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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.

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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.

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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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