

Staffing Policy Committee

MINUTES OF THE STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 5 JANUARY 2022 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman), Cllr Helen Belcher, Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Richard Clewer, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Ashley O'Neill, Cllr Antonio Piazza and Cllr Ricky Rogers

Also Present:

Jo Pitt - Director – HR & OD, Tamsin Kielb – Head of Strategic HR&OD (Deputy Dir HR&OD) Strategic HR & OD, Frances Longmore - HR Policy Officer, HR&OD and Kevin Fielding - Democratic Services Officer

20 **Apologies for absence**

Cllr Jacqui Lay and Mike Osment – UNISON.

21 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Decision

That the minutes of the Staffing Policy Committee meeting held on Thursday 15 September 2021 were confirmed as the correct record

22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

23 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were none.

24 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

25 Performance Management Policies

Frances Longmore - HR Policy Officer, HR&OD outlined a report which sought to seek approval for three updated policies as part of the policy framework for effective performance management (performance, conflict and conduct), recognising that this is a necessary condition for a High Performing Culture (HPC):

- Discipline
- Grievance
- Improving Work Performance (IWP)

Points made included:

The IWP and grievance policy were last reviewed in 2016 and the disciplinary policy in 2010. There had been only minor process / procedure updates since then as necessary.

The Grievance Procedure revisions supported the Mediated Resolution approach for managing interpersonal conflict and complaints which was being embedded.

More generally, the review of these policies now reflected the organisational context within which the council was operating. The launch of Our Identity and the HPC workstream (which was part of the Organisational Recovery Programme) were key strands which had influenced the changes. Feedback from managers had also been taken on board. The approach to HR policies was that they were consistent; accessible and user friendly; supporting and enabling the organisation to effectively manage performance and conduct concerns.

There would be potential costs savings as the policies support effective management of issues and avoid problems escalating beyond the Council, and whilst an exact monetary value could not be determined, there would undoubtedly be cost savings related to time, service delivery, and absence.

It was intended for the revised policies to come into effect from 1st March 2022.

Decision

It was agreed that the Staffing Policy Committee confirmed their agreement to the updates to the Disciplinary, Grievance and IWP policies.

The Chairman thanked Frances Longmore for her report.

26 Recruitment of Ex-offenders Policy

Frances Longmore - HR Policy Officer, HR&OD outlined a report which sought to seek approval on the recruitment of ex-offenders policy which had been updated following changes to the DBS filtering rules.

Filtering rules were first introduced on 20 May 2013 when amendments were made to legislation that affected both what an employer could ask an individual in relation to convictions and cautions, and what was disclosed on a Standard or Enhanced DBS certificate.

The rules were updated on 28th November 2020 as follows:

- Warnings, reprimands and youth cautions would no longer be automatically disclosed on a DBS certificate
- The multiple conviction rule had been removed, meaning that if an individual had more than one conviction, regardless of offence type or time passed, each conviction would be considered against the remaining rules individually, rather than all being automatically disclosed.

The report sought to update the policy, the main considerations being:

To clarify that the council's approach towards employing ex-offenders reflected whether a role was or was not exempt from the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

It also set out, in paragraphs 17-22, what convictions or cautions should be disclosed in line with the new filtering rules.

That there was a recruitment of ex-offenders policy which provided advice to managers, the recruitment team and applicants on the process and circumstances when disclosure of convictions were required as part of the recruitment process or during employment.

It was noted that while awaiting the policy update, the new filtering rules and any associated process changes had been applied.

That there would be no financial impact as a result of the policy updates.

Decision

It was agreed that the Staffing Policy Committee confirmed their agreement to the updates to the recruitment of ex-offenders policy.

The Chairman thanked Frances Longmore for her report.

27 **Ways of Working Policy**

Tamsin Kielb - Head of Strategic HR&OD presented a report that sought to seek approval for an update and amalgamation of the Homeworking and Flexible working policies, this updated policy was called Ways of Working policy.

Points made included:

Prior to the Covid pandemic, many employees had worked part of their time from a council workspace and part from home and some employees worked all their time from a council workspace. However, with the impact of COVID, most employees had had to work from home for most of the time.

The Workplaces and Workspaces workstream were reviewing employee/service needs in order to maximise the use of all workplaces in a manner that enhances services, improves performance, staff wellbeing and realised the best economical returns from our estates.

