

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 2nd July, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Ali (Chair), Gahir (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Bains, Chaudhry, Hulme, Mohammad and Smith

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor N Holledge

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23rd January 2020

In relation to Minute No.19 – The Slough Academy Trust, it was noted that reference to ‘The Education Trust’ should be amended to ‘The Children’s Trust’.

Resolved – That, subject to the amendment set out above, the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2020 be approved as a correct record.

3. Appointment of Sub-Committees

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced a report that sought approval to appoint the Appeals Sub-Committee and the Appointments Sub-Committee, and the allocation of seats to the respective sub-committees.

Members’ attention was drawn to paragraph 5.2 of the report that listed the proposed seat allocation in accordance with the wishes expressed by the Political Groups.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Appeals Sub-Committee and Appointments Sub-Committee be appointed for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year.
- (b) That the Terms of Reference of the sub-committees be approved as set out in Appendix A of the report.
- (c) That seats on the sub-committees be allocated as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report.

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(d) That Members be appointed to serve on the sub-committees in accordance with the wishes expressed by Political Groups in respect of seats allocated to them as set out as follows:

Appeals Sub- Committee: Councillors Davis, M Holledge, Plenty, Rasib and Smith. Deputies – Councillors Cllr Chaudhry and Bains.

Appointments Sub-Committee: Councillors Bains, Akram, Mann, Strutton and Swindlehurst.

4. Temporary Agency Staff

The OD/HR Business Partner introduced a report that provided the Committee with an update on the Council's actions taken regarding the supply and control of temporary labour.

At the last Committee meeting officers had advised of the intention to re-procure the temporary labour service contract. There had been a slight delay in the process due to the need to complete due diligence between the top bidders, however the exercise had now been completed and Matrix SCM had been awarded the contract. It was explained that a 'hybrid model' service would be provided, meaning that the Council would engage with different worker types in different manners, with lower graded labour being managed via a single agency and higher graded and interim labour being engaged via a number of pre-qualified agencies.

Julain Panter, Business Director, Matrix SCM was invited to address the Committee. He explained that the company had partnered with over 90 local authority clients across the UK to deliver cost savings and process efficiencies. Matrix would be working closely with the Council's managers to provide a resilient labour supply chain.

The Chair then invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was confirmed that as part of the due diligence process work had been undertaken to put in place the supply chain agencies.
- It was noted that the rebasing of agency rates would cost approximately £10,000. A Member asked what benefits the additional cost would deliver. In response, it was explained that the previous contract was focused on the agency fee margin and this approach had meant fees were too low to attract candidates. The Matrix contract

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allowed a greater degree of flexibility and would target the right calibre of candidate.

- A Member asked if during the Covid-19 lockdown period agency staff had been working from home, and if this had reduced costs incurred by the Council. It was explained that at the beginning of the lockdown period the Government had issued guidance to local authorities urging them not to end contracts with agency staff.
- In relation to supply chain management it was asked if any of the agencies used were Slough based. It was confirmed that non of the agencies were locally based. However, due to the types of jobs being recruited to, agencies would be employing local people.
- In relation to the number of vacancies currently filled by temporary staff, it was asked how many of these roles could be converted into permanent roles. It was explained that further work would be undertaken in the next stage of the contract to ascertain the number of temporary position that could be converted into permanent roles. Discussions would be held with the Matrix on-site Manager to progress this work. A key performance indicator of the new contract related to the number of posts that could be filled permanently. The OD/HR Business Partner agreed to circulate: a list of the Key Performance Indicators for the new Matrix contract; and when data became available, information relating to the number of temporary roles that had been converted into permanent roles.
- It was asked if the Matrix contract would provide an overall saving to the Council. In addition, it was highlighted that the Council's focus should be on training and 'growing its own staff'. In response, it was explained that as part of the new contract a mapping exercise would be undertaken to consider if posts currently being filled temporarily could be advertised as permanent positions.
- A Member asked how many of the staff currently filling temporary positions were Slough residents. The OD/HR Business Partner agreed to forward this information to the Committee following the meeting.
- It was asked what arrangements were in place to manage the new Matrix contract. It was explained that Key Performance Indicators would be implemented and monthly meetings would be held with Matrix to monitor performance. 'Service credits' had also been agreed within the terms of the contract, meaning that if Matrix failed to meet the set targets a percentage of the fee could be returned to the Council.
- It was noted that a number of agency staff had worked for the Council for more than two years. It was asked why these temporary posts could not have been converted into permanent posts. It was explained that in many cases managers sought a temporary staffing solution. The Council was currently undertaking a restructure and managers did

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not want to recruit to permanent posts to than have to make staff redundant. In some circumstances there was a requirement to recruit specialist staff to work on specific time limited projects.

