24

The Chair thanked all staff and noted that it is a tough time for Somerset Council.

RESOLVED. The committee noted the update.

30 Health & Safety policies - Agenda Item 8

The Chair invited Daniel Thomas, Health, and Safety Strategic Manager to introduce the report. The committee were asked to approve the following H&S policy reviews:

- Food Safety Policy
- Slips and Trips (Same Level Falls) Policy
- Legionella.

There were a number of health and safety reports that were included for information only:

- Health and Safety Update Paper
- Health and Safety Survey Results
- Health and Safety Culture Report

After discussing the policy and report the members of the HR Committee agreed to approve and the following H&S policy reviews:

- Food Safety Policy
- Slips and Trips (Same Level Falls) Policy
- Legionella Policy

Councillor David Fothergill was the proposer and Councillor Leigh Redman seconded.

31 Committee Workplan - Agenda Item 9

The Chair introduced the Committee Workplan. The following points were raised:

- Informal Workshop with the committee and HR team.
- The number of HR policies and what stage they are at will to come to the next committee.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and formally closed the meeting. Noting that the next meeting of the HR Committee is scheduled for 10 July 24.

(The meeting ended at 4.51 pm)

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CHAIR