

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 18 January 2023

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: P Hogarth MBE (Chairman), R Grinsell (Vice-Chairman), A Adeyemo, S Ashraf MBE, Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE, J O'Nyons, W Qais and S Rymer

Officers: Deborah Merry, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Andrew Kinsey, Legal Services Manager and Solicitor to the Council
Helen Flinter, Policy Development and HR Business Manager
Zoe Covington, Counter Fraud Lead

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Allen.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no questions or deputations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

5. DRAFT WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Counter Fraud Lead presented a draft revised Whistleblowing Policy which had been updated based on the best practice policy template produced by Protect (previously known as Public Concern at Work), the UK's whistleblowing charity.

She explained that the new draft policy was deliberately brief and focused on being user friendly and inclusive, while still providing the key information needed to enable and encourage people to raise concerns.

Members of the Committee asked questions about various aspects of the policy and in particular sought clarification about the right of individuals reporting a concern to be accompanied during steps 1 and 2 of the reporting process.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed new Whistleblowing Policy be approved subject to the inclusion of confirmation that individuals raising concerns may be accompanied during Steps 1 & 2 of the Whistleblowing procedure.

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6. TRAVEL, SUBSISTENCE & PERSONAL EXPENSES POLICY – PROFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Committee was presented with proposed changes to the Council's Travel, Subsistence & Personal Expenses Policy, which had been updated to include a new section relating to the payment of professional subscriptions and memberships.

The Policy Development & HR Business Manager explained that the aim of the proposed new policy was to ensure a fair and equitable approach across the Council which recognised the needs of those roles where such membership must be maintained in order for employees to legally carry out their duties.

The approach proposed was to reimburse one professional subscription / membership per year for employees in roles where membership of a professional body was a statutory or legal requirement for the role, and to phase out reimbursement of expenses after two consecutive subscription years for employees whose roles did not meet this definition.

The Policy Development & HR Business Manager confirmed that consultation had taken place with Directorate Leadership, Assistant Directors and the Corporate Leadership Team, as well as the Trade Unions.

Committee members asked questions about the potential impact of the policy on staff morale and development, and the recruitment and retention of employees. Members concluded that further information was needed about the level of fees of the various professional memberships and subscriptions, as well as information about the number of employees and roles of those who would be eligible to claim under the new policy and those currently claiming whose roles would not meet the new eligibility criteria.

RESOLVED:

That consideration of the revised policy be deferred pending provision of the additional information requested by members of the Committee.

7. PROBATION POLICY

The Committee was invited to consider proposed changes to the Council's Probation Policy.

The Policy Development & HR Business Manager explained the main changes to the policy, which were set out in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.7 of the report. She confirmed that the proposed changes emphasised the dual importance for managers to develop a constructive working relationship with new employees, balanced alongside the requirement to act swiftly and appropriately to deal with any issues emerging during the formative phase of a new appointment.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Probation Policy be approved.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm