

Staffing Policy Committee

MINUTES OF THE STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2020 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman), Cllr Tony Jackson (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Richard Clewer, Cllr Mike Hewitt, Cllr Hayley Illman, Cllr Carole King and Cllr Philip Whitehead

Also Present:

Cllr David Halik, Mike Osment (UNISON)

1 **Membership of Committee**

The Committee noted that at its last meeting held on 26 November 2019, Full Council appointed Cllr Stuart Wheeler as Chairman of the Committee in place of Cllr Allision Bucknall and Cllr Carole King to the vacancy caused by the resignation of Cllr David Jenkins.

2 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Ricky Rogers and Cllr John Smale.

3 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved:

To confirm and sign the minutes of the last meeting held on 14 November 2019.

4 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

5 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's Announcements made at the meeting.

6 **Public Participation**

There were no members of the public present or councillors' questions.

7 **Appointment of Sub-Committees**

The Committee reviewed the membership of its sub-committees following changes made at the last meeting of Council to membership of this Committee:-

Resolved:

To appoint members to serve on the sub-committees of this Committee for the remainder of the municipal year as set out below:-

(a) Senior Officers Employment Sub-Committee

Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cllr Richard Clewer & Cllr Hayley Illman.

(Substitute Members: Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Bob Jones MBE, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Fleur de Rhe-Philipe, Cllr Philip Whitehead, Cllr John Smale, Cllr Ian Thorn and Cllr Tony Trotman.)

(b) Appeals Sub-Committee

Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cllr Richard Clewer & Cllr Hayley Illman.

(Substitute Members: Cllr Mike Hewitt, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Fleur de Rhe-Philipe, Cllr Philip Whitehead, Cllr Ian Thorn and Cllr Tony Trotman.)

(c) Grievance Appeals Sub-Committee

Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cllr Tony Jackson & Cllr Hayley Illman.

(Substitute Members: Cllr Peter Evans, Cllr David Halik, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr John Smale, Cllr Ian Thorn and Cllr Tony Trotman.)

8 Smoke Free Sites - Update

The Committee considered a report by the Director, Public Health which provided an update regarding the implementation of the Wiltshire Council smokefree sites initiative that was approved by this Committee in November 2018.

In November 2018 this Committee agreed the following recommendations for Wiltshire Council sites to become smokefree which included:

- The removal of the council smoking policy (including supporting the removal of smoking breaks for staff during work time);
- The revision of the council vaping policy to allow vaping on site away from public view;
- Support for all council sites to go smokefree starting as a rolling programme in March 2019:
 - Phase1 included Monkton Park (Chippenham), County Hall (Trowbridge) and Bourne Hill (Salisbury) including carparks.

- Phase 2 included all campus sites, leisure centres and libraries to go smokefree if not already done so.

The aspirational time line was to have the majority of council sites smokefree by the end of March 2020.

The Committee was informed that some staff had accessed health trainer support to assist in giving up smoking and quite a few had been supported to quit. During the second phase of the programme, depots had been targetted and a number of depot staff had engaged. It was interesting to note that some of these staff had switched to vaping which was allowed.

It was noted that there were about 12 sites where smoking was still taking place, including a query about whether all special education schools were currently smoke free. It was anticipated that six of these sites would be smoke free by April 2020.

Resolved:

To note the contents of the report and confirm support for the final phase of implementation of smoke free sites.

9 **Pay Policy Statement**

The Committee received a report setting out an updated Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2020/2021 for approval, prior to agreement by Council and publication on the Council's website.

It was reported that under Chapter 8 of the Localism Act 2011 every local authority must prepare a pay policy statement for every financial year. Wiltshire Council originally published its pay policy statement in February 2012 and the updated policy was now required to be published on the Council's website by 1 April 2020.

The policy had been updated to include:

- A revised introduction providing an update on the council's progress with apprenticeships, annual budget and workforce total.
- An amendment to the reference of Corporate Director following the tier 1 restructure and the change in job title to Chief Executive Officer.
- An updated total number of council employees and the latest pay ratios.
- The annual budget will be set in January/February in time for approval at full Council.
- The role of Returning Officer following the tier 1 restructure will be agreed in time for approval at full Council.

The Committee discussed the updated policy and noted the two areas which would need updating prior to the policy being presented to Council.

Resolved:

To approve the draft policy to be presented at Full Council on 25 February 2020, subject to:

- **Updating the current annual budget, and**
- **A decision being made as to which officer would carry out the role of Returning Officer.**

10 **Amendments to Business Travel and Mileage Allowances Policy**

The Committee considered a report by the Director, Human Resources & Organisational Development which set out proposed changes to the Council's business travel and mileage allowances policy, with the intention to implement this with effect from 17 February 2020.

The updated policy would require that, wherever possible, staff should attend at their normal place of work and use a pool car for business journeys.

The amended policy simplified the calculation method for mileage an employee could claim when travelling for business purposes if their journey was not starting from their normal place of work and did not include a journey to their normal place of work.

