

**EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
10 FEBRUARY 2021
6.30 - 7.16 PM**



Present:

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

Non-Voting Co-optee Present:

Councillor Heydon

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Tullett

16. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

17. Minutes from previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

19. Update from the Chairman of the Local Joint Committee

The Chairman update the Committee that Local Joint Committee had been held earlier in the afternoon and had covered the items that were on the Employment Committee agenda. There were no particular issues raised.

20. Minutes of Sub Groups

The minutes of the Local Joint Committee and the Education Employment Sub Committee held on 8 July 2020 were noted.

21. Health & Safety Assessment Report

Kevin Gibb, Executive Director: Delivery presented the Health & Safety Assessment report to the committee.

As required by any good employer the council had a duty of care under Health and Safety legislation for ensuring the wellbeing of staff. Due to the pandemic with the majority of staff having had to change their working environment and ways of working, the council was required to update everyone's risk assessments. For employees who used computers as part of their work a new Display Screen Assessments (DSE) had to be undertaken and for home and remote workers, risk assessments had been updated to reflect the increased time working away from the main offices. The assessments had allowed corporately to understand the issues employees faced whilst working from home, and to monitor staff's wellbeing.

There had been good compliance across the council in undertaking the assessments. Quite early on in the process it was realised that staff required proper desks, chairs and large screens at home, and a large exercise was undertaken with the facilities team and IT to ensure these items were delivered to staff at their homes.

A further challenge had been with the staff, due to the nature of their jobs, who were still going in and out of people's homes throughout the pandemic of vulnerable people, which had been a complex situation with the risk to staff needing to be managed closely. Work had been undertaken closely with Public Health England in regards to the negative effect Covid-19 had had with on the Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

It was expected that when government changed to return to office it would be very different, as it would need to be covid secure for a period of time and both home and office assessments may need to be updated. For those working in the community, the risk assessments may need to be updated once the vaccination programme picked up pace. It had been noted that the percentage of returns for the home working assessments in the People Directorate, but it was a working assumption that those were working in the community, but a further piece of work would be undertaken to ensure there was no gaps in the data.

RESOLVED that the Committee consider and endorse the next step identified in section 6 of the Executive Director: Delivery's report.

22. **Pay Policy Statement 2020-21**

Since 2012, and in accordance with the 2011 Localism Act, the Council was required to publish an annual Pay Statement which also aligned with the requirements of the Transparency Regulations.

The report had already been agreed by Council and required review from the Employment Committee.

RESOLVED that the the Pay Policy Statement for 2020/21 is endorsed.

23. **2nd Quarter - Wellbeing Check-In Survey Results**

The Director: Resources presented the 2nd Quarter - Wellbeing Check-In Survey Results.

This was the second survey that had been undertaken during the pandemic to get a sense of how staff were coping during the pandemic. The first had been undertaken in July 2020 and this one in October 2020. A further survey would be undertaken in March 2021.

The key findings of the survey were set out on page 73 of the agenda, a good response had been received on the survey of around 50%. As expected, staff were feeling more of an impact the longer the pandemic went on, in terms of their wellbeing, with many struggling to find a healthy work life balance. As a result of the findings, CMT had agreed some actions to look into the details of these findings.

Wider findings found that a large number of staff would be open to possibility of working more from home than in the office in the future which would open up opportunities for the use of Time Square and other buildings going forward. A report would be brought to Members in the future on these matters.

It was noted by the Committee that staff were finding it hard to switch off and maintain a positive work life balance.

Home schooling questions hadn't been included within the second survey as this had been undertaken in October prior to the second and third lockdowns. It was expected that this would be included within the March survey.

It was expected that staff wouldn't be back in the office within the next few months, so a decision surrounding Time Square wouldn't be taken in haste. Staff had been quite vocal in the last two surveys that whilst they wouldn't want to permanently be based at home, they would be open to working from home more regularly which staff had been able to do effectively for the past 9 months.

It was requested that a review on the critical aspects in relation to home working and the effect of home schooling be brought back to the Committee in the next 6 months.

The Committee noted the report.

24. **Homeworking Policy**

Paul Young, Head of HR and Contracted Services presented the Homeworking Policy. It was reported that following the increase in homeworking as a result of the pandemic, a policy to address homeworking had been produced to formalise an increase in homeworking and to release the demand for the office space in Time Square.

As detailed in the wellbeing surveys a high number of staff had indicated that they would be more willing to work from home more than they had pre pandemic. It was important to note that this was different from the current working from home arrangements which were due to the pandemic, this would be a permanent change in staffs working arrangements going forward with contractual changes. One of these changes had been implemented then it was expected that staff would spend 80% of their time in their home working environment.

The service need was still the priority throughout the policy and where there was a need for an employee to be based in the office then there would be flexibility to work in the office or other council locations.

It was highlighted that there was an ongoing need for people to still come to the office, and particularly when there are new starters so they can be properly inducted in a team environment and meeting individuals face to face.

and the procedure for requests for extended homeworking. Some contracts of employment may need to be modified to align with the new homeworking policy and any individual that could not work from home were addressed in the policy.

RESOLVED that Bracknell Forest Homeworking Policy be approved.

25. **Reform of Local Government Exit Pay**

The Director: Resources gave an overview on the Government's recent introduction of a cap on Public Sector exit payments.

Members would recall that the Exit Payment Cap (£95k cap) had been a topic of

Government discussion since 2015. There had been little movement on the details until they were reconsidered in 2019/2020, which had led to changes being officially passed by parliament in October 2020.

The Exit Payment cap introduced limits to the total exit package which was payable by Public Sector employers to £95,000. The Cap applied to the total amount paid to the employee, including the pension strain cost (capitalised cost) and notice periods in excess of three months but did not include the employer NI contributions.

Currently the Local Government Pension scheme regulations require that where an employee is over age 55 and is made redundant, their pension is automatically released. Due to the conflict RBWM, who administered the Berkshire Local Government Pension scheme and were currently unable to give clarity on payments to those who facing were currently facing redundancy. It was important to note that there was no current redundancy expected at Bracknell Forest.

There were currently test cases going on up and down the country which will hopefully bring clarity.

RESOLVED that

- i. the Employment Committee noted the contents of the report which provides and update on national changes affecting severance entitlements for local government employees.
- ii. the view of the Corporate Management Team be endorsed, that any significant restructure proposals be temporarily put on hold in the current financial year to ensure that individual employees are not adversely affected by the current uncertainty around exit cap implications for LGPS employees.

26. Exclusion of Public and Press

RESOLVED that pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and having regard to the public interest, members of the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following item which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information under the following category of Schedule 12A of that Act:

- (1) Information relating to any individual (Item 13).

27. HR Policy - Organisational Change Protocol

The Committee received a report which outlined a revised Organisational Change Protocol which had been reviewed as part of a wider policy review. This included consideration of salary protection arrangements currently in place and proposed changes to bring Bracknell Forest more in line with neighbouring authorities.

RESOLVED that the

- i. proposed revised Organisational Change policy is adopted.
- ii. changes to the salary protection arrangements are noted.

CHAIRMAN