

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

18 November 2024

Chairperson: Councillor A.J.Richards

Councillors: S.A.Knoyle, S.Purseley, P.D.Richards, T.Bowen, C.Lewis, J.Hale, J.Jones and R.G.Jones

Non Voting Members: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, S.Harris, S.K.Hunt, J.Hurley, S.Jones, A.Llewelyn and C.Phillips

Officers in Attendance: S.Rees, D.Hopkins, S.Evans, N.Daniel, L.Margetson and C.Plowman

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interests received.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2024 were approved as an accurate record.

4. **Annual Equalities Report 2023 2024**

The Committee were provided with the Equalities Employment Information for the year 2023-2024.

It was noted that this report formed part of the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty and contained all of the relevant data that the Council must publish as part of that duty.

RESOLVED:

The Equalities Employment Information for the year 2023-2024, contained within the circulated report, was approved.

5. **Social Partnership Duty Annual Report**

Members received the Social Partnership Duty Annual Report, which had been prepared in line with the Social Partnership Duty as set out in the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023.

It was explained that Local Authorities were required to seek consensus or compromise with their recognised Trade Unions when setting their well-being objectives, and making decisions of a strategic nature about the reasonable steps they intend to take to deliver those objectives. Members were informed that the circulated report set out how Neath Port Talbot Council sought to do that with the recognised Trade Unions. It was added that those recognised Trade Unions had endorsed the content of the circulated report.

RESOLVED:

The Social Partnership Duty Annual Report was approved and submitted to the Social Partnership Council.

6. **Christmas and New Year Holiday Arrangements 2025 2026 and 2026 2027**

Officers provided a report in regard to the opening and closing arrangements for the main Civic Offices during the Christmas and New Year Holiday periods for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027.

It was noted that consultation had taken place with Chief Officers and Trade Unions regarding the preferred options.

RESOLVED:

The proposals in relation to Christmas / New Year holiday arrangements for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027, contained within the circulated report, were approved.

7. **Volunteering Policy**

Officers presented a report which sought to seek approval for a new Volunteering Policy to be implemented across the Council.

It was explained that the development of the Volunteering Policy was detailed as one of the commitments made in the Councils Strategic Workforce Plan and the Delivery Action Plan, for year two of the Workforce Strategy.

Members were informed that the Council already used volunteers across many services, however there wasn't a standard framework for recruiting and managing those volunteers; developing a policy, would help to ensure a consistent approach and make sure that arrangements, such as pre-employment checks, were adhered to. Officers also highlighted the benefits to wellbeing, as volunteers gained a lot from volunteering experiences.

Officers stated that the Volunteering Policy will create opportunities across the Council and can be taken up by those external to the Council, as well as Council employees; it would be another measure in the range of benefits that the Council provides.

A discussion took place in regard to monitoring and mapping impacts of this policy across the Council. It was noted that Officers did not currently capture data in relation to volunteers; however, arrangements will be made to monitor the consistency of the approach, and the relevant data will be captured moving forward. It was mentioned that Officers had engaged with services that currently used volunteers and had, for example, made sure that services such as schools were aware of the pre-employment checks.

Members asked for a better understanding of some of the finer details of the policy and what could be achieved. It was explained that the services themselves would create a list of volunteering opportunities and advertise them, inviting people to present themselves to undertake a particular role; before a member of staff decided to volunteer, they should discuss the role with their Line Manager to ensure there weren't any conflicts of interest. Officers stated that volunteering roles would not take away paid employment and would be supplementary to the Councils core services; a volunteer would not be undertaking the work of a paid employee.

In addition to the above, it was highlighted that the Council already used a lot of volunteers across services such as schools, parks and theatres; however, the policy would hopefully increase the opportunities and provide a framework in order to be able to publicise those opportunities. Officers confirmed that it was a helpful way for

people to gain experience and go on to gain employment, or for those who just want to help.

Members queried the practical arrangements in terms of monitoring and training the volunteers, and referenced the use of this policy for those who were at risk of losing employment. It was stated that volunteers would not be left unsupervised within any of the workplaces, especially those regarding children or adult services; there would always be a paid officer working alongside them. Officers highlighted that in circumstances where someone was at risk of losing their employment, they would primarily use other ways to support them in identifying alternative employment; however, it could be something to utilise alongside other routes, for example in order to help someone gain new and useful skills.

Further clarity was provided in regard to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and the payment of these checks. Officers confirmed that DBS checks for volunteers were free; although there was a small admin fee to process the DBS, which was around £5 per volunteer.

