

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

21 DECEMBER 2021

PRESENT:

Councillors Matthews (Chair), Parton-Hughes (Vice-Chair), Birch, Cross, Powell, Robertson, Tapper, Warburton and S Wilcox

45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Banevicius.

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

47 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and signed as a correct record.

48 BEING A BETTER COUNCIL

The Committee received a presentation on BABC (Being a Better Council) from the Chief Operating Officer. The project focuses on continuous improvement and ensuring that staff have the resources and skills needed to carry out their work effectively and deliver to residents.

Three key areas of work were outlined: Better Led, Better Equipped and Better Performing. In 2022, detailed action plans involving 15 work streams, including the Belonging and Wellbeing Strategy, will be developed for these key areas.

Members were then given the opportunity to ask questions.

There were concerns regarding the shortage of staff and whether the Council had an adequate number of staff to deliver services. The chief operating officer responded that BABC is designed to highlight inefficient processes and improve them, freeing up staff time in the process. Alongside this, staff were being given opportunities to understand new technology and new ways of working. It was believed all the small changes will lead to a substantial change.

Members noted that better working relationships between staff and councillors are needed for BABC. It was reported that the community engagement strategy and Belonging and Well Being Strategy of BABC looks at how residents and staff can engage better with councillors to provide a more collaborative service.

RESOLVED: That the information provided be noted.

49 BELONGING AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation on the Belonging and Wellbeing Strategy, a central part of BABC, from the Chief Operating Officer which replaced the former People Strategy.

The strategy based itself on an organisation that values diversity and supports mental and physical wellbeing. The strategy aims to have a positive impact on the workforce leading to improved staff engagement and ensuring high performance rates which will mean better delivery of services to residents. It also aimed to make the Council an employer of choice.

Members noted that, for the survey data to be better representative, the number of people completing the survey should be reported alongside the success metric of staff satisfaction. This point was noted and agreed to be implemented in the future.

The committee was pleased to see the introduction of mental health first aiders in the policy, praising it as an important step forward.

The importance of high quality communication rather than a higher quantity of emails was stressed. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the Belonging and Wellbeing Strategy was focused on increasing opportunities to engage and collaborate with employees so that communication improved.

The employee assistance program was discussed and it was noted that staff surveys would be conducted on what staff would like to see included.

Members highlighted that there was a need for improved integration of Councillors into the organisation for them to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently. It was reported that officers were aware of this issue and that changes in the organisation's structure will naturally lead to a better staff understanding of Councillor's roles within the Council, specifically how decisions are reached and where they come from.

The importance of potential employees was raised by members stating that the world of work has become incredibly competitive, more so for the employer rather than the employee. It was noted that a metric that measured success in filling vacancies with good quality candidates would be beneficial.

RESOLVED: That the information given be noted.

50 REVISION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

The committee received a report on the revised Health and Safety Policy. The Health and Safety Manager explained that the revisions included a new foreword from the Chief Executive and slight changes to references of potholders. It was noted that under the Health and Safety Work Act, the Council was legally obligated to have the policy in place.

Members queried whether there was a specific guidance document on needlestick injuries as to ensure that people are aware of what to do in advance when this injury occurs. There were additional concerns regarding violence at work and whether staff were supported and encouraged in reporting incidents to the police. The Health and Safety Manager reported that there are specific procedures in place for needlestick injuries and violence at work, which can be found on the intranet and are reviewed every three years. It was noted that in-depth staff training is also provided anywhere between every twelve months and every three years, depending on the risk profile of the staff involved. Regarding violence at work, staff were encouraged to report incidents to police and will be supported with time off and counselling if necessary.

It was asked whether the policy could include a statement that Chairs and Vice Chairs of committees have a responsibility to postpone a meeting should conditions at that meeting represent a risk to health and safety. It was reported that officers are already reviewing the issue and it is already part of the pre briefing of meetings, where Chairs are made aware of their responsibility to manage the meeting and risk assessments are carried out. It was also noted that this issue would be covered in the general risk assessment requirement document.

Members noted that the document stated that working at home was a short-term arrangement. It was asked whether this should be updated before publication, since it was inconsistent with details of BABC. It was reported that this was currently under review through BABC but required engagement from unions which would take place in early 2022.

Members queried whether staff had caught up on training, specifically personal safety awareness courses, in light of the pandemic and whether staff training should be repeated. It was reported that training was tracked, repeated at intervals and reviewed at leadership team. There was also a training directory that was publicised to staff every year.

Concerns were raised about the limited information on RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) and it was questioned if a specific section could be included to protect the Council, staff and wider community.

It was reported that there was a detailed accident reporting procedure that managers were aware of through training and through availability on the intranet. RIDDOR reports were made by the Health and Safety Manager. It was noted that a document that lists the circumstances that are covered by RIDDOR is available.

Members asked what was in place to guarantee a suitable work environment for people working from home. It was reported that there is a robust system in place where workstations of employees were assessed through questionnaires and images of their homeworking environment. Recommendations are then made based on this information which is then conducted via Teams or site visits.

Members discussed the measures were in place to ensure that staff didn't become overburdened at work. It was reported that staff time is observed by managers to try to reduce staff overworking. The Chief Operating Officer stated that this was one of the outputs of the Belonging and Wellbeing Strategy, through the removal of core hours to allow staff to manage their work around commitments such as childcare. It was additionally reported that there was a system in place that assesses health and safety parameters that include employee work time, regular breaks and rest periods. There is also encouragement for staff to take responsibility of their own wellbeing.

There were concerns that the policy didn't consider safety at evening meetings. It was reported that the violence at work procedure outlines some of the controls in place if needed, and this document is available on the intranet. There was also additional staff training that covers situations where staff are meeting with people they don't usually meet with. It was also noted that there are covert buzzers in some meeting rooms that can alert back-office staff and code words that can be used to raise an alert.

The Chief Operating Officer reported that, when meetings with controversial issues occur, they are thoroughly risk assessed beforehand and the Health and Safety Manager is available on the premises along with senior managers. It was advised that having strong controls at the door can aggravate conflict. Instead, staff had been trained to be skilled at diffusing situations. She assured that the Council are attuned to any risks, and these are managed appropriately.

RESOLVED: That the revised Health and Safety Policy be approved.

51 GENDER PAY GAP 2021

The Committee received a report on the gender pay gap at the Council as of 31 March 2021 from the Strategic HR Manager. It was reported that it was an annual requirement, under the Equality Act 2010, to publish this report.

It was reported that the gender pay gap had continued to improve as it reached 2.36%, a reduction from last year's 5.62% figure, significantly lower than the anticipated national average. This was said to be due to the impact of Covid restricting the use of casual staff and the removal of IR35 staffing from the organisation. Questions were then taken.

There were concerns that the quantitative data in section 3.4 of the report did not reflect the qualitative statement that follows it. Several possible reasons were given to potentially explain this. It was concluded that the statement would be temporarily removed while the issue was investigated.

Members were pleased to see that the gender pay gap was small and stated that it reflected on the organisation well.

It was noted that part of the gap exists due to the disproportionate effect the joint waste service has on the figures. The possibility of the Council offering HGV training apprenticeships was discussed, as this could potentially reduce the gap. It was reported that they have been proactively looking at this and hoped to have positive feedback at a future meeting.

The committee highlighted the excellent service provided by the joint waste service and thanked them for their consistent hard work.

Members asked whether, in the future, disability pay gap would be considered as this would be valuable. This was noted as a future possibility.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 7.32pm)

CHAIRMAN