

Employment Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 18th January, 2024.

Present:- Councillors Zarait (Chair), Bedi, Escott and D. Parmar

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor I. Ahmed

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Khawar

PART 1

14. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

15. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25th September 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

16. Pay Policy Statement

The Committee received the updated Pay Policy Statement for the 2024/25 financial year, which set out the Council's pay policy for senior staff and how it related to the salaries of the lowest paid staff. Local authorities were required to prepare and publish such a policy by the Localism Act 2011 and the Committee was asked to review the document and recommend it to full Council for formal approval.

The Associate Director, Human Resources summarised the policy and highlighted the material alternations and additional information from the current year's policy. When the nationally negotiated cost of living award for 2024/25 was agreed the pay scales would be updated and implemented accordingly. The Council was compliant with its obligations to pay the National Living Wage (NLW). The lowest hourly rate paid by the Council was £11.59 and the NLW for those 21 and over was £11.44.

Section 2.2 of the policy, which detailed the posts that reported to Executive Directors or the Chief Executive, had not included the costs of interim staff covering two of the director posts. The Committee was informed that that the cost to the Council for the Director of Property and Estates Management was £900 per day and for the Director of Housing the cost was £865 per day. It was noted that the amounts disclosed for interim rates were the costs incurred by the Council to secure the individuals services not the amounts individuals actually received which would be a lower sum.

The main changes to the policy were summarised and included an additional wording the sections on professional subscriptions, market supplements, interims and gender pay gap reporting.

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Members asked a number of questions about the revised policy including about the length of time that staff could act up into a higher graded position. It was responded that there was no specific time limit as the circumstances when acting up opportunities arose varied widely such as maternity cover, sickness absence or covering a vacant post. A Member highlighted that at the last meeting of the committee, Members had expressed concerns to the Chief Executive about the high number of vacancies amongst senior staff and the relatively high costs of interim cover, and asked about the progress made in recruiting to the new posts. The Associate Director stated that a phased approach was being taken and that recruitment had started with the first appointments being made, including to the role of Director of Law and Governance / Monitoring Officer which would be reported to full Council later in January. Interviews for several other posts were underway and advertisements for positions in the second tranche of recruitment had been placed. The rolling programme of recruitment would last through to the end of March 2024.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was agreed to recommend the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 to full Council for formal approval.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 be approved.
- (b) That the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 be recommended to full Council for formal approval on 25th January 2024.

17. Senior Management Restructure Update

The Committee considered a report that updated on the next stage of the senior management restructure that had been consulted on and approved in September 2023. The report also detailed a severance package that would require the approval of full Council arising out of the senior management restructure and a further one associated with a restructure relating to CCTV.

The Monitoring Officer updated Members on the progress of the restructure. The focus of the reorganisation was to create the capacity and respond to the need to drive forward the recovery programme at pace. Recruitment to the new Director posts was taking place in tranches and external recruitment was underway as all internal processes had been concluded. Starfish had been appointed as the external recruitment provider to support the process. The first tranche included posts including the Director of HR & Workforce Development; Director of Strategy, Change and Resident Engagement; Director of Property & Assets; and Director of Law & Governance (Monitoring Officer). It was confirmed that a number of posts had already been successfully recruited to and others were in progress.

The second part of the report related to two redundancy packages that were above the threshold of £100,000 and therefore required full Council approval.

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It was noted that the packages consisted of statutory and contractual redundancy payments, including pension strain, and no part of either package constituted a special severance payment.

A Member asked whether any of the individuals made redundant through the process would be subsequently re-engaged by the Council. Officers responded that they were not aware of any such plans and highlighted the process for any such arrangement was set out in section 2.12 of the Pay Policy Statement, namely that: *“Any employee who is made redundant, including Chief Officers, must have a break of at least four weeks and one day to retain a redundancy payment before they can be re-employed by the Council in a different position.”* Any such decision to re-engage an individual under this provision would be reported to Members as a Significant Decision, although it was reiterated there were no known plans to do so as part of the current reorganisation.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted and it was agreed to recommend the update to full Council.

