

**EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
7 FEBRUARY 2024
7.30 - 7.53 PM**



Present:

Councillors Pickering (Chair), Gillbe (Vice-Chair), Allen, Frost, McLean and P Thompson

Present Virtually

Councillors O'Regan and Watts

17. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Pickering declared an affected interest in relation to Item 4, Armed Forces Covenant, as she was the Armed Forces Champion for Bracknell Forest Council.

18. Minutes from previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 December 2023 were approved.

19. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

20. Update from the Chairman of the Local Joint Committee

The Committee was advised that the Local Joint Committee had discussed items 7, 8 and 9 on the agenda. There had been some unanimous support for the proposals, with the only request for an amendment being to correct a mistake in the report for the Pay Policy Statement.

21. Minutes of Sub Groups

The Committee received and noted the minutes of the Local Joint Committee held on 18 December 2023.

22. Pay Policy Statement

The Committee considered a report to agree the 2024/25 Pay Policy Statement. Since 2012, and in accordance with the 2011 Localism Act, the Council has been required to publish an annual Pay Statement. The Statement was also aligned with the requirements of the Transparency Regulations.

The statement confirms how the council should apply these pay arrangements, which should be produced prior to the financial year in which it applies. The production of the statement would enable that to be introduced ahead of the 2024/25 financial year.

Once agreed through Employment Committee, the statement would be taken to Council for agreement.

RESOLVED that having reviewed, the Employment Committee agree the Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24.

23. HR Policy Review

The Committee received the latest revised policies from the HR Policy Review for consideration. The Human Resources team have an established programme in place to review/update existing HR policies/procedures and guidance. As part of this process, policies and procedures are being consolidated, wherever possible, and new policies and procedures created to reflect changes to legislation or best practice.

The process for reviewing the policies had included engagement with; stakeholders, trade unions, the equalities group and DMTs, as well as checks against current legislation/best practice provided by ACAS and the CIPD.

The following amendments have been made to the Disciplinary Procedure:

- Clarification that where allegations are minor no formal investigation is undertaken and instead the matter is dealt with by the manager as a discussion.
- Clarification and amendment to the wording relating to the ability to appeal. The proposed wording is intended to simplify the process
- Section added on the use of CCTV in disciplinary investigations

The following amendments have been made to the Lone Working Policy:

- Overall revision of the policy to expand on the process for risk assessments and more focus on mental health
- A greater focus on home working being a type of lone working.
- Moved to new template
- Equality statement added.

The following amendments have been made to the Performance Improvement/Capability Policy:

- Previously there was an informal stage, formal stage 1, formal stage 2 and formal stage 3 this has now been amended to reduce the number of stages to; Informal, formal stage 1 and formal stage 2
- The appeal process has been amended to mirror the appeals in disciplinary – ie appeals against Director decision is to another Director.

The following amendments have been made to the Time off for Public Duties Procedure:

- Moved to new template,
- Equality statement added,
- Stipulating that time off for public duties can only apply to holding one position of this type, the current policy does not cover people holding more than one position which could lead to high levels of additional time off.
- In addition, added that the days allowed are calculated on a pro-rata basis if the person is part time.
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The following amendments have been made to the Time off for Dependents & Carers Leave Policy:

- Moved to new template,
- Equality statement added,

- Inclusion of new legislation relating to Carers Leave which is effective from April 2024 both within the policy and to the title of the policy.
- Changes to terminology which are more inclusive.

It was recognised that policy and procedure alone did not provide the confidence and competence to manage workforce situations. The HR/OD Team would be supporting the effective management of these policies and procedures, through a programme of manager briefing training sessions and dedicated manager induction sessions.

RESOLVED, that having reviewed, the Employment Committee agrees the revised policies for:

- a) Disciplinary Procedure
- b) Lone Working Policy
- c) Performance Improvement/Capability Procedure
- d) Time off for Public Duties Procedure
- e) Time off for Dependants and Carer's Leave Policy

24. Armed Forces Covenant

The Committee received a report on the Armed Forces Covenant and Employers Recognition Scheme. The report sought agreement for the council to reaffirm its pledge to the Armed Forces community by signing the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge and to commit to attaining the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Silver Award in 2024.

Through signing the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge the Council would be publicly demonstrating its continued commitment to supporting the Armed Forces Community and sustaining positive collaborative relationships with the MoD, and locally the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, supporting partner organisations and local employers.

The council progressing to attain silver level status, would provide greater support and commitment to Reservists who are employed by the council. The ERS acknowledges the contribution made by individual employers who have committed to and provide exceptional support to the armed forces community by going above and beyond their covenant pledges and inspire others to do so.

In order to attain silver status, the council would be required to award an additional 5-days annual leave to Reservists in its employment. Whilst it would be a requirement to offer these additional days as paid leave, the report recommended that these are offered as paid days leave so that the valuable contribution that Reservists make to the UK armed forces was recognised and also so that it was recognised that these days are spent undertaken activities required by the MoD as Reservist.

Arising from the committee's comments and question the following points were raised:

- Any employer who is a reservist should inform the local authority and write to the armed forces to get confirmation of this. The local authority does not have any reservists employed currently but has had reservists employed previously.
- The most significant alteration needed to be eligible for the silver award would be the additional 5-days leave for reservists. This additional leave arrangements 5-days would be in addition to their current employee leave arrangements as reservists had not previously been granted additional leave.

- Reservists are required to take 2 weeks leave in order to fulfil their duties. If the Council were to apply for the gold award in the future, then the local authority would be required to offer reservists an additional 10-days annual leave to offset this.

Arising from debate the Committee raised the following point:

- It was commendable for any employee to enlist as a reservist particularly in a time of heightened tensions worldwide and therefore the local authority should support the individual wherever possible.

RESOLVED that the Committee considers the report and approves the following recommendations.

- That the council signs the Armed Forces Covenant Pledge.
- Having achieved the requirements of the bronze ERS award, the council commits to attaining the silver ERS scheme award applying by March 2024.
- To note and endorse the Reservist policy and procedure in Annex C
- That the council recognises the valuable contribution made by reservists by asking the Employment Committee to approve awarding an additional five days paid leave for reservists.

CHAIRMAN