

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 12th April, 2022.

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

Apologies for Absence:- none

PART 1

22. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

23. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th February 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th February 2022 be held as a correct record.

24. Gender Pay Gap Report

The Diversity and Inclusion Lead provided the Committee with an overview of the Gender Pay Gap Report for 2021. The main message was that overall gender equality remains a strength at Slough Borough Council. Nevertheless the Council was committed to continuing to improve gender equality in its workforce through the range of recommendations set out in the report.

Members raised questions on the timeline for policy reviews within the report, on the distinction between mean and median statistics, and on the quite high degree of volatility in the reported figures. It was explained that there was a HR schedule of policy development and that further information and details on timelines and dates for the HR Policy Schedule Review would be provided to the Committee. On the mean and median statistics the Diversity and Inclusion Lead acknowledged that the Council would carry out more analysis and break the figures down further as improvements in the Agresso system would mean improved data interrogation ability. On the high degree of volatility in figures, it was explained that this was partly due to just 2 years figures being presented in the report, and that the transformation programme and restructure had had an impact on statistics, for example in Phase One of the restructure the Council's senior leadership was significantly reduced in number.

Some Members also raised concerns on the number of women in apprenticeship programmes and the number of women in Director-level appointments. It was explained that the subject of apprenticeships would be covered in more detail under Item 5 of the Agenda in the Annual Workforce Profile Report. On the lower number of women in Director-level positions, the Diversity and Inclusion Lead acknowledged that there was no easy answer on this, as such appointments would depend on the candidates available and the

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layer from which they were being recruited. It was common that part-time working and caring responsibilities increased for women later in their careers. The main priority for Slough Borough Council was that those who wanted to progress were given the opportunity to do so.

Members also suggested that it was important, in the report recommendations, to highlight areas where the Council was doing well and getting things right as well as making new recommendations, so as not to lose any of the best practices that were already in place. There was also a reminder on recruitment policy that the workforce of the Council should represent the community it serves.

Finally Committee Members made a general request that where specific questions were asked which could not be answered immediately, that the answer be provided by email to all Committee Members following the meeting rather than waiting for the next Committee Meeting. The Associate Director, Customer & HR agreed to this request.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the report and associated recommendations were noted.

Resolved – that details of the report be noted.

25. Temporary Workers Report

The Employee Relations and Policy Manager outlined the key points of the Temporary Workers Report, highlighting that since the last report there had been a slight increase in the number of temporary workers and a breakdown of these by Directorate had been provided in the report. The report also presented answers to questions that had been raised at the last Committee meeting in February.

The main concerns of Committee Members were around the number of temporary workers who had been employed by the Council for 3 or more years in the same placement, and the high number of leavers during the reporting period. On temporary worker placements of 3+ years, it was explained that these were mainly for difficult to fill positions, and that a recent recruitment campaign for permanent staff in adult social care had taken place which sought to bring down these figures. Members appreciated this but also noted that other categories such as admin and clerical showed high levels of 3+ years temporary placements, and suggested that perhaps the directorates involved needed to be more proactive in addressing this issue. On the high number of leavers, the Employee Relations and Policy Manager confirmed that all members of staff who resigned were offered an exit interview. Members requested further detail on the reasons given in exit interviews for staff leaving Slough Borough Council, and it was agreed that officers would look to see what more could be provided in a summarized and anonymized form to maintain confidentiality.

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Members also requested further detail at a future point on statistics which did not include finance services, as the high numbers of temporary workers in this section currently distorted the overall figures; and also statistics for leavers for the whole year rather than 3 months as provided in the report. The Employee Relations and Policy Manager agreed to provide this.

In answer to further questions it was confirmed that in cases of long-term (over 6 months) sickness absence, different options were explored by managers on a case by case basis for adapting the employee's role or offering an alternative role, and that the sickness policy is currently under review. It was also confirmed that managers would always look to consider fixed-term contracts rather than extending agency contracts when it came to renewal or extension of agency contracts for temporary workers.

In answer to a question on the current number of employment tribunals it was confirmed that there were 9 employment tribunals that were currently underway (which was down from 13 at the time of the last report). At Members' request it was agreed that further (anonymized) details on current tribunals could be shared with members.

Resolved – That details of the report be noted.

26. Annual Workforce Profile Report

The Interim HR Group Manager introduced the Annual Workforce Profile Report, highlighting that the report gave figures as at the end of March 2022 and would be used as the basis of all future annual workforce reports.

Members had questions on the apprenticeship programme, and whether the scheme recruited apprentices from local schools or looked-after children. It was explained that the apprenticeship scheme was an internal programme and was based on business need. The Interim HR Group Manager suggested that a report on the apprenticeship programme be brought to the next Committee, to which Members agreed.

Several Members also passed on concerns from some of their constituents that it could be very difficult for members of the public to reach Council employees by telephone, and raised the question of whether Council workers had returned to working in the office. It was confirmed that there was now an increase in Council staff returning to the office to work, but also an acknowledgement that hybrid working would be the new normal practice for many Council employees.

Some Members remained concerned at the low disclosure levels on ethnicity and disability by Slough Borough Council employees, and it was explained that this data was now captured in anonymized form during the recruitment process from all applicants, so would be in the system for any new employees joining the Council. Members requested further details on ethnicity statistics to be made available on a regular basis, and there was also a request for

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statistics on how many current Council employees lived in Slough, which the officer agreed to provide.

Members also requested an update on the Council's renewal and recovery plan which had been outlined at the previous meeting in February, and it was noted that an interim plan had been approved by Cabinet on 29th March.

The Chair asked for figures for how many qualified officers registered with British Institutions were currently employed in the Highways Department of the Council, as this question had been raised in a previous meeting which had not yet been answered.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Annual Workforce Profile for 2021/22 was noted.

Resolved – that the report be noted.

27. Members Attendance Record 2021/22

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

28. Vote of Thanks

Councillor Dhaliwal proposed a vote of thanks for the Chair, Vice Chair and all officers for their work in supporting the Employment and Appeals Committee over the municipal year.

The Chair proposed a vote of thanks to Councillor Dhaliwal for his work and service on the Employment and Appeals Committee as this would be his last Committee meeting.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.12 pm)