- It was reported that the Matrix contract would be in place for two years with the option to extend for up to four years.
- Referring to Appendix 1 of the report, a Member requested that in future reports additional information regarding the specific temporary job roles in each service directorate be provided, as this would enable the Committee to get a better understanding of the Council's temporary workforce.
- The Chair highlighted the importance of the Council reducing its overall reliance on temporary staff and converting long-serving temporary staff into permanent employees to reduce costs to the Council.

The Chair thanked the OD/HR Business Partner for the report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the OD/HR Business Partner be requested to provide the following information to the Committee:
 - The Key Performance Indicators of the new Matrix contract.
 - Information/figures relating to the number of temporary staff posts converted into permanent posts.
 - The number of temporary staff who were also Slough residents.
 - In relation to Appendix 1 of the report, it was requested that additional information regarding the specific temporary job roles in each directorate, be provided in future reports.

5. The Slough Academy - Update

The Service Lead, People introduced a report that provided a half yearly update on the Slough Academy project and progress made since the last report presented in January 2020.

The Apprentice Specialist was then invited to present the details of the report. It was explained that the programme offered various types of course ranging from 12 month training to courses that spanned over several years. The aim of the Academy was to retain staff and develop employees' skills, particularly

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in service areas where there was market shortage, such as social workers and planning officers.

The Chair then invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was queried if the Council recorded which schools were taking part in the apprenticeship scheme. It was explained that schools and colleges did offer apprenticeships; however none of the Council's apprentices had been recruited directly in this way. The Slough Academy was for employees of the Council and it was not within the remit of the Academy to promote apprenticeships to schools or colleges.
- A Member asked if there were any plans to offer apprenticeships at senior or management levels within the Council. In addition, it was queried what mechanisms were in place to retain staff once they had completed their training. It was explained that there was a variety of training offered ranging from level 2 and 3 (GCSE and A Level) up to level 6 (degree level). There were a high number of people who took part in the apprenticeship scheme who were Slough residents, so if people did subsequently leave the Council, the skills would be retained within the local area. Funding for the apprenticeship scheme was provided by the Government, therefore it was not possible to ask participants to sign a contract with terms and conditions requiring them to work for the Council for any length of time or refund the training fees.
- In light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the anticipated increase in unemployment, it was asked if the Council had any plans to advertise apprenticeships externally. It was explained that an apprenticeship post would be advertised internally first and if not successfully filled, the post would be externally advertised. The position would then be offered to the most suitable candidate. In some cases a position would be advertised internally and externally concurrently to attract talent from a wide range of candidates.
- It was reported that of the current 25 apprentices currently 'in flight' 19 of those were Slough residents.
- It was noted that there were 20 females and five males currently enrolled on the apprenticeship scheme in Slough; whereas nationally there was a more even 51% to 49% male to female ratio. It was explained that a possible reason for this was that particular job sectors, such as childcare attracted more female candidates.

The Chair thanked the Service Lead, People and the Apprentice Specialist for the report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

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6. Employment Policies and Procedures

The Service Lead, People introduced a report that sought approval of a revised Leave Policy and Procedure.

The Leave Policy and Procedure had last been updated in June 2014. Following a recent internal audit of the Agresso System it had been identified that the Policy needed to be reviewed and updated. New employment legislation in relation to Bereavement Leave had been introduced in April 2020 and this was now reflected in the Policy. In addition, the Employee Engagement Forum had requested a review of the Volunteer Leave Scheme to improve and increase the current offering from one paid day to volunteer to two days.

The HR Policy Manager reported that the incorrect policy had been attached as Appendix 2 of the report and agreed to circulate a copy of the Foster Carer Support Leave Policy to the Committee. Members were advised that the revised Leave Policy and Procedure had been agreed with the trade unions. The trade unions had welcomed the amendments included in the revised Policy and Procedure. The proposed Policy would be internally reviewed every three years' unless there was a change in legislation which required it to be reviewed sooner.

