

Staffing Policy Committee

MINUTES OF THE STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Helen Belcher, Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Simon Jacobs, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Antonio Piazza, Cllr Ricky Rogers and Cllr Ashley O'Neill (Substitute - Part II)

Also Present:

Jo Pitt - Director – HR & OD, Jan Juillerat - Strategic Delivery & Insight Manager Strategic HR & OD, Tamsin Kielb – Head of Strategic HR&OD (Deputy Dir HR&OD) Strategic HR & OD, Wali Rahman - OD Consultant Inclusion & Diversity Strategic HR & OD, Michael Taylor – Workforce Insight Analyst Strategic HR & OD, Mike Osment – Unison Representative and Kevin Fielding - Democratic Services Officer

9 **Apologies for absence**

Cllr Stuart Wheeler – (Cllr Ashley O'Neill subbing), Cllr Richard Clewer, & Cllr Jacqui Lay

Note: Cllr Simon Jacobs chaired the meeting in Cllr Wheeler's absence

10 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Decision

- **That the minutes of the Staffing Policy Committee meeting held on Thursday 17 June 2021 were confirmed as the correct record**

11 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

12 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were none.

13 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

14 **Mandatory COVID Vaccination Policy**

Jan Juillerat – Strategy & Insight Manager advised that the report was brought to the Staffing Policy Committee to seek approval to take the newly drafted “Mandatory COVID-19 vaccination” policy to JCC in October for consultation and then for this policy to be applied straight after JCC and before the next SPC in November to be able to meet the legislation implementation date of the 11 November 2021.

That with effect from 11 November 2021 the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2021 (the “Regulations”), made it mandatory for those who work or were required to enter the indoor premises of a Care Quality Commission (CQC) home to have the COVID-19 vaccination.

That the council had 3 CQC homes (Bradbury house, Bradbury Manor and Meadow Lodge) where it employed approximately 100 staff. In addition, it had approximately another 300 staff in adult social care who as part of their duties visit CQC homes which were owned by other organisations, eg Order of St John Care Trust.

Points made by the committee included:

- That a record of any exemptions would need to be kept.
- That it would be desirable for a member of staff who did not want the covid vaccine to be able to return to their original roles within the care sector with Wiltshire Council if they decided have the vaccine. The Director of HR and OD noted that this would be dependent upon the role or a suitable alternative being available for the member of staff.

Decision

That the Staffing Policy Committee confirmed their agreement of this new draft policy to go to JCC for consultation, and to implement following consultation

That if during consultation any amendments to the current draft policy were required the Staffing Policy Committee gave authority to the Director HR&OD to consider these amendments and update the policy as necessary in consultation with the Chairman of the Staffing Policy Committee

The Chairman thanked Jan Juillerat for her report.

15 **Fixed-Term Contract Policy**

Jan Juillerat – Strategy & Insight Manager outlined a report which sought approval from the Staffing Policy Committee on the new Fixed Term Contract (FTC) policy which would replace the current FTC dismissal policy, with the intention to implement this with effect from 1 November 2021.

The current FTC dismissal policy was last reviewed in 2012 and detailed the process for ending a FTC. Where a FTC ended on the date stated in the contract no notice was applicable, but where the FTC needed to end on a different date, contractual notice must be given.

All employees on a FTC had the same employment rights as permanent council employees.

The revised policy set out that there would be specific end dates for FTCs and statutory notice periods, if notice were needed.

Decision

That Staffing Policy Committee confirmed their agreement of this new Fixed Term Contract policy

The Chairman thanked Jan Juillerat for her report.

16 **Purchase of Annual Leave**

Jan Juillerat – Strategy & Insight Manager gave a short update on the scheme which gave employees of Wiltshire Council the opportunity to purchase four weeks additional leave each year (pro-rata for part-time employees). It was aimed at providing greater work/life balance for employees and allow for events such as a special occasion or trips or taking extra leave for personal or family reasons.

The changes to the scheme had been approved by the Staffing Policy Committee at the 11 March 2021 meeting.

Points made included:

- That Wiltshire Council had already saved an additional 40k based on the extension of the scheme during the last 6 months of the scheme.
- That this was a popular and well used Wiltshire Council scheme.

- The importance of providing greater work/life balance for Wiltshire Council employees.

The Chairman thanked Jan Juillerat for her update.

17 **Inclusion Strategy**

Wali Rahman - OD Consultant Inclusion & Diversity Strategic HR & OD gave an update on the Wiltshire Council Inclusion Strategy.

Points made included:

- That training was now gaining momentum.
- Very much a focus on education and awareness.
- Equality and diversion steering group now set up and meeting.
- Starting to look at trends and statistics across all directorates.
- Currently working towards a new communications plan.

Activities

Reverse Mentoring Pilot

- Six directors and six networks members.

Staff Networks

- LGBT+
- 220+ members.
- Meetings and workshops held by BME, Women's and Carers and Disability network.
- Upcoming events for Black History Month and World Menopause Day.

