

COUNCIL FUNCTIONS COMMITTEE

9 November 2021

Present: Councillor D Walford (Chair)
Councillor D Allen-Williamson (Vice-Chair)
Councillors A Dychton, A Saffery, N Shah and M Watkin

Officers: Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational
Development
Democratic Services Officer (OE)

1 Apologies for absence/ committee membership

Councillor Crout was absent without apology.

2 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2021 were agreed and signed.

4 Workforce Monitoring Report 2021

The committee received a report from the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development on the Workforce Monitoring Report 2021.

The Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the report and explained that it was an annual report breaking down the staff population based on the categories contained within the Equality Act 2010. Paragraph 1.2 set out the measure that were being taken to encourage staff to provide their data. This included requesting data from staff when the organisation switched to using the iTrent HR system. There were still significant gaps due to a low data submission rate. Data was given on a voluntary basis and it could not be conclusively determined why there was a reluctance to submit data. Conversations with other councils across Hertfordshire showed that Watford's response rate was not dissimilar to other councils across the county. Conversations with Hertfordshire County

Council had revealed that discussion on why data was collected and used could lead to higher response rates, and the council had begun work to implement this.

Responding to a question from Councillor Watkin, the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained there was no definitive reason why people were reluctant to submit their data. Following conversations with staff and managers, it was discovered that there were various reasons, including a lack of understanding of the purpose of data collection. A plan has been developed to focus on educating staff on why their data is collected.

Councillor Watkin also asked whether it could be possible to incentivise data collection requests. Although some had tried this approach, it had not been found to boost response rates as much as educating people. The Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications has worked to develop the communications side of the education initiative and it was hoped that this would boost response rates. There were also plans to link the iTrent and WebRecruit systems. This would also help to boost response rates.

Councillors Watkin and Shah both commented on the importance of ensuring that people understand that the data collected was anonymised. The Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development agreed and stated that this would be part of communications going forward and confirmed that reports drawn from the iTrent systems were purely numerical and could not be used to identify people.

Councillor A. Saffery asked whether there was an age correlation in the reluctance to submit data. Whilst there had not been no age-related trend identified thus far, this was something that would be examined more closely in future.

RESOLVED-

that the Workforce Monitoring Report be approved.

5 Politically Restricted Posts Policy

The committee received a report from the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development on the Politically Restricted Posts Policy.

The Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the report and explained that the policy set out what it meant by a 'politically restricted post'. The policy stated that staff members in these posts would receive an annual notification letter as a reminder of what was expected of them and staff members not in senior management posts would have the right to appeal. The council's legal team had had full input into the development of this policy which would commence following the approval by the Council Functions Committee and confirmation of the Executive and Group Heads. The list of posts that qualified as politically restricted could be found on p.27 of the policy document. The proposed letter could also be found in the policy document.

In response to Councillor Watkin's question about the lack of a previous policy, it was explained that there was pre-existing information about the meaning of a politically restricted post, however it was thought to be prudent to contain all information in one policy document. This would serve as a clearer, more enhanced source of information for staff members, as some longer-standing staff members commented on being unsure of the parameters of a politically restricted post.

Councillor Watkin asked about the sanctions that could be imposed if staff members violated the rules and whether the policy would form part of the recruitment process in future. The Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development informed the committee that the disciplinary procedure would be used to deal with any infractions. With regards to the recruitment process, it was confirmed that it would be clearly stated and explained if a role were politically restricted in future.

Responding to Councillor Dychton's question about the frequency of review of the policy, the committee were told that the staff would be informed annually of the policy, and the policy itself would be reviewed every three years barring any legislative changes. Legislative changes would lead to immediate review.

RESOLVED-

1. that the Politically Restricted Posts Policy be approved by the Committee.
2. that the draft communication by letter to relevant post holders be approved by the committee.

The committee received a report from the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development on the new Overpayments Policy.

Before introducing the report, the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development brought to the committee's attention that there was a numbering error in the document, however no information had been omitted from the document.

The Overpayments Policy was a result of a recommendation made by the Audit Committee. Although there were terms and conditions contained within contracts of employment regarding overpayments, it was thought to be better to develop an additional policy document for further clarity. The policy set out how overpayments were made and the process for reclaiming any overpayments.

UNISON had been consulted in the creation of the policy and they had suggested certain wording changes in Section 3 of the document after the publishing of the original document. The wording changes could be found below.

3.3. '...Any overpayment adjustment and subsequent deductions shall not reduce the final salary amount for the purpose of pension calculations.'

3.5. '...but if the overpayment is discovered late in the tax year then a longer timescale could be considered to avoid potential financial hardship.'

Councillor Watkin expressed support of the changes advised by UNISON and full support of the Overpayments Policy.

RESOLVED-

that Council Functions Committee approves the Overpayments Policy.

Chair
Council Functions
Committee

The Meeting started at 6.32 pm
and finished at 7.04 pm