

# **PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 2 JULY 2024**

**Councillors Present:** Matt Shakespeare (Chairman), Antony Amirtharaj, Jeff Brooks and Laura Coyle

**Also Present:** Sarah Clarke, Paula Goodwin, Samantha Hodson and Sadie Owen

### **1. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2024 were accepted as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2024 were accepted as true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Update on HR Activity 2023/2024**

Paula Goodwin introduced the report which provided an update on HR activity for 2023/24 and included annual data for the equality makeup of the corporate workforce as of 31 March 2024.

It was explained that the report contained updates on establishment employee data, training, performance management, talent and recruitment. Paula Goodwin highlighted that turnover had reduced from 15.9% to 12.47% in 2023/24, and that there had been an increase in permanent social workers, achieved by filling vacancies with direct recruitment and less advertising. It was further noted that agency spend had been reduced by £2.5 million in the past year.

It was noted that whilst there had been a slight increase in sickness absence from 9.9 days per employee to 10.69 days per employee, this was predominantly within long term sickness absence rather than short term absence which had decreased over the past twelve months.

Councillor Jeff Brooks congratulated officers on the recruitment results but then referred to page 18 of the report which noted 380 employee vacancies (which equated to 20% of the establishment), and requested further explanation as he did not believe that the figure was accurate. Paula Goodwin clarified that table 5.3 provided a fuller breakdown of the 380 vacancies. It was explained that due to a time lag between transitioning the HR and Payroll system from Resourcelink to ITrent and data not being updated promptly as a result, the actual figure of vacant FTE posts was 66.79 as of 31 March 2024. It was explained that future reporting using the ITrent system would be more accurate and effective.

In response to a query from Councillor Antony Amirtharaj it was explained that graduate data was not reported separately, however there was an early careers post within the HR team that was responsible for transforming the council's apprenticeship, T level, and graduate scheme offering. It was reported that there was currently one formal graduate from the National Graduate Scheme, however HR were undertaking work to attract more graduates and make greater use of the graduate apprenticeships.

## PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - 2 JULY 2024 - MINUTES

Noting the increase in sickness absence, Councillor Laura Coyle queried whether there was a long-term strategy to tackle the issue. Paula Goodwin explained that within HR there was a permanent wellbeing business partner who had been working on wellbeing principles and educating managers on wellbeing. Further, there was information on the intranet website, mental health first aiders across the organisation, and an Employee Assistance Programme which offered counselling as part of its support package.

Paula Goodwin explained that it was long term sickness absence that was increasing, which was not necessarily due to work-related stress, and consequently was more difficult to assist staff with. However significant work was undertaken with the Occupational Health Service to assist staff with phased returns and to support staff with access to work, with reasonable adjustments.

Councillor Brooks referred to section 7.19 of the report and queried whether WBC should benchmark against other similar local authorities rather than Office for National Statistics (ONS) data. Paula Goodwin suggested that it would be difficult to find a direct match with which to benchmark, and that local authorities were not necessarily keen to share sickness absence figures.

Councillor Matt Shakespeare referred to section 7.6 of the report, noting a sharp increase in sickness absence, and requested some further detail to explain the data. Paula Goodwin noted that with the recruitment of the wellbeing officer there was a greater drive to tackle the rise in sickness and to assist and educate line managers to support sick staff.

Councillor Brooks queried when Personnel Committee could expect a report on the introduction of the Behaviour Framework. Paula Goodwin highlighted that there were designated behaviour champions who regularly reported on the positives and negatives throughout the organisation, however the Behaviour Framework required further time to embed throughout the organisation following the introduction of a number of supporting policies and procedures. Paula Goodwin asserted that feedback had been positive, however suggested that early 2025 would be too soon to indicate how successful the Behaviour Framework had been.

Councillor Shakespeare queried why completed appraisal data was not 100%, given the importance that appraisals should be regarded by both management and staff. Paula Goodwin noted that appraisals generally occurred at year end in March, April or May and that the data reported had been produced on 31 March 2024. Consequently, it did not record any appraisals that had taken place since that date. It was reported that updated data would be published as part of the organisation's key performance indicators prior to the next meeting in July.

Councillor Shakespeare and Brooks thanked officers for their work.

**RESOLVED that:** Personnel Committee considered and commented on the information provided within the report.

#### 4. Date of Next Meeting

Next meeting to be held on 14 January 2025.

*(The meeting commenced at 18:30 and closed at 19:02)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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