

COUNCIL FUNCTIONS COMMITTEE

16 November 2016

Present: Councillor M Watkin (Chair)
Councillors A Dychton, J Johnson, N Shah and S Johnson

Officers: Head of Human Resources
Assistant HR Business Partner
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)
Head of Human Resources

1 Apologies for absence

Councillor S Johnson replaced Councillor Walford. Apologies were received from Councillor Turmaine. No apologies were received from Councillor Steele.

2 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2016 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 2015 to 31 March 2016.

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 Assistant HR Business partner introduced the report to the Committee. He discussed the workforce analysis with regard to:

- Black and minority ethnic groups (BME).
- Gender.
- Disability.

He explained what steps were taken to encourage employees and job applicants to provide information on protected characteristics.

In response to questions from members, the Head of Human Resources and Assistant HR Business Partner:

- Explained how individuals were asked whether they considered they had a disability. The question was carefully worded so that people did not feel obliged to answer. There was anecdotal evidence that some individuals did not consider themselves disabled as their condition was effectively managed. The issue was effectively a self-assessment.
- Advised the committee, with regard to employee applications, there was a desire to ensure that applicants were not discouraged from disclosing they were disabled for fear of discrimination. Methods to address this matter were outlined.
- Discussed how some organisations mandatorily required staff to provide protected characteristic information – whereas the Council had incentives to do so instead.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Human Resources explained that the data in the report enabled the construct of the Council's human resource to be examined and for steps to be taken to address any shortfall in targets (such as in respect of protected characteristics). She informed the committee that recruitment training would be provided to managers in January 2017, so as to remove the potential for any bias. Advertisements were made in the Disability Journal to encourage people with a disability to apply for roles in the Council. She advised that the Two Ticks employment scheme was being replaced by 'Disability Confident' – the Council had signed up to this (and with a communications programme to publicise in the future).

The Chair asked about the apparent low number of Pakistani individuals applying for positions in the Council. The Head of Human Resources agreed that the figure of nine applicants in the last year did appear low although people may not be disclosing their ethnic origin.

Members commented that it was difficult to draw conclusions from the report as many people were not providing information on protective characteristics.

In response to further questions from the committee, the Head of Human Resources:

- Explained that currently during annual appraisals, staff were not encouraged to complete questions on their protected characteristics (although this might be beneficial). The feedback from some staff was that protected characteristic information was not relevant to their day job.
- Advised that it was generally the case in local government that more female than male staff were employed – this was in part due to the flexible working arrangements within councils. She explained how the relatively low number of senior positions in the Council could give an impression of a small number of women in senior roles. She concluded by outlining the ongoing recruitment processes.

The Chair commented that the fact that no Jewish people were indicated in the report as being employed in the Council seemed to demonstrate that this was a case of under reporting.

The Head of Human Resources informed the committee that the BME population in Watford had increased to 27% of the population as a whole. As a result, a target of employing 27% of BME staff would be introduced in the Council from 1st April 2017.

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

