

## **COUNCIL FUNCTIONS COMMITTEE**

**12 NOVEMBER 2015**

Present: Councillor D Walford (Chair)

Councillors S Bolton, S Johnson, M Haley, N Shah, S Williams  
and L Topping

Also present:

Officers: Head of Human Resources  
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were two changes of membership for the meeting; Councillor S Johnson replaced Councillor M Watkin and Councillor S Williams replaced Councillor M Mills.

### **2 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015 were submitted and signed.

### **4 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF WORKFORCE MONITORING**

The Committee received a report of the Head of Human Resources which detailed the profile of Watford Borough Council's workforce from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

Watford Borough Council was committed to equality and diversity across the full spectrum of its services and in its role as an employer. The commitment was articulated in its equality objective and associated action plan which identified key actions the council would take to ensure equalities for its workforce and that it reflected the community it served. Watford's commitment went beyond its statutory obligations and reinforced its corporate priority to ensure equality and diversity was at the heart of everything it did.

The Head of Human Resources introduced the report to the Committee. She explained that it was a requirement to produce the report each year. She said that overall, performance was good; particularly in relation to recruiting a younger workforce where various initiatives, including apprenticeship schemes, had proved fruitful. However, the Council was not hitting all targets - for example, in relation to staff and job applicants not completing data on protected characteristics. She wondered whether staff might consider this information to be confidential and she explained that new guidance was being issued that could increase the provision of the data. She commented that the matter formed part of a wider national picture; with some people considering the data their own business or if disclosed they potentially being treated less favourably. She explained that a number of Councils in Hertfordshire performed better than Watford in this regard and that some authorities required the data to be provided compulsorily. However, Watford Borough Council did not consider this to be a sound approach at this stage. She said that in the future there may be opportunities to improve take up by utilising the new website design where it might be easier to require that the information be provided; it would also be helpful to get community views on the issue. Another option would be to conduct a survey on the website.

Councillor Haley agreed that this was a difficult area. He made reference to the sexual orientation data where no employees had apparently indicated that they were gay. He considered this to be unusual as this group had historically been committed to equality issues. He felt that it would be a good idea to conduct a survey later in the year but people should not be forced to complete this. He asked the following:

- With reference to paragraph 3.2 in the report; whether there was a further breakdown of any additional take up.
- With reference to Table 1 in the report; whether the breakdown of the Watford Borough Council workforce, as compared to the percentage of the local population, was statistically relevant as the small numbers involved may skew the data. If this was not the case, it may indicate there was a problem with recruitment in certain groups.
- With reference to paragraph 7.1.3 in the report; whether the target of a 13 percent black and ethnic minority workforce should be increased to reflect the population breakdown – accepting that going to a 23.7 percent target might be best achieved gradually.
- With reference to paragraph 10.7 in the report; whether name blind recruitment had been considered as an option in the review (Councillor Topping commented that this was an effective recruitment tool).

The Head of Human Resources said that she completely agreed with Councillor Haley's points. With reference to 'name blind recruitment'; this approach had been discussed with the Communications Team and that the new website would allow for applicant's names to be blanked out. Further exploration would now be carried out with Communications. With regard to homosexual staff, she agreed

that more needed to be done and said that work had been conducted with the Hertfordshire Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Group – such as promoting events, having more of these locally and also advertising to staff to remove any stigma attached to the issue. With regard to the statistics in relation to Black and Ethnic Minority Groups; the workforce was small and, as a result, any minor change in these numbers would skew the percentages. She made reference to page 11 of the report and to Table 6; and explained that recruitment processes were being reviewed seeking to get a broader range of job applicants. With regard to the Black and Ethnic Minority workforce target; she informed the Committee that this would be increased to the 23.7 percent figure to reflect the population as a whole but may take a little time to achieve.

The Head of Human resources returned to the issue of the completion of protected characteristic information commenting that there was no obvious grouping - such as looking at male and female staff. Many members of staff considered the information to be their personal business; consequently, it was a difficult issue to address. If recording the data was made compulsory, people would be likely to record 'prefer not to say'. However, the topic had been placed on the refresher training programme for managers so as to promote diversity and equality in respect of their recruitment processes.

Councillor Williams asked how anonymous the information would be for those providing it. He suggested that people may not complete sexual orientation data as they did not consider this to be relevant. He considered that applications needed to ensure anonymity. The Head of Human Resources reassured the Committee that protected characteristic information was confidential and that it was not available to managers but went straight to Human Resources as it was only included on the equality monitoring form; with the potential of taking the applicant's name off this as well. With regard to staff data; the information was provided on a self service portal – which was then recorded on the confidential Human Resources database. She added that a staff survey was conducted every two to three years but this still did not result in a higher take up.

Councillor Williams commented that the drive to increase Black and Ethnic Minority staff numbers was a good approach but may be difficult to achieve should there be staff cuts or redundancies.

Councillor Topping emphasised that any staff survey should be conducted on a voluntary basis and concurred that training was very important for managers. She commented that if 72 percent of staff did not provide the protected characteristic information perhaps this was an indication that the questions had not been framed correctly. The Head of Human Resources explained that questions were based on equality monitoring standards but agreed that they could possibly be re-vamped and made more user friendly.

Members then had a discussion about the purpose of the Committee and whether topics could be deferred to other existing Council committees. The Chair undertook to raise the matter with Councillor Watkin.

**ACTION - Chair**

RESOLVED –

that the Workforce Monitoring Report be noted.

Chair  
Council Functions Committee

The meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and ended at 7.25 pm