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Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Processes Task and Finish Panel
29 January 2024

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND LEAVER PROCESSES TASK AND FINISH PANEL held on Monday 29 January 2024 at 5.30 pm in the Chestnut Board Room, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors A.Hellyer, M.Birleson, A.Nix, R.Platt, P.Smith,
C.Stanbury and K.Thorpe

OFFICIALS K.Ng, Chief Executive
PRESENT: R.Baker, Executive Director (Finance & Transformation)
J. Pilbeam, Human Resources and Organisational Development
Manager
R. Misir, Democratic Services Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr Alastair Hellyer was confirmed as Chair of the Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Processes task and finish group.

2. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no apologies or substitutions.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PRESENTATION: WORKFORCE DATA, TURNOVER STATISTICS AND RECRUITMENT INSIGHTS

The Panel was taken through a presentation which is attached with these minutes.

Key points raised were as follows:

- The Council has 140 male and 307 female employees.
- 13% of men and 31% of women work part-time (30 hours or fewer per week).
- Staff headcount is slightly lower than it was in 2022/23 although the actual number of hours worked is higher; this is in part due to flexible working although it was noted people may be working more hours and this statistic will change slightly with every starter/leaver.

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- Just over 200 staff ie nearly 50% of the workforce have fewer than 4 years service. Noted that people tend to stay in the same role less than they used to. These trends are not dissimilar to other local authorities.
- 44% of staff are over 50 and therefore likely to leave in the next 15-20 years. The Council does not have a fixed retirement age; staff can retire from the age of 55 and the state pension age is currently 66.
- Although employees' ethnicity is predominantly white (80%), diversity has notably increased in the last five years. There has been an increase in staff not wanting to provide details of their ethnicity.
- 22 employees have declared a disability which is known to be under-reported. The Council can take disability issues into account if it knows about them.
- There were 59 leavers between April – December 2023 and 71 new starters. 38 employees left as a result of voluntary resignation, there were 3 redundancies and some people left at the end of fixed term contracts. In the year before, there were 104 new starters and 115 leavers - the majority of those leaving were again as a result of voluntary resignations; there had also been a significant restructure, and two contracts were outsourced. The Panel was advised that fixed term contracts did not last longer than 12 months; staff gain employment rights once employed for two years. Some staff had been dismissed during their 6 month probationary period due to conduct issues or not meeting the Council's values. The Council was looking at what additional support new starters might need; there had been some occasions when staff had left early during their probation and while this had sometimes been due to conduct, it was recognised starting a new job is daunting and there needs to be a consistent approach across all teams. A buddy system is in place in some areas.
- TUPE processes were explained. Contact Centre and IT staff had been TUPEd into the Council.
- Higher pay elsewhere is not the only reason staff leave. An example was cited where an employee had left due to conflict with a manager but then returned saying the situation was not as bad as they had thought.
- Around 75% of leavers have an exit interview; some people may be off sick when they are leaving and some staff going through an internal process may not wish to do one. Staff are asked to complete an exit interview form; they also have the option of meeting with HR and it is felt a conversation is important so the organisation can delve into the reasons why staff are leaving. Exit interviews are not held when staff are made redundant.
- There is a time lapse between employees leaving and new starters coming into post. 160 posts were advertised between April – December 2023 with 122 people appointed; the Council has recruited to just under 77% of vacancies the first time round. Some roles are for a number of people. There are vacancies for property maintenance, surveyors and independent living officers, and previously it was difficult to recruit to front of house roles at Campus West. There was an increase last summer in people accepting a job offer and then withdrawing which may have been

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due to them receiving incentives from their existing employer or having been made multiple job offers although the situation has now settled down; the Council tries to make contact with potential new recruits early in the process.

- There were 34 internal promotions or moves in 2022-23, and 17 so far in 2023-4. There had been 10 returners over the last 2 years.
- There are usually 4 pay bands for each role although this can vary; salaries were benchmarked against the role profile rather than just the job title. Employees receive an outer fringe allowance. There had previously been a bonus for staff who had not taken sick leave which had been potentially discriminatory. The next task and finish session would look at sickness.
- The Council tries to highlight the benefits of working for it including flexible working; working from home is an attractive option which new starters see as a benefit. A member commented that some businesses want to reduce home working and that residents needed value for money, and another member noted it was difficult to have a corporate policy given some roles (such as refuse staff) were unable to work from home. Asked how the value of working from home was quantified for/by the Council, officers explained there was no standard working from home policy aside from the fact that employees needed to come into the office regularly; it was based on business need (not all staff were able to do work from home), staff were able to access systems, and there was flexibility so long as employees did their job without impacting the service provided. Responding to a question from a member, officers said this flexibility aided the recruitment process; the Council also had a legal responsibility to consider requests for flexible working. The situation was constantly evolving and in some cases staff came into the office more often.
- A member commented they had tried to contact staff and been told this was not possible as the staff member was working from home. Officers clarified that staff working from home were contactable and members should inform the Chief Executive if that was not the case; working from home was not new and had taken place prior to the pandemic. Staff turnover would be much higher if the Council did not adapt to changing circumstances; an officer noted another local authority had lost staff due to its requirement they be in the office three days a week. Members commented this was why it was important to know how staff quantified the value of working from home as they might accept a lower salary than if they had to come into the office on a daily basis. It was suggested working from home arrangements could be asked about in exit interviews and the staff survey.
- A member queried whether staff were asked what they thought of the Council as an employer. Officers responded that there had not been a full staff survey for a couple of years but staff opinion was regularly sought; there was an employee forum chaired by the Chief Executive which team representatives attended and there were 'temperature checks' such as one to ones, team meetings etc. New core values had been introduced corporately using a bottom-up approach. Regular meetings with the

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unions were another temperature check. The next session of the Panel would look at recognition and rewards.

- Difficulties in recruitment were down to a combination of factors including fewer people looking for work, increased competitiveness in the marketplace, skills shortages and the fact that the 'baby boomer' generation was retiring. Recruitment approaches considered included encouraging potential staff who did not necessarily want to work fulltime. A new version of the recruitment part of the website would go live next month which would make clearer the benefits of working for the Council, and a new application tracker system would make it easier for candidates to apply with recruitment assessments taking place remotely. The Council sought evidence of transferable skills rather than necessarily selecting people who had already fulfilled similar roles and there was a focus on attitudes, values and behaviours.
- The HR and Organisational Development Manager met with regional and national colleagues to consider best practice and was asked how the Council measured productivity. Officers noted this was difficult in local government as employees did not make things; work was more based on outputs, and KPIs were published quarterly. However the government had recently announced local authorities would be expected to produce productivity plans.

5. TIMESCALES AND REPORTING TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Panel noted Overview and Scrutiny Committee would next meet on 12 March 2024.

6. DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meetings of the Panel will take place on 12 February at 5.30pm, and 26 February at 5.30pm, both in the Chestnut Room. Members were encouraged to submit questions in advance.

Meeting ended at 6.37 pm