A discussion took place in regard to the volunteering organisations that were already in existence across the County Borough; Members queried the alignment between these organisations and the Volunteering Policy. Officers explained that the Volunteering Policy was specifically for people who would volunteer directly with the Council and not via the existing volunteering organisations. It was noted that organisations, such as Friends of Margam Park, were likely to have their own arrangements in place for membership. It was mentioned that the establishment of a Volunteering Policy would put more emphasis on the role of the managers of volunteers; ensuring compliance with safe recruitment checks for example.

Members highlighted that some of the external volunteering organisations currently supported Council services. It was asked if these organisations would be exempt from registering with the scheme if it was only relevant to those volunteering directly with the Council. Officers explained that the Volunteering Policy wasn't a scheme in which people and/or groups had to register, instead it was a standardised practice. It was noted that volunteering organisations were likely to already have arrangements in place that were similar to that of the Volunteering Policy; Officers suggested that they could recommend the detail of the policy to the relevant volunteering organisations.

The Committee requested that established organisations be informed of this policy in order to increase scope and opportunity; and enable members of the organisations to volunteer if they wished to do so.

RESOLVED:

The implementation of a Volunteering Policy, as detailed in the circulated report, was approved.

8. **Workforce Information Quarter 2**

Members received the Quarter 2 Workforce Information report for 2024/25.

Officers raised that there had been an increase in sickness absence; talking to colleagues across Wales, this seemed to be a National trend rather than specific to Neath Port Talbot. It was noted that this data had been shared with Senior Management Teams across the Council to enable them to identify the reasons for sickness absence across their services, and to ensure that sickness absence was being managed appropriately.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

9. **Employers for Carers, Carer Confident Benchmark Scheme**

Members were informed that Neath Port Talbot Borough Council had successfully been awarded the Employers for Carer's, Carer Confident Scheme, benchmark of Level 2 (Accomplished).

It was noted that in 2022, Members approved the Council's Employers for Carers (EfC) subscription membership; Officers across the People and Organisational Development Team had been working to implement the Council's arrangements in supporting employees who have caring responsibilities outside of work. Officers highlighted that the arrangements had been submitted for assessment, and the results came back as achieving benchmark Level 2 (Accomplished). It was noted that Officers intended to continue to build on this work.

Officers referred to the range of evidence that was submitted for consideration, some of this evidence included:

- Communication arrangements for employees who were carers and the Councils commitment to supporting carers within the workforce.
- Carers Wales Award - Home Care were successful in securing the Line Manager recognition award for the ongoing support provided to employees at the Carers Wales' Carers Week Awards. This demonstrated the bespoke support that they provided.
- Presentations to demonstrate that a range of people, including Line Managers, were briefed to ensure they were aware of how to support carers in the workforce.
- Carers staff survey to find out vital information in regard to what support they need and what more the Council could do to help them.
- Campaign to recruit Carers Champions, who were able to signpost carers to avenues of support and increase awareness.
- Drop-in sessions for Carers Rights Day to increase awareness of support available.
- The development of a Viva Engage Carers Channel, with weekly promotions of self-awareness and support materials.
- How EfC had been included in the on boarding and induction for new starters.

It was highlighted that the criteria for benchmarking mainly related to awareness raising; making sure that people who can support carers in the workplace knew what support to provide, and people who had caring responsibilities knew where to go when they needed that support.

Members asked what the additional actions were required in order to reach the next level. Officers provided the following list in order to achieve Level 3:

- Demonstrate creative and innovative approaches to supporting and engaging carers as part of an open and positive workplace culture.
- Involve carers in the development of policies/guidance and processes to support carers within the workplace.
- Provide a wide range of information and support for carers at all stages of their caring journey.
- Support carers at all stages of employment, from recruitment to returning to, or leaving the workplace.

- Enable and encourage carers to take up practical support both from within and outside the organisation.
- Equip managers to support and retain carers effectively.
- Actively and regularly communicate and promote caring issues/carers throughout the organisation including via line managers.
- Champion caring/carers internally and externally, including leading by example within your workplace and to other employers or your supply chain.

The Committee congratulated the Team on their achievements.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

10. **Employment Rights Bill**

Officers provided Members with information on the new Employment Rights Bill.

It was noted that the Bill was not yet in legislation as it was currently out for consultation. Members were informed that the circulated report identified the changes that would be needed across the Council, as a result of this legislation being implemented.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.

11. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items received.

12. **Access to Meetings**

RESOLVED:

That pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following item of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the above Act.

13. **National Pay Negotiations Update (Exempt under Paragraph 15)**

An update was provided in relation to national pay negotiations.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted.