

**CORPORATE AND EXTERNAL ISSUES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 21st AUGUST 2023

Present – Councillors Galloway (Chairman), Atcha, Bamforth, Chadwick, Cox, Fielding, Heslop, Iqbal, Mistry, Morris, Mort, Price, Priest, Rigby, Taylor, Tighe and Walsh.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Peel	Leader of the Council
Councillor Jiva	Executive Cabinet for Stronger Communities
Mr. L. Fallows	Director of Corporate Resources
Ms. J. King	Assistant Director Human Resources and OD
Mrs. V. Ridge	Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors N. Ayub, Cowen, Flitcroft and Sanders.

Councillor Galloway in the Chair

6. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24th July, 2023 were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes be signed as a correct record.

**7. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR
2023/2024**

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which detailed the proposed work programme for 2023/2024.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2023/2024, as circulated, be noted.

8. REVIEW OF HYBRID WORKING

Ms. J. King, Assistant Director of Human Resources and OD, gave a presentation to members which outlined the work being undertaken and the progress made so far in relation to Hybrid Working.

Information was provided in relation to the following:

- An overview of Hybrid working;
- The Hybrid working policy provisions;
- Information around benefits and challenges for hybrid working;
- Details surrounding consultation on the policy;
- Issues raised by staff and managers;
- Support required for working from home;
- An overview on how many staff are currently working in a hybrid way;
- Details around the training available, and which training is required;
- Information around how the Council is benchmarked against other councils for hybrid working;
- Further information around the guidance provided to the Council by National Joint Council (NJC); and
- Hybrid working and the further review.

Members in their deliberations made the following comments/observations:

- Was the implementation of the hybrid policy partly to address the issues in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff rather than a savings issue;
- The definition of short notice when asking staff to come into the office;
- Was the clear desk policy for all staff;
- When working from home was there a stipulation on the speed of their internet connection;
- The percentage of staff working from home who had not undertaken DSE training;

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- Had there been any research in terms of productivity levels between staff working from home and those working in the office;
- A view that new starters in the Council should spend the majority of their time, at the beginning of their employment, in their place of work to allow them to familiarise themselves with the organisation and colleagues;
- Hybrid working was welcomed;
- Had any tension been caused by the wording in the policy that the majority of time should be spent in the office;
- Inconsistencies with email signatures for Council staff;
- Was the policy at the stage where it could help to inform the Council's Property Strategy review;
- Does the Council have the facility to allow staff to condense their hours over a working week;
- The current wellbeing offer and how we deal with the wellbeing of staff who do not/were unable to engage when working from home;
- Hot desking and was there still a need for wise terminals when the majority of staff now used laptops;
- Do departments regular monitor staff productivity and by what criteria;
- Was access to senior managers and heads of service working from home an issue;
- It was important that a policy was put in place;
- Concern regarding the effect on young people with hybrid working;
- It was felt that it was the senior managers responsibility to be in the workplace most of the time;
- Feedback from staff and managers on hybrid working arrangements;
- Had the implementation of the hybrid policy resulted in any additional costs to the Council;
- The benefits of hybrid working in the future on staff attendance/absence; and
- The impact of working from home on the Town Centre Economy.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

9. APPRENTICESHIPS AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Ms. J. King, Assistant Director of Human Resources/OD, gave a presentation to members which outlined the work being undertaken and the progress made so far in relation to apprenticeships and succession planning.

Information was provided in relation to the following areas:

- Background information to the Council's apprenticeship strategy;
- The current approach taken by Bolton Council;
- Information around the process taken for existing staff;
- Detail around the apprenticeship levy and the rules for funding;
- The number of apprenticeships by Directorate, as of August 2023;
- Detail around the levy and expenditure from April 2017 to July 2023;
- Workforce planning, to include opportunities and age profiles of apprentices;
- Information around how apprenticeships can be used to tackle skills shortages, February to July update;
- Further information around T level industry placements;
- Information on future development opportunities; and
- The recruitment strategy for young people.

A video was also shown from a member of staff within the Corporate Resources Department who joined the Council as an apprentice and explained how his career had progressed from being on the scheme.

Following the presentation, members made the following comments/observations:

- Did the Council set a target for how many apprenticeships we should have over the next few years;
- What was the average term for an apprenticeship;

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- How are we fully utilising the levy fund;
- The success rate of retaining staff once they had completed their apprenticeship;
- Would some individuals have to take a pay cut to be on the apprenticeship scheme;
- The possibility of implementing a loyalty clause in the apprenticeship contract;
- Disappointment was expressed regarding the restrictions imposed on the voucher scheme and it would have been more beneficial if they could have been directed towards paying part of the salaries;
- The flexibility to allocate vouchers, which had not been used, to small businesses was welcomed;
- The involvement and engagement with establishments/organisations who work with ex service men to promote the apprenticeship scheme within Bolton Council;
- The use of the GMAX website to recruit to positions within the Council; and
- Workforce profile and reflecting ethnic minority communities within the Borough.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted and that further details on the work being undertaken in relation to workforce profile and recruitment ED&I interventions be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

10. MEMBERS BUSINESS

The Committee received the extracts of minutes of other meetings of the Council relevant to the remit of this Committee:

- (a) The Cabinet held on 14th August 2023; and
- (b) The Executive Cabinet Member Leader's Portfolio held on 16th August 2023.

Resolved – That the minutes of the various meetings be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 7.40 p.m.)