

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MINUTES – 15 JULY 2021

Present: Councillor McEwan (Chair)
Councillors Brock, Lovelock, Rowland (in place of Councillor Page) and Skeats.

Also Present: Kieran Magee, Alison McNamara, Miriam Palfrey (for items 1, 2 and 3) and Shella Smith.

Apologies: Councillor Page

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

Further to Minute 11 of the meeting held on 17 March 2021, the Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development submitted a report, presenting the Committee with five Employment Policies which had been reviewed jointly and agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. The following documents were attached to the report:

Appendix A	Additional Payments Policy
Appendix B	Grievance Policy
Appendix C	Market Supplements Policy
Appendix D	Grey Fleet Policy
Appendix E	Volunteer Engagement Policy
Appendix F	Equality Impact Assessment

The Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development requested that, following a discussion with Trades Union colleagues at the Joint Trade Union Committee held on 14 July 2021, the Grey Fleet Policy (Appendix D), be removed from the list for approval. This would allow time for further work to agree the Policy with Trades Union colleague to reflect feedback about how the policy would operate at a practical level.

The report explained that all employment policies would be reviewed by the Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development and submitted to the Committee for approval before the end of November 2021, following consultation and negotiation with the Joint Trade Unions. The policies had been reviewed because they did not reflect current best practice or were out of date and hence put the Council at risk, were due to be reviewed in line with the two-year review schedule and had been updated with current job titles and gender-neutral language. The remaining new and residual policies which required review would be brought forward for approval by the end of November 2021.

The report set out the principles that had been in mind when the policies had been written and stated that in future, all employment policies would be reviewed every two years or sooner if legislation required it.

The report also included a table which 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 Trades Unions. Once the policy review had been completed, hyperlinks would be added to the policies where they were cross referenced with other policies. The process for agreeing the policies with the Joint Trade Unions was set out in a table and a

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communications plan had been put in place to communicate the revised policies to managers and employees.

Resolved:

- (1) That the following revised/new HR policies, as set out in in Appendices A to K attached to the report, be approved:
 - Additional Payments Policy;
 - Grievance Policy;
 - Market Supplements Policy;
 - Volunteer Engagement Policy;
- (2) That Appendix D, the Grey Fleet Policy, be amended, and following further consultation with Trades Unions, re-submitted to the Committee for approval at a later date.

3. STAFF SURVEY

The Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development submitted a report presenting the Committee with the results of the staff survey, which was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The report explained that there had been many positive results and improvements compared to the previous survey in 2019. However, there were also some areas where improvements were needed which cut across the whole organisation and the report outlined four areas that would be focused on at a corporate level for improvement over the next year.

The report explained that the staff survey had been open from 29 March to 30 April 2021. It had consisted of 45 questions grouped under seven areas. There had been 1004 responses which represented 58% of the Council's workforce of approximately 1720 staff (excluding schools). There had been 21 questions where more than 80% of staff strongly agreed or agreed, including:

- I make a valuable contribution to the success of the Council by doing my job;
- My line manager shows genuine interest in my wellbeing;
- I enjoy my job;
- I would still like to be working at the Council in a year's time;
- I know what the organisational values of Team Reading are.

The report also set out the four areas where 60% or less staff agreed or strongly agreed:

- I believe action will be taken as a result of this survey;
- I think my pay is fair given the responsibilities of my job;
- Reading Borough Council works as one, where teams collaborate for the benefit of our customers;
- I have experienced or seen bullying or harassment at work.

In addition to the quantitative results, the report explained that there were three areas where staff could add 'free text' comments. There were 966 comments made by 520 respondents which had been sorted into key themes and differentiated by whether the comment was negative (65%), positive (21%) or neutral (14%). The topics most frequently mentioned in the comments were workload, followed by ICT, salary, appreciation and rewards and benefits and bullying & harassment. The Committee noted that the questions relating to bullying and harassment had not included any time limits, and that it had not been possible to identify whether the respondents were referring to current or historic instances.

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The report stated that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had agreed the following four areas of focus and some of the activities that would be undertaken in response to the survey over the next 12 months:

Workload and priorities

- The new corporate plan would be used to give clarity on priorities.
- Incorporating behaviours and a quality assurance process into the management process and upskilling managers in carrying out appraisals and 1:1 meetings, where workload and priorities were discussed with staff.
- Focusing on staff wellbeing as part of the Team Reading Delivery Plan, including sending a monthly Wellbeing Newsletter to all staff, practical tips on wellbeing and links to support services.

ICT issues

- Improved monitoring and review of performance data in relation to the new IT support contracts by the Digital Futures Board.
- The ICT team had hosted an online briefing and question and answer session for all staff on 30 June 2021 when they shared the latest updates and addressed staff comments and questions. This had been made available to all staff electronically.
- A new iTrent User Group had been set up with representatives from each directorate, to address the concerns raised about iTrent specifically.
- The ICT work programme would address a number of digital enabling issues as well as issues with legacy systems.

Behaviours

- The Council had been working with Business in the Community (BITC) to audit policies and practices around equality and inclusion in the workplace, which had included five staff focus groups. Officers were working to use the resulting report and recommendations as the basis for an action plan. Many of the recommendations aligned with the issues raised around bullying and harassment in the staff survey, and these would be integrated into this action plan for submission to Personnel Committee in November 2021. The Committee noted that the Council had a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment

Recognition

- Recognition was a workstream in the Team Reading Programme for 2021/22 and the comments from the survey would be used to build on this. It included, for example, a proposal to hold a Team Reading Staff Awards ceremony to celebrate staff who had role-modelled the Team Reading values.

The report added that the Staff Survey would be repeated in April 2022 so that officers could monitor trends and ensure that improvements in the four priority areas had been made.

The results had been shared with staff in an All Staff Information email on 18 June 2021 and were available to view on the intranet as well as being published in the Staff Newsletter which was sent in hard copy to staff in Environmental and Commercial Services. In addition, the Chief Executive and the Assistant Director of HR and Organisational Development presented the results to staff in an online briefing on 2 July 2021, followed by a question and answer session. The event was recorded for staff who were unable to attend. Staff had also been invited to give ideas and suggestions on how the four priority areas could be improved.

Resolved: That the results of the Staff Survey 2021 attached to the report at Appendix 1 and the four areas of corporate focus for the next year be noted.

4. 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.

5. REDUNDANCY AND EARLY RETIREMENT COSTS - 1 OCTOBER 2020 TO 31 MARCH 2021

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 2020 and 31 March 2021. 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 2020 and 31 March 2021 were attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Resolved That it be noted that the total termination costs incurred due to employees leaving the Council on redundancy grounds between 1 October 2020 and 1 March 2021 was £328,796.00.

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

6. 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 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 employee A 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 paragraph 6.1 of the report, and that authority to conclude the individual package be delegated to the Executive Director of Resources 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 7.01pm).