Under the new policy employees would be required to deduct their normal home to workplace mileage (their "normal commute") from any business mileage claimed.

Members were informed that the draft policy had been agreed by the Joint Consultative Committee in December 2019 and this was confirmed by Mike Osment, Branch Secretary, UNISON.

During discussion, it was considered that some employees might need some support in interpreting the new policy but Members were assured that this would be made available from their managers who would be fully briefed and there would also be support available from the HR advisory and policy teams.

Resolved:

To confirm agreement to the proposed changes to the Council's business mileage and allowances policy.

11 **Sickness Absence Update**

Thought was given to a report by the Director, Human Resources &

Organisational Development which provided an update on the Council's sickness absence position following a request for a more detailed analysis of sickness absence at its previous meeting.

The Committee noted that in Wiltshire, the absence rate over the 2018/19 financial year was 9 days lost per FTE, which cost the Council around £3M; this was consistent with the previous long-term trend.

The current 2019/20 financial year rate was projected to be around 8.7 days lost per FTE, indicating an improvement from the consistently stable long-term trend.

A report by the Local Government Association stated that the average absence rate for single/upper tier authorities only was 10.2 days, which was significantly above Wiltshire's absence rate.

It was noted that the Council's sickness absence followed a very clear seasonal trend with an increase in short term absences in the latter two quarters (October to March) of the financial year due to the cold and flu season. This was particularly prevalent in frontline areas that were working closely with the public or vulnerable residents.

Accordingly, the social care services had the highest absence rates at the Council, projecting for the 2019/20 financial year as follows:

- 22.7 days lost per FTE in Learning Disabilities and Mental Health (LDMH)
- 19.9 days in Access and Reablement
- 8.0 days in Families and Children's Services

All other directorates were projected to be under the corporate average for 2019/20.

The Committee was informed as to what measures had been taking place to address this issue and it was noted that Families & Children's Services had been working diligently to reduce stress related absences. To date, alongside a consistently reducing absence rate, they had also reduced stress related absence by 20%.

Members were informed that HR would continue to monitor absence trends in other directorates and undertake early interventions when required.

During discussion, Members noted in particular the higher than average absence rate in the LDMH teams and the significant number of staff leaving during the 2019/20 half year period. The service had been reviewing whether there were any underlying issues that might be causing this and considered that difficulties with management, the structure and case load management might be contributory factors.

In the Mental Health Service, absence in the Western team was significantly lower than in the North and South teams. Members were pleased to note that HR was working with the service to understand if there was anything that could be learnt that could be applied to the other teams to help reduce their absence rates and accordingly, an action plan was being drawn up in consultation with Occupational Health.

Members were also pleased to see a continuing improvement in the sickness absence trend in Families & Children's Services since 2017/18.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the contents of the report.**
- (2) To request an update in 6 months' time on progress that was being made to reduce the sickness rates in those areas with the highest rates of absence.**

12 **Apprenticeship Update**

The Committee received a report by the Director, Human Resources & Organisational Development which provided an update on the Council's apprenticeship programme, including progress on the recruitment of apprentices and the use of apprenticeship levy.

It was noted that by January it was anticipated that 2.2% of the Council's workforce would be undertaking apprenticeships. Although this was slightly below the Council's 2.3% apprenticeship target, the feedback received from the Council's Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) account manager was that Wiltshire was doing very well compared with other organisations. If schools were excluded then Wiltshire would be well above the target of 5.4%. Members were pleased to note that Wiltshire was one of the few local authorities to guarantee a job for all its apprentices once they had completed their training. Wiltshire had a higher number of upskilling apprentices than other local authorities within the Council's local networks. Other local authorities had higher numbers of apprentices in schools but Wiltshire had a larger number of maintained schools.

The Committee was informed that under new apprenticeship rules, employers were now able to transfer 25% of their levy to other organisations to pay for apprenticeship training. Wiltshire's HR & OD were working closely with BANES, Swindon and Wiltshire Sustainability and Transformation Partnership Group to ensure Wiltshire was able to offer transfers for 6 trainee nursing associates who were based in CP practices around Wiltshire. Wiltshire was also using its apprenticeship levy to fund 11 trainee nursing associates for Wiltshire Health and Care. It was pleasing to note that HR & OD were also working with Families & Children's social care teams to be able to offer transfer funds to employers willing to employ a Wiltshire care leaver, supported by the Virtual School and Employment & Skills teams.

The Committee noted that the number of departments participating in the apprenticeship scheme was increasing. Members were informed that apprenticeship standards were gradually expanding and further apprenticeship places would become available as the range of standards increased. Social work standards were now available which would allow apprenticeships to be established in this area.

Resolved:

To note the contents of the report and to request a further update in May 2020.

13 **Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved:

To note that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee was due to be held on Wednesday 18 March 2020 at County Hall, Trowbridge, starting at 10.30am.

14 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items of business.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 - 11.25 am)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Roger Bishton of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 713035, e-mail roger.bishton@wiltshire.gov.uk

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