

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY, 15 JULY 2022

Councillors Present: Dennis Benneyworth (Chairman), Jeff Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Adrian Abbs and Lynne Doherty

Also Present: Paula Goodwin (Service Lead HR), Harriet Saunders (HR Manager), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer) and Abi Witting (HR Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Thomas Marino

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 21 February 2022 and 10 May 2022 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Chairman.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Update on HR Activity 2021/22

Paula Goodwin (HR Service Lead), introduced the report (Agenda Item 4), which provided updates on HR activity for 2021/2022 including Recruitment, Appraisals and Performance Management, Training, and Casework. Paula Goodwin noted that it was the second time that such a report had been to the Committee.

Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that he did not see any improvement in the data and that he felt that all of the amber items in Appendix A should be explained item by item.

Paula Goodwin explained that the chart was not RAG rated.

Councillor Lynne Doherty queried the accuracy of section 6.3 of the report which referred to '305.83 FTE at WBC as at the 31st March 2022 (including all temporary posts)'.

Paula Goodwin clarified that the word 'vacant' was missing from the sentence.

Appendix A queries

Councillor Doherty queried whether the 'Review of Training and Development Programme, had commenced given that it had a target date to complete by March 2022. Paula Goodwin responded that a training needs analysis was undertaken in February and that a new corporate training programme had been published on the intranet.

Councillor Doherty referred to the section which detailed 'Diversity in Recruitment' and queried whether recruitment had commenced for the position. Paula Goodwin reported that the job description had been finalised and would be advertised in the next couple of weeks.

Councillor Adrian Abbs referred to the Timelord 2 update with a deadline date of June 2021, and queried the comment 'This project has been slightly delayed as it is connected to the TL2 project'. Abi Witting (HR Manager), explained that the deadline had been an

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aspirational target set by the previous Chief Executive. Covid, lockdowns and supply issues had affected the deadline.

Paula Goodwin explained that HR's involvement in the Timelord 2 project had been in relation to policy and workstyle reviews and had been positive.

Councillor Abbs commented that he believed that Timelord 2 had been approved in 2021 and suggested that the aspirational deadline must have been set in 2020. He further suggested that the deadline should potentially have been updated.

Councillor Brooks commented that the report was out of date and requested that Paula Goodwin provide an update on each target.

Paula Goodwin's comments were as follows:-

Review of Training & Development Programme: it was reported that the training programme had been completed and implemented, but that trainers were still being sought for some of the courses. There would be an annual review of the training programme.

Coaching and Mentoring Project: it was reported that the pilot project with ten coaches had been completed by December 2021. It was explained that there was an aspiration to have more coaches with formal qualifications and a complete coaching framework within the organisation with both internal and external coaches.

Councillor Brooks commented that as an aspiration, the action would need to be signed off and consequently the process appeared to be delayed by other processes and areas.

Management Support and Development Offer for Senior Leaders: Paula Goodwin reported that the April 2022 priority had been achieved, however it was also linked to the Leadership and Management Development Programme which was currently under review with a deadline of 2023.

Councillor Abbs suggested that the scheme could be critical given the number of senior staff that had left, and requested a future progress report on the success of the scheme.

Management Induction: it was acknowledged that this had slowed down due to resource issues within HR. The project had commenced but had not been completed.

Honorarium Project: Paula Goodwin noted that this project had also slowed due to resourcing issues within HR, however a resource had recently been allocated to enable a review of pay, grading and allowances which would commence on 1 August.

Work Experience: it was reported that the project had been completed, and was now a 'business as usual' activity.

One Council – our workforce culture: Paula Goodwin reported that the Employee Attitude Survey (EAS), had been completed and the ensuing action plan would be signed off in the next couple of weeks.

Councillor Brooks suggested that Members should be able to review the full results of the EAS.

Abi Witting reported that Councillor Doherty had been a part of the project group and had seen the action plan.

