

## **EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE**

**1 MARCH 2021**

### **PRESENT**

Councillor J. Bennett (in the Chair).

Councillors A.M. Whyte (Vice-Chair), D. Acton, A. Akinola, C. Boyes, M. Cordingley, J. Holden and R. Thompson.

### In attendance

Sara Saleh	Corporate Director of Strategy and Systems
Angela Beadsworth	Head of Workforce and Core Strategy
Kate Sturman	Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence
Bev Norton	Head of HR Operations
Emma Sharples	Solicitor (Corporate & Commercial)
Richard Fontana	Strategic HR Lead for Health, Safety and Wellbeing
Louise Gelder	Organisational Development & Skills Manager
Sarah Eckersley	HR, OD and Skills Officer
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Rigby

### **27. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020 be approved as a correct record.

### **28. QUESTIONS FORM THE PUBLIC**

No questions were received.

### **29. TRAFFORD COUNCIL KICKSTART SCHEME**

The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources introduced the item. The Committee were reminded that they had been informed in 2020 that Trafford were applying to become a gateway employer for the Kickstart programme. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources went over what the programme was about and how it could aid the young people in Trafford before handing over to the Organisational Development (OD) & Skills Manager and the HR, OD and Skills Officer to update the Committee on the developments since the last update.

The OD and Skills Manager explained that the Kickstart fund was a two billion pound programme to create high quality six month work placements for sixteen to twenty four year olds claiming universal credit. Kickstart opportunities were not to replace any existing placement or apprenticeship opportunities within an organisation and the Council had been careful in the way they supported the opportunities both internally and externally to ensure this was upheld. Trafford's application to be part of the Kickstart programme was signed off in December

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2020, which gave Trafford the ability to create thirty eight placements. The placements were due to start in May and each placement was to be for six months with twenty five hours of work per week. The government would pay the wages of each young person on the programme. In addition to wages, £1500 was awarded per placement to provide wrap around support and a further £360 provided for administrative costs. Once a placement was ready the job centre's work coach would send through applications and the Council would look at how to utilise the opportunities available to prepare the young people for work.

The HR, OD and Skills Officer gave the Committee an overview of the Kickstart placements that had been agreed both internally and externally for the first cohort of young people. There had also been progress in preparing placements for the second cohort of young people. The Council were utilising the skills of the organisational development team alongside the Council's e-learning platform to provide the young people with the wrap around support they required to succeed within their placements. Each young person would have a personalised action plan to help them address any areas where they required further development and the Council were using their connections with learning organisations to provide additional training where needed. The Council were also working in partnership with Trafford College to provide young people with an offer of a two week pre-Kickstarter placement which would provide them with training in areas including CV writing, interview preparation, how to work remotely, and how to make a good impression. The strategic growth team had received agreement for a working wardrobe to ensure the young people had what they needed for interviews. Support was also to be provided to the managers and teams providing the placements. It was hoped that some of the Kickstart placements would link into apprenticeships within the Council.

The HR, OD and Skills Officer gave the Committee an update on the Council's apprenticeships. Since the Apprenticeship Levy was introduced on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 the Council had 302 apprenticeship starts. There were two types of apprenticeship offered by the Council. The first were upskill apprenticeships, which were available to all staff, and the second were EPIC Apprenticeships, which were for entry level apprentices. There had been forty four entry level apprentices so far and twelve of those had gone on to full employment within the Council. The Coaching Professional apprenticeship had just begun and had seen an excellent level of uptake. A leap into leadership apprenticeship was due to be launched in the coming months and the Committee were informed that three EPIC Apprentice positions were to be offered within exchequer services. The HR, OD and Skills Officer offered to provide a more detailed report on apprenticeships within the Council.

Following the update Councillor Thompson asked whether the Kickstart positions were being offered to care leavers, whether there were any other disadvantaged groups who would be offered positions, and if the Council were tracking the demographics of those who received Kickstart positions. The OD and Skills Manager responded that the Council were not in control of which applications the job centre sent but they would ensure a fair approach was taken with the applications they received. The Council had been raising awareness of the

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Kickstart programme among care leavers so they were prepared to apply for the opportunity.

Councillor Holden asked how young people find out about Kickstart to be able put themselves forward for the programme. The OD and Skills Manager responded that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Council were looking to arrange information sessions to increase awareness of the programme among young people. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources added that the Council were doing all they could to increase awareness of the programme through staff and services. The Council were also working with DWP so that they were aware of the opportunities available in Trafford and the desired requirements in the Kickstart placements. The Council were hoping to implement a Trafford first approach and to be able to offer as many opportunities to Trafford residents as possible.

Councillor Acton asked how the Council would monitor placements outside of the Council. The HR, OD and Skills Officer responded that the employers that were part of the scheme already had strong working relationships with the Council. Once the young person was placed with an employer the Council would be in regular contact with both the young person and the employer and the HR, OD and Skills Officer would act as the first point of contact for them. The wrap around offer would be provided to both internal and external placements through which the Council would be able to monitor young people's progress.

