

## Staffing and Appeals Committee Minutes

Date: 7 November 2024

Time: 2.03p.m. – 4.13pm.

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Batchelor, Black, Count (substituting for Councillor Reynolds), Murphy (Chair), Nethsingha, and Shailer

### 98. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillors Billington, Reynolds and Tierney.

No declarations of interest were received from Members. The Chief Executive and the Service Director: Human Resources declared a personal interest in minute no.106.

### 99. Minutes – 3rd September 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd September 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 100. People Strategy Update

The Committee received a report detailing the first update on the progress of the People Strategy Action Plan, which had been agreed by Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee in July 2024. Activity was monitored via the Change Board with updates presented to the Committee biannually. Attention was drawn to activity on the following four themes in the workforce strategy: Attracting you; Appreciating you; Supporting you; and Developing you. The item on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy would address the fifth theme – Including you. It was noted that there were risks and barriers to consider in relation to the following themes: Attracting you; Supporting you; and Developing you.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- queried whether there was any feedback on engagement other than the all-employee survey, which had recorded a 54% response rate, to identify whether any changes were needed. The Head of Workforce Policy and Wellbeing offered to provide figures from the New Starter Survey, exit questionnaires and interviews, talk before you walk interviews, and from listening sessions undertaken by Executive Directors within their directorates. **Action Required.**
- queried whether the “Including you” theme was new to the People Strategy, and the need for it to be updated in line with the EDI Strategy. It was noted that the People Strategy identified that inclusion was essential to supporting people. There was a separate EDI action plan covering the community and the Council’s workforce.

Although there was a link to the People Strategy Action Plan, it was important that the process was not duplicated. The Chief Executive reminded Members that the Community, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee had oversight for this work in the community.

- highlighted the need to review the format to identify, using a RAG rating, which actions were not on track.
- welcomed the monitoring of social worker salaries and the review of the pay model in 1.1c in order to reduce agency workers and vacancy rates.
- expressed disappointment regarding the lack of Trade Union involvement in the Strategy but welcomed the serious consideration of staffing issues and the positive work taking place in this area.
- queried whether attendance at the Schwartz Rounds was by self-referral or if there was any management involvement. Members were informed that attendance was voluntary, as part of the process was to invite reflection from the audience, but managers did encourage and support their staff to attend if appropriate. The Chief Executive explained that Schwartz Rounds were well established in the NHS, and had proper clinical oversight. They were always oversubscribed as they covered issues which were of interest across the organisation. The confidentiality of the sessions made them more powerful in encouraging people to share experiences in a safe space.
- queried whether any action had been taken to identify other skills employees might have, which might enable them, for example, to move to a different role within the organisation. It was noted that Corporate Leadership Team had discussed flexible skills but there was more work to be done in relation to the “Attracting you” theme to capture those skills. One example was Mental Health First Aiders where those staff were encouraged to complete their profile on Teams to reflect lived experiences.

It was resolved unanimously to note the content of this report and actions planned.

## 101. Workforce Profile Update

The Committee considered an update report of the workforce demography, current people related challenges and the work being undertaken and planned to address these challenges. A full annual report would be presented each February. Attention was drawn to the Council’s workforce diversity profile in 2023, headcount and full time equivalent (FTE), starters and leavers, absences and average days lost (rolling 12 months) per FTE, top five absences (average days lost per FTE) last six months, and recruitment information July 2023 to June 2024.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- highlighted the need to provide feedback on absences per Directorate and to compare this with other County Councils nationally. It was important to identify and take action when reasons for absence were within the Council’s control such as in relation to buildings and idiosyncrasies within services. Members were informed

that feedback relating to specific services was taken regularly to Directorate Management Teams, which enabled the HR Advisory Team to support and challenge managers and provide intervention.

- queried action in relation to roles which were difficult to recruit to. It was noted that there was a central Recruitment Team who provided support in relation to advert writing, where to advertise and the possible use of apprenticeships. Specific action had been taken for some challenging roles such as partnering with an agency to bring in permanent staff, the creation of a micro site, and the use of LinkedIn.
- highlighted the need to provide a percentage for recruitment information for services to achieve more meaningful data.
- queried whether on average 100 active cases being managed at any one time relating to absence, disciplinary, respect at work, resolving workplace concerns or performance matters was normal for the Council and how it compared to other sectors. It was noted that this number had remained steady for months following the introduction of a case management system. The Chief Executive acknowledged that if the County Council was to benchmark it would need to do so against other County Councils. Members noted that a low case load was not necessarily a positive outcome as it could depend on how an organisation managed this area from a manager and HR perspective. It was also noted by the Service Director: Human Resources that the active cases included a significant number that were being managed at an informal stage. It was important to review and manage the number of suspensions to ensure they remained a neutral act, and to provide the appropriate focus and attention for those that moved to legal proceedings.

The Service Director: Human Resources thanked Members for the suggested improvements in reporting and agreed to incorporate these changes for the next report along with providing specific examples of where intervention had taken place in relation to recruitment and absences. **Action Required.**

It was resolved unanimously to note the content of this report and actions planned.

