

Staffing Policy Committee

MINUTES OF THE STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4 JANUARY 2024 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman), Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Ashley O'Neill, and Cllr Tamara Reay

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from Members of the Committee were received from:

- Councillor Richard Clewer
- Councillor Jacqui Lay
- Councillor Ricky Rogers

Apologies were also noted from Mike Osment, representative for Wiltshire Unison.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 November 2023 were considered.

Councillor Ashley O'Neill requested that an amendment was made to the wording of Bullet Point 9, Minute 48.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2023 as a true and correct record, subject to the removal of the following words at Bullet Point 9 of Minute 48, as the Cabinet Member and officers were satisfied with the current level of security provided:

"It was acknowledged that although officers could not guarantee complete security on Council owned laptops.."

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's announcements.

5 **Public Participation**

There were no statements or questions submitted.

6 **Updates on Policies Due to Oracle Implementation**

Laura Fisher, HR & OD Strategy Manager, provided a verbal update to the Committee on a number of minor amendments to different policies due to the implementation of the Oracle system.

It was confirmed that the amendments were not changes to the nature or terms of the policies, but rather to align with the new Oracle system requirements. The following changes were then briefly detailed:

- **Annual Leave Policy** – as Oracle was being used to request and track annual leave for all employees regardless of working patterns, leave entitlement was now processed in hours and must be used either as a full or half day leave. As such, when using the standard full and half day measurements, a full day would be recorded as 7.4 to represent 7 hours 24 minutes, and a half day as 3.7 to represent 3 hours 45 minutes.
- **Introduction to the HR Helpdesk** – it was explained that the HR Helpdesk would be used as a replacement to employees contacting the HR Advisory Team directly. Therefore, the following policies had been amended to include a standardised statement explaining the new procedure alongside the removal of any other HR Advisory Team references.
 - Equality & Diversity Policy
 - Dignity at Work Policy
 - Code of Conduct Policy
 - Appointments Policy
- **Compressed Hours Policy** – it was explained that the minor changes to the policy reflected the changes to the two Bullet Points above.
- **Time off in Lieu (TOIL) Policy** – it was explained that minor additions had been made to clarify that the policy did not relate to anyone employed on HAY graded contracts. It was further explained that this was current practice and therefore not a change but had been included after reviewing the policy and discovering that it was not noted. It was also highlighted that Bullet Point 2 had also been included.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members queried if the new annual leave system on Oracle was fully operational and emphasised the importance of compliance checks to ensure that managers fully utilised the new system and moved on from the previous method of monitoring and recording annual leave manually. Officers acknowledged that the system was still relatively new after being launched in November 2023, and therefore some teething problems were being experienced due to the complexity and size of Wiltshire Council as an organisation. Despite this, officers reassured Members that regular reviews and compliance checks would be undertaken which would then highlight any discrepancies for further discussions.
- The planned integration of the payroll system into Oracle was raised and both Members and officers noted the complexity of the project.
- Members congratulated officers on the launch of Oracle thus far which they considered to be a success.
- It was highlighted that Members had access to a version of Oracle that was different from Wiltshire Council employees, however it would still allow Councillors to submit expenses alongside other relevant services.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee noted the update.

7 Pay Policy Statement

Laura Fisher, HR & OD Strategy Manager, presented an updated Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2024/25 to the Committee prior to agreement by Full Council and publication on the Wiltshire Council website.

It was explained that under Chapter 8 of the Localism Act 2011, every Local Authority must prepare a Pay Policy Statement for each financial year, with the proposed version having a publication deadline of 1 April 2024. Officers then referred to Paragraphs 4 to 9 of the report which detailed the minor amendments to the policy. Particular emphasis was given to Paragraphs 6 and 9 which noted the additions to Paragraph 55 of the policy relating to arrangements for the agreement of special severance payments, and the ongoing negotiations between the Council and Trade Unions on changes to unsocial hours and standby and callout allowances.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members highlighted an error in the policy which stated that the second phase of the Oracle rollout was set to go live in April 2023 instead of April 2024.
- Members discussed the continuing negotiations between the Council and Trade Unions and the second proposed recommendation as per Paragraph 16 of the report. Officers noted that briefing sessions and an informal meeting were held towards the end of 2023, with a further meeting scheduled for 15 January 2024. That meeting would involve the 3 Trade Unions and would discuss any proposals that they might have which would enable them to reach collective agreement and deliver Council business objectives. It was further confirmed that Members would be contacted prior to the February 2024 Full Council meeting in the event that collective agreement was reached.
- Members were pleased to see that the ratio between highest and lowest paid employees had decreased slightly as a result of the National Joint Council (NJC) pay award.
- Clarification was sought on why the Council's Monitoring Officer's duties were considered as a separate role. It was clarified that they meant the Acting Returning Officer role. In response, it was explained that the role was a statutory requirement nationally and therefore the officer undertaking that role would receive an additional payment which does not form part of base pay.
- It was explained that when considering voluntary redundancies and subsequent re-employment, those employees would not be eligible for any employment continuity benefits.
- Members raised queries with regard to employees on lower pay. Officers explained that Wiltshire pay grades B-O used the NJC pay spine which was nationally negotiated and agreed on between the National Employers and Trade Unions. Although the bottom point of the pay spine provided a little headroom from the national living wage, it was recognised that there was the need to review the national pay spine to ensure that Local Authorities do not pay at the minimum and remain an employer of choice. Any changes nationally would need to be reviewed and implemented at the local level; however, this was not likely to be considered until after the 2024 General Election.
- Paragraphs 83 and 85 of the report was raised and Members queried what the industry standard was. Officers explained that the guidelines were published through the Government and formed part of the Localism Act 2011, however it was emphasised that the Council's ratios were well within these guidelines and that these were not a statutory requirement.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

