

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 13 MARCH 2025

Present: Councillor Emberson (Chair);
Councillors Terry (Vice-Chair), Ennis, Mpofu-Coles and Williams

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21. PAY GAP REPORTS FOR 2024 AND WORKFORCE PROFILE REPORT FOR 2023-24

The Committee considered a report that presented the Council's Gender, Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap Reports for 2024, all of which were appended to the report along with the Workforce Profile 2023-24.

The report stated that the mean gender pay gap was 1.57% and the median was 0%, compared to 0.82% and 0% in the previous year. The mean ethnicity pay gap for 2024 was 4.17% and 0.68% median, compared to 2.45% and minus 0.4% median in the previous year.

In addition to voluntarily publishing ethnicity pay gap information for the first time the Council was also voluntarily publishing disability pay gap information. The mean disability pay gap was 2.05% and the median 0%.

The Workforce Profile for 2023/24 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 2023/24 and compared it to the previous three financial years where relevant.

The report stated that taking positive action on workplace equality could have significant benefits for an organisation's reputation, culture and people. The Ethnicity, Disability and Gender Pay Gap Reports were a fundamental step on the Council's journey to improving workplace equality and would help to create a baseline to track progress and drive continual improvement.

Resolved: That the Gender Pay Gap, Ethnicity Pay Gap and Disability Pay Gap Reports and the Workforce Profile 2023-24, in the appendices attached to the report, be noted.

22. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY UPDATE (2024-26)

The Committee considered a report that provided a summary of the progress to date and outlined agreed actions for delivery of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in year 2 (2025). A table setting out the year one actions status was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and the year two Action Plan was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

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The report stated that the first year of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy had seen the completion of the vast majority of the actions that had been proposed and the key themes for the second year were as follows:

- Celebrating difference;
- Reviewing data and improving it where required;
- Supporting Progression;
- Allyship;
- Reviewing Policies;
- Reviewing the Council's ambition statement;
- Reverse mentoring pilot;
- Recruitment;
- Disability confident;
- Staff Network support;
- Communications and engagement.

The report explained that a key action in year 2 of the delivery plan was to deliver a reverse mentoring pilot for the Senior Leadership Group. Reverse mentoring (also called reciprocal mentoring) was when a senior or more experienced employee was mentored by a more junior colleague. In most cases the junior colleague came from a group who were either not represented or were underrepresented at leadership level such as a different ethnicity, from different socio-economic backgrounds, a different generation, sexuality or gender and it was an effective way to build genuine awareness of the barriers that were faced by diverse groups of employees. The process recognised that there were skill gaps and opportunities to learn on both sides of a mentoring relationship and flipping the format on its head could be very beneficial for both parties. A pilot programme was being developed that would consist of a small group of senior leaders who wished to develop their understanding of the lived experience of employees from ethnically diverse backgrounds and employees with a disability, including a hidden disability. These two areas aligned with the work on ethnicity and disability, both of which were priorities for the Council. The pilot was being developed ahead of its launch in March 2025, the work would include the following:

- Establishing success criteria for the pilot;
- Developing reciprocal mentoring 'ground rules', protocols and advice for participants;
- Developing outline structures for reciprocal mentoring sessions;
- Establishing confidentiality protocols.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress made in year one of the Inclusion and Diversity Plan be noted;
- (2) That the areas of focus for the 2025 Action Plan be noted.

23. REVIEW OF COUNCIL'S EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

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

Appendix A	Fostering Friendly Policy
Appendix B	Equality Impact Assessment

The report explained that the Fostering Friendly Policy had originally been developed by Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) and following discussion with the Corporate Management Team it had been agreed that the Council should adopt the same Policy. The Council understood that foster carers who did other work in addition to fostering needed some flexibility in their working arrangements in order to meet the needs of their fostered child and the Council was committed to support any staff member who was a foster carer or an approved kinship carer. The Policy had been written with the following principles in mind:

1. It must reflect current employment law and the ACAS Codes of Practice and/or guidance where relevant;
2. It must be easy to understand and written in plain English;
3. It should be concise. Any information which was not germane to the operation of the policy had been removed;
4. There should be a consistency of approach across related policies;
5. It should use gender neutral language.

The report included a table that set out in summary terms for the revised policy the issues which had been addressed together with any additional key changes that had been agreed with the Joint Trade Unions. Once the policy review had been completed hyperlinks would be added to the policy where they were cross-referenced with other Policies.

Resolved: That the following new HR Policy, as set out in in Appendix A attached to the report, be approved:

- Fostering Friendly Policy.

24. RBC STAFF SURVEY ACTION PLAN UPDATE AND BFfC STAFF SURVEY OUTCOMES

Further to Minute 17 of the previous meeting, the Committee considered a report that provided an update on the actions that had been taken to address the issues that had been identified in the 2024 Staff Survey and shared the headline results from the Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) Staff Survey. The Corporate Staff Survey Action Plan together with an update on progress to date was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report reminded the Committee that overall the results from the Staff Survey had remained positive with scores being broadly similar to, or showing a modest improvement on the previous survey. Very high positive scores (85% plus) had related to the following:

- Enjoying my job;

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- Making a valuable contribution;
- Being clear about what was expected of me and how this supported the Council;
- Manager support and flexible working;
- My Team working together;
- Managers being approachable and supportive and displaying Team Reading values;
- Understanding Team Reading values;
- The Council valuing a diverse workforce and opportunities to contribute ideas.

There were, however, a number of areas of concern including a modest increase in the number of staff saying that they had witnessed or experienced bullying and harassment. The Corporate Management Team and Directorate Management Team had been considering the scores for the Council as a whole and for individual Assistant Director areas and had agreed where focused activity should be taken. Three areas had been identified for action at a corporate level: Bullying and Harassment, Leadership and Aligning What We Do. Analysis by Assistant Director level had suggested that there were significant differences between teams in respect of some questions with some teams scoring significantly better than others when responses to individual questions were compared and Directorate Management Team plans had reflected these different areas for action.

In BFfC the Staff Survey had run between 18 November and 18 December 2024 and had been a replica of the Council Survey to allow comparisons to be made. 204 (37%) employees had taken part and overall, like the Council, the responses had been positive and had compared well with the Council's overall scores. Additionally, BFfC had reviewed how the company's results compared with the Council's Adult Social Care Teams, the nearest comparable staff group, and again, overall, BFfC had performed well against the Council comparator team for the vast majority of indicators. BFfC had scored significantly better than equivalent Council teams in relation to pay, a similar percentage to Adult Social Care colleagues believed they felt respected, appreciated and valued at work and a lower percentage overall had witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment at work. Similar to the Council, there were differences between scores for different teams, for example, in relation to issues like access to support, confidence in line manager leadership skills and rewards and benefits. Scores for the questions "I have the same opportunities to progress" had also shown significant variation between teams. Actions to address issues that had been identified would be drafted and agreed by BFfC's Senior Leadership Team by mid-April 2025.

The Committee discussed the timing of the 2025 Staff Surveys and felt that holding them at the usual times of year would mean that many of the agreed actions would not have had time to fully take effect. The Committee suggested that delaying the surveys until Spring 2026 would allow time for this, and produce more meaningful responses. Surveys could then be held annually again from 2027.

Resolved:

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- (1) That the Staff Survey Action Plans for the Council and the headline outcome for the BFfC staff survey be noted.**
- (2) That consideration be given to moving the 2025 Council and Brighter Futures for Children surveys to Spring 2026.**

(The meeting closed at 7.19 pm)