Wiltshire Council's current policies (Flexible Working and Homeworking) were introduced in 2011 and do not now fully reflect the reconfiguration of its workplaces or how employees would like to work.

The latest wellbeing survey results showed that most teams and employees believed they can be effective with far less access to council buildings. The Ways of Working Policy had been produced to support this

Extending Wiltshire Council's flexible working practices would support the organisations financial savings as it opens commercial opportunities to make savings through the release or rental of spaces.

Points raised by the committee members included:

The Importance of continued provision of furniture and specialised equipment for those who had a disability.

Cllr Richard Clewer advised that he was not comfortable to agree the Ways of Working Policy report presented to the Committee, and advised that Paragraphs 41-44 of the report were still being discussed at Wiltshire Council Cabinet level, and that the report should be deferred to the March 2022 Staffing Policy Committee meeting.

After a discussion it was agreed:

Decision

That the Staffing Policy Committee approved the amalgamation of the Homeworking and Flexitime policies to create the Ways of Working policy, with the exception of paras 41-44, (set out below) which would be discussed and agreed by Jo Pitt - Director HR&OD, Cllr Ashely O'Neil - Cabinet Member for Governance, Licensing, Staffing, Communities and Area Boards, and Cllr Stuart Wheeler - Chairman of the Staffing Policy Committee.

Meetings and Travel

41. All meetings should be virtual where possible, where they have to be face to face for business value reasons employees should utilise the hybrid meeting rooms.

42. If an employee has to travel for work, they should book a pool car to reduce spend and support the green agenda.

43. If a pool car is not available, or they travel all of the time as part of their role then they may arrange different travel arrangements in line with the travel expenses policy.

44. In line with the travel expenses policy, employees will not be reimbursed for mileage for travelling from home to their place of work, even if travel is on an ad hoc basis.

The Chairman thanked Tamsin Kielb for her report.

28 **Pay Policy Statement**

Tamsin Kielb - Head of Strategic HR&OD presented a report which updated the Committee on the pay policy statement for the financial year 2022/2023 and sought the approval by Staffing Policy Committee prior to agreement by Council and publication on the website.

Points made included:

That under chapter 8 of the Localism Act 2011 every local authority must prepare a pay policy statement for the financial year 2012/2013 and each subsequent financial year.

That Wiltshire Council had originally published its pay policy statement in February 2012 and the updated policy was now required to be published on the website by 1st April 2022.

Decision

That the Staffing Policy Committee approved the updated pay policy statement for 2022/2023 to be presented at Full Council for approval on 15th February 2022.

That Staffing Policy Committee delegated authority to the Director HR&OD and Transformation in consultation with the Chairman – Staffing Policy Committee to approve any amendments required to the pay policy statement prior to Full Council as a result of the Trade Union negotiations on changes to unsocial hours, overtime and standby and callout allowances.

If agreement on changes to these policies were not reached prior to Full Council, the changes would be made to the pay policy statement for the following year for April 2023.

The Chairman thanked Tamsin Kielb for her report.

29 **Employee Awards and Recognition**

Tamsin Kielb - Head of Strategic HR&OD presented a report which sought approval for the introduction of an updated employee recognition awards and provide examples of how the Council could embed ongoing recognition throughout the year.

Points made included:

That the current staff awards scheme was first launched in 2010 and was rebranded in 2016 as the Achieving Excellence awards. There were currently two categories, team and individual, of which there was usually one winner and a highly commended award. Award ceremonies were held quarterly, with nominations open for two to three months preceding this.

The shortlisted employees were invited to a simple ceremony on one of the balconies at County Hall where the winner was announced. Winners received a card, badge, balloons and a cake which were presented to them by a director.

That feedback on the Achieving Excellence Awards was sought from across the organisation by the HR business partners and #TeamEPIC. Further feedback had been sought from the engagement and wellbeing workstream of the Organisational Recovery programme to ensure alignment and recognise lessons learned through the COVID pandemic.

Following the launch of Our Identity Wiltshire Council now needed to integrate this into the award scheme to ensure the organisation recognised and reinforced how staff were expected to work to deliver outcomes.

