

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 8TH FEBRUARY 2024, 7:00PM – 7:40PM

PRESENT:

Councillors: Reg Rice (Chair), Cressida Johnson (Vice-Chair), Dawn Barnes and Erdal Dogan

1. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred to the notice of filming at meetings and this information was noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS (IF ANY)

Apologies for absence were received from Ellen Matheson Harley and Haydee Nunes De Souza.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Dogan declared a personal interest in item 9 and would recuse himself from the meeting for this item.

He clarified that this was not a prejudicial interest but is taken forward further to considering Part 5, section A part 1 & 2 of the Council's Constitution and with an abundance of caution.

5. DEPUTATIONS / PETITIONS / PRESENTATIONS / QUESTIONS

There were no deputations/petitions/presentations or questions.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That minutes of the meeting of 21 December 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

7. PEOPLE REPORT

Tanya Patchett, Head of Employee Relations, Business Partners & Reward, introduced the report as set in the agenda pack at pages 5 -10.

The People Report combined key workforce data and analysis including headcount, the cost of both the permanent workforce and off payroll arrangements, starters/leavers, sickness absence and Apprentices as shown in Appendix A.

The following was noted in response to questions from the Committee:

- In terms of the plans around reducing agency staffing, Officers advised that the aim was to reduce the number of agency staff by the end of this financial year. The Council had contracts with Matrix which was the organisation that provided agency workers. Directors had set out a plan which reduced their use of agency spend over the remainder of this contract. This was also monitored by Directors and Cabinet Members in regular meetings to ensure this was on track with continual reductions. Targets had been reviewed to focus on areas where larger reductions would need to be made.
- In response to a follow up question, the Committee noted that there was no set time limit for an agency worker and they could continue as an agency worker indefinitely. However, the preference was to reduce the number of agency contracts.
- Officers added that the Council had aimed to provide all agency workers a fair income and benefits. Regular checks would be carried out when there was an increase in pay rates to ensure that no agency worker would be falling below their pay grade and to also ensure they were receiving equal treatment to permanent employees where the law requires it.
- There was a drive to convert agency workers to permanent employees to reduce costs and increase stability in the workforce.
- There were currently around 607 agency workers within the Council. There was a higher number of agency workers within the Children, Adults and Housing services due to difficulties in recruiting to permanent roles. This issue was widespread and not limited to Haringey.
- It was also difficult to recruit permanent staff into specialist roles in technology and legal.
- In response to a question from the Committee regarding comparison of agency workers in Haringey and its neighbouring boroughs, it was noted that it was difficult to compare this on a like for like basis.
- In response to a question regarding the drop in the number of apprenticeships, Officers advised that there had been concerted efforts across the organisation to increase the number of apprenticeships specifically recruiting people externally, as one of the targets was to drive the number of young people coming into the organisation. It was also noted that there would always be fluctuations in apprenticeship rates.
- The Committee heard that the percentage of people that came out of their apprenticeship and retained by the Council was high. In addition, the vast majority of that 132 apprentices in December 2023 were existing employees undertaking apprenticeship qualification with the Council.

RESOLVED:

To note the report.

8. HR POLICIES - PROPOSAL AND REVISED FORWARD PLAN

Tanya Patchett, Head of Employee Relations, Business Partners & Reward, introduced the report as set out in the agenda pack at pages 11-18.

The report sets out a new proposal for approaching the revision of policies in Haringey council and presented a forward plan for policy review in 2024/25.

The report was presented following extensive feedback the Employee Relations team and managers in respect of the use of our current policies. This had been discussed at length with Trade Unions who agreed with the revised approach and suggested priority policies for the forward plan.

The vast majority of HR casework in the Council was related to one of the following five policies below and these were the policies proposed for review in 2024/25.

The policies included:

- Disciplinary Policy
- Capability Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Sickness Absence Policy

HR policies had developed over a number of years and required review to be shorter, easier to understand and operate. Due to the complexity of policies, each of the policies had an accompanying set of practice notes so managers, employees and ER specialists would need to be versed in both documents. By simplifying existing policies, the aim was to remove the need for separate practice notes.

An example template of a simplified policy was presented to the Committee at pages 14-17 in the agenda pack. This document would be used as a basic template and would be amended to reflect the Council's Policies.

The Committee sought clarification around the Council's Disciplinary Policy. The Committee was advised that if an employee receives any sanction other than dismissal, they would need to submit an appeal which would be heard by a senior manager. If the employee was dismissed, then the process of appeal would come to Members, this was regardless of the employee's grade.

RESOLVED:

The Committee considered the proposal and approved the approach and the policy forward plan for the coming Municipal Year.

9. TRADE UNION FACILITY TIME AGREEMENT

Cllr Dogan left the meeting room at 19.25, in accordance with his earlier declaration of interest.

Dan Paul, Chief People Officer, introduced the report as set out in the agenda pack at pages 19 – 32.

This report updated the Trade Union Facility Time agreement, which dated from 2011. It updated facility time allowances for each union, modernises the agreement and included a mechanism for dispute resolution.

Between 2011-2024, there had been substantial changes to the way the Council operated, the services that were delivered and the way they were delivered, for instance the insourcing of Homes for Haringey and the profile of Union membership.

The Council had been in a period of austerity from 2010 onwards, so there had been some reductions in the Council's workforce and union membership.

The Teaching and non-teaching unions would each appoint an Employee Side secretary. The role of the Employee Side Secretary was to co-ordinate responses from all the trade unions they represented and to convey them to the Council. The Employee Side Secretary for the Teacher unions would be representing the NEU, ASCL, NAHT & NASUWT unions and for the non-teacher unions would be Unison, GMB and Unite.

The main changes highlighted in terms of facilities was the increase for the NAU based on membership and workload, and a decrease for Unite based on low levels of membership.

The report also highlighted the transitional agreement where, at an aggregated total level for each Trade Union, increases to facility time were proposed, they would take effect on the first day of the month after the agreement had been approved by General Purposes Committee and Schools Forum. This would be the Implementation Date. Where decreases were proposed, they would be delayed for 6 months after the Implementation Date to allow for a transitional period.

RESOLVED:

The Committee approved the Facility Time Agreement.

10. ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE POLICY (AMENDMENT)

Cllr Dogan returned to the meeting room at 19:29

Dan Paul, Chief People Officer, introduced the report as set out in the agenda pack at pages 33 – 36.

This report recommended a change to the wording of section 8.2 of the Organisational Change Policy – Redeployment.

The following was noted in response to questions from the Committee:

- In order to maximise redeployment opportunities and minimise redundancies, it was considered beneficial to widen the grade band at which redeployment was likely to be appropriate, from the current three grades (one up and one down) to five grades (three up and one down).
- The Committee noted that this policy does not include teachers who were employed by the Council. Teachers would have their own terms and conditions for employment.
- Pay protection was in place for 18 months if the job was at a lower grade to the substantive job to allow the employee to adjust to new circumstances.

RESOLVED:

The Committee approved the following change in Section 8.2 of the Organisational Change Policy:

Current wording:

A vacancy will only be considered a suitable alternative post if it is either at the same grade, at one grade up, or one grade down, from the redeployee's substantive grade.

New proposed wording:

A vacancy will only be considered a suitable alternative post if it is either at the same grade, at up to three grades up (two in the case of those on Senior Manager terms and conditions of Employment), or one grade down from the redeployee's substantive grade.

11. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no new items of urgent business.

12. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that the dates of future meeting were to be confirmed.

CHAIR: Councillor Reg Rice

Signed by Chair

Date