

**STAFFING AND APPEALS COMMITTEE - MINUTES**

**Date:** Thursday, 28th November 2019

**Time:** 10.00a.m. – 11.30a.m.

**Place:** Room 128, Shire Hall, Cambridge

**Present:** Councillors Ambrose-Smith, Ashwood, Harrison, Hudson, King (substituting for Councillor Hunt), and Schumann

**70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies received from Councillors Hunt and Whitehead. There were no declarations of interest.

**71. MINUTES – 16TH AUGUST 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th August 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**72. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PEOPLE STRATEGY**

The Committee received a report detailing a six monthly update on progress with the People Strategy action plan. It was noted that an officer led governance board had been established to lead and monitor the strategy related actions. Attention was drawn to progress to date against the five strategy themes of: Skills Development and Behaviour; Wellbeing; Resourcing: Employee Engagement; and Reward and Recognition. In relation to the two recent recruitment campaigns set out under the Resourcing theme, it was noted that these campaigns had focused on the motivation of people wishing to work for the Council such as the reputation and whether caseloads were manageable rather than salary.

The Committee welcomed this positive and detailed report, and individual Members raised the following in relation to the themes:

**Skills Development and Behaviours**

- welcomed the proposal to introduce a new appraisal process which would focus on more robust and regular conversations, rather than a reliance on a burdensome annual process.

**Wellbeing**

- welcomed the introduction of comprehensive mental health awareness training.

## **Resourcing**

- queried whether it had been difficult to attract retailers to take part in the employee discount scheme. It was noted that the scheme was managed by Vectis on behalf of the Council and other partner councils, and was therefore large enough to be viable for retailers.
- queried whether the Council paid interns the minimum wage and how it distinguished between interns and work experience. It was noted that interns were paid the national minimum wage. The Council exercised tight controls over work experience opportunities limiting them to two weeks.
- highlighted problems recruiting Highways Officers. The HR Director offered to update the Committee on plans in progress. It was suggested that the Council needed to be smarter about incentives. Members were informed that one of the incentives for a Highways Officer was a very clear career progression starting from apprenticeships. The Chairman reported that an independent analysis was always carried out of the reasons why the Council struggled to recruit. One Member commented that Highways Officers often left to join local highways companies as well as Highways England.
- highlighted the problem of retaining Public Health Officers who had the attraction of working for Public Health England. Although it was noted that many officers liked working for the Council and making a difference locally, there was still the issue of private versus public in relation to recruitment. The HR Director acknowledged the need to identify the competitive edge as to what attracted people to work for the public sector, which could include as well as making a difference, flexible working, and work life balance.
- suggested that the Shire Hall 2020 hub and spoke model could be used in the future as an attraction in relation to recruitment. Another Member raised the need to facilitate transport as far as possible for those employees who would have to make longer journeys. The Chairman reported that he was a member of the Shire Hall 2020 group and this was an absolute priority for the group.
- queried whether there was any research available regarding the pros and cons of flexible and agile working. One Member asked how managers would monitor employees with this lack of control. The Chairman reported that there was research available, he acknowledged that there were also cons with some people abusing the system but people could abuse the current system. The Council therefore needed to be clear as to how it would manage this. The HR Director reported that he could also provide data. He informed the Committee that many authorities were moving away from presenteeism in the workplace. However, this needed to be supported by regular dialogue between employees and their managers.

## **Employee Engagement**

- queried the measurables contained in the report. It was noted that there were a number of measurable contained in a report scheduled later on the agenda. The Committee was informed that the Council also conducted an employee survey every two to three years. It was queried why the Council did not carry out an employee survey every year. It was noted that annual surveys were more appropriate for smaller councils. For larger organisations with over 4,000 disparately placed employees, it was more appropriate to conduct a survey every two years. It was noted that this was because it took longer to survey more employees and for the resulting actions to have an effect. It was queried why it took so long to implement actions and whether the scale of intervention needed to be increased. It was noted that actions to improve would take longer for organisations with a larger number of employees as they were usually managed as part of the appraisal process. Mori, the market research company, recommended conducting a survey for an organisation as large as the Council a year and half to two years.

## **Other Issues**

- highlighted the need to attach the action plan, which contain clear outcomes and timescales, to reports in future.
- queried whether the Strategy had an end date. The Committee was informed that the Council had not had a strategy for a number of years. It was noted that it should have a plan covering no more than three years in order to reflect current challenges.

