

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 21st June, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Usmani (Chair), N Holledge (Vice-Chair), Bedi, Brooker, Davis, Sharif and M Holledge

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Chahal

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th April 2016

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th April 2016 be approved as a correct record.

3. Introduction to the Role of the Committee and Workforce Issues for the Year Ahead

Christina Hefferon, Assistant Director OD and HR, updated Members on the role of the Committee and Workforce issues for the year ahead.

Members were informed that Ms Hefferon had been in the post of Assistant Director since September 2015. The role was a new one for Slough Borough Council, and it was her remit to ensure there was a quality OD and HR structure in place within the Council moving forward. This included ensuring that the HR policies were improved to ensure policies were simpler and easy to follow and understand.

Workforce issues in the year ahead included further updates to HR policies, and the launch of the new Payroll and HR Agresso system. Information regarding these topics, and other issues that may arise during the year, would be brought to future meetings of the Committee.

Members were advised that a number of staff were returning to SBC employment, including library staff, and staff from Cambridge Education. From Cambridge Education, the majority would be moving to the Slough Children's Services Trust, though the Council would retain a small team moving forward.

Members requested details of any impending redundancies. It was confirmed that there were currently a low number of redundancies being processed. However, Members were advised that it was important to note that in all instances, it was the post that was made redundant, and not the person. In such an instance, all efforts were made to redeploy the staff member to another role within the organisation.

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4. Introduction to Gemma Bailey - Head of Corporate HR

Christina Hefferon, Assistant Director OD and HR, introduced the Committee to Gemma Bailey, the new Head of Corporate HR.

Ms Bailey advised Members that she had joined the Council following 14 years spent at Royal Holloway University, where she was Deputy Director of HR. It was confirmed that Ms Bailey would be responsible for HR matters that covered the whole of the Council, including Pay and Recruitment matters.

Members welcomed Ms Bailey to the Council, and advised they were looking forward to working with her moving forward.

5. Introduction to Martin Vaggers - Agresso Project Manager

Christina Hefferon, Assistant Director OD and HR, introduced the Committee to Martin Vaggers, Agresso Project Manager.

Mr Vaggers confirmed that his was an interim role, following approximately 30 years experience working in HR, for a variety of organisations including Local Authorities, and would be responsible for the rollout of the HR and Payroll functionality within the new Agresso system.

Members were advised that the Finance portion of the system had been implemented and was now live. However, following feedback from staff, the rollout of the HR and Payroll functionality had been put on hold until such time as staff could be given further training. In addition, the new implementation date would allow for the system to launch with the most up-to-date version. The system would be as secure as possible, and would include password protections with unique logins.

It was confirmed that, once live, the new system would comprise three key functions:

1. HR access, allowing real-time reports;
2. Staff self-service, including booking leave, reviewing payslips and P60 documents, and electronic timesheets;
3. Manager self-service, allowing Managers to authorise employee leave, register absences etc.

The new self-service functionality would mean a change to staff's existing processes, and would therefore necessitate a change a cultural change as staff became familiar with the new processes.

Currently, the system was at the planning for implementation stage, which included pilot sessions and the assignation of system champions. Whilst it was recognised that the scope of the project was large (900+ machines) all steps were being taken to ensure a smooth rollout, including upgrading staff to the new iGel system.

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Members welcomed Martin to the Council, and advised they were looking forward to working with him in the future.

6. Matrix Contract Report: Temporary Agency Staff

Roger Parkin, Strategic Director - Customer and Community Services, advised Members that following recent staff absences at Matrix due to annual leave, data received for the purpose of compiling a report had, upon review, proven to be erroneous. As such, it was felt that it was prudent to forgo publishing a report until such time as the data could be validated, to ensure any information presented was wholly correct.

In the absence of a report, Members asked a number of questions, including:

Was the Council still having difficulty in recruiting permanent staff?

A reduction in the use of agency staff had been seen in several departments, including Planning and Building Control. This was due in part to the implementation of training and development programmes to upskill staff from junior to senior roles, thereby growing internal talent and forgoing the need to look outside the organisation. In addition, benchmarking exercises against other Local Authorities had been undertaken to ensure pay parity, and where short, the Council was paying market supplements as required, in order to incentivise prospective employees to come and work for Slough.

How many staff members were on fixed-term contracts?

This data could be provided following the meeting, but it was important to recognise that anyone on a fixed-term contract was employed by the Council and not an agency. The same rights and benefits applied to these employees as pertained to permanent staff, e.g. entry into the pension scheme. Salaries were equivalent to permanent staff.

What was the Council doing to ensure that talented staff were not lost to other employers?

Employees were incentivised to join Slough and continue to work for Slough in the long term via attractive benefits such as flexible working, smart working and pay parity. This ensured that all employees were enabled to retain a healthy and positive work/life balance.

Members were disappointed that a report could not be brought to the meeting, and agreed that Mr Parkin would forward an interim report to all Members of the Employment & Appeals Panel as soon as possible.

7. Update on Agency Staff within Wellbeing

Simon Broad, Head of Adult Safeguarding and Learning Disabilities, provided Members with an update on the use of agency staff within the Wellbeing Directorate.

