

CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 21 February 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Committee held at Guildhall on
Wednesday, 21 February 2024 at 1.45 pm

Present

Members:

Deputy Alastair Moss (Chair)
Florence Keelson-Anfu (Deputy Chair)
Deputy Randall Anderson
Deputy Keith Bottomley
Alderman Sir Charles Bowman
Steve Goodman
Deputy Christopher Hayward
Alderman & Sheriff Dame Susan Langley
Gregory Lawrence
Deputy Charles Edward Lord
Catherine McGuinness
Timothy James McNally
Philip Woodhouse

Officers:

Ian Thomas	- The Town Clerk
Caroline Al-Beyerty	- The Chamberlain
Greg Moore	- Interim Deputy Town Clerk
Polly Dunn	- Interim Assistant Town Clerk
Alison Littlewood	- Interim Chief People Officer
Sonia Virdee	- Chamberlain's Department
Simon Gray	- Chamberlain's Department
Frank Marchione	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Nick Senior	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Alix Newbold	- City of London Police
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Tabitha Swann	- Town Clerk's Department
Oliver Sanandres	- Town Clerk's Department
Jacqueline Cover	- HR Department
Chris Fagan	- HR Department
Colette Hawkins	- HR Department
Faye Johnstone	- HR Department
Kaye Saxton-Lea	- HR Department
Pauline Shakespeare	- HR Department
Carol Simpson	- HR Department
Cindy Vallance	- HR Department
Dionne Williams-Dodoo	- HR Department
John Cater	- Town Clerk's Department

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Deputy Henry Colthurst, Anthony Fitzpatrick, Mandeep Thandi, and James Tumbridge.

2. **MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on Wednesday, 10th January 2024 be approved as an accurate record.

4. **WORKPLACE ATTENDANCE UPDATE**

The Committee considered a Report of the Interim Chief People Officer concerning the Workplace Attendance Policy.

The Chair opened the discussion by inviting the Deputy Town Clerk to read out a recently received letter, jointly submitted by the City's recognised Trades Unions, the GMB and Unite, which outlined their concerns with the proposal in the Report to require all employees in the current hybrid and academic categories, who currently are required to attend their office or place of work on a minimum of 2 days per week, to increase their attendance to a minimum of 3 days per week (or 60% of their working time) from September 1st.

After the Deputy Town Clerk had concluded, officers responded to each of the major points raised in the Unions' letter (*italicised below*).

- *No engagement with the staff, for example in form of a survey specifically around increasing from 2 days to x days*

It was pointed out that the recommendation was submitted to the Corporate Services Committee for Members' consideration at this meeting; substantive communications and discussions around the detail of the Policy will commence in earnest with staff, the Unions, the Staff Networks and other stakeholders once the recommendation was approved.

- *Tardiness of providing the revised policy and EIA to the unions*

Officers expressed their apologies to the Unions for the quick turnaround - the union meeting was held on Monday, 5th February.

- *The tight timeline whereby it gives the unions little or no opportunity to seek feedback with our members.*

It was emphasised that, should the change be approved, discussions will immediately commence with the Unions concerning the detail around how best to implement it.

- *Embargo on the shared documents so the full picture cannot be shared with union members.*

It was emphasised that no such embargo occurred.

- *EQIA- is it fully comprehensive as there has been no engagement with the staff?*

It was stressed that EQIAs are live documents, and this one will be continually reviewed if the change is agreed.

- *Financial implications of the proposed change and other implications*

Officers acknowledged the likely detrimental financial impact this would pose for a number of employees, and, as a result, consideration was being given, via the ongoing work in the Benefits Review, for options around discounted travel and salary sacrifice schemes. It was also pointed out that data indicated that those employees currently coming into their place of work for 5 days each week, were amongst the lowest paid across the organisation.

- *Presenteeism v productivity. WFH has proven to increase productivity overall.*

Officers pointed out that the City had not undertaken a productivity survey around working from home in 2022, so unfortunately could not quantify whether this had derived overall productivity gains or indeed losses during this period.

- *Health & safety legislation dictates that if there is a change to working practices/equipment etc there needs to be a consultation process the proposed changes will have impact on the wellbeing of the staff (mental stress, anxiety potentially leading to physical health manifestations, financial worries etc)*

It was emphasised that, should the change be approved, discussions will immediately commence with staff via the Staff Networks, the Unions, and other staff stakeholder groups concerning the detail around how best to implement the policy.

