

Staffing Policy Committee

MINUTES OF THE STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER 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 Ricky Rogers, and Cllr Simon Jacobs (Substitute)

31 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Richard Clewer, who was substituted by Councillor Simon Jacobs
- Councillor Richard Britton

32 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 September 2024 were considered.

The Chairman raised Minute Item 26, Potential Strike Action, and requested an update from officers. In response, Members were informed that industrial action did not take place as the Unions did not achieve a mandate to strike.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 September 2024 as a true and correct record.

33 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

34 Chairman's Announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

35 **Public Participation**

There were no statements or questions submitted.

36 **Vexatious and Unreasonable Communications from Members of the Public Policy**

Henry Powell, Democracy and Complaints Manager, introduced the report and proposed the adoption of the Vexatious and Unreasonable Communications from Members of the Public Policy and Procedure.

The background to the report was outlined as per Paragraphs 2 to 4, and it was highlighted that although it was a small percentage of people contacting, corresponding with, or complaining to the Council in a way that could be described as obsessive, harassing, or unreasonably repetitious, these individuals occupied a disproportionate amount of Council resources and could result in unacceptable levels of stress for staff. Consequently, the Council as an employer has a responsibility under Health and Safety Legislations to apply reasonably practicable measures to support the prevention of harm to employees, including psychological distress.

It was acknowledged that the Council already had an “Unreasonable Complainants Policy and Procedure” in place, however following a review of the policy, a number of improvements were identified, as detailed in Paragraph 6. Furthermore, once approved, the policy would be promoted across the Council to ensure maximum awareness and appropriate use.

During the discussion, points included:

- It was confirmed that the policy included reference to Members and although it wasn't a requirement, Members could apply the same framework when considering the behaviour of individuals contacting them.
- In response to how many instances of contact would qualify as unreasonable behaviour, officers confirmed that it was more dependent on the nature of the contact itself rather than a numerical threshold and referred to Paragraph 9 which detailed how the Policy aligned with the Equality Act 2010.
- It was confirmed that all decisions must be reviewed no more than 6 months after any restrictions were implemented, but that if it was considered that the individual was communicating reasonably, the restrictions could be removed where appropriate.
- Members queried how many times the Unwanted Behaviours from Members of the Public Policy had been utilised, to which officers confirmed that they could provide outside of the meeting after reviewing the data.
- It was acknowledged that as the current policy was underutilised and underpromoted, it was difficult to assess the trend of relevant behaviour encountered, but it was emphasised that although it was a minority of

individuals, the level of officer time spent on these communications was vastly disproportionate.

- Officers agreed to make a minor amendment to the wording of the Policy to reflect that it would also refer to contact or communications from organisations that could be considered unreasonable or vexatious.
- Members raised that response periods for both postal and email communications by officers should be promoted more widely and made more visible to members of the public to help manage expectations.

Following which, it was:

Resolved:

The Committee approved the Vexatious and Unreasonable Communications from Members of the Public Policy and Procedure for implementation.

37 **Update on the Employment Rights Bill**

Amanda George, Head of Strategic HR, introduced the report and updated the Committee on the HR Policy Workplan and the forthcoming changes to employment legislation.

It was explained that the draft Employment Rights Bill, as announced by Central Government on 10 October 2024, set out 28 individual reforms, the majority of which being subject to parliamentary debate by both the House of Commons and House of Lords, and various public consultations. As such, officers were awaiting the detail of these to be confirmed in order to better assess the impacts on the Council and HR Policy Framework.

However, the following key measures were noted as being:

- a) Day One rights to claim unfair dismissal, have the right to request flexible working, claim unpaid parental leave, paternity leave, and sick pay.
- b) Reforming the law on dismissal and re-engagement.
- c) Reform of zero-hour contracts.
- d) Extension of maternity protections.
- e) The introduction of a Fair Work Agency for the enforcement of statutory employment law rights including National Minimum Wage and Statutory Sick Pay.

Furthermore, it was noted that outside of the scope of the Employment Rights Bill but included within the accompanying 'Next Steps to Make Work Pay' policy paper, were planned reviews of parent leave, carers leave and TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)), alongside a reconfiguration of the current legal distinction between 'employees' and 'workers', and a proposed move to a single worker status.

Members were reassured that officers would be following the progress of the Bill and any substantial changes or requirements to introduce new policies as a result of the Bill's enactment would be shared with the Committee at future meetings.

There being no questions or comments, it was then:

Resolved:

The Committee noted the updates and awaited further updates once these were known.

38 **Biannual Workforce Report**

Gregory Page, Senior Data Engineer, alongside Tamsin Kielb, Director of HR & OD, introduced the Biannual Workforce report and updated the Committee on the current workforce analytics position which detailed data up to and including September 2024.

As the new Oracle system had replaced SAP as the system to organise and collate workforce data across the Council since the start of April 2024, it was explained that new reporting methodologies across several typical Key Performance Indicator (KPI) measures had highlighted some differences when comparing data between the two systems. Thus, presenting challenges for officers in ensuring that the data was understood and reported accurately in a timely manner. Officers drew attention to one such challenge as detailed under the section of the report titled "Headcount" in which it was explained that an inconsistency in headcount reporting had been identified due to the previous headcount calculation being based on position count rather than a true headcount, as some staff held more than one position.

