

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

10 DECEMBER 2018

PRESENT

Councillors J. Slater (Vice-Chair), J. Bennett (in the Chair), D. Acton, B. Rigby and G. Whitham

In attendance

Sara Saleh	Corporate Director of People
Angela Beadsworth	Head of Workforce and Core Strategy
Alexander Murray	Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Cawdrey and M. Hyman.

19. MINUTES

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20. REVISED HR POLICIES

The Corporate Director of People informed the Committee that three of the four policies had been revised with one being an entirely new policy. The revised policies were the Adoption Policy, the Employee Volunteering Policy, and the Fertility Investigation and Treatment Policy. The New policy was the annual leave policy. There was also a minor update to the Councils grievance policy and a new guaranteed interview policy to allow certain groups when they apply for positions within the Council which will ultimately form part of the recruitment policy.

The Committee were told that the changes made in the policies were positive ones which improved the conditions for staff. The Corporate Director of People then gave a summary of each policy and highlighted the key changes that had been made. Following the highlights of each policy the Committee were asked if they had any questions or whether they were happy to agree the changes.

A Committee Member asked about putting the onus of finding a volunteering opportunity on the Employee. The Corporate Director of people answered that this allowed staff to find the opportunities that they wanted rather than volunteer for an organisation affiliated with the Council. The Head of Business partnerships added that by making this changed it then allowed the recognition of employees' ongoing voluntary commitments not just those that had been applied for since they started working for the Council.

The Member then asked whether the volunteering activity of employees was going to be tracked by the Council. The Head of business partnerships answered that the Council would be tracking the volunteering activities of staff members going forward.

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A Committee Member enquired whether Volunteering as school governors was included within the policy. The Corporate Director of People answered that they were not currently covered by the policy but that it was something that could be considered in the future.

The Vice Chair asked whether within the Fertility Investigation and Treatment Policy there could be special leave provision given to the partners of those who received fertility treatment instead of them having to use annual leave or flexi leave. The Corporate Director of People said that they would go away and look at the possibility of making that adjustment.

The Corporate Director of People then gave an overview of the proposed Annual leave policy. The policy was to formalise the position of the Council which had been available to staff on the intranet. The policy covered the move from quoting staff member's annual leave in days to hours and a shift to an individual's yearly allowance included bank holidays, which was in line with the MiTrent system used to process employees leave.

The Vice Chair asked whether, under the unused annual leave section of the policy, it reflected the legal case which had decided that Employees on long term sick leave were entitled to carry over their statutory leave but not their occupational leave. The Corporate Director of People noted that it had not been captured within the policy but it would be updated.

The grievance policy had been updated by the addition of a sentence to make it clear that the policy did not relate matters of statutory provision. The change had been agreed in consultation with representatives from both UNISON and GMB.

The final policy which was covered at the meeting was the recruitment policy and guaranteed interview scheme. The offer of guaranteed interview places for several groups. The groups were all at a distinct disadvantage when it came to securing long term gainful employment. The groups were disabled individuals, ex-service personnel, working well clients, long term unemployed, and care leavers. People who were determined to be part of these groups would be guaranteed an interview if they met the essential criteria for the role.

All of the revised policies were to come into effect from the 1st January with the exception of the guaranteed interview scheme as part of the recruitment policy which would be implemented as part of the Councils resourcing review and a date for implementation had not been set.

The Vice Chair asked about the guaranteed interview scheme and whether the protected characteristics within the policy were defined within law or if the Council may be open to challenge. Another Member asked whether the list given was an exhaustive list, how the list had been created and why this change was part of the resourcing review.

The Corporate Director stated that it was not an exhaustive list but they were trying to get ahead of the predicted changes that they felt would be implemented

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in time. This change was part of the resourcing review as they wanted all the changes related to resourcing to go through at the same time, however it could be implemented sooner if the Committee wanted.

A Member then followed up by asking whether any provision was made for homeless people applying for positions without an address. The Corporate Director responded that there was not currently anything written within policies regarding homeless applicants but she assured the Committee that the recruitment team were forward thinking and would support such an individual applying for a position. The Corporate director added that this could be something to consider going forward.

Another Member asked at what point the Council require individuals to prove that they belonged to one of the groups. The Head of Workforce and Core Strategy responded that all the questions raised by the Committee were reasons why the policy was not to be implemented right away. After the principals of the policy were agreed further work was to be done to look at other groups that could be added and to consider when and how individuals would be asked to prove they belonged to one of the groups. The Member then asked whether the groups listed were being used by any other authorities and if anything could be taken from them. The Head of Workforce and Core Strategy informed the Committee that these policies had been developed in in communication with Greater Manchester Authorities.

A Member asked about how the Council communicated their position in respect to these policies too hard to reach groups. The Corporate Director responded that this was something that HR were working on alongside the Councils Communications and Marketing team who were generating a communications strategy.

The Chair added that while the policy was a step in the right direction there were many issues with the employment of an interview process which would continue to disadvantage these groups. Issues such as those who were long term unemployed or homeless lacking interview experience, confidence, and suitable clothing would still provide a barrier to these groups even if they were given an interview.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Committee note and agree the changes to the policies.
- 2) That Human Resources are to look into the possibility of introducing special leave for the partners of people going through fertility treatment.
- 3) That the annual leave policy be reviewed in light of the outcomes of the case on unused leave for those who are on long term sick leave.
- 4) That the Committee receive an update on the recruitment policy when it was ready to be implemented.

21. WORKFORCE UPDATE

The Corporate Director of People gave a brief overview of the workforce update. The Committee were told that data that the 2017/18 data did not include Trafford CCG within it. There had been a reduction in the number of vacancies following the spike that was seen within August. There had been a reduction of 30 percent for agency spend from September to October. There had been a slight increase in the level of absences across the Council.

