

# PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2013

*Note: These Minutes have been amended.*

*Please see Minutes of meeting held on 4 February 2014 for amendments.*

**Councillors Present:** David Betts (Substitute) (In place of Peter Argyle), Tony Linden, Mollie Lock (Vice-Chairman), Andrew Rowles and Quentin Webb (Chairman)

**Also Present:** Jane Milone (Human Resources Manager) and Robert O'Reilly (Head of Human Resources) and Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Peter Argyle

### PART I

#### 4. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 19 February 2013 and 14 May 2013 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Chairman.

#### 5. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 6. Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4) concerning approval of a revised Whistleblowing Policy and underpinning procedure. Jane Milone in introducing the item explained that the Council had an existing Confidential Reporting Code in place since 2006. The existing policy provided protection to employees provided that they made disclosures in 'good faith'.

Recent changes to legislation (the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013) had prompted a revision of the policy and Officers had used the opportunity to ensure that the policy was easier to understand and included a clearer description of how a complaint would be handled. The Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) permitted employees to raise concerns where they had a reasonable belief that:

1. a criminal offence;
2. a miscarriage of justice;
3. an act creating a risk to health and safety;
4. a breach of other legal obligation;
5. damage to the environment;
6. Concealment of any of the above.

had been or was likely to be committed without fear of dismissal, victimisation or detriment and it was in the public interest to disclose it.

Jane Milone explained that Councillor Alan Law (the Portfolio Holder for HR) had queried why 'gross negligence' was not included as one of the criteria. Officers had sought legal advice and it had been agreed that the policy should adhere to the legal parameters of the Act since the Council would open itself to a challenge via Judicial Review if it attempted to go beyond those limits. Protected disclosures relating to cases where "a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with a legal obligation to which he

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or she is subject" would be expected to cover incidents of gross negligence. The article in 'Reporter' could also be used to provide examples of various scenarios and provide an explanation to managers as to how they could deal with these instances by referring them to the guidance.

A helpline had also been introduced that employees could use if they were unsure whether to raise a concern or not and it also provided a confidential way to raise concerns. The help line went through to the Head of Human Resources (HR). Officers confirmed that this was not a direct line to the Head of HR but that HR team members were used to dealing with confidential issues. Jane Milone reminded Members that employees would be encouraged to put their name to their allegation as anonymous complains were harder to investigate (see paragraph 4.4 of the Policy and Procedure). The policy was also designed to give protection to employees raising concerns. Potential complaints about the Head of HR would need to be dealt with using the procedures set out in the guidance.

*Councillor Tony Linden arrived at 11.13am.*

Councillor Mollie Lock queried what training would be given to managers having to deal with a whistleblowing incident. The Committee therefore requested that training be provided as part of the Leadership Development Training that was about to be introduced and that the issue should be raised at the next Corporate Management Team (CMT) meeting.

Councillor Tony Linden queried how incidents would be reported back to Members. Officers explained that this would be evaluated on a case by case basis and where appropriate Senior Officers would discuss issues with relevant Members if needed.

### **RESOLVED that:**

1. **Training on the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure to be included in the Leadership Development Training programme;**
2. **The Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure to be raised at the next CMT meeting;**
3. **An article on the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure to be included in the next iteration of 'Reporter';**
4. **The Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure be approved.**

## **7. Update on Progress with Apprenticeships**

The Committee considered a verbal report (Agenda Item 5) which provided Members with an update on the progress that was being made with the employment of apprentices. Robert O' Reilly explained that he would provide Members with a written report on this issue at the next meeting as a number of new issues had recently been raised with him.

Officers explained that the apprentice scheme had been launched after the scheme was agreed at the 11 December 2011 Personnel Committee meeting. It had been agreed that apprentices could be employed at the National Minimum Wage for Apprentices (£2.68 per hour). Members at both Management Board and Personnel Committee meetings had raised concern that this was set at too low a level. For some apprentices the costs associated with getting to work meant that it was not worth their while to take up an apprenticeship. Although all posts were being filled the number of applicants was disappointing.

It was however noted that this was not a funded scheme and therefore any costs associated with raising the level of income would have to be met from the services

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offering the apprenticeship. A suggestion had been to set the level at the National Age Related Minimum Wage which would mean that apprentices aged between 18 and 20 would receive £5.03 per hour and those aged between 16 and 18 would receive £3.72 per hour.