- *This is moving away from inclusive by design - and will mean that people with care responsibilities (usually women) and those with disabilities will be disproportionately impacted and therefore discriminated against*

If the change was approved, HR would engage closely with the relevant staff networks in both these areas.

- *It means that there will be an upsurge in workplace adjustments requests.*

It was anticipated that there would be an increase in flexible working requests if the change was approved. The legislation changes for the flexible regime which takes effect from 6 April 2024 was highlighted. These changes include allowing employees to make two statutory requests in any 12-month period, introduce a new requirement for employers to consult with employees before rejecting a request, a

reduction in the amount of time for a decision to be made from 3 to 2 months and making the right to request a 'day one' right.

- *It is going to cause a massive burden on HR*

HR would work closely with line managers to ensure that the changes (if approved) were implemented effectively and efficiently for roll out from September.

- *Accommodation - are workplaces conducive to accommodate increased presence in the office?*

This was acknowledged as a critical area; if the change was approved, officers would be working with the unions and key departments, such as the City Surveyors, in considering changes to the workplace to accommodate greater usage and to meet the challenge of the changed working styles for employees such as the higher frequency of meetings conducted via MS Teams.

- *Makes prospect of working for the City less attractive to some workers and could lead to less staff retention especially for those who have joined up on the current arrangement.*

It was emphasised that the policy was always intended as a temporary measure and was not specified as a component in people's contracts. It was emphasised that, should the change be approved, discussions will immediately commence with staff, the Unions, the Staff Networks and other staff stakeholder groups concerning the detail around how best to implement the policy.

The Chair thanked officers for the assistance and opened the discussion to Members.

Several Members queried whether a three-day frequency was sufficient, a Member highlighted the productivity gains generated by a number of blue chips firms in the City which had returned to a five-day a week frequency over the past year and suggested that four or five days should be the aim for the City Corporation as well. In addition to the productivity gains, it would also be important for the Corporation to act as an exemplar to others, which would, in turn, increase footfall and economic activity across the Square Mile.

Members also queried whether the 1st September go-live date could be brought forwards; the pace of change in this policy area had, since pandemic restrictions in England were lifted in 2021, been too slow overall and did not fit with the City Corporation's aspiration to be an agile organisation. Officers responded that the proposed September launch provided for a sufficient and fair amount of time for employees to adjust their personal/family arrangements and for HR to carry out comprehensive discussions with the key stakeholder groups, including the EDI Group, the staff networks, and the trade unions about how best to implement the change.

The Town Clerk emphasised that he had not been aware of a written plan for the organisation to fully return to five days a week in the workplace and urged caution around the suitability of drawing comparisons with firms in the private sector. He emphasised that Members have the discretion to vary or withdraw the policy but that, as Head of the Paid Service, his recommendation was that three days in the workplace for the categories of staff highlighted in the paper was the optimal approach currently. Three days was currently the norm across sectors, and he expressed concern that increasing this frequency to four or five days would be out of the kilter with the current employment market, and that this in turn would impact upon the Corporation's ability to attract and retain talent. It was already apparent from some of the reactions to the Report amongst the workforce that there was a degree of opposition to a three-day policy so any move to increase this to four days would create further pushback. He reminded the Committee that the policy was a practice, which had continued to evolve since the onset of the pandemic and the organisation was not contractually bound to retain the two-day in the workplace frequency on a permanent basis.

In response to a separate query, the Town Clerk informed the Committee that discussions involving the City Surveyors were taking place concerning changes to the workplace environment. This would be a particular focus given the changing nature of working styles over recent years, an example being the large increase in meetings being conducted via MS Teams which necessitated quieter/private space in the office as opposed to open plan desks. Members welcomed this information and asked officers to consider a rollout of additional privacy booths, these had proven very popular since their installation last year. In addition, consideration should be given to the utilisation of Guildhall under a three day in the week policy, particularly around whether the organisation would need to implement an anchor day(s) approach so as to avoid a situation where staff were clustering their days in the office in the middle of the week, leaving the building under-utilised on Mondays and Fridays. Costings for these matters would be presented to the Finance Committee and relevant committees (including Corporate Services Committee) in due course.

Several Members remarked on the perceived current unfairness of those on lower salaries having to come into the workplace more often than those on higher salaries, and the ensuing costs for these individuals that this incurs. A Member asked the Town Clerk to raise with his senior management team his alternative proposal for senior managers to come into the office five days per week from September 1st.

