

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate

Date: 17 April 2023

Time: 4.00 pm

Present: Councillors J Cleverly (Chair), S Adan, J Harris, G Horton, M Howells, M Linton, B Perkins, C Reeks, J Reynolds and K Thomas

In Attendance: Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director Transformation and Corporate Centre), Tracy McKim (Head of People Policy and Transformation), Kevin Howells (HR and OD Manager), Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Adviser), Taylor Strange (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

None.

2 Declaration of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 January 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd January 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising

The Committee requested updates on the following:

On page 6 of the minutes - The Committee requested an update on conversations with Registered Social Landlords contributing towards the Community Safety Warden service.

On page 12 of the minutes - The Committee requested verification on whether the streetlights can permit daily variations for on and off times.

On page 14 of the minutes – The Committee wished to know if there are any legal implications of not recording calls in the Contact Centre.

On page 16 of the minutes - The Committee requested a list of the assets that the Council own. The Head of People Policy and Transformation then informed the Committee that this project has started, with the assets currently being checked as well as looking at implications in relations to these such as cost and environmental impact. Once this is done a strategic asset management plan will be developed.

On page 21 of the minutes - it was highlighted that Newport Transport would provide digital information at bus shelters, and wanted to know if there was any update.

4 Recruitment and Retention

Invitees:

- Rhys Cornwall – Strategic Director – Transformation and Corporate Change
- Tracy McKim – Head of People, Policy and Transformation
- Kevin Howells – HR and OD Manager

The Head of People, Policy and Transformation advised that during the Council Service Area Plan 2022-24 report at the 5th December 2022 committee meeting, Members identified Recruitment and Retention issues as an area that they would like to look into further. The HR and OD Manager then gave a brief overview of the report.

The Committee asked the following:

- The Committee asked for a comparison of national statistics with those from Newport, particularly noting any discrepancies. Additionally, they were interested in the average starting and ending employment ages at the NCC.

The HR and OD Manager advised the Committee they will provide the relevant data and trends.

- The Committee expressed interest in further data regarding reasons for employees leaving and the demographics of sought-after candidates for employment.

The HR and OD Manager advised they will provide a workforce demographic analysis to the Committee.

- The Committee inquired about pay raises.

The HR and OD Manager advised that pay rises in recent years have been more substantial compared to earlier periods. This was tied to factors such as teacher pay awards, pension cost increases, and grant-funded positions. They also indicated that the workforce size has grown over the past few years.

- The Committee queried about the ratio of supervisors and managers to lower grade employees.

The HR and OD Manager indicated that lower-paid workers' wages are increasing, potentially narrowing the pay gap. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation mentioned that higher-scale positions, which require specific skills, often face shortages. They also emphasized the significance of addressing other workforce disparities, including gender and race, besides age.

- The Committee questioned if there were trends among employees who conducted exit interviews.

The HR and OD Manager advised they can compile such data, and pointed out that previous exit interviews failed to capture reasons for seeking new jobs, but the process has since been revised to include this information.

- The Committee inquired about the salary range breakdown, particularly between high-scale and entry-level salaries.

The Strategic Director pointed out that the report provides a general overview of pay awards, such as last year's within NCC, but added that these have been below 1% over the past decade. They clarified that the report's figure includes total staff costs,

including pensions. The Strategic Director also mentioned Newport's rapidly growing population under 65, resulting in a significant portion of school-based staff. They agreed to take note of the Committee's specific data interests for future reporting.

- The Committee enquired about the "market force policy".

The HR and OD Manager confirmed its existence, but noted it's currently unused. However, they mentioned it may come into play if recruitment challenges arise for specific posts. It was further noted that implementing this policy could invite claims from staff with similar role responsibilities to supplemented posts. The Council, along with others, aims to explore other mechanisms before resorting to the market force policy.

- The Committee pointed out regional disparities in pay.

The HR and OD Manager stated that while pay structures are similar across councils, the greater disparities lie in the external competitive market. The Strategic Director added that factors like workload can also contribute to these differences, exemplifying that council pay structures can't compete with private sector engineering roles. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation advised that personal reasons also contribute to staff departures.

- The Committee commented that the living wage is £10.90, but two grade structures fall below this.

The HR and OD Manager explained that supplementary pay is provided when wages drop under the living wage and currently pay awards are under negotiation. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation assured that no staff member is paid below the living wage.

- The Committee questioned if incentives are offered to encourage people to work and relocate to Newport.

The HR and OD Manager responded that this approach is used during targeted recruitment, and information about the city and other related details are available on the jobs page on the NCC website.

- The Committee enquired about the salaries of employees working with partners like Norse and SRS.

The Strategic Director clarified that SRS is employed by Torfaen Council, which faces similar challenges regarding the salaries of skilled workers.

- The Committee expressed interest in maintaining the size of departments.

The Strategic Director acknowledged tough decisions were made concerning staff reductions and removal of posts. The HR and OD Manager further added that the UK's departure from the EU affected available staff. While NCC has access to the government sponsorship scheme, they don't actively pursue these sponsorships. They typically use agency staff to fill gaps, but this approach is currently under review.