There had been a number of charities supported by dress down Fridays and cake sales. There had been some mental health support sessions as well as Pilates sessions. The Council had employed 104 apprentices and they were working with other authorities on developing a level four apprenticeship. The Council had carried out communication and engagement exercises with schools and colleges across Trafford and there had been a good level of interest shown by young people wanting to take up the level four apprenticeships.

Following the update the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions. A Member pointed out that there was a high level of absence within the Council and they suggested that this was an area that the Committee should pay close attention to and that it should be on the agenda for future meeting. The Corporate Director responded that this was something that the Council had been working making inroads into the level of absences. The Committee were informed that the Council had a number of employees that were suffering from long term conditions and the Council were looking at ways to effectively support these employees. It was felt that there were also some employees who knew how to work the system regarding short term sickness and this was going to be reviewed by HR.

The Committee Member recognised that long term sickness was something that every organisation had and that staff in such a position needed support. The Member then requested that the information that the Council gathered through return to work and other documents relating to the issues around short term absences be brought to the Committee for information. The Head of Workforce and Core Strategy added that the Council were also doing work around the wider aspects of attendance management such as Health and Wellbeing and culture change within the organisation.

The Vice Chair asked that data be provided which removed long term sickness so that the position around short term sickness could be properly understood. They added that they looked forward to the annual staff survey as it would give employees an opportunity to feedback in a confidential manner. The Vice Chair asked whether the charity Every Month could be considered to receive funding from fundraising events. The Corporate director responded that the team would look into this.

A Committee Member noted that Trafford was not a living wage accredited employer and so they did not have mechanisms in place in order to make sure that employees' wages continued to stay above the living wage. The Member asked for clarification as to whether the living wage that was listed in the document referred to the national living wage or the living wage as set by

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campaigners. The Corporate Director stated that she had not covered pay as part of her overview as it was a separate item on the agenda. In response to the Councillors question the Corporate Director responded that she would seek clarification as to what was meant within the document and pass the answer onto the Committee.

Another Member noted the Council's excellent performance in terms of apprenticeships both within the Council itself and as a champion of them across the area. The Member also noted the important role that the Unions had played in supporting this work and ensuring that it achieved such success.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted by the Committee.
- 2) That the levels of absence among staff be an agenda item at a later meeting of the Committee.
- 3) That the update on staff absence is to include data on short term absence only.
- 4) That clarification as to the definition of living wage within the update be provided to the Committee.
- 5) That the charity Every Month be considered to receive funding from fundraising events.
- 6) That the excellent work of the Council and the Unions with regards to apprenticeships be commended by the Committee.

22. NEW PAY STRUCTURE

The Corporate Director of People gave an overview of the report that had been circulated with the agenda. The Committee were told that the report covered the new agreed pay deal for all council employees as well as adjustments to a number of pay bands which would affect employees on those bands. The pay increases proposed within the new structure would ensure that Trafford paid all employees above both the national living wage and the actual living wage and would be reviewed again in the following year.

The new structure renumbered and amalgamated a number of scale points with each scale point representing a 2% increase. The changes that had been made were to ensure that the pay structure to minimise the impact upon employees. The revised structure ensured that no pay band had more than 5 points within it, there were no overlapping pay bands, increment first and then assimilate to new pay spine where appropriate, no job evaluations and there was a minimal impact upon the budget. The Corporate Director drew the Committees attention to the impact upon catering and cleaning services supplied to schools. As these positions were traded services which were open to competition the wage increase could have a negative impact on the level of buy back of these services.

The Corporate Director then went through the three options that had been laid out within the report and recommended option 2 as it had less impact upon staff. Agreement in principal had been reached with the local trade union representatives although this was still to be finalised at the regional level.

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Following the overview the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Committee Members asked questions about the position regarding the traded services. The Corporate Director assured the Committee that the staff would receive the pay award and it had been flagged to the Committee as by doing this those services would be less competitive within the marketplace. The Committee asked that the reasons for the increase in these services be highlighted to schools that bought the services. The Corporate Director told the Committee that letters were being developed to go out to schools informing them of the reasons behind the increases.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the report and approve its recommendations.

23. AGENCY SPEND Q2

The Corporate Director of People gave an overview of the report to the Committee. The Committee were told about the agency spend per directorate. The CFW agency spend was mainly due to having to bring in social workers in order to meet the Councils statutory responsibilities. This was a national problem and the Council were reviewing the offer for Trafford's social workers to try and improve the position. Work with Ofsted had shown that a key issue was the caseload that social workers had to cope with and the Council were looking into reducing this.

In Transformation and Resources spend in Q2 had increased by 10% from the previous year. Within EGEI there had been a small reduction in spend but this was the only directorate which had been less than the previous year. Overall the amount spent on agency staff had increased by over £140,000 compared to quarter 2 the previous year. Following the update the Committee had the opportunity to ask questions.

The Vice Chair mentioned that at a previous meeting the issue of essential car user status for social workers had been mentioned as something that could be offered. She enquired as to whether there been any work looking into the impact that such an offer would have. The Corporate Director stated that this was something that would be looked at as part of the employment engagement survey which was to be conducted in 2019.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted by the Committee.

24. QUARTERLY REPORT ON EXEMPTIONS TO THE SICKNESS POLICY

The Corporate Director of People informed the Committee that there had been no exemptions since the last meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

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25. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

The Chair allowed consideration of the following matter as an item of urgent business as so that work could begin on aligning the Councils business with the agreed corporate priorities at the earliest opportunity and the Committees approval of the approach was needed before the work could begin.

The Corporate Director of People briefly described the approach laid out within the report the Committee had received. Following the description the Committee had the opportunity to ask questions but none were raised.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the recommendations approved by the Committee.

The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and finished at 5.48 pm