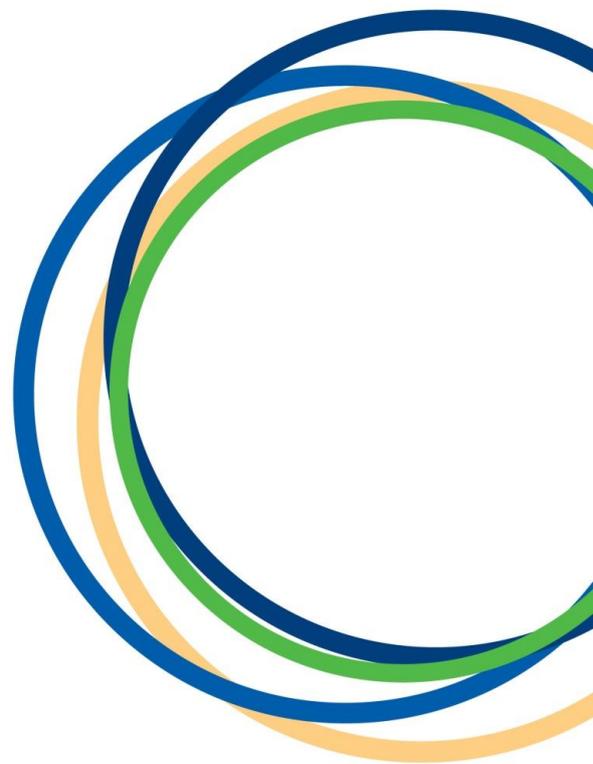


Minutes of a meeting of the **Employment Committee** held at the **Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams** on **Wednesday, 8 December 2021 at 7.30 pm.**

**Present:** Councillors

**Also present:** Councillors V. H. Lewanski, T. Schofield, N. D. Harrison, P. Chandler and J. P. King



**21 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brunt, who appointed Councillor James King as a substitute; and, Mari Roberts-Wood, Head of Paid Service.

**22 Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

**23 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes and exempt minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 November 2021, as amended within the addendum under exempt minute 17, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**24 EXEMPT - Senior Management Update**

**RESOLVED** to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for this item of business under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that:

1. It involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act; and
2. the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

The Committee received an exempt verbal update in relation to the Council's Senior Management arrangements.

**25 EXEMPT - Pay Award Update 2021/22**

**RESOLVED** to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for this item of business under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that:

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1. It involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act; and
2. the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

The Committee considered an exempt verbal update on the Pay Award Process 2021/22.

## **26 Pay Policy Statement 2022/23**

The Localism Act 2011 required Councils to determine and publish annual pay policy statements.

The statement was a factual document which set out the Council's existing agreed approach to pay and included details of the highest and lowest earners and the relationship between the two.

The pay policy statement was to be approved by the Council in advance of the financial year to which it related and, to ensure transparency, it would be published on the Council's website.

Data provided within the report was to be updated to reflect the position as at 1 January 2022.

The format and content of the statement was in line with the statement approved by the Council last year with the following changes to note:

- All figures and pay ratios were updated to reflect in year changes.
- It reaffirmed the Council's ongoing commitment to paying a fair and real living wage to all employees and workers, above national minimum wage levels.

The vacant Chief Executive role had been included within the calculations and therefore the figures would be updated as of January 2022.

Members raised a number of questions:

- In reference to the second paragraph under the subheading 'Remuneration of employees on appointment' - in terms of the correct governance and role of the Employment Committee, there was a distinction between the appointments process and the designation process. Officers undertook to review that paragraph to add clarity.
- Contractual increments - this formed an important part of the Council's remuneration arrangements and Members sought additional detail describing both the structure and budget impact of this mechanism year on year, which officers undertook to circulate as an 'aide memoire' to the Committee.
- In relation to the salary budget table, additional information was sought to put the year on year increases into context, including:

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- the number of full-time equivalents employed by the Council in each year; and,
  - the proportion of salary budget increase dedicated to either growth in salaries or growth in head count.
- The Council was undertaking benchmarking for all Senior Management Team roles, including for the remuneration of the 4 chief officers.
  - In response to a question about whether the cost of interim posts had been included within the average salary figure for senior officers under the subheading 'Definition and remuneration of Chief Officers', officers clarified that those figures were based on job-evaluated costs rather than actual costs.
  - The percentage comparison by gender within the introduction did not add up to 100%; and, the ratio of average Chief Officers' pay to the average pay of other employees within the report was stated as just under 3:1, however the figures on the previous page indicated that the ratio was above 3:1.
  - In terms of the exceptional increases and additions to remuneration of Chief Officers, Members sought an explanation of what additional duties were associated with the 10% increase for the statutory officers and asked for clarity on whether the 10% increase was included in the previous figures (e.g., averages and ratio comparisons).