The Chair asked whether there were any possible deterrents for young people in applying for the scheme if they did not complete the whole six month placement. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources responded that there would be no penalties for the young person if they did not find employment after the six month and that it would not impact their ability to claim unemployment benefits.

The Chair asked if the placements did not work whether the young person would be able to switch placements. The HR, OD and Skills Officer responded that everything would be done to try and ensure a placement worked but the young person could go back to DWP and apply for another placement if necessary.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That a report on the Council's apprenticeships be brought to a meeting of the Committee in the 2021/22 municipal year.

### **30. TRAFFORD COUNCIL'S PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2021/22**

The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources introduced the report and asked the Committee to note the amended figures which had been provided on that day due to an inaccuracy within section 15 of the report having been identified.

The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence gave an overview of the report that had been circulated with the agenda. There had been an interim appointment at chief officer level to bring in expertise for the Covid 19 outbreak

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management programme and recovery work. The lowest salary rate within the Council was £9.44 per hour which was above the real living wage until it was increased in November 2020 from £9.30 to £9.50 and so this was corrected at the meeting. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence explained Trafford were on course to meet the real living wage with the minimum wage increase that had been proposed by the government.

The Pay Policy Statement looked at the ratio of wages at different levels within councils. The ratio between the top and median wage in Trafford had remained at 1:6.92. The ratio for an average chief officer wage and lowest wage was 1:5.76 which showed a slight change from the previous year.

The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence shared their screen to display the updated gender pay gap figures with the adjustments highlighted in yellow. The Council's mean gender pay gap was 9.75% and the median pay gap was 15.46%. There were a number of factors that impacted the gender pay gap with the main ones being; the levels of part time and full time employment, the proportion of women attracted to the lower paid in house services (whereas the lower paid services which attracted men were not delivered in house), and the ageing workforce (as the pay gap increased when looking at employees over 40). When compared to the previous year's figures the Council had seen a reduction in the gender pay gap from 10.76% mean and 20.55% median. Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence informed the Committee that further work would be done focusing on the gender pay gap among full time workers. It was expected that as the Council moved towards more agile working arrangements following the pandemic that the gender pay gap would decrease.

Following the update Councillor Boyes asked what the demographic and role of the Council's median wage workers were. Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence did not have the figures to hand but would share them with Councillor Boyes after the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That report be noted and recommendations agreed.
- 2) That information on Median Wage Workers be provided to Councillor Boyes.

### **31. UPDATE ON THE VOLUNTARY WORKFORCE PROPOSALS**

The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources introduced the report which followed on from the reports in September and December concerning proposals to offer staff more agile working arrangements and allow the Council to generate savings. Three options were made available to staff members which were; voluntary severance, a nine day working fortnight, and a leave purchasing scheme. The three schemes closed in October 2020 and the Council were poised to enact the outcomes.

The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence informed the Committee that there had been one hundred and ninety six applications for voluntary severance of which forty two had release agreed. Of those twenty two elected to

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leave in March and twenty elected to leave in September. A further thirty one applications had the decision deferred as the decisions panel felt that they were not in a position to confirm release at that time, but there was potential for those staff members to be released in the future. The positions of those thirty one staff would continue to be monitored in light of changes throughout the organisation and release those staff if it became feasible to do so. Since it was agreed to defer the thirty one applications four had been agreed and the staff would be leaving at the end of March. The remaining applications were declined or withdrawn and all staff who applied received notification of the outcome in December through a meeting with their line manager and a formal letter.

It had been expected that pension reform would be in place in January or February 2021 and impact those who left in March. However, the legislation was revoked in February 2021 and so the exit pay cap and pension reform did not take place. HR will continue to monitor the situation regarding a future pay cap and pension reforms.

The flexible working scheme had seven applications agreed and a further nine were ongoing. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence informed the Committee that staff could apply for flexible working arrangements at any point in time so staff who did not apply during the scheme still had the option available to them.

The voluntary leave scheme had two hundred and forty four employees purchase leave at an average of six days per employee. Overall it was a decrease on the amount of voluntary leave bought in the previous year, but this had been expected due to a decrease in people taking leave and an increase in staff banking leave.

Following the update Councillor Thompson asked how the people who applied for voluntary severance were spread across the directorates and whether the numbers applying raised any concerns. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that applications had been received from across all areas of the Council and there had not been any cause for concern.

Councillor Boyes asked whether there would be any increased contributions that the Council would have to pay following the delay in pension reform. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that they were not aware of any additional payments required but would check with finance.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence check whether the Council are required to make any additional payments due to the delay in pension reform.

**32. AGENCY AND CONSULTANT SPEND QUARTER 3 - PERIOD 1ST  
SEPTEMBER 2020 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2020**

The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources introduced the report and informed the Committee that the Council's ability to recruit to a number of vacancies had been impacted by the pandemic, primarily due to a general stagnation within the job market. Those difficulties had translated into an increase in agency spend.

