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Contact:
democracy@welhat.gov.uk

You are requested to attend a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE to be held on Tuesday 12 March 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber

A G E N D A P A R T 1

1. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

To note any substitution of Members made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules.

2. APOLOGIES

3. MINUTES

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 (previously circulated).

4. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 11

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

To note declarations of Members' disclosable pecuniary interests, non-disclosable pecuniary interests and non-pecuniary interests in respect of items on the Agenda.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER, UPDATE FOR THE BOROUGH

Update provided by Chief Inspector Pete Frost, Welwyn Hatfield Police.

7. HEALTH OFFER FOR THE BOROUGH

Update provided by Joyce Guthrie, Assistant Director, Leisure, Community & Culture.

8. SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH PANELS (T&PS) PROGRESS REPORTS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS

To receive progress reports and/or recommendations from Scrutiny Task and Finish Panels (T&Ps), if any.

(a) REPORT OF THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TASK AND FINISH PANEL (Pages 3 - 60)

To receive a report from the Chair of the Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Panel.

9. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

10. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee is asked to resolve:

That under Section 100(A)(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting for Item 11 (if any) on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100(A)(3) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

In resolving to exclude the public in respect of the exempt information, it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

PART II - PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF A CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT NATURE AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN

<u>Circulation:</u>	Councillors	G.Michaelides	A.Hellyer (Vice-Chairman)
		L.Crofton	T.Mitchinson
		T.Rowse (Vice-Chairman)	L.Musk (Chair)
		M.Siewniak	A.Nix
		C.Stanbury	D.Panter
		S.Thusu	B.Sarson
		R.Trigg	K.Thorpe

Senior Leadership Team
Press and Public (except Part II Items)

If you require any further information about this Agenda please contact Democratic Services, Governance Services on or email – democracy@welhat.gov.uk

Part I
Item No.
All Wards

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 12 MARCH 2024
REPORT OF THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TASK AND FINISH PANEL

SCRUTINY REVIEW – RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND LEAVER PROCESSES

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a Task and Finish panel to understand more about the Council's staff turnover, recruitment challenges and its approach to the retention of staff.
- 1.2 The objectives of the Committee are to determine if recommendations could be made to:
- Reduce turnover (if deemed high);
 - Improve recruitment techniques/success rate;
 - Improve retention (if deemed low); and
 - Improve the handover process when staff leave the council
- 1.3 The Task and Finish Panel met on three occasions (see minutes in appendix A) and examined a range of data and information. This report outlines the findings arising from the Panel.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of this report.
- 2.2 That the Committee agree with the recommendations as set out in paragraph 3.6.

3. Explanation

3.1 Staff Turnover

- 3.1.1 There are currently around 450 employees working for the council. The Task and Finish Panel received the staffing profile breakdown by age, ethnicity and length of service.
- 3.1.2 It was noted that during 2022/23, there were 104 new starters and 115 leavers. The majority of the leavers were as a result of voluntary resignations. It was noted by the Panel that the turnover during that period was relatively high compared to other Hertfordshire authorities. It was recognised that it was an exceptional year, given there was a major senior

management restructure, and also two contracts (community buses and lifeline alarm control centre) were outsourced.

- 3.1.3 For the period between April – December 2023, there were 71 new starters and 59 leavers. The majority of the leavers were again as a result of voluntary resignations and the ending of fixed term contracts. It was also noted by the Panel that the turnover was relatively low compared to other Hertfordshire authorities.
- 3.1.4 The Panel was pleased to note that there were 34 internal promotions/moves during 2022/23 and 17 between April – December 2023. And that there had been 10 returners over the last two years.
- 3.1.5 The Panel acknowledges that staff turnover is sometimes inevitable. Also it could create new opportunities to remaining staff members and new starters to the team could bring new ideas to improve the service.
- 3.1.6 The Panel recognises that there is currently an informal buddy system put in place to help new starters settling into their jobs. Members could see the benefit of putting a formal system in place and would recommend officers to implement this at the earliest opportunity, which would provide more support to new starters and this would also ensure consistency across all the teams.

