

Minutes of: EMPLOYMENT PANEL

Date of Meeting: 24 June 2021

Present: Councillor T Rafiq (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, R Brown, S Butler, R Gold,
J Grimshaw, T Holt, J Mason and T Pickstone

Also in attendance: Lynne Ridsdale - Executive Director, Strategy and
Transformation, Sam McVaigh – Director of People and
Inclusion, Kelly Barnett – Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest received.

3 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Councillor Rafiq presented the terms of reference of the Employment Panel for consideration.

The Employment Panel is a new committee that has replaced some functions of the former Human Resources and Appeals Panel. Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive, informed members that the restructure approval work that used to come to the Human Resources and Appeals Panel is a Cabinet function, therefore in line with the new Council Constitution it has been agreed that major restructures will go through to Cabinet, using the key decision threshold. Smaller restructures will be agreed with the portfolio holder for Human Resources and the relevant portfolio holder for the area.

It was agreed:

1. The terms of reference be updated to be clear that the 5-member panels and 3-member panels convened for the panel's appeals and employment functions are politically balanced.
2. That the terms of reference document be noted.

4 CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT AGILE WORKING POLICY

Councillor Rafiq presented the draft Agile Working Policy to members for feedback.

Councillor Rafiq highlighted the following points from the report and draft policy:

- The Agile Working Model was approved by Cabinet on 26th May 2021.
- The Agile Working Model will be supported by a formal HR policy which will provide the framework for managing agile workers across the Council.
- The intention is for agile working to start from Stage 4 of the national roadmap out of lockdown, which is currently the 19th July 2021.
- The Agile Working Model will be subject to regular, structured reviews with the first formal review taking place in December 2021.
- The proposals contained within the report and draft policy will not require, at this point, any changes to terms and conditions or contracts of employment.
- Agile working is voluntary, and, where roles allow, staff will be given the option to work from home or from the office.
- The policy includes a new framework for performance management for agile workers.
- Staff will remain subject to other core HR policies.
- The role of managers is key to the success of agile working in terms of performance management and supporting the wellbeing of their team.
- The policy includes relevant information about wellbeing, health and safety, and information governance.
- Trade Union colleagues have been consulted on the Agile Working Policy and their feedback is reflected within the report.

Councillor Rafiq invited members to feedback on the report and draft policy.

Members raised the following questions and comments:

- It was questioned if the £5m saving, outlined in the report was accurate.

Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive, explained that the ambition around the estate saving is real. There is a framework for workforce agility, which is a platform to drive efficiency through reduced use of assets.

The savings of £5m relates to the transformation programme which is listed for Cabinet approval in July. The Council has worked with a strategic partner to inform the transformation programme and the £5m figure is derived from this work.

Agile is a part of the transformation programme. Going forward there will be a shift in focus to link this work to the required asset rationalisation programme. Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion will continue to be a part of the work and will lead on the evaluation over the next 6 months. Wider investments will be informed by the same evaluation process.

- It was questioned what the wider package of tools are, which are being further developed.

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion explained current and planned future work to support staff. It was explained that lots can be learned from other organisations around hybrid and agile working, however the current circumstances are unprecedented, and it is crucial the model which evolves meets the needs of Bury. This is why there is an evaluation in September and in December. Wrap around support for staff will be developed by engaging with staff and giving them opportunities to feedback their experiences. This will, in part, be supported by the existing network of internal change agents who are working hard with colleagues. Tools and support already exist in relation to things such as planning the working week, mental wellbeing and health and safety. Going forward, one particular area of focus will be around support to managers.

- It was questioned how many staff members will take up the option to work agilely.

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion explained that there are approximately 200 members of staff who would like a fixed desk in the office. There are approximately 800 members of staff that have confirmed that they would like to be an agile worker. There are also colleagues that are in a role that is location dependent due to the nature of their job roles. It was suggested that people may change their minds about where they would like to work as we move forward.

- It was questioned if there was a reason for agile working being voluntary.

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion explained that by doing it as voluntary, it would give colleagues an opportunity to see how agile working works. They will be using the period up until December to give both the organisation and members of staff, time to see what it feels like so an evidence-based decision can be made.

- Concerns were raised about staff wellbeing, how poor performance would be managed, and the unknown permanent impact of working agilely.

Councillor Rafiq explained that agile working is voluntary and staff members are able to work from the office.

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion explained that whilst no one has come out of a pandemic before, there is a lot of evidence of agile working generally. For example, the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion have done work over the last decade on agile working as something that can support inclusion and wellbeing. To some extent, the risks identified in the report have been informed by the experiences of other organisations. Outcome management and wellbeing are where support needs to be strong.

- A concern was raised about how new members of staff will be inducted.

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion agreed that this needs to be an area of focus and he is already thinking of ways to support colleagues.

- A concern was raised around access to office chairs whilst working remotely and the health and safety implications this could cause.

Sam McVaigh explained that if staff need equipment to support them at home, they can access this; and this has been the case throughout the pandemic.

- The risks around reduced ability for junior colleagues to learn and develop through physical colocation and interaction was raised as a concern.

Councillor Rafiq explained that there will be opportunities to use various contact methods to contact colleagues and direct line management.

Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive, explained that the Agile Working Model will still see regular (though less frequent) face-to-face engagement for staff and thought is being given to how this is used to effectively support colleagues' development.

- A concern was raised of being able to receive an instant answer from colleagues.

Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive explained that there is a technological solution. In the Microsoft 365 package that is currently being rolled out, there is a chat function, which is an informal way to contact colleagues to ask questions. An internal social media platform called Yama is being looked at, although no decisions on this have been made. Communication will be tested through the evaluation.

- It was questioned what implications may be caused due to having less building space for staff.

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion explained that there will be a reduction in overall space for colleagues. However, analysis suggests there will be more than sufficient space to access a desk for those that want to. Again, this will be tested through the evaluation.

- It was raised as a concern that some customers prefer to use the telephone and not use new technology.

Sam McVaigh, Director of People and Inclusion explained that, as previously noted, agile workers would still be contactable by telephone. Customer impact would be considered by the Agile Working Evaluation.

- It was questioned if there was a mentor or buddy system for staff.

Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive explained that there are already arrangements in place from long standing development models.

It was agreed:

1. That the contents of the report and the attached draft Agile Working Policy be noted.
2. That comments made on the draft Agile Working Policy are to be considered by the Chief Executive prior to a decision being made to approve, adopt and implement the policy, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs and HR and the Director of People and Inclusion.
3. That the intention to write to relevant Council staff to confirm their working arrangements in line with the agile policy be noted.
4. That the intention to launch the agile working arrangements and the associated policy on 19 July, the current anticipated date of the 'Stage 4' roadmap out of lockdown plan be noted.

COUNCILLOR T RAFIQ
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 5.30 pm and ended at 6.20 pm)