

## Staffing Policy Committee

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### MINUTES OF THE STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

#### Present:

Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman), Cllr Allison Bucknell (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ashley O'Neill, Cllr Simon Jacobs (Substitute), and Cllr Tom Rounds (Substitute)

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#### 20 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Richard Britton, who was substituted by Councillor Simon Jacobs
- Councillor Richard Clewer, who was substituted by Councillor Tom Rounds
- Councillor Ricky Rogers

#### 21 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 March 2024 were considered. The Chairman raised the resolution under Minute Item 15, Driver Health Screening, and noted that a statement in relation to the resolution had been received from officers which read:

*“There were a number of concerns and queries about the Driver Health Screening Policy, mostly about whether the additional checks were a proportionate response to our obligations under the H&S at Work Act. The Head of Legal Services was consulted and their initial view is that by adopting the policy the Council is taking reasonable steps to ensure employees remain fit and safe for work, but that there is little evidence to suggest this is actually a necessary step - so by introducing this in the absence of any meaningful data to support the introduction of this policy, we could be going beyond what is actually necessary.*

*There is no evidence to suggest that any other Council is conducting these additional checks and there is a cost to the Occupational Health service as well as the services which the drivers work for to introduce these checks. Furthermore, of the small number of reported fleet driver accidents over the last 5 years, none had driver health issues as an identified contributory factor. It is therefore proposed that we do not pursue this policy any further.”*

There being no further comments from Members, it was:

**Resolved:**

- 1) **The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 March 2024 as a true and correct record.**
- 2) **The Committee noted the statement from officers with regard to Minute Item 15, Driver Health Screening.**

22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

23 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

24 **Public Participation**

There were no statements or questions submitted.

25 **Apprenticeship Update**

Kathryn Partington, OD Consultant – Apprenticeships, introduced the report and updated the Committee on the Council's Apprenticeship Programme, including a progress report on the recruitment of apprentices and how it is being used to target early careers and the use of the Council's Apprenticeship Levy.

The background to the report was explained alongside further details on the different apprenticeship types and apprenticeship numbers and take up from April 2023 – April 2024 as per Paragraphs 5 to 11 of the report. Officers then explained the apprenticeship levy transfers under the new apprenticeship rules updated in April 2024 and it was highlighted that HR&OD officers were working closely with the BANES, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board (BSW ICB) Apprenticeship Group in the joint procurement of apprenticeships through the Salisbury Managed Procurement Services (SMPS) and that Wiltshire Council were the only Local Authority to have a regular presence in the group.

Members were informed that the Council had 55 different apprenticeship standards being delivered by 42 different training providers and that officers monitored the success rates with providers throughout the apprenticeships to ensure quality and value for money. Officers emphasised the hard work made in early careers engagement as detailed in Paragraphs 24 to 29 of the report.

Finally, Members were informed that officers were looking to work with Gloucestershire & Wiltshire Partnership to increase levy sharing, to support more Small to Medium Enterprises that align with the Council's priorities with apprenticeship funding for their employees, and to work closely with service areas to utilise apprenticeships for 'hard to fill' roles and allowing staff to progress internally and build careers with Wiltshire Council.

During the discussion, points included:

- It was confirmed that all apprenticeships were advertised on the Council's career sites, social media pages, and government websites, however it was noted that in respect of the latter, there was a two-week time frame in which the vacancy needed to be posted and closed, which could lead to timing issues. Furthermore, officers were working closely with the Communications Team and internal managers and Heads of Service to develop a new SharePoint page to make it easier for different directorates to see what opportunities were available for apprentices.
- Members sought further clarification on "sunsetting" funds available for the apprenticeship programme to which officers further explained Paragraphs 21 to 23 of the report. It was further explained that there were few employers who could fully utilise the levy due to the organisational difficulties in supporting the apprenticeship training alongside the day to day job. However, it was noted that officers were anticipating potential changes to the levy which could entail more flexibility rather than losing or transferring the levy.
- It was clarified that some apprenticeships were only offered internally, such as social workers, due to the long wait time for Wiltshire Council staff to be offered the qualification and due to the difficulty of the role.
- In response to a question, it was clarified that officers worked with the Targeted Education Team in supporting Looked After Young People and care leavers in achieving apprenticeships and that officers had held an event specifically to make them aware of the different opportunities through the Council. It was also noted that the Recruitment Team also worked with any apprenticeship referrals to support them through different activities such as mock interviews.
- The pay grades for different apprenticeship levels were explained and it was confirmed that those employees undertaking upskilling apprenticeships did not sacrifice any proportion of their salaries by obtaining the qualification.
- It was noted that there was a good range of different apprenticeship standards being offered through the Council, with a national focus on entry level apprenticeships and a Wiltshire specific focus on early years apprenticeships and how to increase uptake.
- Members queried how young people living in more rural parts of Wiltshire would have equal opportunity to access apprenticeships within more urban parts of Wiltshire. Officers highlighted that they had attended almost every career fair they had been invited to across Wiltshire and were looking to focus on getting different services to attend events, build interest, and make direct contact with young people. However, it was

noted that officers had not factored in the offering of a transport service, but that prospective candidates were aware of the potential travel implications to the appropriate hub.

- Officers were thanked for the update, their hard work, and successes as detailed in the report.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee noted the contents of the report and the work undertaken to support the Apprenticeship Programme and early careers.**

26 **Potential Strike Action**

Joanna Richer, Senior HR Case Adviser, verbally updated the Committee on National Pay negotiations and possible strike action.

Members were informed that the National Pay Award for 2024 had not been agreed and therefore, no pay award had been applied. The Unions submitted their claim at the end of February 2024 and following consultation, the National Employers responded with a full and final offer in May 2024 which proposed, with effect from 1 April 2024, an increase of £1,290 (pro-rata for part-time employees) to be paid as a consolidated, permanent addition on all National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Points 2 to 43 inclusive. It was explained that the offer would achieve a bottom rate of pay of £12.26 with effect from 1 April 2024 which would equate to a pay increase of 5.77% for employees on Pay Point 2, and all employees on the NJC pay spine would receive a minimum 2.5% pay increase.

The three Unions then balloted their members on this offer with UNISON and Unite the Union rejecting the offer, and GMB Union accepting the offer. UNISON confirmed that following the rejection, they would be balloting their members on industrial action which commenced on 4 September 2024 and would run until 16 October 2024. Unite the Union also announced that they would be balloting members for industrial action from 27 August 2024 to 15 October 2024, however it was confirmed that staff at Wiltshire Council or within Wiltshire schools would not be balloted.

Officers explained that the outcome of the UNISON ballot would not be known until after 16 October 2024, and if the vote for industrial action was agreed, the Union would need to give at least 14 days notice for strike dates. As industrial action would affect both Wiltshire Council staff and support staff in Wiltshire schools, officers were beginning preparations for the potential impacts of a strike by UNISON Members from early November 2024 onwards. As such, it was confirmed that approximately 700 Council staff were UNISON Members and could strike if industrial action was called, with a significant proportion of those staff working in the Council's front line services. It was explained that a working group would be established including Heads of Service,

Communications, Legal, and HR to consider mitigation for strike action and to put contingency plans in place. Officers would also work with employees in Education and Skills to provide support to any schools and academies who may be impacted alongside other partners such as the NHS and Wiltshire Police. It was noted that there were regulations in place regarding the provision of cover for the workloads of those staff striking, however Members were reassured that these services would be prioritised and resourced to provide support where needed.

Finally, it was confirmed that those members of staff involved in any industrial action would not be paid for the days that they were on strike, and as soon as any strike action was announced, those members of staff would be prevented from booking annual leave on those dates in order to reduce the impact.

Members were reassured that further updates would be provided once the ballot outcome was announced. Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee noted the update.**

27 **Update on Review of Terms and Conditions**

Tamsin Kielb, Director of HR & OD, verbally updated the Committee on the progress of the consultation.

Members were informed the following a consultation meeting with the Unions in January 2024, it had been indicated by the Unions that a resolution could be found on standby and callout. As such, further discussions were held, and the Unions voiced their concerns with the proposal which led to amendments being made on standby and callout, and the Unions agreeing to go out to ballot.