3.2 **Recruitment**

- 3.2.1 The Panel examined the reasons for difficulties in recruitment in the current market. It was acknowledged that this was down to a combination of factors, including fewer people looking for work, skills shortages, “baby boomer” generation retiring, increased competitiveness in the marketplace, impact of Brexit, along with lifestyle changes after the COVID era.
- 3.2.2 The Panel also received recruitment data from officers. In particular, 160 posts were advertised between April – December 2023 with 122 people appointed, which equates to around 77% of vacancies being filled the first time round.
- 3.2.3 The Council’s recruitment approaches have also changed to adapt to the needs of the market after the COVID era. For example, the Council has implemented a new job application system where candidates could select their interview slot and that most of the assessments are now taking place remotely.
- 3.2.4 The Panel also noted that the Council has recently launched a new recruitment website, which promotes a wide range of benefits working at the Council. The website also enables the candidates to get a better feel of what it is like working at the council by promoting individual staff stories as well as showing the new CORE values and behaviours of the Council. The Panel was impressed with the wide range of benefits provided by the Council and

suggested that officers should look at adding to the new recruitment site top fifty reasons to work for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

- 3.2.5 It was also noted that the Council has employed two Graduate Trainees for the first time this year under the LGA National Graduate Development Programme and that a number of hard-to-recruit teams also have trainee posts put in place in order to grow our own talent.
- 3.2.6 The Panel also received information about the Council's flexible working and remote working arrangements.
- 3.2.7 The Council should continue to build a better brand and promote all the good work it's doing at every opportunity in order to attract a wider pool of candidates to work for the council. At the same time, officers should keep abreast of good practice in recruitment.

3.3 Home Working

- 3.3.1 The Panel discussed the benefits and drawbacks from home working. It recognises that almost all employers now offer home working and it would be even more difficult for the Council to recruit staff if home working was not an option.
- 3.3.2 It was explained to the Panel that the Council has put in the following arrangement regarding home working.
 - No one will be permanently based at home.
 - All staff are expected to attend the workplace at least once a week and as required for service provision, also to attend training and other corporate events. The relevant Director/Assistant Directors determine office cover arrangements in each of their teams.
 - If the role is suitable for more agile working arrangements, these must be discussed, agreed and recorded with their manager.
 - The Council does not pay for travel to and from the workplace and does not contribute to any expenses incurred as a result of working from home.
- 3.3.3 Indeed, there are teams that work from the office five days a week as their jobs would not enable them to work remotely, this includes Campus West staff, the Hive and Museum services.

3.4 Staff retention

3.4.1 The Panel received detailed information about what the council has been doing to retain staff. Whilst acknowledging that due to budget constraints, and that the council is in the National Pay Awards, there is very little that the council could do with salary. However, it was noted that the council has put in place the following initiatives to retain and grow staff.

- **Awards**

- The Council provides long service awards to staff that work for the council for more than ten years.
- The Council also runs an Employee Recognition Scheme, where the judging panel is made up of all members of Employee Forum, not senior management.
- The Council also encourages staff to nominate projects to be put forward for national awards to create a sense of pride in the workplace. Indeed, the Council has been successful in winning a number of awards in recent years.

- **Learning and Development**

- The Council provides a wide range of training courses to staff and managers are actively encouraging their team to attend.
- The Council also sponsors staff to study towards professional qualifications
- The Council will soon be launching a new Management Development Programme

- **Health and Wellbeing**

- The Council provides all the staff with access to an Employee Assistance Programme, which provides free 24/7 staff counselling, information and advice on a range of services
- The Council provides training for all staff on mental health awareness and training for managers in supporting staff wellbeing
- The Council provides staff with free access to an app called GoodShape, which provides medical advice 24/7 as well as personalised health advice.
- The Council is a Mindful employer and a Disability Confident employer

- The HR team works closely with managers to provide support for staff with long term disabilities and health conditions.
- **Staff empowerment**
 - All teams at the Council nominate their own representatives to attend the Employee Forum, which is chaired by the Chief Executive. The meeting takes place every 6-8 weeks and representatives could raise any concerns directly to Senior Management. This is in addition to other avenues (e.g. one-to-one with their managers, team meetings, etc) that is available to staff should they need to raise any concerns.
 - The Council operates a buying and selling annual leave scheme, as well as flexible working arrangements supporting a better work-life balance to our workforce.
 - The Panel acknowledged that the Council has done a number of staff surveys in the past and that the Council has since moved to conducting short surveys (e.g. CORE values staff survey, review of employee recognition scheme, climate change survey).
 - The Panel recommends that staff surveys should continue to be done regularly.