The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence went over the salient points of the report. The total spend across the organisation during the period had been £1,114,787 which represented an increase of around £50,000 from the previous quarter. There continued to be national pressure around the recruitment of social workers within children's services. There had been a number of in house initiatives to help increase the numbers of social workers within both adults and children's services but they had not managed to deliver a sufficient increase in recruitment so far. These pressures seemed to be increasing across the Council with each directorate seeing an increase in agency spend, with the exception of the Finance and Systems Directorate. Work was ongoing with agencies to ensure the best candidates were found for positions and the resourcing team were working to improve stability within the workforce. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence noted that the Committee had previously requested to look at the proportion of the Council's budget that agency spend represented and informed the Committee that the figures would be included within the annual report, which would also include the previous year's data for comparison.

Following the overview Councillor Boyes asked how many days of work the £12,511 spend within the Place Directorate represented and in what capacity. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that spend on agency staff within the Place directorate related to key roles within the planning team and some roles within Economic Growth. Regarding that particular amount the Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence would have to look into the Council's data and respond to the Councillor after the meeting. Councillor Boyes asked that the data be split into Planning and Economic Growth when it was provided.

Councillor Cordingley asked whether other authorities saw similar seasonal increases in demand as Trafford. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources responded that the Council did benchmark themselves against the other Greater Manchester Authorities and they were all struggling with staffing.

Councillor Holden raised a question relating to a specific individual. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that the question would have to be addressed after the meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That responses be provided to Councillor Boyes' and Councillor Holden's questions.

### **33. WORKFORCE UPDATE**

The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources introduced the report. As the Committee had time to read the update prior to the meeting the Strategic HR Lead for Health, Safety and Wellbeing would go over the key highlights of the measures the Council had taken to support the safety and wellbeing of staff for the Committee.

The Strategic HR Lead for Health, Safety and Wellbeing updated the Committee on the ongoing support for staff working from home. This support aided staff in setting up a workspace at home through the provision of guidance, health and safety assessments, and equipment. Additional support was being provided to support colleague's mental health including tea and talk sessions, regular manager check-ins, and the work undertaken by our mental health first aiders.

The Covid secure measures continued to be in place within all Council buildings. The measures were reviewed monthly to ensure they continued to be effective. Everyone moving around Council buildings were required to wear face coverings to reduce the likelihood of infection, which had been complied with by all staff since its introduction. Rapid testing had been in place since January to support frontline staff and other cohorts to take regular tests and was working well.

The Health and Safety team had been working with colleagues in education services to support schools prepare to reopen. The support included guidance around completion of risk assessments and updates on the latest Covid guidance. The team had provided health and safety support on arrangements for regular lateral flow testing within schools for pupils and staff and also attended the head teacher's forum, alongside colleagues from Public Health to provide further guidance

The Council were to hold elections in May and the team had been working with elections staff to ensure that they would be able to go ahead safely. Finally, the Committee were informed of the continued health and wellbeing support to aid staff throughout the pandemic including Health and Wellbeing Week.

Following the update Councillor Thompson asked whether mobile polling stations would still be able to be used during the elections. The Strategic HR Lead for Health, Safety, and Wellbeing responded that all types of polling station would be able to operate in a Covid safe way including mobile polling stations.

Councillor Boyes asked whether there had been any guidance on socially distancing for candidates and agents at the count for the election. The Strategic HR Lead for Health, Safety, and Wellbeing responded that information was being provided by the Electoral Commission for how to deliver each aspect of the elections. Where guidance was not supplied the Council were applying the same approach that they had taken to making other areas Covid secure.

Councillor Acton asked whether workforce plans had been developed for when the lockdown came to an end. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources responded that the Council had been working on the workforce integration plans

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throughout the pandemic. The Council were taking a cautious approach in allowing people to move back into office working. The first cohort to go back into offices would be those whose roles benefitted from working in the office. The first phase would see no more than 20% occupancy in Council buildings and would only progress to the next phase when it was safe to do so.

The Council were also planning that the workforce would not go back to working in the same way as they were prior to the pandemic. A number of advantages around flexible working had been identified during the pandemic and the Council would adjust their policies and procedures to ensure those advantages remained.

Councillor Acton asked for a report to be provided to the Committee detailing the Council's plans for the workforce. The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources responded that they would be able to share the Council's workforce reintegration plans with the Committees and offered to meet with Councillor Acton to discuss the Council's plans.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That a report on the Council's reintegration plans be brought to the Committee.
- 3) That the Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources arrange a meeting with Councillor Acton.

**34. QUARTERLY REPORT ON EXEMPTIONS TO THE SICKNESS POLICY**

The Head of HR Operations informed the Committee that three requests had been received in the previous quarter from two individuals within Adult services and two of the requests were approved.

The Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources took the opportunity to thank all of the Officers who worked within Human Resources for the excellent work that they continually provided. The Committee supported the views expressed by the Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources and added their thanks to Officers as well.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the Committee and the Corporate Director of Strategy and Resources thank all of the Council's HR Officers for their excellent work.

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and finished at 6.15 pm