

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 16 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Terry (Chair);
Councillors Brock (Vice-Chair) and Ennis

Apologies: Councillors Mitchell and Mpofu-Coles

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. MINUTES OF APPOINTMENT COMMITTEES

The Minutes of Personnel Appointment Committees held on 17 November 2022, 26 January, 23 July and 25 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7. PROCEEDINGS OF LOCAL JOINT FORUM

The Chief Executive submitted the proceedings of the Local Joint Forum meeting held on 10 October 2023.

8. GENDER AND ETHNICITY PAY GAP REPORTS FOR 2023 AND WORKFORCE PROFILE REPORT FOR 2022-23

The Committee considered a report that presented the Council's Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Reports for 2023 and the Workforce Profile Report for 2022/23. A copy of the Gender Pay Gap Report 2023 was attached to the report at Appendix 1, a copy of the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report was attached at Appendix 2 and a copy of the Workforce Profile was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report explained that the mean gender pay gap was 0.82% and the median was 0.00%, compared to the previous year's figures of 0.13% (mean) and 3.06% (median). The mean ethnicity pay gap for 2023 was 2.46% mean and minus 0.40% median, compared to the previous year when they had been 2.68% mean and minus 1.76% median.

The Workforce Profile Report for 2022/23 provided a summary of equalities monitoring data and trends over time. It covered data on the protected characteristics of the current workforce and job applicants in 2022/23 and compared it to the previous three years, where relevant.

The report explained that taking positive action on workplace equality could have significant benefits for an organisation's reputation, culture and people. The Ethnicity

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and Gender Pay Gap reports were a fundamental step in the Council's journey to improving workplace equality and it helped to create a baseline to track current progress and drive continued improvement.

Resolved: That the Gender Pay Gap Report 2023, the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report 2023 and the Workforce Profile 2022-23, as attached to the report at appendices 1, 2 and 3, be noted

9. RBC INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY AND PLAN

The Committee considered a report that presented the draft Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Plan. A copy of the draft Strategy and Plan was attached to the report at Appendix A, a comparison of the current workforce against the most recent census (2021), including information about 'prefer not to say'/'do not want to declare' statistics was attached at Appendix B and the outcomes from the Big Conversation on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was attached to the report at Appendix C.

The report explained that the Council was actively working to develop its approach to inclusion and diversity and to become a more inclusive employer. The Council had been working on its inclusion agenda for several years and had sought advice and insight from its own workforce and from external specialists, working to understand where it needed to improve and what its priorities should be. Reading was a diverse and vibrant place with pockets of affluence and deprivation and most of the people who worked for the Council were local. More than half the workforce (54%) lived in the Borough and a further 27% were from nearby RG postcodes, a total of 81%. The aim would be to have a workforce that reflected and understood the communities it served and to be seen as an employer of choice within the communities, one that valued inclusion and diversity, and the different perspectives they brought.

Throughout the Strategy reference was made to Inclusion and Diversity. This was deliberate and reflected the strong feedback that had been received from staff, leaders and managers, as well as reflecting best practice. The Council's external specialists, Inclusive Employers, had advised that achieving full inclusion was the important first goal, as when inclusion was delivered, diversity and equality would naturally follow. The Strategy focused on the inclusion and diversity of both the current and future workforce. However, it was clear that some groups experience of discrimination demanded additional focus. Work on racism had been framed through the lens of the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development's definition, as follows:

"Whilst workplace inclusion was essential, racism needed to be expressly addressed, given the long standing lack of progress on race equality in society and workplaces. It needed to be named and consciously addressed alongside, and separate to, an overarching commitment to inclusion."

The Action Plan therefore ensured work would be carried out early on embedding the Council's ambition as well as the approach to the recruitment, support and development of disabled staff. Further work would then focus on the other protected characteristics.

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The report explained that work on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda had been underway since late 2020 following a motion that had been passed by Council on 20 October 2020 (Minute 7 refers) on Tackling Employment Inequality. This work had been enhanced following a report by the consultants Business in the Community who had been commissioned to review the Council's approach to EDI. Tangible progress had been made particularly in terms of the equality and diversity agenda and this was set out in the report.