- The Committee wondered if elected members could receive employee benefits.

The Head of People Policy and Transformation recalled this issue from two previous committee meetings and stated it's under review, especially for benefits supporting council goals like the Cycle to Work scheme.

- The Committee asked what strategies the Officers would like to implement to address existing challenges. The HR and OD Manager suggested reassessing the wording of job applications and encouraging team leaders and managers to engage with the public. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation recommended simplifying job advertisements, even if the supporting documentation remains technical.
- The Committee expressed their support for value-based recruitment and appreciated the promotion of wellbeing assistance in the workplace.
- The Committee asked if there were any hard facts on Brexit's impact on recruitment and retention.

The HR and OD Manager noted there was no data specifically to the impact of Brexit on Newport Council's staff. The Strategic Director explained that there has been national research on the issue of Brexit but not at a local level. It was also advised that the Head of People, Policy and Transformation writes a regular report on external pressures and cost of living which goes to Cabinet

- The Committee questioned the impact of costly agency staff on overall employee salary expenses.

The HR and OD Manager revealed that the agency staff cost in the last fiscal year was approximately £2.8 million, a considerable amount. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation pointed out that certain services rely heavily on agency staff, partially offsetting these costs by avoiding full-time employment expenses. The Strategic Director stressed the necessity of maintaining certain workforce levels for smooth operations, requiring agency staff to fill in during absences.

- The Committee enquired if agency staff could be hired permanently to decrease costs.

The HR and OD Manager responded that some agencies permit this transition, while others do not.

- The Committee suggested emphasising recognition awards like the "Extra Mile Award", emphasising that staff appreciation extends beyond just pay increases.

The HR and OD Manager confirmed that an annual recognition initiative exists, allowing both unions and staff to nominate individuals for these awards.

- The Committee questioned if there was a strategy for collaborating with other authorities to cut costs by using the same agencies.

The HR and OD Manager indicated that they are cooperating with other Gwent partners establish a single point of access for recruitment, although this is still in the early stages for regional recruitment. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation detailed the Council's membership in the WLGA.

- The Committee asked which platforms, besides the Newport website and a few recruitment agencies, are used to advertise jobs.

The HR and OD Manager shared that they use Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok for general advertising, and additional channels for targeted advertising.

- The Committee asked if the Council has considered a bank system for positions like teachers.

The Strategic Director shared that this was discontinued in 2010 due to local analysis revealing significant costs and pointed out that it's a national rather than a local authority issue. The HR and OD Manager added that the Welsh Government is working on a solution for supply teachers.

- The Committee inquired about a potential increase in recorded staff meetings. T

The HR and OD Manager indicated several changes have been implemented and they are evaluating their impacts. The Strategic Director added that the impact on sickness rates and staff morale isn't clear yet. The Committee emphasised that the effects of remote work aren't limited to productivity but also significantly influence staff communication.

- The Committee enquired about any employee feedback regarding remote work.

The HR and OD Manager stated that surveys will be sent out to gather opinions on the New Normal policy and to identify further support needed. The Strategic Director explained that survey responses have informed the policy, with a focus on providing choice and ensuring staff wellbeing. They also noted the challenge of separating work from personal time, a central concern in wellbeing efforts. The Head of People, Policy and Transformation the minimum expectations for staff engagement within departments.

The Committee thanked the officers for attending.

Conclusions

- Members thanked the officers for their attendance and praised the information contained in the report. Members expressed their satisfaction with the value-based recruitment process and the emphasis on the right values and believed that this approach would lead to a more effective and efficient workforce. Members also appreciated the effort put into making the onboarding process smooth and easy to understand.
- Members requested information on how the statistics regarding recruitment and retention issues in local authorities are reflected in Newport, or where Newport differs from those statistics. Additionally, Members requested information on the average age of people who leave and the average age of new recruits, as well as the length of time employees stay working in the Council.
- Members requested data on employee departures and applicant demographics. It was also asked if it could be advised how the Council attracts a diverse range of applicants, and if there is any analysis of the applicant pool's demographics. It was also requested if they could receive demographics on existing staff that include gender, race as well as age.
- Members requested if they could have a comparison of the workforce over previous years, as well as workforce numbers comparative to other local authorities.
- Members asked if they could have a breakdown of salary bands in terms of the percentage of employees in entry-level and top-level grades, and how does the ratio of managers receiving pay awards compare to that of lower-level staff?
- Members highlighted the Senior Audit Officer as being a shared post, and asked if introducing shared roles at lower levels could be a possible solution to some recruitment and retention issues.

5 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Invitee:

- Neil Barnett – Scrutiny Adviser

a. Action Plans

The Scrutiny Advisor noted all issues raised in the minutes will be actioned as well as figures of the call wait times in the Contact Centre, and then informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next committee meeting:

Monday 25th July 2022 at 4pm, the agenda items;

- **2022/23 Service Plan End of Year Reviews**

It was also noted that from July 2023 – May 2024, Councillor Mark Howells would be the new chair of the Committee.

The meeting terminated at 5.45 pm