Inclusion and Diversity Training

- 20% of managers had now attended the Creative an inclusive workplace training event.

- 16% of managers had now attended the Equality and Diversity training event.

EDI Steering Group Update

- Upcoming plans.
- Service insights, stepping up programme, communications and action plan for next year.

Key dates

- Next EDI steering group meeting: Tuesday 12 October, 2:00-3:30.
- 27 September – 3 October: National Inclusion Week.
- October - Black History Month.
- 11 October: South West Black History Month Online Conference, 1pm-5pm.
- 19 October: Lunchtime #EPIC Talk on menopause.

The Chairman advised that excellent work was being carried out across the council, with Wiltshire Council leading across the South West on this important topic.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have future updates.

The Chairman thanked Wali Rahman for his update and for the hard work which was being carried out on this work across Wiltshire Council.

It was noted that Wali Rahman had recently received an award for his work championing inclusion at Wiltshire Council.

18 **Quarterly Report - April-June 21**

Michael Taylor – Workforce Insight Analyst outlined the written report (April - June 2021) contained in the agenda pack

Points made included:

That the COVID-19 virus had had significantly less impact on sickness absence during this quarter, contributing 18 absences totalling 198 working days, a 75% reduction compared to the previous quarter (January – March), which saw 79

COVID-related sickness absences totalling 789 working days. COVID-related sickness absence represents only 2.8% of the total days lost from April - June, making COVID-19 the 11th most common absence reason for absence (previously second most common in January – March). This reduction was aligned with a reduction in cases seen nationally during the same period.

However, since the end of the April to June quarter the council had experienced a slight increase in COVID-related sickness absence, also aligned with a similar trend nationally, mostly likely due to the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant. The council also experienced an increasing trend in those self isolating since the end of June, also likely due to the delta variant and people being notified to self isolate through the NHS COVID-19 app which hit a peak in July. However, it should also be noted that even when numbers peaked in July, this was still only affecting around 1% of our workforce and the council were continuing to mitigate transmission with restrictions remaining in place regarding workplace access and social distancing measures in council buildings. Since these numbers peaked in July, however, the number of staff self isolating had reduced significantly, a figure which was expected to further reduce with all government restrictions ceasing and no longer requiring to check in to venues. At the time of writing, the automatic requirement to self isolate when identified as a COVID-19 case contact had been removed for most of the population in England. COVID absence figures continued to be reported on a weekly basis and reviewed by the corporate leadership team.

Stress-related absence had largely contributed to the increase in sickness absence this quarter. Stress-related absence had increased by almost a third (31%), compared to the previous quarter, and has contributed almost half of the total absence days lost in the quarter (43%). Contributing to this were significant increases in social care (both children's and adults), Joint Commissioning and IT. Results of the July 2021 Wellbeing and Engagement Survey and intelligence from the relevant HR Business Partners suggested that social care were experiencing increased demand (adults) and latent demand (children's) and were having to work very differently as a result of the pandemic. Many of the staff in these areas reported that they did not feel empowered to take a break from work to support their own mental wellbeing, which could be contributing to this increase in stress-related absence. The survey showed a similar trend experienced by Joint Commissioning. In addition there was a restructure underway within IT and results from the recent Wellbeing and Engagement Survey suggested that staff in this area were feeling pessimistic about the future and were currently citing future uncertainty as their biggest concern, which may be contributing to the increase in stress-related absence. These responses would be discussed in senior management team meetings and the Wellbeing and Engagement Survey action planning process, to understand how the council could support these services.

Wiltshire Council were facing financial constraints as a result of the pandemic, and therefore costs were under constant scrutiny. Costs of both casual and agency staff this quarter had continued to follow a reducing trend, realising a combined reduction of around £1m compared to the same quarter last year (April to June 2020). The permanent costs had increased, however, by around

£457k (1.6%), largely due to eligible staff receiving a pay increment in April 2021.

Maintaining a sufficient and sustainable workforce was critical to service delivery and providing a consistent service for Wiltshire residents. Of particular note are the data relating to the headcount by age band graph in the section below, which showed a trend of reducing numbers of staff under 25 years of age (and under 34) over the previous three quarters and the turnover table, which showed an increase in staff leaving who were under 25. Looking in more detail at the data, over the last 4 quarters, 59% of leavers under 25 were in Leisure. Leisure generally had a high turnover of staff due to the seasonal nature of the work, however due to the closures and reduced service being delivered in Leisure during the pandemic, turnover of staff under 25 had increased compared to the financial year prior to the pandemic (42%). 'Places Leisure' is to be brought back into the council in October 2021, at which point we would see an increase in the proportion of staff under 25.

Decision

- **The Staffing Policy Committee noted the report**

The Chairman thanked Michael Taylor for his report.

19 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items to consider.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 - 11.50 am)

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