The draft Strategy outlined the plans over the next three years to develop the inclusion and diversity work which would enable the Council to progress towards being a fully inclusive organisation and it was of key importance that everyone recognised that inclusion and diversity was everyone's responsibility. The fundamental requirement was for everyone who worked for the Council to understand what the Strategy aimed to achieve and their role in delivering it.

The report detailed the current diversity position and summarised feedback from The Big Conversation, an engagement event that had taken place with staff during June and July 2023.

The report explained that the work to understand the views and opinions of the workforce, the demographic analysis and the actions suggested by the Inclusion Maturity model had been crafted into both an Action Plan and an Ambition Statement for Inclusion and Diversity that set out the Council's ambition as follows:

“An inclusive culture where we can all do our best work and can thrive”

Finally, the report set out what would be done to achieve this ambition.

The Committee discussed the report and thanked officers in HR for their work on the Strategy, Action Plan and The Big Conversation and Councillor Terry for driving the work forward. The Committee also asked that they received a report annually on the progress of the Strategy and Action Plan.

Resolved:

- (1) That the proposed Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Plan, attached to the report at Appendix A, be agreed;**
- (2) That a report be submitted to the Committee annually on the progress of the Diversity Strategy and Action Plan.**

10. RBC STAFF SURVEY AND ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered a report presenting the outcomes of the latest staff survey that had been carried out in June and July 2023 and the actions proposed. A table setting out the headlines from the 2023 staff survey was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

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The report explained that the staff survey had been open for four weeks from 19 June to 14 July 2023. It had consisted of 58 questions, plus optional questions about the respondent, for example directorate, ethnicity, age range etc. The questions that had been asked had included new ones that related to equality, diversity and inclusion. There had been 744 responses which had represented 44% of the Council's workforce. This was a decrease from previous surveys in 2022, 2021 and 2019 where the response rates had been 49%, 58% and 51% respectively. The results were nevertheless statistically valid.

The report detailed positives to maintain/build on, areas for improvement from the comments made, cohort analysis and tables setting out actions and the next steps.

With regard to the cohort analysis, further analysis had been carried out into how different groups had responded and had included looking at protected characteristics, location and 'group', for example senior managers. The report summarised feedback in terms of enjoyment of roles, pay, workload, bullying and harassment and opportunities to progress.

Resolved: That the staff survey outcomes and action plan be noted.

11. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

The Committee considered a report presenting two Employment Policies which had been reviewed jointly and agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. The following documents were attached to the report:

Appendix A	Breast Feeding Policy
Appendix B	Additional Payments Policy
Appendix C	Family Leave Policy

The report explained that the Breast Feeding Policy was new and the Additional Payments Policy and Family Leave Policy had been updated to ensure the content was easily understood and the language was gender neutral.

The report included a table that set out in summary terms for each of the new and revised policies the issues which had been addressed together with additional key changes that had been agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. Once the policy review was complete, hyperlinks would be added to the policies where they cross-referenced to other policies.

Resolved: That the following revised HR policies, as set out in in Appendices A, B and C, attached to the report, be approved:

- **Breast Feeding Policy;**
- **Additional Payments Policy;**
- **Family Leave Policy.**

12. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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Resolved:

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of the following item, as it was likely that there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act.

13. REDUNDANCY AND SPECIAL SEVERANCE PAYMENT COSTS - 1 OCTOBER 2022 TO 31 OCTOBER 2023

The Committee received a report that provided a monitoring statement of all termination costs that had been incurred due to employees leaving the Council on redundancy grounds between 1 October 2022 and 31 October 2023. It also included a summary of Special Severance Payments that had been made within the same period. The report did not include termination costs for schools based staff and there had been no early retirements on the grounds of efficiency and no redundancies during this period.

Resolved That it be noted that the total Special Severance Payments that had been incurred between 1 October 2022 and 31 October 2023 was £19,255.

(Exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2).

(The meeting closed at 7.21 pm)