## 102. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Update

The Committee received a report detailing an update on the progress of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Action Plan. There were three themes to help define the Council's equality objectives: our workforce; our communities; and our services. Underpinning these themes were three guiding principles: taking evidence-based action; listening to the voices of everyone; and having a transparent and robust approach that delivers meaningful change. There were twelve equality objectives for each of the three themes and each objective had a series of actions aligned to it. Attention was drawn to the progress of the actions under each theme and some examples of actions show casing the work of the strategy.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- highlighted the value of diversity in itself but suggested that the Strategy should include more ways to celebrate it. The importance of celebrating diversity was

acknowledged and officers were considering more ways of doing this. Attention was drawn to the Council's blogs and communications where recently it had held an in person event to celebrate Black History Month.

- welcomed the actions set out in the Strategy as there was a real need to make work more accessible for everyone. The Chief Executive reminded Members that full Council had agreed that care experience should have equivalent status as a protected characteristic. This had followed a presentation to Council from Elle Johnson, a care leaver, who was now employed by the Council to lead the care leaver offer and was sharing her experience with neighbouring authorities.
- queried whether the Council had passed a motion in relation to people from areas of high social deprivation as a protected characteristic and if so, whether it could be incorporated into future reports. It was also suggested that it would be useful to have a library of motion logs which could be accessed easily. The Chief Executive reported that the Council agreed in 2022 to include the socio-economic duty as part of its equality impact assessment process, which should also be included as part of the Strategy. Members also noted that social mobility was now considered as part of EDI reporting. **Action Required.**
- queried whether this work was being shared across other public sector organisations such as the Combined Authority, which had, for example, prepared a Good Work Charter and had a remit to cover the private sector. It was important that larger organisations such as the Council helped smaller organisations and shared good practice. It was noted that there was a local authority EDI Regional Network to share good practice, and the EDI Business Partner was also a member of the Integrated Care System EDI group which involved the NHS. The Chief Executive reported that the Council had been actively involved, particularly via its public health team, in helping the Combined Authority take forward the Good Work Charter, which would be reflected back into the work of the Council.
- welcomed the provision of neurodiversity at work training and queried whether anyone had been dismissed because of neurodiversity issues. It was also queried whether turnover and dismissal rates were higher for ethnic minorities. The Service Director: Human Resources reported that protected characteristics and outcomes were recorded as part of case work, which could be included in future reports. It was noted that there was not a disproportionate issue in relation to turnover and dismissal for these groups at this point in time.
- highlighted the need to monitor the disability pay gap as this was likely to be a future legal requirement. The Service Director: Human Resources confirmed that the Council had been reporting the gender and ethnicity pay gaps but there was still a considerable amount of work to do in relation to the data to report the disability pay gap. The Human Resources Team was planning to report on this area in the future but only 35% of the workforce had currently declared whether or not they had a disability so the accuracy of reporting at the moment was limited. Work was taking place therefore to improve the response rate in relation to this area to provide more statistically viable information before considering the value of analysing the disability pay gap.

- queried how the reporting tool handled anonymous complaints. Members were reminded that the Respect at Work Disclosure tool had only been launched in September 2024. The Service could monitor trends but could not meaningfully progress a complaint without contact details. The Wellbeing Hub and HR support and guidance was available to assist colleagues making a complaint.

It was resolved unanimously to note the status of the actions in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Action Plan.

### 103. Cambridgeshire as a next generation employer – growing our potential

The Committee considered an overview of the activity that enabled the Council to be a next generation employer and support colleagues under 30 to develop and grow their careers. It was noted that the Council had been shortlisted in the Local Government Chronicle's Workforce Awards 2024 in the 'Best Next Generation Employer' category. Attention was drawn to the Council's approach to work experience; apprenticeships; graduate schemes; career support; examples of thriving careers; and 5% Club membership.

Individual members raised the following issues in relation to the report:

- queried the offer to graduates of hybrid working. Members were informed that this depended on the person, the team they were working in and the requirements of the role. Managers were supported regarding incorporating hybrid working but for some roles it was important to work alongside colleagues. Many graduates had studied remotely during the Covid pandemic so had missed the opportunity to learn from experience from placements for example.
- welcomed the report which reflected the Council's aim to have more apprentices moving through the organisation and supported in their careers, which was a significant benefit to the organisation.
- highlighted the need to support people in their 40s and 50s coming into graduate roles or making career changes. It was therefore important that future reports reflected that this work was not just about young people. Members were informed that the presentation had focused on people under 30 purely because the award the Council had been shortlisted for was centred around people under 30, but the Council had lots of examples of older people progressing their careers via apprenticeships. A number of social worker apprenticeships were people embarking on their second or third career. The Head of Learning and Developed offered to share examples with the Committee. **Action Required.**

It was resolved unanimously to note the progress made to date.

### 104. Staffing and Appeals Committee Agenda Plan

The Committee noted its agenda plan and suggested that a legislative update be included for the next meeting covering the Employment Rights Bill.

## 105. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Nethsingha, and agreed unanimously to exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that the agenda contained exempt information under Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed - information relating to any individual.

## 106. Cost of Living Increase 2024 – Leadership Pay Scale

The Committee considered a report on the cost-of-living increase 2024: Leadership Pay Scale.

It was resolved unanimously to agree the recommendations set out in the report.

Chair