

ADMINISTRATION AND REGULATION COMMITTEE

17 JUNE 2020 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors Akbar (Chair), Adrees, Castleman, Lovell, S. Hussain, Mead and Wynn

20. MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 9 April 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and the Chair be authorised to sign the minutes in due course.

21. VOLUNTARY SEPARATION SCHEME – REINTRODUCING THE LOCAL SCHEME (REF: 7)

The HR Business Manager presented the report (Ref: 7), advising the Committee of the Council's intention to re-introduce the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) from August 2020, if not a little earlier, and for the foreseeable future, until rescinded in line with section 1.2 of the scheme

She reminded Members that the VSS was not a policy or procedure, but a local scheme, which had been in operation from 2010 until rescinded in 2019. The committee was advised the scheme was rescinded in February 2019 on the understanding that it be could be re-introduced at any time in the future if necessary.

Under the scheme employees could seek voluntary redundancy, provided they could meet three tests, detailed in the report and summarised as follows:

- **Redundancy Test** - Deletion of the post would be in accordance with the statutory definition of redundancy
- **Financial Tests** - The cost of redundancy could be recouped within one year under normal circumstances
- **Service Test** – The proposal would not lead to the loss of key skills / experience

She said that details of how the financial test would work were set out in the report (page 19 of the pack). If the post in question was redundant, the employee would leave under voluntary redundancy.

She added that the number of voluntary redundancies under the scheme had been low during the period of its operation and there had been none in the previous year, as the scheme was out of action anyway.

She further said that the scheme could be re-instated from 14 July, when full Council would be setting its emergency budget to deal with the cost of the Covid-19

pandemic. The options for the committee was to approve to bring the scheme back for a prescribed period, leave it open ended or not to bring it back with reasons. Without the scheme, compulsory redundancies would be the only option for the council unless employees volunteered for redundancy to facilitate the implementation of any organisational change processes.

The HR Business Manager went on to advise that trade unions had agreed to the scheme as it was before being rescinded, but had requested that the financial test be reviewed when the scheme was re-introduced, as it had led to disappointments previously. She said discussion would continue with the trade unions and Finance, as careful consideration was needed if changes to the scheme would be more costly, given the current situation the council faced with its finances.

Members discussed the proposal and concluded that they were not content to approve to bring back the scheme, as there was no trade union agreement yet. They would wish to see written trade unions' agreement, given that the council was facing having to cut over 300 jobs.

The HR Business Manager said there was trade union agreement for the financial test in the current scheme, before it was rescinded, which could be re-instated while the financial test was further discussed and reviewed with Finance and the trade unions. She suggested she could then bring a report back to committee on 17 July.

Members were still not content that trade unions were not fully happy with the financial test. A member moved that the current scheme be re-instated for 3 months, which was seconded and approved by the committee. The HR Business Manager was requested to hold discussion with Finance and the trade unions on the financial test and report back to the committee in 3 months' time – provisionally committee 2nd November 2020.

Resolved: (i) That the updates to the Voluntary Separation Scheme to take account of changes to team titles and post titles be noted;

(ii) That the updated current Voluntary Separation Scheme be reintroduced

(ii) That the Service Director HR and Monitoring Officer be requested to report back to the committee in 3 months' time, to report on progress following discussion with Finance and the trade unions on the financial test.

22. UPDATE ON EXIT INTERVIEWS (REF: 8)

The Service Director HR and Monitoring Officer presented the report (Ref: 8), informing the committee of the outcomes of the review of exit interviews conducted between the period April 2018 and April 2020 and actions taken to address issues raised.

She said the report was for information and noting, as Members wanted to know why people were leaving the council. All those leaving were requested to complete an online exit interview form, with no manager's involvement, but employees could request a meeting with HR if required.

The HR Business Manager added that it was important to review and analyse the completed online forms, which was done on a monthly basis to look for any issues that needed attention. The reviews were also considered in the longer terms for trend analysis.

He said turnover was below local authorities' average, except for a spike due to a TUPE exercise. He added there was, however, a concern in relation to the high turnover for employees with under 2 years' service, which required more work to address.

Dealing with a question on the high turnover for employees with under 2 years' service, he said one of the issues could be to do with managers not following up to ensure employees were 'bedded in' after induction. A skill audit was required to see how employees could progress and get locked into the council. A lot had been done in terms of training and development, apprenticeship scheme and management training.

A Member praised the officer for a good and interesting report and was pleased there were other reasons why people left, other than pay and conditions.

Responding to a question on ethnicity monitoring, the HR Business Manager said work was underway to add more equality questions, as currently there was a restriction in the number of fields available on the on-line form.

On comparison with other local authorities, he added focus was on Luton, but local authority trends were also looked to ensure Luton was not out of line. Turnover was in line with other councils, but further workforce analysis was needed to see why turnover was focused at the lower pay grades. More work was needed to encourage young people to join and stay beyond 2 years, as the council had an ageing workforce. Information available seems to indicate the current pay and benefits structure is out of line with what younger employees are looking for. The good pension scheme was of more interest to older employees. He said this was a national issue.

Dealing with another question on dismissals, the officer went on to explain the figures provided in the report, which included people coming to the end of their fixed contracts. There was a spike in sickness dismissals following disciplinary processes, as the council was dealing with long term sickness absences. Sickness figures had improved resulting in less formal action being taken leading to compulsory dismissal.

The Chair moved that the recommendation to note the report be approved, which was agreed.

Resolved: That the report on the update on exit interviews of employees conducted between the period April 2018 and April 2020 and action taken be noted.

23. REVIEWING TUPE PLUS (Ref: 9)

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

24. ADMINISTRATION AND REGULATION COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21(REF: 10)

The Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer presented the report (Ref: 10) in relation to the committee's future work programme.

She said the TUPE Plus item was withdrawn from the meeting's agenda (minute 23 above refers) and listed for 15 July 2020 as more work was required.

She informed the committee that a number of Organisational Change Assessments (OCAs) were expected to be programmed for the next few meetings.

A Member suggested that the Revised Market Supplements Policy and Annual Update and the Travel Assistance OCA from the 15 July agenda be more delayed until the September meeting.

The Service Director said the Market Supplements item was a backward looking report and would not address any climate friendly issues. In relation to the Travel Assistance OCA, she added that there was community trust issue, as the team re-structure affected transport of special education needs children and the elderly. She added it had already been moved from the April 2020 meeting and would prolong the uncertainty.

It was agreed to keep the Market Supplement item in the work programme for the 15 July, but postpone the Travel Assistance OCA until the 7 September meeting. (Note: Now taken out of work programme until further notice)

The committee also agreed to consider the VSS report on 2 November 2020.

Resolved: That the following changes be made to the Work Programme 2020-21:

- Move 'Travel Assistance Team OCA' from 15th July 2020 to 7 September 2020 (Author: Sally Cartwright)
(Note: Following the meeting, it was established that the Travel Assistance OCA had now been taken off the work programme until further notice)
- Include 'Voluntary Separation Scheme – Reintroducing the Local Scheme' in the work programme for 2 November 2020 (Author: Anne Davies)

(Note: The meeting ended 18:46 pm)