That Wiltshire Council recognised the financial challenges, however, in order to support and embed Our Identity and how it wants to worked as an organisation, some expenditure would be required to ensure the awards were meaningful. The finances required to enable the Council to hold an annual celebration event for all winners would be sourced via sponsorship, however if this was not forthcoming, the event would be adapted to a lower-cost option.

Points made by the Committee included:

The important of staff and managers keep a log of who's done well during the year.

The importance of staff being recognised for their hard work – that sometimes the elected members didn't know the names of a member of staff who had given good service.

That it would be worth circulating a note to all elected members advising how they could nominate employees under the new scheme.

Decision

It was agreed that the Staffing Policy Committee approved the changes to the employee recognition awards.

The Chairman thanked Tamsin Kielb for her report.

30 **Quarterly Workforce Report - July – September 2021**

Jo Pitt - Director HR&OD outlined the report.

Points made included:

That during this quarter the UK government lifted all government restrictions on social contact. The council, however, continued to operate with restrictions inside of council-owned buildings to safeguard staff and Wiltshire residents, with workplace access restrictions and social distancing measures remaining in place.

The pandemic had reinforced the need for a more agile and adaptable workforce, and work through our Organisational Recovery programme continued to address this. The Agile workstream had introduced the Agile Workforce Pool which allowed staff to undertake temporary placements in critical service areas. This provided staff with the opportunity to build their career, develop skills and expand their knowledge of the council and allowed the council to meet short term demand. Currently there were 71 employees signed up to the Agile Workforce Pool.

COVID-related sickness absence experienced a significant increase this quarter, contributing 75 absences totalling 544 working days. This represented a 175% increase in working days lost (and the largest increase of all absence reasons) compared to the previous quarter (April - June), which saw 18 COVID-related sickness absences totalling 198 working days. However, despite this increase, COVID-related sickness absence still represented only around 7% of the total days lost in the July – September quarter, making COVID-19 the fifth most common reason for absence (previously 11th most common in April - June). This increase was aligned with rising cases experienced nationally during the same period, largely due to the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant and justified the council's decision to maintain restrictions in all office buildings to safeguard staff and Wiltshire residents. While the council experienced a significant increase in cases during the quarter, this never affected more than 1.2% of the workforce at any one time in the quarter. This

was a rate below national figures, with the ONS reporting a high of around 1.6% of the UK population during the quarter. COVID absence figures continued to be reported on a weekly basis and reviewed by the corporate leadership team.

COVID-related absence represented the most significant contribution to the increase in sickness absence (days lost) this quarter due to the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant, the relaxation of all social restrictions and increasing cases seen nationally. In addition 'muscular/skeletal' and 'cold/flu and other infections' had also experienced significant increases (52% and 72% respectively from April – June 2021). With the majority of our staff working from home, both absence reasons had experienced a significant reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, with current rates similar to pre-COVID, this increase was likely a return to a more 'normal' level with social restrictions eased. Stress-related absence had continued to increase this quarter, however the increase was less significant (+7%) to last quarter. The increase in stress-related absence was largely due to a significant increase in non-work related stress, with other stress-related reasons (depression/anxiety, neurological and work-related stress absences) all experiencing reductions compared to the previous quarter (April – June 2021). The increase in non-work related stress appeared predominantly in social care (both adults and childrens) and Joint Commissioning. Work was currently underway to deliver an action plan to reduce sickness absence in general across social care, with a particular focus on reducing stress related absence in these areas.

During this quarter, the council also published the results of a third Wellbeing and Engagement Survey since the start of the pandemic. The results of this survey showed improvements in how satisfied staff were with their physical workspace when working from home, supported by the continued roll out of ICT equipment to create a more appropriate and comfortable workstation at home. This response has experienced a continued improvement across the three Wellbeing and Engagement Surveys conducted so far. The results had also shown an improvement in positive response towards empowerment, work-life balance, morale, and productivity in comparison to the previous survey in October 2020.

Cllr Richard Clewer raised concerns re an increase in stress related absences and whether this was specific to a service – it was agreed that Jo Pitt would follow up.

Decision

That the Staffing Policy Committee noted the Quarterly Workforce Report.

The Chairman thanked Jo Pitt for the report.

31 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

32 **Close**

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 - 11.25 am)

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