- a) **The Staffing Policy Committee approved the updated pay policy statement for 2024-25 to be presented at Full Council for approval on 20 February 2024.**
- b) **The Staffing Policy Committee delegated authority to the Director of HR & OD to approve any amendments required to the pay policy statement prior to Full Council as a result of the Trade Unions negotiations on changes to unsocial hours and standby and callout allowances. The Director of HR & OD will inform the Staffing Policy Committee of any changes prior to publication. If agreement on changes to these policies is not reached prior to Full Council, the changes will be made to the pay policy statement for the following year for April 2025.**

8 Bi-Annual Workforce Report

Kirsty Butcher, Workforce Insight Analyst, alongside Tamsin Kielb, Director HR & OD, updated the Committee on the current workforce analytics position.

It was confirmed that the report concentrated on Q1 and Q2 for the 2023-24 financial year, with the latter sections focussing on long term trends.

During the discussion, points included:

Sickness Absence

- With regard to stress related absences, Members queried if there was a breakdown available to show the split between those that were work or non-work related. Officers explained that it was difficult to retrieve such data at present, however as Oracle continued to be embedded within the organisation, it may be something that could be looked at in the future. Furthermore, it was emphasised that people experiencing stress was not just a local issue, but a national and even global challenge with the trend continuing to rise.
- It was noted that the 12 months to September 2023 reported an average of 9.5 days sickness absence per employee which was above the national average of 5 days. Officers highlighted that within the Council there were pockets of stress related absences, and that the data could be skewed by a smaller number of employees with longer term absences. As such, it was difficult to accurately determine the number of employees absent as a percentage of the total workforce, but as their reporting evolved, officers revisit this.
- It was explained that due to a recent corporate restructure, the Occupational Health department now fell under the remit of Tamsin Kielb,

who reassured Members that understanding how to better support employees experiencing stress related absences was a priority. Furthermore, officers were focussing on achieving a holistic view of the area in general to discern how to best address the issue of resilience within the workforce proactively rather than undertaking a reactive approach. As such, officers were intending on organising a project team to look at this and would include areas such as supporting managers in identifying patterns in individuals, relapse plans, and relevant policies.

Employee Turnover

- Members were pleased to read that Wiltshire Council were seeing an increase of approximately 2 applicants per job advertisement between January to March 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.
- Members also commended the introduction of the 'Leaver Journey' within Oracle from April 2024, which would trigger automatic invitations for exit interviews. This would hopefully increase the number of exit interviews completed and would enable better analysis of reasons for leaving which would then feed into action plans.

Finance and Salary Costs

- Agency costs were raised, and officers queried where the other pinch points were apart from the social care directorates. Officers stated that they would provide the information to Members outside of the meeting, however they provided reassurance that the area continued to be scrutinised within the services. Despite this, it was highlighted that the increase in costs was not unexpected when considering the challenging job market, particularly in social care. Furthermore, it was emphasised that the Council were in a good position in comparison to historic costs and other neighbouring Local Authorities.
- Members requested that information in relation to apprenticeships and training be included within future reports. Officers noted that there was a good uptake in apprenticeships. It was further noted that officers would focus on attracting and retaining under 25-year-olds to support the longevity of the workforce.

Advisory Cases

- Members requested further breakdowns of the data to assess the number of cases closed and the total length of time taken for completion in order to undertake comparisons between the targets stipulated within any relevant policies. Officers highlighted that the completion time was dependent on managerial capacity to hear cases as well as individual

case complexities, however there was a focus on bringing case numbers, and time taken, down.

- Members queried if there was a correlation between advisory cases and long-term sickness and absence and if tightening procedures could better support both employees and managers within the process. The intended sickness absence review was reiterated, and Members were reassured that this area would be considered within that.

Members commended officers for their hard work and expressed anticipation for further updates.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee noted the update.

9 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 - 11.15 am)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey - Democratic Services
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