

DRAFT

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

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2024

Councillors Present: Antony Amirtharaj, Jeff Brooks, Vicky Poole and Matt Shakespeare (Chairman)

Also Present: Paula Goodwin (Service Lead HR), Olympia Byrne (HR Services Manager), Karen Turner (HR Business Partner Manager) and Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Biyi Oloko

PART I

5. Election of the Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Matt Shakespeare be elected as Chairman of the Personnel Committee for the remainder of the 2023/2024 Municipal Year.

6. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

8. Update on HR Activity Q1 and Q2 - 2023/2024

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 5) which provided an update on HR activity for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2023/2024. Paula Goodwin introduced the report, starting with the Executive Summary, and highlighted the following positive points:

- The number of established posts had increased over the past five years, but the number of occupied posts had remained relatively flat over this period.
- Voluntary turnover had reduced to 12% over the past year and there had been a marked reduction in the amount of HR casework across the Council.
- There had been significant recruitment in the past year. Especially in challenging areas for recruitment. This had helped to reduce the reliance on agency staff.
- Sickness absence had reduced to 8.75 days per worker on average.

Turning to section 6 of the report (Starters, Leavers and Turnover), it was noted that the People Directorate had yet to be split into the separate Directorates of Children and Family Services and Adult Social Care for the purposes of this report, but this would change in the next financial year.

Councillor Vicky Poole queried whether there had been any feedback as to why people were leaving the Council, had any trends been identified or areas of concern. She

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highlighted that the report did not mention longevity of staff and further queried whether there were any areas that had experienced particularly high staff turnover.

Paula Goodwin noted that outgoing staff were given the opportunity to complete exit questionnaires when leaving but take up of this was not as high as they would like and this would be promoted more going forward. It was advised that individual reasons for leaving varied, often this was for promotion to another role, and that there was an ongoing effort to improve quality of data gathered so that there could be greater focus on retaining staff. Longevity figures had not been included in the report but the average length of service for Council employees was eight years.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that there were lots of encouraging aspects of the report and that work was ongoing to better understand the reasoning behind staff leaving within 12 months of joining. He was hopeful that HR could be involved in the exit interview process, capacity allowing, as it was important to give departing staff a safe space to encourage a more open and honest dialogue.

Councillor Brooks then queried section 5 of the report (employment data) in order to understand whether the increased headcount was due to the ongoing process of converting agency staff or due to increased service demand.

Paula Goodwin explained that the higher headcount was partially due to changes in the way data was collated and partially due to a move away from temporary staffing arrangements. She noted that both this and how length of service related to turnover, could be explored in more detail in future reports.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj queried whether there was a disconnect due to the large disparity in the number of vacancies mentioned in the report and the number of adverts listed on the website. It was also suggested that the tab on the website should say careers rather than jobs.

Paula Goodwin noted that the Council often posted one job advert for multiple vacancies and utilised rolling adverts. It was also explained that not all vacancies were true vacancies and that some posts were held as vacancies with the budget for the post allocated elsewhere. Paula added that some of the vacancies could in fact be a small FTE (full time equivalent). The data on this point would be explored in more detail.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that budget management was helped by keeping some posts vacant for a period of time, although this was not an ideal scenario. He explained that there was an ongoing review designed to ascertain which vacant posts needed to be recruited.

Councillor Matt Shakespeare highlighted that the numbers in the table in section 6.1 of the report were encouraging. He queried if it was the expectation for this to continue into Q3 and Q4. Paula Goodwin advised that the expectation was that the data would not dramatically change. It was explained that work was being undertaken to move agency staff to permanent posts and that Q3 to Q4 tended to be slower with regards to staff turnover.

Paula Godwin provided background to section 7 of the report (talent attraction). She explained the aim was to simplify the hiring process for applicants and that agency staff were being approached to establish whether there was desire to become a permanent member of staff.

It was explained that the Council continued to make good use of the Apprenticeship Levy and had recently been successful in hiring a graduate through the national careers graduate scheme. It was highlighted that there was work being done to increase the graduate offer with links to other education establishments.

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An update was then provided on the progress of the Employee Value Proposition. A survey had been held and there had been a positive feedback session with staff. It was noted that staff wanted to make more of a difference to local communities and were looking to be developed more. As a result, opportunities to develop career pathways were being explored.

Councillor Amirtharaj queried why there had only been one graduate recruited, whether there was an ongoing effort to recruit more and whether there was an ongoing effort to reach out to education providers. He also queried that the referral process for recruitment.

Paula Goodwin advised that the referral scheme was only introduced in April 2023 and that she would undertake work to ensure it was easily available. Councillor Amirtharaj queried whether it was possible to highlight it on the advert. Paula Goodwin advised that it was, and she would share the feedback.

Paula Goodwin expanded that the graduate was the first one the authority had been successful in recruiting from the national scheme. It was explained that there were ongoing conversations with universities and that graduates were recruited through other routes. The Council's success with t-levels and work with local schools was noted.

Councillor Brooks gave assurance that effort had been given to improve talent attraction. The referral scheme needed to be publicised more widely and time was required to get this right. It was explained that the HR team were working through a backlog due to the transition to the new payroll system. It was also explained that the Council had begun to use agencies to recruit in some specific circumstances to save money longer term.