Councillor Brooks made a formal request to see the full results of the EAS, and to review the raw data. Paula Goodwin agreed to take the request away.

Councillor Abbs agreed with Councillor Brooks request and suggested that there was a need to review the data in order to understand the thoughts of employees, even if the information was restricted to Personnel Committee Members.

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HR and Payroll Systems: Paula Goodwin commented that work was continuing and on track. It was reported that an integrated HR, finance, payroll specification had just been completed and would be going out to full procurement following formal sign off later in the week.

In response to a query raised by Councillor Abbs, Paula Goodwin explained that the project had originally been put on hold due to Covid, and that the specification had not yet gone out to tender.

Councillor Abbs offered to review the specification, as he had direct knowledge of the type of product and the industry.

Paula Goodwin commented that an independent consultant had already reviewed the process. Councillor Abbs commented that as the specification had not gone out to tender he would appreciate sight of it as he had seen many projects from the Council in the past that had been over specified.

Paula Goodwin agreed to take the request away.

Raising Concerns Project: it was reported that the project had been delayed due to resource issues and would commence again toward the end of the year.

Internal Communications: Paula Goodwin noted that the objective was linked to the staff survey and would lead to formalising an internal communication plan. It was noted that the action plan had not been signed off to date, but would be imminently.

Employment Data

Councillor Doherty queried how the starters and leavers average length of service data compared to other local authorities and to the private sector. Abi Witting responded that benchmarking with public sector data had occurred when the turnover KPI was initially devised, and at that time WBC had been on par. It was noted that public sector turnover was traditionally higher than that for the private sector.

It was reported that average length of service had not been benchmarked.

Abi Witting agreed to provide further details as to average length of service with comparison data to other organisations.

Councillor Abbs suggested that the information would be easier to absorb if presented in the form of a graph or chart.

Councillor Brooks noted that the percentage of workforce under 25 years old had risen from 10% to 20.95% over five years and queried whether this was the result of a direct strategy or just the market generally.

Abi Witting explained that there had been a steady increase to the workforce of those under 25 as a result of apprenticeships and work experience initiatives. Further, in 2021-22 the Kickstart scheme had assisted. Work had been undertaken to achieve a diverse and inclusive workforce rather than specifically target certain age ranges.

Councillor Brooks queried the difference between the 193 FTE vacancies referred to in section 5.2 of the report as opposed to the 305 referred to in Appendix B.

Paula Goodwin explained that the difference related to the inclusion of all vacant staff positions. The 193 figure referred only to permanent positions. Councillor Brooks commented that it was a high percentage and should be targeted for reduction. Councillor Brooks suggested a reduced target of 15%.

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Councillor Abbs commented that equalities data appeared to have remained the same. Councillor Dennis Benneyworth did not feel that the data was out of the ordinary for a local authority.

Paula Goodwin explained that the majority of staff at the Council were women due to the provision of Adult Social Care which historically attracted women rather than men.

Councillor Abbs commented that he understood that in relation to equality the Council followed Census data and that the report still referred to 2011 Census information. Paula Goodwin noted that the newest data had only been published the previous week. Councillor Abbs suggested that HR needed to start developing strategies and policies to achieve a more representative workforce.

Recruitment and Retention

Councillor Brooks commented that the information was light on detail as to specifics for agency workers. Councillor Brooks expressed interest in knowing details of the agency workers, given that the spend would be £3M more than budgeted.

Councillor Brooks commented that £42,000 had been spent on temporary workers in May in the Finance and Property department. Councillor Brooks suggested that Members should know why there was such spend.

Paula Goodwin highlighted that the Commissioning department were responsible for the agency contract and so would retain the details.

Councillor Brooks commented that the HR department should have the information available to it, and that it was a failure of the organisation not to have.

Paula Goodwin explained that Adult Social Care Service was responsible for approximately 45% of agency staff, and the Children and Families Service for 25%, however there were agency staff throughout the organisation. It was estimated that there were currently approximately 200 agency staff employed by WBC.