At a recent Disability Equality Scrutiny Board meeting it had been suggested that an apprenticeship should be set up for a disabled person (for a person under the age of 19). This had led to a request for an additional apprenticeship to be set up for one of the Council's Looked After Children too. A proposal was therefore being put forward for central funding for these two posts and it was anticipated that this would cost around £25k.

Robert O' Reilly noted that during 2012 the Council had appointed 18 apprentices. Seven of these apprentices had since found permanent employment at the Council and two had been permanently employed in other organisations.

In 2013, 17 apprenticeships would be offered and three apprentices had already started in September and three more had been appointed. The next assessment centre would be taking place soon. Councillor Quentin Webb encouraged Members of the Committee to attend one of these sessions to enhance their understanding of the process.

Robert O'Reilly explained that all Council vacancies were now advertised on the Jobs Go Public website. In addition apprenticeships were also advertised on Facebook, Twitter and through the West Berkshire Training Consortium. Councillor Mollie Lock queried whether Officers could go into schools to promote the scheme. The Head of HR explained that the Council did not have the resources to undertake this work. Members queried whether it would be possible to email schools about the scheme and the vacancies in July each year. Officers agreed to discuss this issue at the next Schools HR Co-ordination Group.

Councillor David Betts queried what percentage of applicants came from outside of the conurbations of Newbury and Thatcham. He was concerned that young people in the east of the district would go to jobs fayres in Reading and would therefore not be aware of the opportunities at West Berkshire Council. He was also concerned that transport costs would dissuade them from applying. Robert agreed that he would include this information into the report that would be brought to the next meeting.

Councillor Quentin Webb thanked Robert O' Reilly for the update.

**RESOLVED that** a written report be brought to the next meeting.

### 8. **The Recruitment Toolkit**

The Committee considered a verbal report (Agenda Item 6) which provided an update on the tools available to recruiting managers within the Council, including assessment centres and psychometric testing and training provided in recruitment skills.

Robert O' Reilly informed Members that an Investors in People assessment had taken place about three before this meeting. The assessor had interviewed around 40 members of staff and a few elected Members. Initial feedback had confirmed that the Council had received IIP accreditation for the third time and it would be valid until 2017. The assessor would be attending the Corporate Board meeting on the 10 December 2013 to provide feedback and set out recommendations for the Council. It was noted that

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approval had been granted by the Executive to fund a Leadership Academy from 2014 onwards.

Robert O' Reilly outlined the HR Services that were provided to assist managers with recruitment. Basic services included job evaluation for new and changed roles, establishment control and access to on-line advertising website (Jobs Go Public).

Managers undertook their own shortlisting and once this was done HR were responsible for contacting successful applicants and sought references for them too. Following the interview process HR undertook pre-employment checks, provided a conditional offer to applicants and prepared a contract of employment for the successful applicant.

In addition HR provided an Occupational Testing service and administered an Occupational Personality Questionnaire when requested by recruiting managers. In addition they also assisted with the development of Assessment Centres for key posts. A small charge was made to cover the cost of materials. The Council used tests from SHL who had been a leading provider in this area for a number of years.

HR also provided advice on all aspects of recruitment, via the telephone or dedicated email and drafted policies and procedures and advice which were located on the HR pages of the intranet. HR also offered training via e-learning and face to face testing. Recruitment training had recently been reviewed. The current course had been reduced from two days to one. Officers attending the course were required to undertake an online course which set out procedures etc before attending the one day session. This training focussed on interviewing skills such as questioning and listening.

Robert O' Reilly reported that a request had been received from Jan Evans and Stephen Stace to place a banner advert in a local newspaper to attract applicants for roles in Social Services. It was noted that this was contrary to a decision made previously at a Personnel Committee meeting. They had however sought an exception as they felt that the Jobs Go Public website would not attract the type of applicants they were looking for. The Committee agreed that they could do so provided that it was funded from their own budgets and that the Head of Service considered placing the advertisement in the Reading Chronicle and the Marlborough News in addition to the Newbury Weekly News.

Councillor Quentin Webb thanked officers for the update.

**RESOLVED** that Adult Social Services be permitted to place a banner advert in the Newbury Weekly News as requested and that the Head of Service to give consideration to placing the advertisement in the Reading Chronicle and the Marlborough News as well

### 9. **Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee agreed to hold the next meeting on 15 January 2014 at 11am. Provisional agenda items included Continuous Service for Schools and the previously agreed paper on Apprentices.

*(The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and closed at 12.15 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....