

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MINUTES – 21 NOVEMBER 2024

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

Also Present: Kathryn Cook, Gavin Handford, Lisa Munga and Miriam Palfrey.

11. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. PROCEEDINGS OF THE LOCAL JOINT FORUM

The Committee received the proceedings of the Local Joint Forum (LJF) meetings held on 8 October 2024.

13. LJF MEMBERSHIP

The Committee considered a report explaining that the Constitution of the Council set out the role of the LJF and that this was reviewed regularly. The membership of the LJF had been amended at the LJF meeting on 6 June 2024 (Minute 6 refers) in respect of Trade Union membership and quoracy and at the meeting on 8 October 2024 Councillor quoracy had been confirmed (Minute 4 refers).

At the meeting of LJF in June 2024 the list of unions to be represented at meetings had been amended to reflect changes since the last review and a list of the unions who were represented at LJF was set out in the report. At the meeting it had been agreed that the quoracy for Trade Unions attendance should be three in total and the quoracy requirement for Councillors should remain at three, which matched the Trade Unions.

Resolved: That the proposals for Union and Councillor Membership of the Local Joint Forum be noted.

14. ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

The Committee considered a report on the approval of a Zero Tolerance Policy, a copy of which was appended to the report.

The report explained that the implementation of the draft Policy would affect all customers and staff. It explained how the Council might respond, adapt or restrict access to a Service when it was considered that a customer's behaviour was unacceptable. It also set how the Council expected staff to operate, this was to ensure that the Council could protect its staff and the services it provided.

The report was set out in two parts. The first section was a public document that set out the proposed Policy and the second part was for the Council's and Brighter Future for Children's use internally and provided guidance and strategies for dealing with situation where members of the public presented with unacceptable behaviours.

The report explained that Zero Tolerance would mean that the Council would not tolerate any form of abuse, assault or harassment of Council staff and would act directly against any such behaviour. The Policy set out and defined what it considered to be all categories of violence, harassment and abuse, all of which were detrimental to employee wellbeing. The target audience was firstly customers, business users, clients and members of the public who used the Council's services and secondly, staff; the Policy covered employed staff and others who worked on behalf of the Council including contractors and volunteers. The Policy also provided guidance on what should happen during and after an incident, whether face-to-face, over the telephone, online (such as social media),

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or via postal correspondence. The Appendices contained examples of how to break contact and the plethora of training and supporting guidance that was available for staff and managers.

A working party, consisting of colleagues from Health and Safety, Human Resources, the Customer Relations Team and the Customer Fulfilment Centre had created the first draft of the Policy. A desk research exercise had been carried out to gauge and understand the approach that had been taken by other local authorities and public bodies to zero tolerance of violence, harassment and abuse. This had shown that Councils across the country were facing similar challenges and had published policies of zero tolerance. The Policy had been widely consulted on within the Council.

A plan was in place to communicate the Policy to managers, employees and customers which would include news items on the intranet informing staff of the new Policy, it would be highlighted in the weekly newsletter to all staff and there would be drop-in sessions for managers which would be run by Health and Safety colleagues. The communications plan for customer would include posters for public spaces and social media, updating all call centre telephone lines across the Council with the Zero Tolerance approach to call handling and updating the Council's website with the Policy.

Resolved: That the implementation of a Zero Tolerance Policy, attached to the report at Appendix 1, be approved.

15. REVIEW OF COUNCIL'S EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

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

Appendix A	Code of Conduct
Appendix B	Gifts and Hospitality
Appendix C	Workload
Appendix D	Working from Abroad

The report included a table that set out in summary terms for each of the revised policies 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 policies where they were cross-referenced with other Policies.

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

- **Code of Conduct;**
- **Gifts and Hospitality;**
- **Workload;**
- **Working from Abroad.**

16. UPDATE ON RBC'S INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY AND PLAN

The Committee considered a report that provided the annual update on delivery of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. A copy of Strategy was attached to the report at Appendix 1, a year one plan update was attached at Appendix 2 and the year 2 delivery plan was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report stated that Reading was a diverse and vibrant place with pockets of affluence and deprivation. Most of the people who worked for the Council were local with approximately half of the workforce (48%) living in the Borough and a further 37% had an RG postcode. The desire was for the Council to have a workforce that reflected and understood the communities it served and to be seen as an employer of choice within the Borough's communities, one that valued inclusion and diversity and the different perspectives they brought.