A further meeting was held in July 2024 in which the Council raised a new proposal on unsocial hours with an aim to move red lines closer. However, during this meeting, the Unions advised that the proposed changes to standby and callout were rejected and GMB Union declined to discuss the new proposal unless the Council confirmed that they were withdrawing the S.188, which may result in dismissal and re-engagement. In response, the Council advised that they could not withdraw the S.188, as this remained a legal route should the Council be unable to reach a collective agreement on the proposed changes.

Members were reassured that communications were ongoing with the Unions and that further meetings were being organised together with the new Chief Executive, Lucy Townsend.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee noted the update.**

28 **Refer a Friend Policy**

Laura Fisher, HR&OD Strategy Manager, introduced the report and updated the Committee on the introduction of a policy for the Refer a Friend scheme.

The introduction and objective of the pilot scheme was highlighted as per Paragraphs 2 to 7 of the report alongside the definition of a 'hard to fill role' and some of the highlights of the scheme as detailed in the report.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members commended officers on the scheme and highlighted the cost savings figures and increased chance of successfully filling a hard to fill role long-term.
- It was confirmed that although no family members had been referred through the scheme thus far, the policy did not prohibit such a referral. In response to a query, officers had no concerns as to fraud and/or abuse of the policy during the pilot, however noted that as new positions were added to the list of eligible roles, attention could be paid to the personal details of those applying to prevent such. Furthermore, Members were reassured that the terms of the policy afforded a level of inbuilt protection against such issues.
- When considering apprenticeships, officers highlighted that the scheme was designed for hard to fill roles, however if an apprenticeship was aligned to one of the eligible roles, officers could consider combining the two processes.
- It was confirmed that existing employees could find advertisements for hard to fill roles through the internal careers page and communications and by manager's drawing employees' attention to any available opportunities. It was further explained that the scheme was also part of the application process in which a prospective candidate could state the name of the employee that referred them in order to receive the incentive payments if applicable.
- Members noted Appendix 2 which detailed the list of eligible roles and queried if there were any particular roles or directorates that could be better supported with the introduction of the policy. In response, officers noted that they were looking to focus on the roles within the Planning Service in the future.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee approved the implementation of the Refer a Friend policy, formalising the pilot scheme introduced in 2022.**

29 **Appointment of Members to Sub-Committees**

The Committee were asked to appoint the Membership of the following Sub-Committees:

- Senior Officer Employment Sub-Committee
- Staffing Appeals Sub-Committee
- Grievance Appeals Sub-Committee

It was noted that both the Senior Officer Employment Sub-Committee and the Staffing Appeals Sub-Committee were required to include at least one Member of the Cabinet. Furthermore, Sub-Committees, like Committees, were required to be politically balanced unless there had been a vote without objection by Full Council setting out otherwise. Accordingly, as each Sub-Committee comprised of three Members, these would need to be two Members of the Conservative Party and one Member of the Liberal Democrat Party. It was also recommended that as the Staffing Appeals Sub-Committee could hear appeals from the Senior Officer Employment Sub-Committee, the Membership should comprise of different Members.

Finally, it was recommended that all Members and substitutes of the Staffing Policy Committee were explicitly confirmed to be substitutes for the Sub-Committee Members to enable flexibility.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

- 1) **The Committee appointed the following Members to each of the below Sub-Committees for 2024-25:**
  - **Senior Officer Employment Sub-Committee**
    - **Councillor Stuart Wheeler**
    - **Councillor Richard Clewer**
    - **Councillor Helen Belcher OBE**
  - **Staffing Appeals Sub-Committee**
    - **Councillor Allison Bucknell**
    - **Councillor Ashley O'Neill**
    - **Councillor Carole King**
  - **Grievance Appeals Sub-Committee**
    - **Councillor Stuart Wheeler**
    - **Councillor Allison Bucknell**
    - **Councillor Carole King**
- 2) **The Committee agreed to appoint all Members and substitutes of the Staffing Policy Committee as substitutes for each Sub-Committee.**

30 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.30 - 3.30 pm)

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