Resolved –

- (a) That the contents of this report be noted.
- (b) That the report be recommend to Council.
- (c) To note that at its meeting on 25th January 2024, Council would be requested to agree:

That the Head of Paid Service should make and approve the redundancy packages set out in Appendix A for employees 1 & 2, noting that these consists of statutory and contractual redundancy payments and no part of either package constitutes a special severance payment.

18. HR Policies and Procedures

The Committee considered a report that sought approval of three amended human resources policies and management procedures – the flexible working policy, probation policy and the suite of maternity and family friendly policies. Members were also asked to note the hybrid working policy which had been approved and implemented.

The HR Service Lead stated that there was a programme in place to review the Council’s HR policies and procedures. The sign off of the policies and management guidance documents was in line with the requirements of the HR Improvement Plan and to ensure managers received a suite of up-to-date policies with management guidance to support the use of the policy to manage their staff effectively. The current policies were felt to be overly lengthy and difficult for managers to follow without refence to HR even at the informal stages. Due to their comprehensive nature, the policies could create

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risks for the organisation in terms of Employment Tribunal claims, and therefore the approach in the revision had been to streamline and separate into two parts with the format of a shorter policy statement and a more in-depth management guidance to reduce bureaucracy and mitigate risks for the organisation.

The Committee discussed the Hybrid Working Policy which had been implemented in November 2023 and stated that staff who could work in a hybrid manner could work from home but would be required to attend their Slough place of work, e.g. Observatory House, for a minimum of two, and preferably three days per week or more if required by the demands for the job. This would be pro-rata for part time workers and the policy would be reviewed after six months. Several Members of the Committee highlighted the importance of attendance in the office to promote collaboration, learning and teamwork and commented that the policy could go further than the minimum of two days. Officers responded that this was the beginning of the hybrid working policy and the number of office days required was likely to increase in the future. It was also recognised that there was need to ensure Observatory House was conducive to a hybrid working model.

Councillor Iftakhar Ahmed addressed the Committee under Rule 30 and expressed dissatisfaction with the minimum of two days in the office, expressing the view that the minimum should be three days and the policy should be rigorously enforced. Officers responded that any increase in the minimum requirement would necessitate further consultation with staff. It was emphasised that staff were equipped to work effectively from home and managers had a key role to ensure high levels of performance irrespective of whether staff were working from the office or at home.

In conclusion, the Committee agreed that the policy was comprehensive and that it was important to recognise that hybrid working could play an important role in attracting and retaining high quality staff. Members felt it was a starting point and there was support for the policy to go further in the future with a minimum requirement of three office based days following the six-month review.

The three policies for which approval was sought were summarised and Members considered them in turn.

- Flexible Working Policy – the updates were mainly cosmetic and to ensure it aligned with current employment legislation and the ACAS Code of Practice.
- Probation Policy – the changes included aligning the policy with the new onboarding process for staff.
- Maternity and Family Friendly Policies – all family friendly policies and maternity had been amalgamated into one policy, which the Committee welcomed.

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A question was asked in relation to the Acceptable Use of Systems and Technology Policy that had been approved at the last meeting. The Committee had been informed that awareness raising and training on the policy would take place following approval. A Member asked what training had taken place with staff on that policy and the normal process to raise awareness of any future policy changes. The Associate Director, HR stated that information on the Acceptable Use Policy training / awareness raising would be sought and circulated following the meeting. More generally, there was usually a communications plan in place to update managers and staff on revised policies such as briefings and sometimes e-learning.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Flexible Working Policy, the Probation Policy and the Maternity and Family Friendly Suite of Policies were approved and the Hybrid Working Policy was noted.

Resolved –

(a) That the following three amended policies and management guidance documents be approved:

- Flexible Working Policy
- Probation Policy
- Maternity and Family Friendly Suite of Policies

(b) That the Hybrid Working Policy be noted.

19. Attendance Record

Resolved – That details of the Members' attendance record for 2023/24 be noted.

20. Date of Next Meeting - 16th April 2024

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed as 16th April 2024.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.17 pm)