A Member commended the paper as clear and thorough and was supportive of the recommendations with the caveat that officers should continue to monitor the employment market and if the norm shifted from three days to four or five days in the workplace then the Corporation should follow the market trend.

A Member asked that the Union's assertion that employees are more productive when working from home should be tested as well as gathering information from employees on their views on this policy; officers responded

that this area would be something which would be incorporated into the Staff Survey in the spring.

A Member commented that the organisation made a fundamental error when the policy was reduced from three days in the workplace to two days, it was always harder to take back what you had given, and this was a lesson to learn for the future. Whilst he was supportive of the recommendation to return to three days in the workplace as a solid starting point, he asked that, in line with the wishes of an increasing number of Members of the Court, consideration should also be given to how the Corporation could keep the door open to a four day in the office policy in the future. He contended that four days was probably the upper limit in terms of ambition as the shift to home working on Fridays had been a longer-term trend which had been accelerated by the pandemic and was now likely to be a permanent feature in people's working lives. He added that it was important to remember that the change to remote working was a result of the global pandemic and not as a response to calls for adjustments to people's work-life balance.

Several Members indicated their support for consideration of a four-day in the workplace policy, whilst this would further support the Corporation's ambition to be a place based organisation, careful and thorough planning was required, particularly to understand the impact this would have on recruitment and retention and to give plenty of notice to the workforce that this was the ambition of elected Members. Views on when a four-day in the workplace frequency should commence varied, with the Chair emphasising that officers should first be given the opportunity to implement the three-day in the office policy, and then, in due course, provide their professional opinion and advice on the advantages, disadvantages and the wider process of moving to a four-day a week in the workplace policy. All agreed that expectation management would be key.

The Chief People Officer advised that any shift to four days needed to be very carefully considered and all should be mindful of the risk to recruitment and retention. Whilst the Deputy Chair acknowledged this risk, she emphasised that the ambition of the Corporation was to be a place based organisation which it should not shy away from; staff ultimately had the choice to remain or seek to find an employer which offered a greater degree of remote working. She suggested that as a starting point, senior managers should attend the workplace four days a week.

In response to a query, whilst acknowledging that he came into the office five days a week, the Town Clerk emphasised that there was currently a lack of empirical evidence for the benefits, or otherwise, of working from home, and that a range of academic studies carried out both in the UK and overseas since the pandemic could be marshalled in favour of or against working from home. Separately he urged caution about the City trying to emulate South Cambridgeshire District Council's four day a week compressed hours approach as this had triggered a Best Value Notice from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in November 2023.

RESOLVED – that the Committee approved the following:

- With effect from the 1st September 2024, a change to the current workplace attendance policy will apply.
- All employees in the current hybrid and academic categories who currently are required to attend their office or place of work on a minimum of 2 days per week, will be required to increase their attendance to a minimum of 3 days per week (or 60% of their working time).

5. **PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/25**

The Committee considered a Report of the Interim Chief People Officer concerning the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25.

The Chair began the discussion by proposing that the second recommendation in the Report concerning the deferral of the awarding of the performance related pay mechanism for 2024 should be amended in favour of reinstating the award of performance pay.

Deferral of this award had been maintained for the past several years, largely as result of measures introduced as a response to the pandemic, several Members agreed with the Chair that this was no longer a valid position and asked that the matter of awarding of performance related pay mechanism for 2024 is revisited and that a Report comes back to a future meeting of the Committee.

In response to a separate query, officers confirmed that the pay of named senior individuals in the Corporation was disclosed in separate published documentation. The Report before Members today concerned the pay policy. A Member proposed that an additional Remuneration Report which could be published should be something which is considered by the Senior Remuneration Sub-Committee – a Report of this nature would be in line with best practice across the public and private sectors.

An officer highlighted an error in the drafting of the Report (page 77), the last increase in the London Living Wage was implemented on 24th October 2023, not 24th October 2024 as stated in the paper. This would be rectified in the version of this Report which went to the Court of Common Council for final approval on 7th March.

RESOLVED – that the Committee:

- Reviewed and agreed the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 and recommend it be submitted to the next Policy and Resources Committee on 22 February 2024, for agreement and forwarding to the Court of Common Council.
- Agreed that the matter of awarding of performance related pay mechanism for 2024 is revisited and that a Report comes back to a

future meeting, noting that this does not impact the Pay Policy, as drafted. This includes performance increments; contribution payments (Grades D-SMG) and recognition payments (Grades A-C).

