

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MINUTES - 19 NOVEMBER 2020

Present: Councillor Emberson (Chair);
Councillors Brock, Lovelock, Page and Skeats.

Also Present: Teresa Kaine and Shella Smith; Alison McNamara and Miriam Palfrey (for items 1 to 4).

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record subject to it being noted that the proceedings of the Local Joint Forum meeting held on 16 October 2019 had not been considered and consequently Miriam Palfrey and Alison McNamara were present at the meeting for items five and six.

2. PROCEEDINGS OF THE LOCAL JOINT FORUM

The Chief Executive submitted the proceedings of the Local Joint Forum meeting held on 16 October 2019.

Resolved - That the proceedings of the Local Joint Forum meeting be received.

3 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

The Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development submitted a report, presenting the Committee with thirteen Employment Policies which had been reviewed jointly and agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. The review of the Council's employment policy framework aimed to ensure that all employment policies were clear, easy to understand, up to date and reviewed regularly. The following appendices were attached to the report:

Appendix A	Annual Leave Policy
Appendix B	Code of Conduct
Appendix C	Disruption to Normal Working Arrangements Policy
Appendix D	Recruitment and Selection Policy
Appendix E	Guidance on Recruitment and Retention of People with a Disability
Appendix F	Whistle Blowing Policy
Appendix G	Transgender Policy
Appendix H	Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy
Appendix I	Long Service Awards
Appendix J	Family Leave Policy
Appendix K	Overpayment Recovery Policy
Appendix L	Gifts and Hospitality Policy
Appendix M	Volunteering Policy
Appendix N	Equality Impact Assessment

The report explained that all employment policies would be reviewed by the HR and Organisational Development Team before the end of March 2021 and submitted to the Committee, following negotiations with the Joint Trade Unions. The policies had been prioritised because they did not reflect current best practice or were out of date and

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hence put the Council at risk. A Transgender Policy, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy, Overpayment and Recovery Policy and Volunteering Policy were missing from the current policy framework; this had been addressed and new policies covering these areas were now included.

The report included a table that set out in summary terms for each of the revised policies the issues which had been addressed together with additional key changes that had been agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. Once the policy review was complete, hyperlinks would be added to the policies where they cross-referenced with other policies. The report also included a summary of the new policies and a table that set out the process that had been followed for agreeing the policies with the Joint Trade Unions. A communications plan was also in place to communicate the revised policies to managers and employees.

The Committee discussed the report and the Employment Policies and specifically the Volunteering Policy and the requirement for the voluntary work to take place in the Borough when many people might not live in Reading or just over its borders. It was agreed that this part of the Policy should be reviewed in 12 months' time.

Resolved:

(1) That the following revised/new HR policies, as set out in Appendices A to M attached to the report, be approved:

- Annual Leave Policy;
- Code of Conduct;
- Disruption to Normal Working Arrangements Policy;
- Recruitment and Selection Policy;
- Guidance on Recruitment and Retention of People with a Disability;
- Whistle Blowing Policy;
- Transgender Policy;
- Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy;
- Long Service Awards;
- Family Leave Policy;
- Overpayment Recovery Policy;
- Gifts and Hospitality Policy;
- Volunteering Policy;

(2) That the requirement in the Volunteering Policy that the voluntary work take place in the Borough be reviewed in 12 months' time.

4. EQUALITY AUDIT 2019/20

The Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development submitted a report, presenting the Committee with an Equality Audit for 2019/20, which provided a summary of equalities monitoring data for the Council's current workforce and job applicants, and monitored trends over time. The report also provided the Committee

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with an update on progress that had been made towards meeting the requirements set out in the Tackling Employment Inequality Motion that had been moved and carried at the meeting of Council on 20 October 2020. The Equality Audit 2019/20 was attached to the report at Appendix 1, a summary of the Business in the Community Race at Work Charter was attached at Appendix 2 and the ongoing initiatives to increase diversity and inclusion in the workforce was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report stated that the percentage of the workforce who identified as being from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority backgrounds (BAME) had remained relatively stable in the previous two years and stood at 14.2% in 2019/20 (the percentage of BAME people in the economically active population within the Borough boundaries was 23%). The percentage of BAME job applicants in 2019/20 was 30.9% and the percentage of candidates from BAME backgrounds who were appointed in the same period was 17.2%. At the meeting of Council on 20 October 2020 a motion had been moved and carried on Tackling Employment Inequality, this had included a signatory to Business in the Community (BITC) Race at Work Charter, the commitments were as follows:

