

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

6 SEPTEMBER 2021

PRESENT

Councillor J. Bennett (in the Chair).

Councillors A.M. Whyte (Vice-Chair), D. Acton, C. Boyes, J. Holden, D. Jarman, S. Longden, D.C. O'Sullivan and A.J. Williams

In attendance

Angela Beadsworth	Interim Director of Human Resources
Bev Norton	Head of HR Operations
Kate Sturman	Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence

APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

12. MINUTES

As the meeting was held informally the approval of the previous minutes was deferred to the next meeting.

13. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

14. PEOPLE UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2021

The Interim Director of Human Resources (HR) introduced the report and picked out various highlights which included: the continued health and safety measures taken by the Council to protect staff; work to support Adult Services regarding mandatory vaccinations for care home staff; the Epic Management programme; the refresh of the Members Induction Programme; and the beginning of the Kickstart programme.

Following the introduction, the Chair asked AB to expand upon the new agency Social worker framework. The Interim Director of HR informed the Committee that the Council had struggled to recruit to social workers in the last few years, so the HR team had established a framework for agency staff in that area. A further update would be available for the next Committee meeting in December and would show the volume of agency staff appointed through the framework. Work was ongoing within the Children's Service redesign which, it was hoped, would reduce the need for agency staff.

Councillor Acton asked whether the Council had signed up to the domestic abuse charter or whether they were in the process of doing it. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that the Council had liaised with GMB, had identified the strands required to sign up to the charter, and were working to

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complete them. The Council had approached a training provider to deliver domestic abuse training for mental health first aiders, managers, and staff.

Councillor Acton asked how the birthday Leave scheme and two additional flexi days would be managed. The Interim Director of HR responded that the Council had taken this decision considering the high number of hours that staff had worked over the past year and the additional days leave was a reward for staff in recognition of their efforts. The Committee were informed that the Council were using a flexi recording system which allowed staff to carry forward more than the 16-hour limit between flexi periods. This had led to staff accruing substantial flexi balances and the additional flexi days would allow them to take some of that balance prior to the system reset in April 2022. Work was also ongoing with managers to ensure staff had a good work life balance and only worked additional hours when it was essential to the business.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the content of the report be noted.
- 2) That an update on the agency framework come to the Committee's next meeting.

15. WORKFORCE RE-INTEGRATION UPDATE

The largest piece of work was on staff engagement which had been conducted through a series of events utilising Microsoft Teams. The sessions included presentations of plans and breakout groups focused on key questions. A dedicated intranet page had been developed for those who were unable to attend a session, which enabled staff to view a recording of one of the sessions, download the presentation, pose questions to the team, and provided a form with the key questions for them to answer.

Feedback received correlated with the feedback given the year before with many people wanting to have a hybrid approach with home and office working. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence informed the Committee that there was a lot of flexibility within the Council's current arrangement for staff to suit their needs. The feedback received was generally positive and included views that staff liked the flexibility available and not having to commute every day. The concerns and challenges raised did not contain recurring points but were spread out across an array of different themes. The feedback would be passed on to the reintegration project team and factored into their workstreams. The key areas of support required were equipment, IT support, and guidance on how the arrangements would work.

From September staff would be encouraged to come into the office one or two days a week and managers were to support staff in coming back. Many of the measures in place during the pandemic were still in place to ensure staff safety. When people came into the offices there would be opportunity for them to test some equipment that was to be rolled out including hybrid meeting facilities and collaboration working areas. Microsoft 365 was to be rolled out in the coming months and the new ways of working were planned to be in place by March 2022.

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Following the update Councillor Williams asked that this item come back to the Committee as it was likely to evolve as the Council moved towards smart working. He asked that when the item was next on the agenda more detail be provided around any challenges teams were facing, especially regarding any bespoke programmes they used. Councillor Williams added that the number of responses received from the survey were very low for an organisation the size of the Council and hoped that further engagement events would be held to gain employees views.

Councillor Boyes asked how many responses received saying that they would like to come back to the office full time were from people who lived alone. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that was not something that they had looked at within the question. But there was office workstyle available which would suit people who wanted to come into the office every day.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the content of the report be noted.
- 2) That a further update be brought to the Committee.

16. AGENCY SPEND

The Interim Director of HR introduced the agency spend report for quarter one and drew the Committee's attention to key highlights of the report. Agency spend was down within Children's Services when compared to last quarter and to quarter one of the previous year. The Interim Director of HR then informed the Committee of the various pieces of work within Children's service which attributed aimed at reducing the level of agency spend. The pieces of work included the introduction of a market supplement in April 2021, engagement with recruitment consultants to develop a three-month campaign aimed at social workers, additional support provided to newly qualified social workers and student social workers, and Trafford being part of the Greater Manchester Step up Partnership.

Adult Services spend on agency workers had increased in quarter one and compared to the same period in 2020/21. There was a national shortage of support workers and this was expected to increase when the mandatory vaccination mandate to work in care homes came into force. The Council had onboarded nine newly qualified social workers within Adult Services and the Trafford Academy were working to encourage young people to take up a career in social work.

The Governance and Community Strategy directorate had also increased agency spend and had nine active assignments in place. The HR operations team were working closely with the directorate on a structural redesign to ensure roles were more attractive. The operations team were also supporting the recruitment of a new Director of Legal and Governance and the Advert for the position was to be posted later in the week.

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Finance and Systems had no agency staff during the period and there were five active assignments in Strategy and Resources. Place had put temporary placements in place while recruitment was conducted for several key posts.

Overall, the spend on agency staff had decreased from quarter four of 2020/21 but was slightly higher when compared to quarter one of 2020/21. Services continued to monitor spend on agency staff with the support of resourcing team who ensure that they get the right person with the right skills when an agency resource was required.

Following the overview Committee Members were given an opportunity to ask questions but none were raised. The Chair commended the proactive work that was being done to recruit and retain social workers within the Council.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

17. QUARTERLY REPORT ON EXEMPTIONS TO THE SICKNESS POLICY

The Head of HR Operations informed the Committee that there had been a reduction in the number of requests received from ten in the previous quarter to eight. The eight requests had come from six individuals and all had been approved. Six of the requests had come from Children's Service and the remaining two requests had come from Strategy and Resources. In the previous quarter half of the requests had been related to long covid and that had reduced greatly to only one of the requests relating to long Covid. Two requests related to mental health, two related to cancer, and one related to another condition. Four of the six employees had either returned to work or had left the Council. So far in quarter two of the municipal year there had been four requests two had been approved and two were awaiting approval.

Following the update Members had the opportunity to ask questions but none were raised.

RESOLVED: That the content of the update be noted.

The meeting commenced at 5.10 pm and finished at 5.45 p.m.