3.5 Handover process when staff leave the Council

- 3.5.1 The Panel was provided with exit interview information. The exit interviews are held by HR team directly with the employee to explore the reason for leaving, including the role, management and perception of the Council. The only time exit interviews do not take place is if the employee is being made redundant or dismissed. Figures were shared with the Panel showing job satisfaction: 90% of staff felt their skills were effectively utilised, 62% felt their salary was fair and 83% felt they had the necessary skills to undertake their duties.
- 3.5.2 Most staff's experience of the Council is positive (61% rated it good and 25% rated it excellent) and they would recommend the Council as an employer to the others.
- 3.5.3 It was acknowledged by the Panel that staff would serve their notice period and during that time the leaver's manager would start the handover process. It was shared with the Panel that all the staff should save their work on a shared drive and that processes and procedures should already be put in place to ensure that services could still run in the period of any staff absence.
- 3.5.4 It was also understood by the Panel that the Council uses the Jadu system to handle customer case work and that all previous communications with the

customer should be saved on the system rather than the individual employee's mailbox.

3.6 Summary of Recommendations from Task and Finish Panel

- 3.6.1 A formal buddy system should be implemented to ensure all new starters are supported in the best possible way to settle into their new job.
- 3.6.2 Officers should look at adding to the new recruitment site top fifty reasons to work for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
- 3.6.3 Staff surveys should continue to be done on a regular basis.
- 3.6.4 All of the above recommendations should be implemented by HR, overseen by the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation).

4. Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 None arising directly from the report.

5. Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 None arising directly from the report.

6. Risk Management Implication

- 6.1 None arising directly from the report.

7. Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 None arising directly from the report.

8. Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 None arising directly from the report.

9. Link to Corporate Priorities

- 9.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority: "Run an effective council."

10. Climate Change Implication(s)

- 10.1 None arising directly from the report.

11. Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 11.1 None arising directly from the report.

12. Equality and Diversity

- 12.1 An EqlA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

Appendix A – Minutes of the Task and Finish Panel meetings

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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.

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

- 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

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

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

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Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Processes Task and Finish Panel
12 February 2024

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND LEAVER PROCESSES TASK AND FINISH PANEL held on Monday 12 February 2024 at 5.30 pm in the Chestnut Board Room, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors

A.Hellyer, A.Nix, R.Platt, P.Smith, C.Stanbury and
K.Thorpe

OFFICIALS

PRESENT: K.Ng, Chief Executive
J Pilbeam, Head of Human Resources and Organisational
Development
R. Misir, Democratic Services Officer

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Birleson.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

9. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2024 were approved as a correct record.

10. PRESENTATION

The Panel was taken through a presentation which is attached with these minutes. Key points raised were as follows:

Homeworking:

- Consolidation of office space has led to increased income and lowered overheads.
- The presentation provides a summary of workplace attendance. Almost 20% of staff are in the workplace 5 days a week with a further 65% in between 2 – 4 days per week. 11.5% of staff work at Campus West and the museum etc who are unable to work from home.