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The Council's Inclusion and Diversity ambition was to create an inclusive culture where all staff could do their best work and could thrive. Tangible progress had been made since the launch of the Strategy and this was set out in the report. The main priorities for the second year of the Plan were set out in the report and in detail in Appendix 3.

Resolved: That the progress that had been made in relation to the delivery of the Council's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy be noted.

17. RBC STAFF SURVEY AND ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered a report that set out the staff survey outcomes and action plan. Detailed results from the staff survey were attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Council regularly ran a staff survey to understand the views of staff about working for the Council and the latest survey had been carried out in July 2024. The survey had consisted of 58 questions, plus optional questions about the respondent. There had been 793 responses which had represented 43% of the Council's workforce. This was a similar response to the previous year's survey. Headline results for the survey had been published to all staff and a corporate action plan had been created to address the cross-cutting themes of bullying and harassment, leadership and aligning priorities. These themes had been identified following detailed analysis of the results and consideration of themes that had been presented from previous surveys but, which had not been positively impacted by previous action plans. Additionally, each Executive Director had reviewed the responses for their service areas and was in the process of agreeing their Directorate action plans.

Overall, the results had remained positive with scores broadly similar to, or showing a modest improvement on, the previous survey. The report set out areas where there had been very high positive scores of 85% or more and questions which had seen a positive increase of 3% or more. The report also set out questions that had seen an adverse increase of 3% or more.

Analysis by Assistant Director area had suggested that there were differences between teams in respect of some questions with some teams scoring significantly better than others when responses to individual questions were compared. Work to understand the reasons behind this were underway, including understanding the patterns that had been shown between high and low scoring questions within individual teams. Work had already been carried out to understand if and where differences existed relating to different protected characteristics.

The results had been shared with the Corporate Management Team in September 2024 and three areas had been highlighted for action at corporate level, as follows:

- Bullying and Harassment;
- Leadership;
- Aligning priorities.

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

18. SPEAKING UP

The Committee considered a report on the work under development to encourage staff to speak up when they were aware of errors, poor practice or behaviours, or improvements that could be made.

The report explained that the Council had established procedures and policies for whistleblowing, staff supervision, one-to-ones, exit interviews, internal audits, dealing with bullying and harassment. However, recent events in relation to both the Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) issue and staff survey results in respect of those employees stating they had either experienced or witnessed bullying and harassment in the previous 12 months, suggested there was a more fundamental cultural issue that needed to be addressed. An action had been included in the TRO action plan to encourage and

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support staff to speak up when they were aware of errors, poor practice or improvements that could be made. The Chief Executive would report on progress in relation to the whole TRO action plan at Audit and Governance Committee on 21 January 2025. The Corporate Staff Survey action plan was also relevant to this issue (see Minute 17 above).

The report stated that whilst effective communication of the Council's commitment to encourage people to speak up would be an important aspect this work, it would be insufficient by itself to change the culture in relation to how staff felt about speaking up. Detailed proposals would be considered by the Corporate Management Team in December 2024 but, the actions were expected to include the following:

- Creation of a 'speaking up' publication to clearly set out for staff what the Council's expectations were and how they would be supported if they spoke up;
- Role modelling by senior leaders;
- Provision of additional learning and development opportunities;
- Exploration of how developing a 'learning organisation' mindset and practices could ensure staff felt supported to report issues early.

Resolved: That the work under development to encourage staff to speak up when they were aware of errors, poor practice or behaviours, or improvements that could be made be noted.

19. REDUNDANCY AND SPECIAL SEVERANCE PAYMENT COSTS – 1 APRIL 2024- 30 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Committee considered a report that provided a summary of Special Severance Payments that had been made between 1 April 2024 and 30 September 2024. The report did not include termination costs for schools-based staff and stated that there had been no early retirements on the grounds of efficiency and no redundancies during the period.

Resolved: That the total of Special Severance Payments incurred between 1 April 2024 and 30 September 2024 was £93,448.72 be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.59pm).