

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE
11 JULY 2024
7.30 - 7.46 PM



Present:

Councillors Pickering (Chair), Allen, P Thompson and Webb

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Gillbe, M Forster, Frost and Neil

Present Virtually:

Councillor Mclean

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Minutes from previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 07 February 2024 were approved.

RESOLVED, with the addition of the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting of the Annual Meeting of the Committee held on 15 May 2024 were approved.

6. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

7. Update from the Chairman of the Local Joint Committee

The Committee was advised that the Local Joint Committee had discussed item 7 on the agenda. There had been no objections raised to the HR Policy Review and the Local Joint Committee had indicated they were supportive of the recommendations being approved.

8. Minutes of Sub Groups

The Committee received and noted the minutes of the Local Joint Committee held on 07 February 2024.

9. HR Policy Review

The Committee received the latest revised policies from the HR Policy Review for consideration. The HR 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 DMT.

The following amendments had been made to HR policies:

Paternity & Maternity Support Leave Procedure:

- Procedure created to consolidate different guidance documents.
- Moved to new template, which includes the BFC equality statement.
- Amended to reflect changes to legislative changes on the taking of paternity leave and notice required which are effective from April 2024: Paternity Leave (Amendment) Regulations 2024.
- Inclusion of reference to Parental Bereavement Leave – Section 9.0.

Agile Working Policy:

- Moved to new template, which includes the BFC equality statement.
- Guidance on working abroad (Section 12 of the policy) expanded to include the requirement for employees to check if the country is safe and that ICT may restrict countries from which it is considered safe to work due to security information.
- The requirement that new starters/leavers are required to attend Time Square to collect/return ICT equipment being added, following cases where IT equipment has been shipped at the Council's expense to employee's homes.
- Strengthened wording around departments that cannot Agile Work.
- Reference to Lone Working policy.

Smoke Free Workplace Policy:

- The policy has been renamed from No Smoking Policy to reflect the greater scope of the policy.
- Moved to new template, which includes the BFC equality statement
- Inclusion of other forms of smoking within the policy, such as vaping, e-cigarettes.
- To reflect increase agile working, policy amended to include requirement to refrain from smoking/vaping when working away from office and attending virtual meetings on Teams/Zoom, etc.

Maternity Pay & Leave Policy

- The policy has been created to provide more concise guidance - previously two separate guidance documents existed.
- Moved to new template, which includes the BFC equality statement
- Amendment have been made to reflect legislative changes for the taking of neonatal leave and parental bereavement leave.
- Breastfeeding guidance incorporated.

Organisational Change Policy

- Moved to new template which incorporates the BFC equality statement
- Amendments to reflect legislative changes to give greater protection for employees who are pregnant or on maternity leave.
- Clarification on the selection process and when At Risk letters are issued

- A draft consultation document template and a Sequence of Events timeline added for greater clarity.
- Guidance added on employee support and family leave protection.
- Organisational design principles included.

Flexitime Scheme Procedure

- A procedure has been created to supplement the intranet page, which was previously the only source of reference/guidance for the Council's Flexitime scheme.
- Procedure is on the BFC standard template, which incorporates an equality statement.
- Amendment to the requirement to take breaks which are in line with Working Time Regulations (1998) i.e. a minimum 20-minute break after 6 hours working. The BFC Flexitime procedure requires a 30-minute break after 6 hours to support employees' health and wellbeing.
- Simplifying of the rules around number of hours required to work in a day
- Referenced to Agile Working policy.

Managing Absence Policy

- Moved to new template which incorporates the BFC equality statement
- Additional guidance included on reasonable adjustments for employees with a disability/long-term condition – Section 7.0. This includes the recording of time off for medical treatment (Section 7.1).
- Updated guidance on handling repeated long-term sickness i.e., 20 days or more, and the handling of such absences under performance improvement and capability procedure.

In discussion the following point was raised:

- The early implementation of paid neonatal leave ahead of new legislation was welcomed.
- A minor change in wording of paragraph 6.1 of the Smoke Free Workplace Policy was needed to clarify that the policy did not apply to those working from home.
- The abbreviations OML and AML would be added throughout the Maternity Pay and Leave Policy, to ensure continuity in language.

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

- 1) Paternity and Maternity Support Leave Procedure
- 2) Agile Working Policy
- 3) Smoke Free Workplace Policy
- 4) Maternity Pay & Leave Policy
- 5) Organisational Change Policy
- 6) Flexitime Scheme Procedure
- 7) Managing Absence Policy

10. 2024 Pay Award Update

The Committee received an update on the 2024/25 pay settlement for workers.

The trade unions had submitted their pay claim. This claim had included:

- A £3k or 10% pay rise, whichever was greater
- A reduction in working week of 2 hours
- An additional day paid leave for wellbeing
- A review of pay gaps to tackle inequality
- A phased approach for to reaching a minimum £15ph wage for all staff.

In response the National Employers had given a final offer off:

- A pay rise of £1,290 per year for all NJC pay points 2 to 43.
- A 2.5% pay rise for all those above NJC pay point 43.

Following ballots UNISON and Unite had decided to reject the pay offer whilst GMB had agreed to accept the pay offer.

Following questioning the Committee noted the following points:

- It was normal for there to be delays in agreeing the pay award at the start of a financial year, with the previous years dispute having only been settled in November 2023.
- It was important to remember this was a national dispute, not a dispute between the Trade Unions and Bracknell Forest Council.
- The requested phased implementation of a £15 per hour minimum wage for local authorities could be overtaken by rises in the living wage set by the government.

CHAIRMAN