Sickness Management

- Support for staff health and wellbeing is provided through access to the Employee Assistance Programme, counselling, wellbeing events, mental health awareness training etc. A health passport has been introduced for staff with long term disabilities/ health conditions; should their manager change, relevant information is available to the new manager.
- The Council is a Mindful employer (meaning it supports a positive approach towards mental health) and a Disability Confident employer (a guarantee that disabled prospective employees who meet the essential criteria are offered an assessment for the role; the focus is on what they can do rather than what they cannot). The Access to Work scheme can support individuals back into the workplace or to remain in the workplace. However some employees do not want their disability recorded.
- Sickness absence data was shown in the presentation. There tended to be more sickness in winter. Sickness figures can be skewed by someone who is absent for an extended period and some staff currently have long term sickness absences. The main reason for sickness absence is mental health/ anxiety/ stress and depression. Sometimes staff have cited work-related stress when action is taken against them which can lead to a period of absence. A member noted mental health issues were a significant cause of absence and wondered if this was indicative of why some staff might be leaving. Officers noted this may not always be work-related and it can be hard to find the right intervention; it can also take longer to recover from such issues which can skew absence figures. Use of GoodShape (an outsourced service) means HR is immediately aware if someone is absent for these reasons and can make referrals as soon as the issues are clear. It is thought people are reporting stress more and there is more talk about wellbeing - some people are likely to be less resilient than others. The Council tries to give affected employees the opportunity to speak with professionals as well as identifying how they can support themselves, and has a clear monitoring process.
- Responding to a comment about how employers do not always know when staff are stressed, officers noted stress is often a combination of factors; it can take a while for people to return to work and medication can take time to take effect. Staff are given flexibility with appointments in order that they can receive professional support.
- Sickness absence fell during the pandemic but has now gone up. Due to the nature of their roles, not all staff can work from home if they are a little under the weather.
- The Council monitors sickness closely, utilising quality conversations and specialist help in order to provide support. Many people were unable to get NHS appointments during the pandemic and so are only now absent for surgery. If staff are supported when they are first absent it aids their recovery and helps keep them in the workplace, and the Council's approach is to look at what they can do, not what they cannot. Consideration can be given to providing cover if someone is known to be on long-term sick but usually colleagues pick up their work. While the Council has a duty of care to the individual, it also has one to those remaining at work.

- Sickness pay is in accordance with national terms and conditions. Hertfordshire County Council had introduced a policy whereby staff were unpaid during the first two days of sickness absence and their sickness rates increased as a result; they have now reverted to previous arrangements. Employees with more than 5 years service are eligible for 6 months full pay followed by 6 months half pay. Sickness absence triggers are as follows: 6 days in a 12 month period (pro rata for part time employees), any block of absence exceeding 20 days, and any noted pattern of absence. Staff who are sick call GoodShape and speak to a nurse.
- Sometimes when it is not possible to find suitable alternative employment for staff, their contract will need to be terminated. Those in the pension scheme may be able to access ill health retirement but that it is increasingly difficult.
- In terms of sickness absence, the Council is probably in the middle ranking compared with other local authorities. Councils have different inhouse services, so some councils will have more manual or operational staff who can have more absences due to physical issues, whereas office workers can sometimes work from home if they have a minor ailment. It was agreed that comparative data would be provided to members.

Staff Benefits, Development and Reward

- Members were given a flavour of courses that would be held over the next month which included statutory and mandatory training as well as wellbeing support. Directors stipulate what skills a postholder needs. Each directorate has a training budget and there is also a central budget for softer skills. There is a Course of Study policy to support employees with the cost of a qualification where appropriate, and an apprenticeship fund that supports trainees. While there is not a stipulated amount of training staff need to periodically complete, HR monitors who has attended courses (which staff can access via MyLearn). There can be bespoke training which would be decided at director level and would come from the CPD budget. It was **agreed** that officers would try to obtain figures about how our training budget compares to that of other local councils.
- Staff benefits and rewards were itemised in the presentation and included competitive salaries, pay progression and staff discounts. The Panel also noted the Council's leave allowance, flexitime system and the opportunity to buy or sell annual leave. Staff are asked in February whether they wish to buy or sell up to 5 days of leave (buying 5 days means they lose 5 days salary over a 12 month period). Some staff do not have access to flexitime and appreciate the opportunity for additional leave and others would rather be paid for selling it. There were more requests this year to buy rather than sell leave.
- There are long service awards, employee recognition awards and opportunities for learning and development, as well as access to the Local Government Pension Scheme. Hybrid working options are available in most roles; access to green travel options (including the cycle to work scheme, Arriva travel discount etc) are available; and HR works with local

retailers who promote benefits to staff. Members commended these benefits and it was noted that while local government salaries may not be the highest, the overall combination of benefits was not available to other employers in the borough. The Council's recruitment website has been redesigned and highlights the benefits of working for it.

