

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Personnel Committee held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 11 November 2021.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chair), Mrs C Bell, Mrs S Chandler, Mr P J Oakford, Mrs S Prendergast, Mr C Simkins, Dr L Sullivan, Mr B J Sweetland and Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Beer (Corporate Director of People and Communications), Mr P Royel (Head of HR & OD) and Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### **1. Membership**

*(Item 1)*

RESOLVED that the Membership be noted.

##### **2. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this meeting.**

*(Item 3)*

No declarations were made at the start of the meeting.

At the commencement of Item 8 – Pay Bargaining, Dr Sullivan declared an interest as her husband was a KCC employee.

##### **3. Annual Workforce Profile Report Update**

*(Item 4)*

1. Paul Royel presented the report, explaining that the majority of the data was unaltered since the previous consideration by the Committee and noting that the Committee had recognised then that the data was indicative of unusual times for the organisation and employment arrangements more generally.
2. Mr Royel provided an overview of key points in the report, including highlighting that recruitment and absence levels were returning to normal levels; turnover was increasing but still at the low end of the normal expected bracket (10 – 15%); female representation at senior levels continued to be high; sickness levels were up slightly on the previous year but not at pre-pandemic levels.
3. Mr Royel replied to questions of detail and noted comments, which included the following:
  - Higher Adult Social Care directorate sickness levels were expected to a degree, in part because of stricter regulations dictating when staff must take sick leave. Additional capacity to cover sickness absence was built into service and staffing arrangements.

- Some leavers were asked for feedback on the organisation at the point of departure but there were limitations on how and when this was captured and not necessarily as illustrative as might be anticipated.
- COVID specific sickness absences only accounted for 5% of sick leave.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

#### **4. People Strategy 2017 to 2022 Evaluation**

*(Item 5)*

1. Mr Royel introduced the report which provided an evaluation of the People Strategy 2017 – 2022. The Strategy was the first of its type used at KCC serving as an overarching employment strategy for the organisation. Mr Royel explained that the Strategy set out a 5 year vision for the workforce so it was clear what KCC expected as an employer and how it worked with staff. He advised that some aspects had been accelerated in response to the Pandemic and it now featured as one of the key projects within the Strategic Reset Program.
2. The evaluation undertaken had examined all 8 main aims and objectives of the Strategy and Mr Royel provided an overview of the findings. Key successes included; recognition of good engagement with staff, E-Learning development, reshaping of the management development offer and the introduction of the Kent Academy. In addition, other achievements across the employment offer included; 26% increase in Kent Rewards use over 4 years, two thousand mindfulness sessions attended, positive response in staff surveys for staff being treated with respect, 24% reduction in the use of agency staff (excluding COVID testing staff) and increase in the graduate intake scheme.
3. Mr Royel noted that there remained areas for further work, as would be expected. Key points included; the need to build managerial confidence as part of the ongoing management development programmes, workforce planning needed to be more strategic to ensure KCC had the right people in the right places at the right time.
4. Summarising, Mr Royel confirmed that the evaluation had indicated significant positive outcomes via the People Strategy and the activity required to address the areas for further work would continue to be managed under the next Strategy.
5. Mr Royel responded to questions of detail and comments, which included:
  - Confirming that additional work had been undertaken to help the organisation better understand and address issues related to staff sickness involving mental health and that there was also a staff support group focusing on mental health.
  - It was clarified that while the vast majority of managers had the right skills and knowledge and were supported by effective policies and processes, some lacked the confidence to respond flexibly and dynamically. This had been highlighted in the pandemic and was being assessed to deliver a positive solution.

- Ensuring clear understanding at all levels in terms of accountability and responsibility was accepted as a vital issue and that it was important that managers were able to make decisions at the right level. Staff survey results indicated that there was increased support and understanding for management, partly due to the increased visibility and leadership action required during the pandemic.
- The Total Contribution Payment system explained in terms of the organisation needing to have a consistent and manageable approach to assessing and rewarding performance. It was highlighted that the financial differences between grades was not necessarily significant but the formal process ensured the organisation had to recognise hard work and good performance with improved pay. The number of appeals against TCP gradings remained very low.
- It was explained that the gender pay-gap calculation was not seen as effective and useful approach and that the organisation instead valued the effective grading and evaluation of jobs and more importantly, the equal pay audit undertaken showed that there was no discrepancy in terms of equal pay. It was suggested that the skewed averages shown in the gender pay-gap calculation reflected wider societal issues which influenced some employment elements and they were beyond the remit of the Council address. It was highlighted that the high number of women in senior roles at KCC evidenced that there were not major barriers to progression and significant success within the organisation.
- In terms of inclusion, the conversion rate of applications to jobs for relevant groups had improved significantly since the implementation of the Strategy. The work of support groups was highlighted in this area and to ensure the organisation can listen to staff and understand their experiences better. Further work was still required to improve diverse and inclusive recruitment but it was noted that wider societal factors impacted on recruitment in ways outside of KCC's control.

RESOLVED that the achievements and overall evaluation of the People Strategy be noted.

## **5. Employee Relations Casework Activity**

*(Item 6)*

1. Mr Royel introduced the report, explaining that data and figures always varied due to the differences between cases. He highlighted that the complexity of cases had increased significantly.
2. Following up from points raised at previous meetings, Mr Royel provided further information regarding the reasoning for settlements. This involved clarifying commercial assessments were important in terms of considering the most efficient and appropriate way for KCC to manage these type of situations.
3. Responding to questions, Mr Royel advised Members that the appeals process was robust and appropriate. The concern regarding how any existing relationships between staff involved in the complaints process was noted but reassurances were given regarding appropriate separation when required. The suggestion of direct Member involvement in the process was not considered

necessarily appropriate in view of the different relationship with KCC and the importance of maintaining independence.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**6. Exclusion of the Press and Public**  
*(Item 7)*

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**EXEMPT ITEMS**

(Open minutes)

**7. Pay Bargaining**  
*(Item 8)*

*(Dr Sullivan declared an interest in that her husband was a KCC employee but stated that it did not preclude her from participating in the discussion.)*

1. Mr Royel provided an update on progress with the local pay bargaining arrangements for 2022/23. It was highlighted that the outcome of the negotiations would be considered at the January Personnel Committee meeting.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.