It was resolved unanimously to note the information contained in the report.

## **73. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL GENDER PAY GAP UPDATE**

The Committee received a report detailing an update on progress towards the actions outlined in the Gender Pay Gap action plan. The Council's Gender Pay Gap report had been published a year ago. Members were reminded that changes were likely to take time as the Council needed to change the way it operated and attitudes. The Government had predicted that the gender pay gap would not be closed until 2052. The HR Director reported that he had wanted to update the Committee rather than wait until March when more evidence would be available. Attention was drawn to the current picture which included pay quartiles, and the pay gap by grade. The Committee then focused on the following actions: Development Opportunities; Employee Engagement; Recruitment and Selection; and Working Practices. It was noted that all initiatives needed to be joined up.

Individual Members raised the following in relation to the report:

- queried whether it was possible to have a gender pay gap and have gender equality. The Committee was informed that there was not one single issue causing a problem. Instead there were smaller gaps across the organisation and the Council was looking as a whole to encourage movement. The Chairman suggested that whilst it might be difficult to achieve equal pay in the short term, the Council could achieve equality. The HR Director reported that the rules relating to the grading of new jobs were fair to everyone, as the pay

structure or the Council's policies did not discriminate. The reasons for a gender pay gap were complex and linked to employment culture and social patterns, most employers had gender pay gaps and some common reasons were things like women taking career breaks, caring or different approaches to negotiating.

- acknowledged that there had been a significant change in society and it was important to encourage changes. However, it was also important to be aware of the cultural assumptions behind them.
- noted the exceptional performance of Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire County Councils. The HR Director explained that some of the differences would be around what type of services these councils delivered. One Member highlighted the importance of benchmarking to identify how some authorities appeared to be performing better than Cambridgeshire. It was important not to dismiss this data just because some authorities operated differently.
- queried the possibility of annotating the benchmarking data to provide a clear explanation behind why some authorities performed differently to others. The HR Director reported that all authorities were required to complete for Government a rigid data template which provided no opportunity for context. It was noted that the context would need to be provided separately to the Committee.
- highlighted the fact that women did not self-promote as much as men. It was suggested that there should be some training on self-promotion and negotiation skills to ensure women were better equipped to progress in their career. It was important that the effectiveness of any such training was monitored. Another Member raised the need for this training to be open to everyone. In response, it was noted that this training was important to tackle a specific issue facing women. The Council therefore needed to consider ways of tackling this issue which did not exclude men who felt the need for similar support.
- highlighted the need to address the pay gap for other disadvantaged groups such as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). The Chairman reported that this issue had already been raised by Councillor Manning. The HR Director confirmed that it issue was being considered with the need to identify some non-discriminatory interventions. He informed the Committee that it was possible to ask employees to state their ethnic minority and other protected characteristics but some were reluctant to do so. It was easier to provide a breakdown of male or female employees. However, this was something being worked on. The Council needed to articulate to its employees the reason why it required this data. He confirmed that he would investigate how the Council could run a proactive campaign.

It was resolved unanimously to note the information contained in the report.

#### **74. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL WORKFORCE**

The Committee was provided with an overview of the workforce profile and employee relations activity. Attention was drawn to a breakdown of the workforce, turnover and employee relations and absence.

Individual Members raised the following in relation to the report:

- welcomed the fact that absences were decreasing and the workforce was getting younger. The HR Director reported that the latter had been helped by the apprenticeship agenda.
- queried why people were leaving e.g. retirement or managed out. It was noted that a project connected to the People Strategy would involve an in depth analysis of leavers. The HR Director reported that more information could be included on the online exit form. One Member queried whether the move to Alconbury had been cited as a reason for staff leaving. The Chairman reported that this had been flagged up with some positive and some negative responses.
- queried why the Council was looking at diversity information. The HR Director reported that as a large employer the Council needed to have evidence so it could review and ensure that it was being fair and equal to all its employees. The Chairman added that this information helped the Council to measure outliers and question why. Another Member queried that as a Council with an overwhelmingly white workforce whether it did enough to facilitate ethnic minorities. The Chairman asked whether it was possible to compare the workforce against the local populace. It was noted that census data was only available for 2011. However, it would be possible to update with new data. Another Member explained that people were packed full of biases and that it was important the Council watched for an institutional bias.

It was resolved unanimously to note the information contained in the report.

Chairman