- Appoint an Executive Sponsor for Race;
- Capture ethnicity data and publicise progress;
- Commit at board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying;
- Make clear that supporting equality in the workplace was the responsibility of all leaders and managers;
- Take action that supported ethnic minority career progression.

The report stated that the Council employed more female staff, with 59.1% females and 40.9% males, although this had reduced in the previous three years. The Council still attracted more applications from women than men, however, these numbers were now more closely aligned than in 2018/19 with almost equal proportions of applications from men and women in 2019/20 (52.5% female and 46.1% male).

A slightly larger percentage of applicants stated that they had a disability (3.9%) than the existing workforce (3.7%), this compared with a 6% economically active population within the Borough. The report detailed the work that had previously been carried out in this area and the actions that were suggested to increase the number of disabled staff.

The report explained that the Council had already carried out a number of initiatives to support diversity and inclusion at work. A Team Reading Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan was being created which brought together actions from the various equality strands to enable more effective monitoring and reporting to the Corporate Management Team and to Personnel Committee. The Action Plan would include steps that were being taken to address the staffing issues that had not already been covered in the report which were contained in the motion to Council in October 2020. The Action Plan would also be informed by the findings of the more detailed equality audit to be carried out with assistance from BITC.

Shella Smith informed the Committee that work was ongoing with the Joint Trade Unions to agree a final version of paragraph 4.4 of the Equality Audit; when agreed this

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would be included in the final version of the Audit. Shella also reported that the Council had received around 10,000 applications for jobs since January 2020, with 30% being from applicants who had identified themselves as being from BAME backgrounds. However, the applicants were not getting through to successful posts in the same percentages, so work needed to be done in helping those from BAME backgrounds with, for example, CVs and interview techniques, with the aim of creating a 'level playing field' for all applicants.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Equality Audit for 2019/20, attached to the report at Appendix 1, be noted;
- (2) That the Council had signed the Business in the Community (BITC) Race at Work Charter, attached to the report at Appendix 2, and the work underway to explore working with BITC to carry out a more in-depth equality audit at the Council, the results of which would be used to develop actions to create a more inclusive culture at the Council, be noted;
- (3) That an Ethnicity Pay Gap Report for 2020, alongside the Gender Pay Gap Report for 2020, be submitted to the meeting on 17 March 2021.

5. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of the following items, as it was likely that there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.

6 EARLY RETIREMENTS AND REDUNDANCIES

The Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development submitted a report, which provided a monitoring statement of all termination costs that had been incurred due to employees leaving the Council on either early retirement or redundancy grounds between 1 October 2019 and 30 September 2020. There had been no early retirements on the grounds of efficiency during this period. Termination costs that had been incurred due to employees leaving the Council on redundancy grounds between 1 October 2019 and 30 September 2020 were attached to the report at Appendix 1 and a summary of reforms of local government exit pay was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

Resolved That it be noted that the total termination costs incurred due to employees leaving the Council on redundancy grounds between 1 October 2019 and 30 September 2020 was £300,218.54.

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7. FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT REQUEST

The Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development and the Executive Director of Resources submitted a joint report, which set out a request for flexible retirement of A and B and the payment of pension benefits through the Local Government Pension Scheme. The proposal, together with the financial implications, was set out in a schedule appended to the report.

Resolved -

- (1) That the flexible retirement of employees A and B on the terms set out in the schedule appended to the report and the payment of pension benefits through the Local Government Pension Scheme be approved;**
- (2) That the proposal be approved on the basis of the financial implications as set out in paragraphs 7.1 of the report, and that authority to conclude the individual package be delegated to the Executive Director of Resources, the Monitoring Officer and Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development (acting jointly).**

(Exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2).

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.03pm).