

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 19th October, 2021.

Present:- Councillors Ali (Chair), Brooker (Vice-Chair), Basra, Bedi, Carter, Gahir and Smith

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Hulme and Sharif

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Dhaliwal

PART 1

8. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Basra and Bedi both declared that they worked with Khalsa Secondary Academy.

9. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th July 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2021 be approved as a correct record subject to an amendment to Minute Reference 3 - Gender Pay Gap; to read Positive Action Strategy and not Positive Discrimination Strategy.

10. HR Policies and Procedures

The Associate Director, Customer provided the Committee with an overview of the updated Dignity at Work Code of Conduct and Managing Stress and Wellbeing Code of Practice.

The Diversity and Inclusion Lead provided Members with a summary of the areas that had been updated and or strengthened in both policies. The Dignity at Work Code of Conduct had been updated to include clear definitions and examples of inappropriate behaviour, with details of both the informal and formal processes open to employees to resolve any concerns and issues they may have.

The Managing Stress and Wellbeing Code of Practice outlined the key responsibilities of the organisation in identifying and supporting staff that were experiencing stress at work. In particular, the code highlighted the roles of both managers and employees in promoting wellbeing, placing important emphasis on spotting early signs, and making early interventions. Furthermore, it included the wide range of practical support available to all staff, including the confidential Employee Assistance Programme.

Consultation in respect of the revised codes had taken place, including with Trade Union colleagues and the Employee Engagement Forum.

It was noted that following approval of the Codes , they would be communicated to the wider organisation and implementation would include a

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programme of events and sessions to Directorates to ensure they were fully understood.

A number of issues were raised in the ensuing discussion, including a request for further details relating to the effectiveness of the current policies and statistics regarding number of complaints received and upheld; and data comparison with neighbouring local authorities. It was noted that following approval of the policies, data would then be collated and available at a future meeting.

Members welcomed the inclusion of cyber bullying within the policies, acknowledging that this was a growing issue that needed to be taken seriously and asked what measures were put in place to ensure that it was monitored and enforced. It was recognised that this was a challenging area and complaints would be taken seriously and appropriate action taken where necessary.

A Member emphasised the importance of highlighting to staff that the policies were developed with their wellbeing at the forefront and asked how the information would be communicated to staff. The Committee was informed that a roll out of the policies to staff had been developed and that employee engagement groups would be used to collate any feedback. Referring specifically to empowering individuals to have the confidence to come forward and raise matters, it was explained that all staff would be informed of the alternative support available if they felt that they were unable to approach their line manager; and that this included approaching HR representatives. The Chair noted the number of consultees that had been contacted for their views on the proposed codes and asked what, if any, feedback had been received. Members were informed that a number of points had been suggested, such as alternative contacts if individuals felt they were unable to approach their line manager and guidance on dealing with vexatious claims; which had been incorporated within the codes. The importance of ensuring agency staff also adhered to the standards of behaviour expected from permanent staff was raised and that it was the managers responsibility to communicate with all staff.

Addressing the Committee under Rule 30, Councillor Sharif questioned whether the policies and procedures being proposed equipped staff with the confidence to make a complaint, referring to an example when a member of staff was denied permission from their manager to contact HR. The Employee Relations and HR Policy Manager reminded Members that each directorate/team had a designated appointed HR representative whom individuals could approach for advice; emphasizing that managerial permission was not required to do so. Following approval of the Codes, a programme of delivery, including workshops, would be rolled out to ensure awareness amongst all staff.

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Resolved – That the Dignity at Work Code of Conduct and Managing Stress and Wellbeing Code of Practice, as appended to the report, be approved.

11. Temporary Workers

The Committee received details of a report which outlined the Council's use of temporary/agency workers and included information raised by Members at the July 2021 meeting. The Employee Relations and HR Policy Manager stated that agency workers were required to fill specialist roles or posts that were difficult to recruit to.

It was noted that there had been a £3.4m spend on temporary workers during Quarter 3 (July to September 2021) and although work continued to reduce agency fees and generate savings; it was recognised there would always be a requirement for agency workers due to a skills shortage or specialist projects. Whilst the Council would always aim to recruit permanently, this wasn't always possible due to a national shortage in specific areas such as qualified planners or social workers. Progress was being made in the reduction of use of temporary staff with 21% temporary workers as a percentage of the whole workforce in July 2021 to 16% in September 2021.

A summary of performance against KPIs was highlighted, and all were achieved with the exception of placements for Early Years which at 65%. It was explained that this was due to self-withdrawal of a supplier and that measures had been put in place to source and procure an alternative supplier(s) via Matrix.

An update on the Matrix efficiency saving project was given, with work continuing within each directorate to encourage agency workers to move into permanent vacant positions where posts have received approval to be recruited to. In addition, workers were encouraged to move Client Direct Limited's (CDL) to reduce agency fees and to date, 37 workers had transferred to CDL in the last quarter; which was an increase of 22 from the previous quarter.

A Member sought clarification regarding the £112k agency savings that had been generated and was informed that savings had been achieved through a combination of factors including reductions in agency fees, related admin fees 5% including National Insurance (which ranges between 0% to 5.83% depending on the pay rate and role procured).

Responding to whether the Council could afford the associated staff costs in the finance directorate within the context of the current financial situation; the Director of Finance explained that the Council had initially agreed to allocate a sum of £700k. Furthermore, the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton, had made a statutory recommendation that additional resources be taken on by the finance team and that these costs would be factored in the Capitalisation Direction.

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The Chair noted that although there had been a reduction in the number of agency staff from July to September, the total agency spend remained consistent with that for the previous two quarters. It was explained that figures were subject to change due to reconciliation of timesheets, which often came in late and costs were also dependent on the area of work within which staff were required.

Resolved –

- a) That details of the report and the progress to manage the use and cost of temporary / agency workers be noted.
- b) That the actions from the last meeting be noted in section 9 of the report.

12. Our Futures Programme - Workforce Update

The Associate Director, Customer updated the Committee on the final closure of Phase 2 of the Our Futures Project. A workforce overview was provided and it was noted that of 85 posts had initially been identified at risk of redundancy, a total of 49 redundancies and 11 re-deployments were made. The figure of 49 redundancies was a correction from the figure of 59 stated in the report.

The Director of Finance reminded the Committee that the Our Futures programme incurred £3.009m one off expenditure in 2020/21 and was forecast to spend a further £2.585m one off expenditure in 2021/22 to implement the transformation programme. The majority of this spend was to fund redundancy costs (£2.611m) and consultancy support for the project (£2.066m). The programme was estimated to save £3.5m in 2021/22. However this excludes DSO productivity pay, Music Service and some grant funded posts for which the programme omitted the budget and thus nets down to an estimated £2.5m in 2021/22.

Members asked a range of questions relating to the programme, including whether the redundancies made were compulsory or voluntary. It was explained that all redundancies made were compulsory as those posts had been deleted from the new structure.

A Member requested that information regarding the current numbers of staff in comparison to those prior to the Our Futures Programme be provided and it was agreed that this information would be provided at the next meeting. Up to date information on current directorate/team structures would also be useful in providing accurate details to residents.

Concern was expressed with regard to the number of vacancies across the council and both the impact that this would have on delivery of services and retention of staff. The Associate Director, Customer stated that the delivery of Our Futures Programme was now being made within the context of a S114 Notice being issued. It was recognised that the instability caused by the S114 Notice may have prompted a number of staff to depart but looking forward the Council had to be realistic in that its financial situation meant that it would

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have to downsize and therefore assess how and what services could still be provided. Specific details relating to the number of qualified engineers currently employed within the highways department were requested and it was agreed that these would be provided.

The Chair sought clarification relating to the savings associated with the programme. In reports considered at previous meetings, the Committee had been informed that circa £5.2m savings were expected to be achieved and the savings figure was now projected to be in the region of £2.5m. The Director of Finance stated Council budget papers had estimated £3.5m and explained that colleagues had most likely assumed £1.5m savings as a result of agency cost savings following the implementation and delivery of the Our Futures Programme.

Referring to the approximate £2m consultancy costs that had been incurred by the Council for the Our Futures Programme, Members requested that information regarding the process for appointing the Consultants be provided.

A Member asked, now that the Our Futures Programme had been completed, whether the staffing structure was fit for purpose. The Director of Finance explained that the Council's current financial situation meant that it was highly likely that further restructures would need to be carried out; albeit a different approach would be adopted in future.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Sharif reiterated comments about the engagement of an external consultancy to oversee the Our Futures Programme and that it was difficult to ascertain the benefits of having done so.

A number of Committee Members stated that in their view, the Our Futures Programme had failed to deliver what was required to ensure the Council was a world class organisation. The Committee placed on record the importance of ensuring lessons were learnt from the Our Futures Programme in order to avoid a repeat of the same errors being made.

Resolved – That details of the report be noted.

13. Members Attendance Record 2021/22

Resolved – That details of the Members Attendance Record 2021/22 be noted.

14. Date of Next Meeting - 20th January 2022

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 20th January 2022.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.14 pm)