It was explained that it was an aspiration of HR to collate data detailing the placement of all agency staff within the organisation. Paula Goodwin reported that it was a national problem and that recruitment was struggling generally. Paula Goodwin commented that there was a plan to tackle the issue and to look at salary and retention packages generally. It was reported that there was an aim to reduce the agency spend by £3M within 2.5 years.

Abi Witting further added that a number of agency staff had been employed in the past year at the community support hub, lateral flow testing sites and Ukrainian support centre to ensure an appropriate Council response.

Councillor Brooks commented that the responses provided were 'broad brush', and requested that a representative from Commissioning be present at the next Personnel Committee meeting, as the HR representatives did not have access to the relevant data.

Councillor Brooks drew attention to the Recruitment section of the minutes dated 21 February 2022, whereby he 'offered to provide some advice to the HR department' and requested review of the service level agreement. He noted that neither had occurred.

Councillor Doherty commented that it was unfair to level the accusation at officers and suggested that Councillor Brooks failed to understand the role of an elected Member and the scheme of delegation. Councillor Doherty suggested that it was not Councillor Brooks' role to offer professional guidance to Council officers.

Councillor Brooks responded that he thought any Member with subject matter expertise would be welcomed by the organisation.

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Paula Goodwin explained that the newly created talent acquisition post would be run as a project, with specific KPIs. Failure to deliver after 18 months would result in removal.

Councillor Abbs queried whether IR35 was having a direct impact on the costs being experienced. Paula Goodwin commented that it was difficult to answer the question, but that there had been a cost increase in agency staff, with IR 35 and agency staff able to command a higher rate particularly in areas where there were current shortages. Paula Goodwin reported that there were robust policies, procedures and guidance in place relating to IR 35.

Performance Management

Harriet Saunders (HR Manager), explained that the level of absences relating to stress and anxiety had increased not only across the Council and the public sector, but across all sectors. Harriet Saunders reported that the service was aiming to provide a robust, wrap around support network to tackle this.

Councillor Doherty commented that the introduction of the Employee Assistance Programme had been a good initiative. Councillor Doherty noted that the biggest indicator of stress appeared to be within the People Directorate and noted that whilst improvements had been made to the appraisal process, the People Directorate was behind other services. Councillor Doherty suggested that managers should be encouraged to conduct appraisals, as part of the supportive system to assist with stress.

Councillor Doherty further suggested that it would be interesting to monitor the positive impact of Timelord 2 on the mental health of staff, after the isolation over recent years.

Harriet Saunders emphasised the importance of the quality of conversation between managers and employees rather than specifically an annual appraisal, and that this was being encouraged across the Council.

Councillor Abbs drew attention to page 23 of the agenda noting that the average number of days lost as sickness absence across the Council was 9.95. He commented that the national average was 6.9 and queried why there was such a high level of absence within the sector, as opposed to the private sector. Harriet Saunders responded that it was partly due to the Adult Social Care sector, but that generally there wasn't the depth of data available to provide a detailed explanation. Harriet Saunders commented that it was an ongoing project to obtain further information in order to address the issue.

Abi Witting further added that 121 forms had recently been improved with specific targeted questions to encourage wellbeing conversations.

Training

Councillor Abbs queried the percentage of mandatory training that had a test associated with it.

Abi Witting responded that most of the e-learning modules required completion of a quiz at the end and agreed to circulate information following the meeting in relation to the percentage of mandatory training that had an assessment attached.

Whilst it was acknowledged that Member training was not within the remit of HR, Councillor Abbs suggested that Members should also be tested following completion of mandatory training sessions.

In response to a query from Councillor Brooks, Paula Goodwin agreed to take away a request for Commissioning officer representation at the next meeting.

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6. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee agreed to hold the next meeting on Friday 11 November 2022 at 10:30 am.

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature