

Employment Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 22nd June, 2023.

Present:- Councillors Zarait (Chair), Khawar (Vice-Chair), Bedi, Escott and D. Parmar

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Ahmed and Iftakhar

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Qaseem

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Zarait declared that his sister worked for Slough Borough Council.

2. Employment Committee Terms of Reference - To note

The Employment Committee Terms of Reference were noted.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st March 2023

Councillor Parmar raised a question about follow-up to action points raised in the Grievance policy report on figures for grievance complaints as reported in the March minutes. The Monitoring Officer advised that this be resolved with officers outside the Committee meeting.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2023 be approved as a correct record.

4. Workforce Equality Data Report

At the outset of the meeting Surjit Nagra, Associate Director HR, welcomed the new Committee members.

The Diversity and Inclusion Manager introduced the Workforce Equality Data Report, explaining that it was part of public sector equality duty to publish the report and in Slough Borough Council's case the report was very much a starting point to understand the impact of the many changes that the Council had experienced in the past two years.

The Council employed more female than male employees, as was common in local government, and compared well with a local equivalent comparator. 58% of the Council's workforce were female, with a good representation of female staff across all salary bands. There were still more male than female staff members in the most senior positions, but statistics were from December 2022 and there had been staff movement since then. Self-disclosure by staff of disability and ethnicity data was lower than ideal, and officers were looking at ways to improve this, while recognising that giving this data was entirely voluntary. The Council also had policies regarding diversity and wellbeing

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issues and a number of staff networks, which they hoped would thrive over the coming year.

Priorities going forward were to improve data, encourage employees to update diversity information, develop an applicant tracking system and continue to develop staff support networks.

In answer to questions from Committee Members, the Diversity and Inclusion Manager explained that workforce equality data was captured and reported on an annual basis; that staff feedback was actively sought including during exit interviews; that controls on gender pay gap data included Equality Impact Assessments; and that the staff salary grades were available on the Council website.

In answer to questions from Members speaking under Rule 30, the Diversity and Inclusion Manager explained that in total there were approximately 1,000 directly-employed members of staff and 343 agency workers working at the Council. There was also further discussion on ethnicity data with officers re-emphasizing that providing this information was voluntary and while staff were encouraged to provide it there was no compulsion. Impact Equality Assessments could only be done based on the data available as provided by staff.

Resolved – That the Committee reviewed and noted the Workforce Equality Data Report.

5. Temporary Agency Staff Report

The Project Manager for Transformation introduced the Temporary Agency Staff Report, explaining that the cost of agency staff had increased post-Section 114 as the Council had had to bring in a range of staff, particularly in finance and ICT departments. It was felt that this spend had now peaked and there had been recent recruitment to finance and ICT departments. The Council would always need some agency staff, however, and recruitment of permanent staff continued to be challenging due to the current labour-market environment.

Officers pointed out that Appendix 1 provided with the report was outdated and an updated version would be provided at a future Committee.

Questions from Members included on efforts made to retain staff and make temporary staff permanent, and on delays in services caused by not having a full complement of staff. The Project Manager for Transformation explained that in terms of retaining staff there was a development programme for employees, to order to try to retain as many good quality employees as possible, and market supplements were in place where needed. In terms of making temporary staff permanent, this had been done where possible, eg in ICT department, although in some cases staff chose to remain on agency

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worker status. In terms of delays to services the Project Manager explained that this question was difficult to answer but could be taken away.

Councillors present under Rule 30 stated that it would be helpful to have a further breakdown and details, such as types of roles, on the spend figures given by directorate on p47 of the report, at a future Committee. Members also suggested offering graduate programmes and having Slough jobs for Slough residents. The Project Manager explained that the Council had traditionally followed the national graduate programme, but could not restrict any jobs to Slough residents under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 employees had to be appointed on merit. Nevertheless officers were looking at ways to better reach local residents about recruitment and appealed to Members that anything they could do within their own networks would be helpful. The Monitoring Officer added that a high percentage of Slough Council staff did live within the borough.

Resolved – That the Committee reviewed and noted the Temporary Agency Staff Report.

6. Senior Management Restructure

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report, flagging that the senior management restructure was subject to the process outlined in para 2.4 of the report, and that Commissioners had the right to intervene if they sought fit. Commissioners had commented on the report that they supported efforts to improve overall management of the Authority, and would need to see further details before agreeing the formal proposals.

The current proposals were going through the formal consultation process, including on whether the current number of 6 Executive Directors could be reduced to 5, as there had been one voluntary redundancy request. The Monitoring Officer flagged up that this meant it was likely that a report would go to July Council concerning the terms of any ED voluntary redundancy as part of the transparency agenda.

In answer to a question on whether voluntary redundancy terms were fixed or negotiated, the Monitoring Officer clarified that these were in accordance with the terms and conditions of an employee's contractual entitlement. One Member raised concern that in looking to save costs, it was important that the well-being of staff was also taken into account, for example in the re-distribution of workloads. The Monitoring Officer agreed and advised that this was why the consultation had been through a number of phases and informal consultations in addition to the formal process.

In answer to what cost-savings were envisaged by the restructure process, the Monitoring Officer anticipated it would be cost-neutral at worst, but also flagged that it was important to recognise the Authority's position and the special needs it had at this stage as it underwent a recovery process. Further restructures could be needed in the future, and costs would need to be assessed continually.

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Resolved – Members noted the contents of the Senior Management Restructure Update Report.

7. Date of Next Meeting - 12th September 2023

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed as 12th September 2023.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.33 pm)