- There is not a bonus scheme as equal pay means it would be hard for this to be implemented fairly across the organisation. Members noted that recognition awards meant staff were recognised for exceptional performance.
- Members discussed working from home and officers reflected that while it needs to meet the Council's business needs (and staff need to be on standby to come into the office if, say, cover is needed) there are advantages in that it avoids commuting time and means the organisation can recruit from a wider area as it will attract people who do not want or are unable to work from the office 5 days per week. A member commented that disengaged staff will not want to work wherever they are located; as far as working from home or the office was concerned, some people welcomed the social interaction in the office while others appreciated the time not spent commuting. However he observed working from home might be a concern for new starters as it was important they felt comfortable to ask questions.
- Members noted working from home had been custom and practice prior to the pandemic and **agreed** it would be helpful to have a statement about how this worked and the approach behind it.
- A member noted that staff benefits were extensive and asked how the Council was able to differentiate itself in recruitment terms if the same benefits were offered by other local authorities. Officers advised they looked at what other councils were offering nationally and broke down the benefits – for example, retirement would be a key issue for some staff whereas a reduced carbon footprint might be an attraction for others. It is also about having a brand for the Council, ie promoting our achievements, being a welcoming employer and an inclusive organisation with training opportunities and good work life balance. A member commented that this was similar to some private sector employers who also wanted to showcase what they could offer. It was **agreed** members would be sent a link to the new recruitment website which featured stories from employees about why they had chosen to work at the Council.
- A member highlighted the value of staff surveys and noted it had been a while since the last one.

Flexible Working

- Employees have a legal right to request flexible working from their first day of service. Two requests can be made per person per year and the Council needs a business reason to decline. There are 140 different working patterns in the Council which demonstrates its willingness to retain dedicated staff who may have commitments at a certain time and also means staff can be available for customers for longer periods of time.

Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Processes Task and Finish Panel
12 February 2024

- The flexitime scheme was explained, which is by management agreement.

Leaver Process and Feedback

- Most staff have a 4 – 12 week notice period although staff on long term sickness absence may not be able to work but remain employed for the duration of their notice.
- Exit interviews explore the reason for leaving including the role, management, and perception of the Council, as well as if the employee left during their probationary period. The only time exit interviews do not take place is if the employee is being made redundant or dismissed. Figures were shared showing job satisfaction: 90% of staff felt their skills were effectively utilised, 62% felt their salary was fair and 83% felt they had the necessary skills to undertake their duties.
- Most staff's experience of the Council is positive (61% rated it good and 25% rated it excellent) and they would recommend the organisation as an employer.
- Jadu is a case management system which makes it is clear who is doing what work and how it is being progressed when someone leaves; a member noted it provided hard data about people's workloads which might give comfort about productivity wherever staff were working from.
- Use of shared drives mean if someone is out of the office, progress on work is easily identified. It is down to each manager to manage the leaver process including identifying what they want to happen to the leaver's emails (eg have them forwarded for a month).

It was **agreed** the Panel's terms of reference would be sent to the Chair ahead of the next meeting in order that he could discuss items for the next meeting with the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

11. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

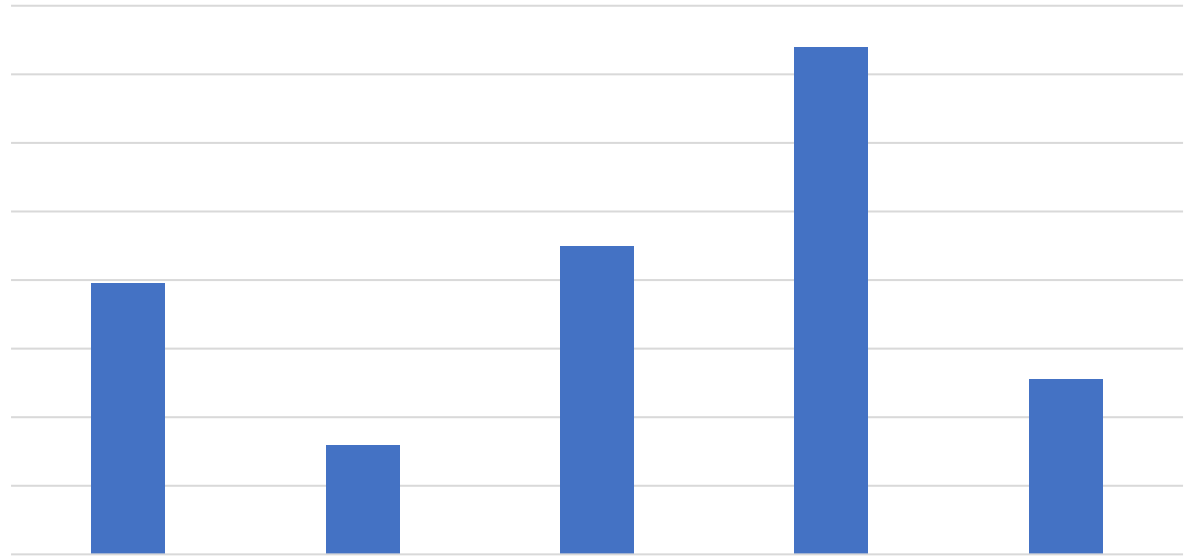
There were no items of urgent business.