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Mr Broad confirmed that while several departments had seen a reduction in their use of agency workers, the numbers of agency staff within Wellbeing remained high. The majority of these were social care staff, including qualified staff (social workers, therapists etc.) and non-qualified staff (drivers, escorts etc.)

With regard to non-qualified staff, a number of vacant positions were being deliberately retained whilst a staff rationalisation exercise was undertaken, the aim of which was to rationalise staff members under 1 manager, within 1 team. It was expected that this would save £325K annually. The agency workers were therefore required to ensure service continuity whilst this exercise was undertaken.

For qualified staff, it was recognised that there was a national shortage of people to fill roles that required skill and experience, such as social workers. Slough was competing in a challenging marketplace to attract these staff members, though one of the key incentives to attract the calibre of staff required was the unique challenges that Slough faced. Together with the attractiveness of the work, Slough was ensuring that market supplements and competitive pay packages were being offered to entice prospective employees to choose to work in Slough.

Members asked a number of questions, including:

With the implementation of the new Crossrail project and Slough's proximity to London, what was Slough doing to compete for permanent staff that could choose to work at a London Authority instead?

Slough was endeavouring to think creatively to ensure high quality staff were choosing to work for Slough Borough Council. This included the measures discussed earlier, such as competitive salaries, but for social care workers salary was often only one consideration, and often not the most important. It was expected that the unique challenges that working in Slough presented would entice quality staff to seek employment here.

How great was the case load of social care staff?

Often case loads per staff member totalled 200, however, it was important to assess the complexity of those cases. For example, it could be expected that of those 200 cases, only 5 would need weekly contact, and perhaps only 1 would need daily contact. Non qualified staff could be used for those cases with low needs, whilst qualified staff could be used for cases of high need. The most important factor was to ensure cases were dealt with in a timely and proactive manner by the appropriate case officer, to ensure quality of service.

Members thanked Mr Broad for his attendance to the meeting, and noted his verbal update.

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8. Update on the Transformation Programme

Christina Hefferon, Assistant Director Organisational Development & HR, confirmed that the item updating Members on the Transformation Programme had been added to the meeting agenda in error, and was instead to be considered at a future meeting of the Corporate Consultative Forum.

9. Staff Wellbeing Update

Surjit Nagra, HR and OD Business Partner, provided an update on staff wellbeing.

Members were reminded that the data was for the period ending March 2016, and that when the new Agresso system was implemented, the Committee would be provided with more up-to-date data.

The target of sickness absence for each directorate was 8.1 per FTE, with the exception of the Wellbeing directorate, which had a target of 9.4 per FTE in recognition of the different challenges staff faced. Overall, the Council had achieved a figure of 8.3 per FTE, marginally above the overall target of 8.1. It was recognised that the Wellbeing directorate and the Regeneration, Housing and Resources directorate had exceeded the 8.1 target, whilst the Chief Executive directorate and Customer and Community Services were comfortably achieving their targets.

By division, certain areas such as Community and Skills had exceeded their target, but measures had been taken to reduce sickness absence levels within these divisions.

For number of sick days per employee, it was noted that of the 836 total Council staff, only 30 were seen to have been on long term sickness (defined as sicknesses totalling over 20 days). Of these 30 staff, 24 had since returned to work, resulting in only 6 staff remaining on long term absence.

It was noted that any staff returning to work following long term absence would be referred to Occupational Health. OH would carry out a risk assessment of their work environment and make recommendations to Managers as to how best to manage their return to work. If there was no likelihood of return, Managers would then progress through formal processes which could lead to dismissal on the grounds of unsatisfactory attendance. Since the turn of the year, 3 staff members had been dismissed.

It was confirmed that absentees were contacted regularly, which could include home visits, and that all staff were required to provide the necessary documentation, e.g. fit notes etc. If employees were found to be claiming absence inappropriately, then disciplinary action would be undertaken.

As ever, the Council was endeavouring to take all available steps to reduce staff absences, including promoting a healthy lifestyle through activities and

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diet, providing support clinics such as back clinics and physiotherapy sessions, counselling services, and vaccinations.

Members sought clarity as to how regularly the Council's counselling service was used. It was agreed that anonymised figures would be brought to the next meeting.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

10. Appointment of Appeals Sub-Committee

The Committee considered a report on the establishment of an Appeals Sub-Committee. The political group nominations to the Sub-Committee were reported.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Appeals Sub-Committee be appointed for the 2016/17 Municipal Year.
- (b) That the terms of reference of the Sub-Committees be as set out in Appendix A
- (c) That seats be allocated to the Sub-Committee as shown in paragraph 5.1
- (d) That the following Members be appointed to serve on the Sub-Committee in accordance with the wishes expressed by the Political groups in respect of the seats allocated to them:

Sub-Committee	Seats	Labour	Conservative
Appeals Sub-Committee	5 (+ 5 deputies)	4 (+4) Brooker, M Holledge, N Holledge, Plenty (Rasib + 3 vacancies)	1 (+1) R Sandhu (Chahal)

11. Member's Attendance Record 2016/17

The Member's Attendance Record was noted.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday, 25th October 2016.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.58 pm)