Resolved –

- (a) That the revised Leave Policy and Procedure be approved.
- (b) That the HR Policy Manager be requested to provide a copy of the Foster Carer Support Leave Policy to the Committee.

7. Our Futures Programme - Workforce Update

The Chief Executive introduced a report that provided an update on the progress of the Council's 'Our Futures Programme'.

In April 2019 Cabinet had approved a business case for a transformation programme to deliver a new operating model for the Council. This had been prompted by rising demand for key services in the context of reduced Government funding and changing customer expectations. The business case reflected the Council's ambition to be a 'world class organisation', with a sustainable cost base and a 'one council' staff team.

The focus of the report was on the restructuring programme which had two phases. Phase 1 involved a reorganisation of the Council's Senior Leadership Team; the process was currently underway and was expected to

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be completed by the end of August 2020. Phase 2 of the programme had a wider scope and would affect all staff below the Senior Leadership Team. It was not anticipated that there would be large scale redundancies as the Council had vacant posts, rather the Council sought to implement a new 'job family' framework. It was acknowledged that there had been a long running frustration regarding the high level of agency staff within the organisation and the aim would be to reduce agency staff in the future.

The Chair then invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was noted that Slough had historically had a number of temporary members of the Senior Leadership Team. It was query if the new Senior Leadership Team members would be full time, permanent posts. In response, assurance was provided that the roles would be permanent. The ambition of the restructure was to appoint leaders with strong generic leadership skills that would enabled the Council to be resilient and 'fleet of foot'. It was confirmed that the £1 million saving generated by the Phase 1 restructure would be delivered by reduced salary costs.
- Clarification was sought regarding the plans to establish 'job families' and what these would look like. It was explained that traditionally local authorities had worked in 'vertical silos' that did not enable people to be deployed in a flexible way. Job families would allow peoples skill sets to operate 'horizontally' across the organisation.
- It was asked if the new structure meant there would be greater flexibility of departmental budgets. It was confirmed that there would be a more flexible use of budgets across the Council and resources would be used in departments were there was the greatest need. Departmental budgets would be re-allocated and there was an ambition for cultural change which promoted a collegiate approach.
- Clarification was sought regarding the Associate Director posts and the rationale for the creation of 'job families'. It was explained that the ambition was to appoint strategic leaders and each Associate Director would be responsible for a 'cluster of services'.
- It was asked if there would be any external recruitment to the Senior Leadership Team. It was reported that three of the Executive Director posts had been 'job matched' and there had been no job matches at Associate Director level. An external recruitment partner would be facilitating the internal appointment process and the same partner would also be involved in the external recruitment process.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

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8. Members' Development Programme 2020/21 Update

The Service Lead, People introduced a report that provided an update on the current work of the Members' Development Task and Finish Group on revising the Members' Development Programme to ensure that it met the corporate and individual learning and development needs of councillors.

The Chair invited comments and questions from Members.

During the course of the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Clarification was sought regarding the final bullet point under paragraph 3.2.1 'Monitor attendances at development activities/events – consider actions against individual Members where this may be unsatisfactory, including disciplinary measures'. It was explained these were proposals being discussed by the Task and Finish Group. It was highlighted that matters relating to Member performance fell to the political whips to manage. There was an expectation that Members took up training and development opportunities available.
- It was noted that the 2019/20 Members' Development budget was £20,000, and asked if this would be sufficient to fund an expanded programme of training events. It was agreed that the budget would be monitored and if it needed to be increased a business case would be submitted to request additional funding. In addition, it was noted that there had been a £14,000 underspend in 2019/20 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it was asked if the underspend could be rolled over and added to the 2020/21 budget. It was explained that the underspend would not be rolled over into the next financial year and if the training budget required additional funding this would be reviewed.
- It was requested that a variety of training methods be used to engage and interact with Members rather than information being delivered via PowerPoint presentations. It was confirmed that a range of development opportunities would be explored including 'e- learning' modules.
- It was requested that target dates be set to implement the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group recommendations to ensure they did not 'drift'.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the comments and suggestions raised by Members be taken into consideration by the Members' Development Task and Finish Group as part of the review of the Members' Development Programme.

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9. Members' Attendance Record 2020/21

Resolved – That the details of the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

10. Date of Next Meeting - 20th October 2020

Resolved – The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 20th October 2020.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 8.23pm)