6. **DRAFT HR DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25**

The Committee considered a Report of the Interim Chief People Officer concerning the draft 2024/25 departmental Business Plan for Human Resources.

RESOLVED – that the Committee approved the departmental High Level Business Plan 2024/25 at Appendix 1.

7. **DRAFT COMPTROLLER & CITY SOLICITOR'S DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25**

The Committee considered a Report of the Comptroller & City Solicitor concerning the draft 2024/25 departmental Business Plan for the Comptroller & City Solicitor's Department.

RESOLVED – that the Committee:

- Noted the factors taken into consideration in compiling the C&CS Business Plan; and
- Approved the departmental Business Plan 2024/25 at Appendix 1.

8. **ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING (ERP) PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee received a Joint Report of the Chamberlain and the Interim Chief People Officer concerning the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Programme.

Members were pleased to hear that the software being procured was “off-the-shelf” as opposed to a bespoke solution, the Chair also reassured them that the Deputy Chair and other Members were actively involved with the discussions and would continue to exercise influence in the planning of the programme.

In response to a query, officers assured Members that the ERP solution would meet the challenges and complexities of the Corporation's pensions schemes and payroll.

Officers assured the Committee that ongoing engagement with multiple departments and institutions was yielding positive feedback and that all involved with the programme acknowledged that “bringing the business with us” was a vital component of the work.

The Committee asked to be provided quarterly updates on the progress of the Programme going forwards.

RESOLVED – that the Committee noted the Report.

9. **HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE**

The Chairman requested that, going forwards, given the importance of this topic, updates to the Committee on these matters should be in the form of a written Report (i.e., not a verbal update)

The Chair asked officers to circulate a written summary to the Committee on Health and Safety matters before the next meeting.

Separately, the Town Clerk requested Members grant delegated authority in order for officers to amend the Committee's Terms of Reference to strengthen the wording on Health and Safety.

RESOLVED – that the Committee granted Delegated Authority for the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Corporate Services Committee, to approve amendments to the Committee's Terms of Reference in order to strengthen the wording concerning the Committee's Health and Safety remit.

10. **APPRENTICESHIPS UPDATE**

The Committee received a Report of the Interim Chief People Officer concerning apprenticeships at the Corporation.

A Member asked consideration was given to enhancing the City's support for the City of London Academies Trust's Pre-Apprenticeship Programme.

In response to a query, officers assured Members that close consideration was being given to examining and measuring the impact of the Corporation's Apprenticeship Programme on improving social mobility, this includes the City's collaborations with schools and organisations such as the Prince's Trust, as well as monitoring the "whole journey" for an apprentice, especially around the pathway to permanent employment either with the City or elsewhere.

A Member asked whether a proportion of the City apprenticeships can be ring-fenced for care leavers

A Member proposed that approaches were made to the two largest companies in each City Ward asking them for their support in efforts to enhance the Apprenticeship Programme. In a similar vein, it was also suggested that the City write to all of the Livery Companies inviting them to support the Programme.

RESOLVED – that the Committee noted the Report.

11. **REGISTER OF INTEREST FOR THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT GROUP**

The Committee received a Report of the Interim Chief People Officer concerning the Register of Interest for the Senior Management Group.

In response to a query, officers confirmed that those individuals in Grade I roles (and above) were considered senior management at the City Corporation.

Officers clarified that the document was in the public domain and was freely accessible to all who were interested.

In response to a query, the Town Clerk confirmed that officers were obliged to include membership of the Freemasons in their register of interests if relevant.

RESOLVED – that the Committee noted the Report.

12. COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received a Report of the Interim Chief People Officer concerning the Committee's Forward Plan.

RESOLVED – that the Committee noted the Report.

13. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no questions.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were no urgent items.

15. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

16. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the non-public minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 10th January 2024 be approved as an accurate record.

17. AMBITION 25 - MY CONTRIBUTION MY REWARD UPDATE

The Committee considered a Report of the Interim Chief People Officer concerning Ambition 25 – My Contribution My Reward.

18. REPORT OF (NON-PUBLIC) ACTION TAKEN

The Committee received a Report of the Town Clerk concerning a recent decision taken under delegated authority procedures.

19. NON-PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no questions.

20. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED

There were no items of urgent business.

21. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the confidential minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 10th January 2024 be approved as an accurate record.

22. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT STAFFING

The Committee considered a Report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment.

23. TOWN CLERK'S UPDATE

The Committee considered a late, additional Report of the Town Clerk.

The meeting ended at 3.45 pm

Chair

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