Sickness absence was then raised, and it was acknowledged that although sickness costs were typically higher than expected according to the forecasted trend line, officers believed that it was likely to be attributable to the change in process with the move from SAP to Oracle as knowledge and comfort with the use of the system were still being embedded. However, it was confirmed that further communications and training were planned to support managers in staff sickness and case management.

During the discussion, points included:

- The rise in FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) staff was highlighted, with officers noting that a proportion of the visible growth was attributable to the filling of vacancies, the insourcing of Leisure, and increased grant funding in several services such as Adult Social Care, Environment, and Highways & Transport. However, Members were reassured that officers would continue to discuss the rise with relevant Directors to ensure that an accurate trend line was provided.

- It was acknowledged that while Oracle continued to be embedded within the organisation, there were still challenges being experienced, including compliance, however the system allowed for easier and more accurate recording of data such as annual leave, sickness absences, and mandatory training completion.
- The small size of the team responsible for the implementation and operation of Oracle was commended when considering the extent and complexity of the project.
- The successful conversion of 7 agency workers into permanent roles within the Council were raised, and it was confirmed by officers that depending on the role, there were no associated exit fees, thus leading to significant cost savings.
- With regards to the Apprenticeship Levy, it was explained that despite reaching out to neighbouring authorities, officers had not received any data that would aid in comparison exercises or benchmarking. However, Members were reassured that officers were satisfied with the progress being made within the apprenticeship schemes over the past 2 years.
- Members queried volume of turnover within the HR&OD Directorate since April 2024, with officers explaining that it was primarily due to a significant number of staff coming up to retirement following the implementation of Oracle. However, the sheer volume of work required to introduce, integrate, and then embed the system had meant that additional resources had been employed, thus allowing for progression within the Directorate.

Following which, it was then:

Resolved:

The Committee noted the update.

39 **Staff Car Parking**

Amanda George, Head of Strategic HR, introduced the report and outlined the changes to staff car parking in Trowbridge in light of the proposal to build the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre on the County Hall East Wing site.

Members were informed that there were approximately 590 staff car parking spaces available at County Hall, with a reduction of approximately 270 spaces following the proposal to build the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre on the County Hall East Wing site. However, Members were reassured that a car parking review was being undertaken which aimed to replace the majority of spaces that would be lost to ensure that there continued to be adequate spaces to accommodate staff, Councillors, and visitors.

The work that had taken place to date was detailed as per Paragraphs 5 through 9, and it was noted that the changes to the staff car parks, and the additional spaces at other Council car parks, would reduce the deficit from 270 to 43. It was acknowledged that some of the car parks that had been allocated

to staff were located further away from County Hall and would require a half mile walk to reach the building. However, officers confirmed that this distance was in line with other hubs and would result in similar car parking experiences and length of walk for staff across the County.

It was highlighted that further reviews were being undertaken to determine occupancy rates for visitors, Priority Permit Holders, Directors, and Councillor spaces to ensure the best utilisation of those spaces and to explore reductions if appropriate. However, it was emphasised that on days where there were Full Council meetings a special parking procedure would be applied to ensure adequate spaces for all Councillors and officers.

During the discussion, points included:

- It was clarified that any and all Wiltshire Council staff were able to park at County Hall during their working days, however due to the breadth of roles within the Council, staff who required quick access to their cars, such as officers within Social Care, were issued with priority passes which allowed them to park in the Priority Permit Holders spaces at the front of County Hall. Other Priority Permit Holders such as Directors, Councillors and Temporary Health Permits, were also detailed.
- It was confirmed that the Workplace Parking Levy was only applicable for new buildings where there was a requirement to have a certain number of car parking spaces for the building and was therefore not applicable for County Hall.
- In response to a query, it was confirmed that officers would be able to collate an average day-by-day of the working week to take into account variations and allow for contingencies for the utilisation of parking spaces which could then be circulated to Members outside of the meeting.
- Members emphasised the importance of consistency in respect of equivalence of walking distances between allocated staff car parks for each hub and requested that officers review this with officers in the Highways Team, when possible, to ensure accurate representations.
- Officers explained that the last parking review was undertaken in 2015, and it was noted that there were fewer car parking spaces while the East Wing was still in place due to the size of the building. Furthermore, Parking Orders had been placed on the associated car parks for County Hall to allow for stricter enforcement.
- It was noted that there would be EV charging provision for visitor and staff parking spaces alongside the storage of electric fleet vehicles.
- It was acknowledged that during the construction phase of the Leisure Centre Project there would be disruption to existing parking spaces and access points, however officers were confident that the proposed changes would help to better utilise parking provision for the longer term.
- Members commended officers for the recognition and support for those members of staff with caring/parent responsibilities with regard to making the current car sharing spaces available to staff arriving after 9am.

Following which, it was then:

Resolved:

The Committee noted that there was a car parking review which would result in some minor changes to staff car parking in Trowbridge and that the work undertaken should not result in a significant loss of spaces, but that the location of some of the spaces would change.

40 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 3.10 pm)

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