Members considered the points raised needed to be addressed before the Pay Policy Statement 2022/23 was brought to Full Council in February and therefore the Committee resolved to convene a new meeting in January to consider the updated statement.

## **27 Workforce Data Summary (6 month update)**

The committee received a bi-annual workforce data summary, with the current mid-year report comprising of sickness absence and employee turnover data.

Members asked for a breakdown of the figures relating to stress, showing whether the root cause was work related or due to personal factors. Officers undertook to circulate a breakdown to the committee after the meeting. Members were informed that the Council reviewed reported cases in detail, working closely with managers to help and support staff with any stress-related issues, and seeking occupational and medical health advice in response to stress-related absences.

In relation to the statistics for employee turnover and attrition, Members noted a turnover rate of 7% and considered whether there was a relationship with the proportion of current vacancies at 5%.

The Committee discussed whether the 'Great Resignation', which was a term used to describe organisations experiencing high turnover in the wake of the pandemic, had impacted the Council.

The global pandemic had affected people in different ways, which had driven some to consider their work-life balance and change careers. The phenomenon was

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considered to be more prominent in the United States, where geographical economic differences played a part, whereas in the United Kingdom the turnover rate was less pronounced.

The Council had not seen a trend towards significantly increased turnover; however officers would continue to monitor the situation closely. A member noted a turnover rate of around 11-12% in previous years had conversely fallen to 7%, as within the report, suggesting that staff were more likely to retain their current employment.

Members sought to understand the time taken to recruit to vacancies and officers therefore undertook to report the average recruitment time to the committee in future.

The Committee discussed the Council's approach to filling vacancies, taking into consideration the changing needs of services, and whether filling vacancies with 'like-for-like' posts was always the best course of action.

In response, Members were informed that proper consideration of the need for a post is an integral part of the recruitment process, and that a variety of options are considered such as interim appointments, changing role specifications, grading or team structures, partnering with organisations, or resourcing via contractors and external agencies. Vacancies were also considered to be an opportunity to review the Council's current arrangements and to consider whether savings could be offered if a post was no longer required.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

## **28 Future Hybrid Working**

The Council's hybrid working arrangements were subject to government guidance and restrictions and the Council's own risk assessments.

In relation to the earlier discussion about the 'Great Resignation' the Committee noted that, when staff were asked about their reason for leaving employment, the ability to work remotely was an important factor. In the context of the pandemic, people had more flexibility to pursue careers remotely which would otherwise have been impractical or unsuitable beforehand. Equally, employers also had an opportunity to attract candidates from a wider talent pool without the same geographical constraints.

In view of the Council's remote and hybrid working arrangements, officers had recently undertaken reviewed assets as part of Service and Financial Planning for 2022/23, reviewing the Council's entire estate for recommendations about other potential uses. Officers had also met with Raven Housing Trust, who were taking a similar approach, to share lessons learned and best practice for mutual benefit. Similarly, information sharing with other district and borough councils in Surrey was also providing useful insight into other models and ways of working.

Risk assessments for working onsite for both officers and Members had recently been reviewed and would continue to be monitored closely alongside government guidance, legislative requirements and public health advice.

A second staff survey about home working had closed during the previous week, following an initial survey last July. The statistics and conclusions of that survey would be shared with staff and Members in due course, to inform how the Council will work in future.

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The Directors had recently attended an open Q&A session for staff, in addition to drop-in sessions for staff who wanted to present any challenges and concerns. Those events had produced some useful learning points to help inform the Council's decision-making in this regard.

Members considered whether hybrid working arrangements would have implications for remuneration of staff, in view of the geographical economic differences reflected in average salaries across the country and the commuting costs such as parking and transport for those who needed to travel to work.

In response, officers explained that the Council did not include London weighting in its salaries and that there were other costs for those working remotely, such as additional utilities for electricity and heating. Officers acknowledged that the borough's location next to London did present some recruitment challenges for certain roles where the Council was competing for higher-paid staff in London, however the use of market supplements in those cases was considered as part of the recruitment process to address those challenges.

With that in mind, the Council's remuneration arrangements operated in the same way currently as they did before the pandemic and, in view of the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches, the current arrangements were considered to be suitable.

Members also noted that the Council's broader definition of 'flexible working' was not limited only to those staff whose roles could be delivered remotely, but also included a variety of other workplace benefits for staff based onsite such as different shift patterns and flexibility in contractual hours.

### **29 Future Work Programme**

**RESOLVED** to note the Future Work Programme.

### **30 Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting finished at 8.36 pm