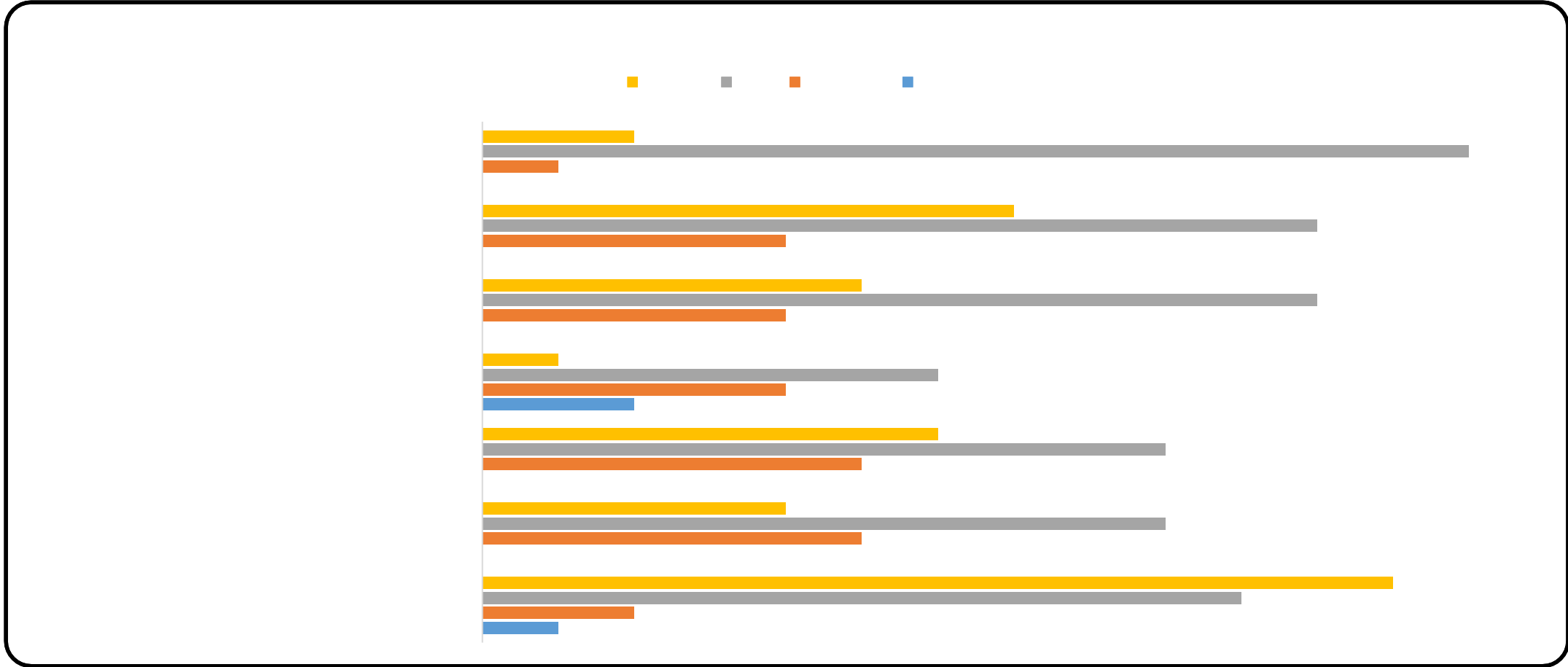
12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