The Employee Value Proposition (EVP) would help to document why officers worked for the Council and stayed with the Council, and this information would be publicised.

Councillor Vicky Poole reported that applicants increasingly gravitated towards the benefits on offer at an organisation, rather than pay, and that adverts were not clear enough on the benefits on offer at West Berkshire Council.

Paula Goodwin explained that the Council had started using LinkedIn through which managers had been encouraged to share benefits of working at West Berkshire Council. It was advised that benefits were normally advertised but that work would be done to ensure this was clear.

Councillor Shakespeare queried whether the results from the candidate survey would be published. Paula Goodwin explained that this data was gathered in confidence and therefore could not be published. It was advised that managers were surveyed but more needed to be done to gather feedback from candidates.

Councillor Brooks noted that candidate experience was vital and there was further work to be done with regards to surveying candidates. He suggested that data needed to be aggregated to show trends. It was the duty of managers as well as HR to recruit and find ways to make improvements to the process where possible.

Section 8 of the report was then introduced by Paula Goodwin. It was noted that sickness absence was in line with neighbouring authorities and the situation nationally. Common reasons for absence were in line with averages elsewhere. It was advised that much was being done to try and support employees but that the aim would always be to do more.

Councillor Vicky Poole noted section 8.12 of the report showing that sickness absence due to mental health had risen to 36.2% from 24.1% in the previous year. She sought further detail to help understand the reasoning behind this.

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Paula Goodwin explained that this was part of a national trend and that this was partially due to people getting frustrated because of waiting lists to access NHS services and getting less support. Stress related absence was not necessarily work related. This area of sickness absence could stem from people suffering with Covid/long Covid.

Councillor Vicky Poole highlighted that 77.3% of West Berkshire Council's workforce were assigned female at birth. She queried what support was offered to people going through the menopause. Councillor Poole noted upcoming changes which required organisations to make suitable adjustments and she queried what preparations were being undertaken.

Paula Goodwin noted that West Berkshire Council operated a Menopause Support Group and had a Menopause Policy. It was explained that there was a reasonable adjustment procedure in place amongst other provisions. It was further advised that Unison had menopause support cafes and that there was an employee well-being business partner that could provide advice.

Turning to training, Paula Goodwin highlighted that the Council was implementing a new e-learning solution which offered better learning for staff. It was explained that the Council operated a blended approach to training with e-learning and classroom based learning. It was stated that the annual training on offer needed analysis to better understand where the budget should be targeted.

Paula stated that there was more training on offer than pre-covid. It was explained that the Council did not have a formal managers induction programme but that this was on the agenda. There was considerable in-house training on offer and that take up was very good. It was explained that there was an ongoing process of reviewing appraisals and the one-to-one process with the aim to develop improved personal development plans.

Councillor Poole queried when the management programme would be implemented and whether there would be an effort to seek specialist skills from outside the organisation.

Paula Goodwin explained that there was training for managers, but it needed to be collated into a formal programme.

Councillor Brooks suggested that there was a need to ensure that training was in place in softer skills, i.e. in recognising good performance. He queried whether staff feedback regarding their personal training needs was documented as part of the appraisal process.

Paula Goodwin advised that Personal Development Plans were used as part of appraisals, but they needed to be enhanced and utilised more fully. It would be a separate document that would be used more regularly throughout year. It was confirmed that a new performance management module was being created that would allow the Council to better inform training needs.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9. **Statutory Pay Policy (C4491)**

The Committee considered the Statutory Pay Policy Statement (Agenda Item 6). Approval of the Statement would be sought at the Council meeting on 26 March 2024, prior to its publication which was required by 1 April 2024. This was an annual requirement and was based on the previous 12 months.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj queried whether the report contained a discrepancy regarding bonuses. Section 4.5 of the report referred to bonuses, but this did not align with the information within the Statement. He queried if this was applicable as the Council was a not-for-profit organisation. Councillor Amirtharaj also queried whether a reward or recognition scheme existed to reward exceptional work by staff.

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Paula Goodwin explained that reward schemes were not covered by the Pay Policy. She clarified that there was no bonus scheme for officers. She advised that pay policy statements followed a standard template and reference to bonuses had to be included as some councils did offer them. Paula further clarified that allowances were paid for some departments.

Paula Goodwin went on to advise that the approach taken on recognition was being reviewed.

Councillor Jeff Brooks requested further detail on the methodology of the report and the pay scales used by the Council. Paula Goodwin explained that the Council used local pay scales, but increases in pay were determined by the national pay award. It was also noted that pay scales and grades were determined by Hay job evaluation.

Councillor Vicky Poole queried how the Council's pay scales compared to those used elsewhere. Did others pay, giving them an advantage with regards to recruiting staff.

Paula Goodwin advised that the Council did link with other local authorities, particularly with regards to hard to fill roles, and benchmarked pay against them. It was also explained that in some cases, jobs were evaluated to ensure the grading was correct. There was also a market supplement policy in place to help to recruit in more challenging areas.

Councillor Shakespeare queried when the report would be published. Paula Goodwin advised that the approved report would be published subject to approval by Council.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the Statutory Pay Policy Statement be recommended for approval by Council.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.32pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature