

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 14th June, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Ali (Chair), Bal (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Basra, M. Bedi, Gahir, Grewal, Qaseem and Smith

Apologies for Absence:- None

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bal declared that his daughters worked for Slough Borough Council.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th April 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th April 2022 be held as a correct record.

3. Finance Department Restructure Proposals

The Chair asked Members if they would agree to change the Agenda order so that the Finance Department Restructure Proposals could be presented and discussed first. Members agreed to this.

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources outlined the key issues in the report: that there was a need to improve the quality of the Council's finance service on a permanent basis; that there were currently a high number of interim staff in the finance department; and that the proposed restructure would follow proper process to recruit through the autumn and following a handover period interim staff would leave in spring 2023 with a new permanent team in place.

Currently about half the finance department were interim with only one permanent member of staff at senior management level. Comparative data was given in the report in terms of finance staffing levels compared with two other councils of similar size to Slough, one in the North West and one close by. The proposed new structure gave higher staff numbers in Slough comparatively, the Executive Director explained that this was because Slough currently faced issues in its finance function that the other Councils did not, and the higher number of staff proposed was appropriate to the need.

The Executive Director explained that staff potentially affected by the restructure had been pre-briefed before details of the report became public.

Members asked a number of questions around the recruitment process, and whether internal as well as external recruitment was planned. The Executive

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Director advised that internal recruitment would take place initially, with all posts open to all staff to apply, in July-August. There would be an assessment process for potential staff followed by appointment and some successful applicants would also have development plans in place where needed, as the aim was to upskill existing staff where possible. External candidates would then go through the same assessment process in September and be appointed if successful. The proposal was for all interim staff to leave by the end of March 2023.

More external recruitment would be necessary for senior level positions. In answer to a concern that the proposed new structure was geared towards more senior positions the Executive Director explained that the right people at senior level was vital to get the finance function in the strongest position going forward. With modern developments and ways of working lower level work was increasingly done by robotics and intelligence, so a lower number of staff would be needed.

Members raised the point that lessons needed to be learned from previous experiences where officers often got the blame for organisational failings, and that it was important that the right people were held accountable. Members also asked whether there was an alternative plan if the recruitment did not attract suitable candidates. The Executive Director advised that the alternative would be a continuation of interim staff, as the Council would not be able to function without a finance team and any other alternatives would be too costly.

The Chair acknowledged that the report and the restructure proposal was important, but requested that such reports be provided to the Committee with more notice in future. This was noted.

Resolved – that the Committee:

- a) Note the consultation process for the revised structure for the Finance and Commercial services department to include the addition of a number of new posts.
- b) Recommend to Full Council the approval of a new chief officer role of Executive Director of Finance and Commercial, and two new deputy chief officer roles with remuneration of potentially over £100,000 to replace the one Associate Director – Finance and Commercial, and delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to amend Article 12, Part 3.6 and Part 7 of the Constitution accordingly.

4. Apprenticeship Report

The Workforce Development Manager introduced the report, outlining that reorganisation within the Council had affected the apprenticeship programme. In the reporting period the programme had grown, but not as much as managers would have liked, mainly due to internal restructures and staff churn. Good statistics in terms of equal opportunities and diversity within the programme were highlighted, and the team were looking, with other local Councils, to try and change the way Government levies were dealt with, in

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order to potentially use these in future to recruit and pay salaries, as well as training for the Apprentice programme.

Members asked why there were not stronger apprenticeships links with Slough Children First, the Workforce Development Manager explained that there had been much contact with SCF, but as yet no apprenticeships, and while the Council could promote the programme there may be other more attractive options to potential candidates.

Several Members also suggested instigating or improving links with local employers, eg on Slough Trading Estate, to promote the apprenticeship programme, and also advertising the apprenticeship programme more widely, for example in local temples and churches, and also potentially on a local radio station. The Workforce Development Manager agreed that these were options the team would explore further.

Questions on funding and government levies were also raised, and it was explained that the levies provided for the apprenticeship programme were ring-fenced and currently could only be used for training activity, any unused funds were automatically returned. However the Workforce Development Manager explained he was working on a paper proposing the option to offer unused levy funds to other partners in Slough for Apprenticeships, and more detail on this could be shared in due course.

The point that the Council had a duty to those undertaking apprenticeships, to give them the best offer possible, was raised, and the Workforce Development Manager agreed, adding that all applications were vetted to ensure everything was in place for the apprentices. Training was funded by government levies, but various factors had meant that resource pressure had been great and teams could not always afford to release staff one day a week to undertake apprenticeships.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved – that details of the report be noted.

5. Temporary Agency Staff Report

Councillor Bedi had to leave the meeting early and asked if she could email some questions she had on the report to the Employee Relations and Policy Manager direct, which was agreed.

The Employee Relations and Policy Manager then outlined the key details of the report. £15m had been spent on agency and temporary workers in budget year 21/22, and this was broken down into spend in each quarter. There was movement now within the Council of offering permanent positions and moving away from agency staff, with restructures and recruitment programmes underway for finance and IT. Although high staff turnover was currently an issue, this was not unique to Slough, with national figures showing a record

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1.2m job vacancies currently, caused by many people choosing or having to change jobs in the aftermath of covid and lockdown.

Members raised concerns that although the figures showed a very small drop in total spend on Agency staff, due to a reduction in quarter 2, overall trends seemed to be showing an increase in reliance on temporary staff. Members also asked about redundancies. The Employee Relations and Policy Manager explained that department restructures had affected the figures and current work was underway to reduce the number of agency staff. Redundancies following restructures and the closure of a number of care homes had also contributed to the high number of leavers. Further information and details of ongoing employee relations cases was requested by Members, and the Employee Relations and Policy Manager agreed to provide this.

Positive comments from staff feedback in their exit interviews had been provided in Appendix 3 of the report, and Members also asked whether negative feedback had been acted upon. It was confirmed that increased work and support on stress and wellbeing was being offered to staff in response to some of the points raised in leavers' feedback.

Some Members raised concerns about directorates which seemed to be consistently reliant on agency staff, including in Customer Services departments, and what measures were being taken to address this. It was explained that the number of staff in Customer Services had been reduced in the last restructure, and there had then followed a huge demand for these services, this was being looked at again to redress the balance. Measures were being taken but it would take time for change to take effect.

In answer to a question on how often temporary positions were reviewed it was confirmed that this took place on a monthly basis, and if an extension to a temporary contract was requested this would have to be done via a full business case.

Resolved – that details of the report be noted.

6. Date of Next Meeting - 12th October 2022

Resolved – The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 12th October 2022.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.45 pm)