

**EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
4 FEBRUARY 2021
6.00 - 7.30 PM**



Present:

Councillors Leake (Chairman), Allen (Vice-Chairman), Angell, Bhandari, Dudley, Neil, Porter, Tullett and Wade

Non-Voting Co-optee Present:

Councillors Heydon

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

15. Staff Retention

The Director: Resources presented a report to the Committee outlining the options for staff retention initiatives for their consideration, which would inform the final 2021/22 budget proposals which would be considered by the Executive and Council later this month.

In November 2020, the Council published its draft budget proposals, prior to the Government announcing the Local Government Settlement Scheme. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced just before Christmas and proved to be relatively generous, this included an extension of one-off specific grants to help mitigate Covid-related costs into 2021/22 was announced. Most significantly for Bracknell Forest, the New Homes Bonus grant was continued in 2021/22, which coincided with the period of fastest housing growth in the borough since the creation of the new town. Due to these changes, the Council had some unexpected one-off financial flexibility in 2021/2 and proposals to use this on a range of measures to support the Borough's recovery from the impacts of Covid would be set out in a report to the Executive's meeting on 9 February 2021.

A pay freeze in 2021/22 had been announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 2020 as part of his Spending Round announcement, for most public sector employees, including those in local government, coupled with the presume of working from home, and the effect that this could have on staff and their mental health, it was believed that this was likely to make retention of staff over the next 12 – 18 months more difficult during a period when the Council needed to have access to the right skills and capacity to help the Borough and its residents recover from the impacts of the Covid pandemic. Senior Officers were already reporting that there was quick staff turn around already happening in a number of key areas.

The Committee were presented with a simple proposal for a 1% retention payment to staff, which was based on staff's base salaries, and excluded the Central

Management Team. The report detailed options surrounding who would receive the payment and when this should be paid. There were also options within the report and supplementary around further options that the Council may wish to undertake for a more targeted approach for a particular staff group should there be particular issues over the course of the year.

It was important for the Committee to note, that before those specific and targeted approaches were introduced, the Borough Solicitor had advised that they would be to be subject to an equality impact assessment due to the make up of the council's workforce.

The proposal for the retention payment did not require all the funding earmarked for the proposal, s it was at the Committees discretion to whether the recommended to the Executive that this be added to one of the other themes within the one of stimulus package or remained held by the Employment Committee to target any specific issues that may arise during 2021/22.

The Chief Executive emphasised to the Committee that the Central Management Team had been excluded for the proposals, so there was no self-interest. It was also stated that retaining an effective workforce was much easier and cheaper than recruiting a new one and the response of the council through the pandemic had been effective, and this had relied upon the staff that the council have. It was advised that the best scheme would be an easy scheme, one that was easily communicated so that a very positive message didn't get lost.

Arising from the Committees comments and questions, the following points were made:

- Retention was an ongoing issue and should be discussed at a future meeting in detail.
- The 1% was a one-off payment and did include a one of cost for employees' pension.
- The 1% increase was only for one year and wouldn't carry on the following year.
- Concerns were raised that jobs were being lost across the country, and that this could cause political outcry.
- It was acknowledged that a 1% payment would not make a difference for all staff, but for many it would have a significant impact.
- As it was a specific retention payment, it wouldn't be received every month and it would be up to the Committee to decide when that payment should be made.
- Concerns were raised about the message it was going to send out.
- It was not a compensation payment for people having working from home.
- Paragraph 5.8 gave a number of suggested options to the Committee.
- The reason for doing this what due to there being difficulties with recruitment and retention. With the new way of working, there was now competition nationally as well as locally, as you could be working from home but your work place could be located somewhere else in the country.
- The payment was not about thanking or rewarding staff.
- The situation of retention was not getting easier, it was being reported that staff were not staying for a significant period of time. This was particularly an issue in social care jobs.
- Those who were earning less than £24k were expected to receive a pay award, of £250 but the details surrounding this proposal had not yet been announced.

- Every decision needed to be taken individually, and the decision to issue the retention payment should be based on the Councils current position.
- Concerns were raised surrounding who should be in receipt of the 1% retention payment.
- It was assumed that some staff would still be on incremental payment bands.
- Concerns were raised about how residents may feel about the increase.
- It was recognised that this decision may be difficult for some Members.

Following the debate, the Chairman put the following motion to the Committee, which was seconded and voted on.

RESOLVED that subject to any restrictions of provision, that the Committee agreed in principle the retention payment, not exceeding 1%, be approved for distribution subject to any further decisions or comments the Committee may make.

The Committee then discussed the detail behind the retention payment, which was guided by paragraph 5.8 within the report.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- It was discussed whether a salary cut off should be introduced.
- The Borough Solicitors advice regarded equality impact assessments was more focused on specific groups, rather than the hierarchy of staff.
- Before the recommendation went to the Executive, this would be put forward to the Borough Solicitor to confirm whether there were equality issues.
- The staff that were difficult to retain was detailed in paragraph 5.12 of the report.
- The area with the biggest retention issue at present was social care, but there were already specific retention measures in place for these areas.
- A simple approach was recommended by the Chief Executive so that there were not ramifications from staff excluded from the scheme, which may be felt as a disincentive.
- Heads of service was a vulnerable area, which was in the 50k-80k salary range.
- The report stated that staff in employment from January 2021 would get the payment, but members argued that the pandemic had started in March 2020 and that staff who had been in employment from this point should be the one in receipt of it.
- Paragraph 5.8c was not a mistype within the report.
- The Chief Executive highlighted that staff that had joined after March 2020 had also been impacted by the pandemic and lockdown.
- It was important to note that this was not a thank you to staff payment.
- This payment was aimed to retain staff to continue services.
- It was suggested that a sliding scale be introduced.
- It was suggested that if staff had been in post a year before then you could qualify for the payment. ie May 2020 could qualify for the May 2021 payment.
- Members wished to ensure the staff did not feel annoyed if new staff who had not worked through the pandemic qualified for the payment.
- There were no overtime issues that would impact.
- It was asked whether a set payment had been looked at rather than a % payment, it was confirmed that this had not been considered.
- In regard to bottom loading – the Committee were reminded that the lower paid staff would be getting a separate national pay award.

- Members were unable to say exactly which officers had been impacted the most, and how their day job had been altered.
- If a flat rate was given, this would be approx. £350 per employee. Which would mean those on BFC grade F would be receiving approximately their 1%.
- It was felt that a 1% increase across the staff was a good team approach and would make it feel like all staff were in it together,
- It was important that the retention payment was inclusive.
- Rewarding to all staff would be fair and inclusive.
- Pro rata would be included.
- The figure allocated how allowed for not everyone being included.
- The Chief Executive suggested that the payment dates be December 2021 and May/June 2021. This would include the majority of staff if they had been working for the Council over the past 12 months.
- The 1% would be split over two payments.
- The Committee would leave the Officer to determine the two dates as it was an operational decision.
- There were very few golden hellos, these had been in the Legal service.
- The message regarding the organisation valuing the staff was a really important one.
- Concerns were raised that a small payment wouldn't necessarily keep an employer at the Council if they were intending to leave.
- It was important that staff thought they were being well looked after at BFC and that the grass may not be greener elsewhere.
- It was requested that a report be brought back to the Council on whether the payment had made a positive impact.
- The £50k remaining would be available for the Employment Committee to use on Employment matters over the next year.

RESOLVED that the 1% retention payment be given to all staff, apart from CMT, on a pro rata basis, in May/June 2021 and December 2021.

The Employment Committees recommendations would be given to the Executive Members for consideration as part of the Council's final 2021/22 budget proposals.

CHAIRMAN