

Staffing Policy Committee

MINUTES OF THE STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 MAY 2023 AT KENNET ROOM, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman), Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Richard Clewer, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ashley O'Neill, Cllr Tamara Reay and Cllr Ricky Rogers

22 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence received from any Members of the Committee, however apologies from Jo Madeley, Head of Legal Services, and Tamsin Kielb, Director of HR & OD, were noted.

23 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 March 2023 were considered.

The Chairman raised Minute 14 and asked Gemma Morrison, HR & OD Strategic Delivery Manager, for an update on the response that was due to be circulated regarding the possibility of elected Members utilising salary sacrifice schemes in general, with reference to the Tusker electric or hybrid vehicle proposal reported at the meeting held on 5 January 2023.

In response, Members were informed that the scheme, and therefore the Tusker implementation, was still under review and as such, an update could not be provided at that time. However, Members were reassured that they would be notified as soon as there was an update to present.

In addition, Councillor Jacqui Lay stated that her apologies had not been noted for the previous meeting, and it was therefore confirmed that this would be rectified.

After which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 March 2023 as a true and correct record.

24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

25 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

26 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted.

27 **Grow Your Own Social Workers Policy**

Gemma Morrison, HR & OD Strategic Delivery Manager, introduced the report which outlined the draft policy for the 'Grow Our Own Social Workers' scheme which aimed to provide an opportunity for employees to undertake a professional qualification in Social Work with a view that if staff commenced the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) within 3 months of successful qualification, then their previous service would be taken into account for contractual benefits. Furthermore, it was noted that the Career Break policy had also been amended to reflect the introduction of the new 'Grow Our Own' policy.

The Committee discussed the report and queried whether the policy could be broadened to include other staff and agencies with ties to Wiltshire Council in similar fields, and to offer them with the same opportunities. It was confirmed that officers would discuss the proposal with principal social workers within the department and provide an answer for Members outside of the meeting.

The Committee also asked questions relating to the amount of agency staff needed/working in the field, the number of posts officers were seeking to grow, if the scheme had been practiced in other Local Authorities, and if there was scope to expand the policy to allow more flexibility in other areas within the Council. In response, officers confirmed that they would explore the suggestions and questions raised and would again, provide answers for the Committee once the data and information had been reviewed.

The Committee also asked that the service monitor the progress in order for officers to bring back further performance reports back to the Committee.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee moved to support and agree the new Grow Our Own policy, and the related amendments made to the Career Break Policy.

28 **Chief Officer Posts Guidance**

Paula Marsh, Senior Strategic Business Partner, introduced the item and provided a brief summary of the work undertaken to ensure alignment between the Council's constitution, Council policies, and role descriptions in relation to 'Chief Officer' posts.

It was noted that officers had undertaken this strategic policy drive to ensure that there was continuity across all policies, and a single source of reference for all officers when recruiting for those types of roles.

Cllr Ashley O'Neill highlighted that Paragraph 5 of the report stated that the changes would be confirmed at the next Full Council meeting and suggested that the recommendation be amended to reflect that the changes may not be approved as the meeting was scheduled for 16 May 2023, and therefore would be held after the Committee meeting.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee noted the new guidance document and confirmed that policies should be updated to align and refer to this where appropriate, providing such changes are approved at the next Full Council meeting scheduled for 16 May 2023.

29 **Quarterly Workforce Report**

Michael Taylor, Workforce Insight Analyst, introduced the quarterly workforce report, with particular focus on sickness absence, employee turnover, and finance and salary costs.

It was highlighted that as mentioned in the previous report, Public Health experts had predicted a significant increase in flu and Covid variants over the winter months. Officers noted that Q3 and Q4 were considerably higher than expected for absences related to cold/flu and other seasonal influences, therefore supporting the Public Health experts' predictions. As such, officers could use these predictions in the future to develop contingency plans and more preventative measures such as ensuring that more customer facing roles be targeted for flu jabs. However, Members were reassured that these increases did not affect the entire sickness rate across the Council which remained in line with national averages.

Employee turnover was then raised, and it was noted that the current job market was more candidate-driven, thus resulting in a surplus of jobs, but a shortage of top-tier candidates. In response to a question, officers noted that Wiltshire Council had received 125 work experience submissions, 70 of which had been matched with appropriate placements. Furthermore, all Wiltshire schools had access to the recruitment team, and officers from which attended employment days and job fairs across the County to advertise working at the Council. It was highlighted that it was an area of focus, however officers acknowledged that there was always scope for improvements.

During the discussion, members asked what methods were in place to reduce elements of workplace stress and consequently, reducing the amount of time that staff were on sick leave for. Officers highlighted that within the Council

there were pockets of stress related absences, however it was emphasised that these specific stress areas were monitored and reviewed regularly with frequent staff engagement sessions to help support these members of staff. Furthermore, the annual Staff Survey data would be circulated to services shortly, which would again help to highlight any service areas that needed particular support. Following from this, Members suggested including a further breakdown of the data by department in the next workforce report to ensure the right areas were targeted for further support.

Members raised the drive to get staff back to working within the hubs and queried if this was conducive to inclusivity and if it was causing further stress and pressure to staff. In response, officers confirmed that the staff networks were seeking to re-establish the focus groups assigned to this topic, to review the current arrangement. At which point, any feedback gleaned would be reported back to the Committee.

Officers confirmed that all members of staff who have been signed off with stress or other related illnesses were immediately referred to Occupational Health. It was emphasised that staff could not be forced to engage with interventions such as counselling, however officers would liaise with the Occupational Health team to provide Members with further information such as the take-up rate for these opportunities.

Agency costs were then raised, and it was queried whether these would be reduced as a result of the new policy of deleting vacant posts. Officers explained that agency staff were only employed in certain areas of the Council. Furthermore, if the post was a temporary measure, then once the contract had reached its end, the relationship with the agency would cease and the post would be deleted. However, during the term of contract, the role would count as an established post. It was further explained that agency staff were predominantly required within Social Care when the need arose to fill statutory roles or ensure continuity of service, hence why there were levels of fluctuation throughout the year. It was also explained that the discrepancies apparent on the graphs within the report could be due to two to three high level roles skewing the figures. Members further noted that Wiltshire Council's agency costs fared well in comparison to other neighbouring Council's.

Resolved:

The Committee noted the update.

30 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 2.50 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey - Democratic Services
Officer of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718259, e-mail
ellen.ghey@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line 01225 713114 or email
communications@wiltshire.gov.uk

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