Monday 26 February 2024 at 5.30 pm, Chestnut Room

Meeting ended at 6.55 pm

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Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Processes Task and Finish Panel
26 February 2024

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND LEAVER PROCESSES TASK AND FINISH PANEL held on Monday 26 February 2024 at 5.30 pm in the Chestnut Board Room, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors

A.Hellyer (Chairman), M.Birleson, A.Nix, R.Platt,
P.Smith, C.Stanbury and K.Thorpe

OFFICIALS

PRESENT: K.Ng, Chief Executive
J Pilbeam, Head of Human Resources and Organisational
Development
R Misir, Senior Democratic Services Officer

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February were agreed as a correct record.

16. PRESENTATION:

Members were taken through a presentation which is attached with these minutes, which included an overview of what the panel had discussed to date in its previous two sessions. The meeting then considered benchmarking statistics. It noted data for staff turnover for 2022/23 compared with other local authorities: Welwyn Hatfield had had a major restructure that year and had also outsourced two major contracts, whereas for 2023/24, staff turnover for the Council had been in the middle range at the point up to December 2023. Sickness absence benchmarking also showed Welwyn Hatfield's figures to be mid-range. It was difficult to get a true comparison for learning and development budgets given for some local authorities including ours, the budgets are centralised whereas others are not but again, Welwyn Hatfield's training budget, which included conferences and seminars, appeared to be in the middle range.

Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Processes Task and Finish Panel
26 February 2024

The panel was shown absence KPIs by directorate. It noted that figures were higher in those areas where staff are unable to work from home when unwell (staff who are unable to work remotely include those in Campus West and Museum Services etc), and that absence figures would be skewed if for example, one person was off sick for a month. Members queried the breakdown of the absence KPIs and it was **agreed** further clarification would be provided.

A statement about existing homeworking arrangements for Council staff was presented which stated that no one would be permanently home-based; staff were expected to attend work at least once a week as well as attending training and other corporate events; agile working agreements needed to be agreed with managers; and the Council did not pay for travel to work or expenses incurred while working from home. These four components of the statement were taken from staff employment contracts and individually agreed team charters about working from home agreements. The meeting noted that staff were required to complete health and safety assessments for homeworking and that any specialist equipment was provided for use in the office. No broadband allowance was paid as there was no requirement for staff to work from home.

In terms of vacancies, there had been 27 vacancies but not all were actively being recruited to. The longest recruitment campaigns were for Independent Living Officers and surveyors where we had multiple vacancies. However there were 317 applications in Property Maintenance and Climate Change alone since October. The Council has a new recruitment website which tells staff stories about why they feel the Council is an attractive employer and the meeting noted the increase in live traffic volumes on this website between October and now, although it is not yet known whether this would be converted into actual job applications.

A draft report for Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) about the work and recommendations of the panel was shared. The executive summary included the original aims and objectives of the panel agreed at OSC in July 2023. A member felt working from home should be referenced in the summary and the Chair proposed that when he introduced the item at OSC, he would note that homeworking was a significant component of recruitment and retention and that flexible working formed part of employee benefits which the panel had considered in detail.

During further consideration of the draft report, it was **agreed** to include additional information about what the Council does in respect of staff turnover, particularly for staff on probation, and to reference the informal buddying system. It was **agreed** that the four points about homeworking referenced above would be included in paragraph 3.2.8 of the report. It was also **agreed** that reference would be made to promoting the 'brand' of Welwyn Hatfield including the benefits of working for it. Officers agreed that a revised version would be circulated the following day which members would need to agree by email and this, along with the minutes of the panel meetings, would form part of the OSC agenda.

Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Processes Task and Finish Panel
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Members asked how the panel's recommendations would be implemented and monitored following OSC. It was agreed that the first OSC meeting of the new municipal year could note the panel's recommendations had been agreed and OSC would be asked to review them.

17. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

There was no other business.

Meeting ended at 6.25 pm

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