



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Thursday 29 January 2015 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Butt (Chair), Councillor Moher (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Crane, Kansagra, McLennan and Pavey

Also present: Councillor Perrin

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Denselow and Hirani

1. **Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

None declared.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 January 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. **Matters arising**

None.

4. **Deputations**

None.

5. **Review of Equalities and HR policies and practice at Brent Council**

Councillor Pavey (Deputy Leader of the Council) introduced his review which had been commissioned following an employment tribunal case in September, 2014. He stated that the review was not intended to be an inquiry into any individual HR case, person or department but designed to take stock of the council's HR policies and practice to see where improvements could be made. Councillor Pavey, Cabinet member with responsibility for Equalities and the council's role as an employer, emphasised that the review looked into the part individuals could play in ensuring Brent Council was the best possible place to work. He outlined the strands covered including staff focus groups, workshops, analysis by Investor in People assessors and a LGA policy review and thanked all who had contributed including staff, members and external advisors.

Councillor Pavey stated that the review found that generally Brent was a good place to work however there were two recurrent themes, namely, consistent policy implementation and the under-representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff at senior management level. The latter theme was a national problem however, given the diversity of the community and the workforce, the council had an obligation to challenge. Councillor Pavey stated that embedding dignity and respect throughout the organisation and diversifying senior management were key issues arising from the review and he outlined some of the 31 recommendations in the review which included a review of the code of conduct and competency framework to make expected standards of behaviour clear; embedding standards in HR and decision making processes; corporate learning from grievances and employment tribunals; two way internal communications; focus groups for underrepresented staff and an independent staff survey every two years. To further improve diversity in senior management, the review proposed a bespoke council development programme with a specific focus on underrepresented groups and a reverse mentoring programme. Councillor Pavey advised that the report proposed that the delivery of the implementation of the recommendations in the review be overseen by a committee of councillors and he hoped that the review would bring about genuine change.

Committee members welcomed the report. Questions were raised on the possible reasons why there were not more successful BAME applicants for senior positions and more internal promotion was commended. The value of external development programmes such as with the Kings Fund and Leadership Academies was put forward and also secondments to other boroughs. Improved flexible working patterns for senior management positions was suggested as another means of making posts more attractive to women and BAME communities. Questions were also raised about the assistance given to new arrivals to the borough such as training, presentation and language skills. Reference was also made to the financial difficulties being faced by local government and also the need to understand how to encourage applicants into local government careers.

Councillor Pavey agreed on the need to look at the shortage of BAME applicants and to give existing staff development opportunities. Regarding development programmes, he stated that it had been found that staff take up on external courses was relatively low and it was felt that they were more likely to attend in-house programmes. Councillor Pavey referred to the need for more work on the apprenticeship and graduate programmes and how to place greater emphasis on local recruitment to the latter. He asked the committee to note the findings of his review and to agree the proposal for an action plan.

Councillor Butt (Leader of the Council) acknowledged that the council was embarking on a long process of change and thanked all those who had contributed to the review.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the findings of the review of Equalities and HR policies and practice at Brent Council be noted;
- (ii) that officers prepare an action plan for improvement for March 2015.

6. Stress Policy

The report from the Director of HR provided details of the proposed new Stress Policy. When developing the new policy, the opportunity has been taken to provide clearer guidance to all staff on the symptoms of stress and to expand the policy to cover all stress whether potentially work related or not. The policy made clear that not all stress necessarily impacted negatively on wellbeing and that employees and managers must take active responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

Cara Davani (Director of HR) stated that the policy was part of an on-going policy review and sought to advise managers on how to deal with stress. There was also a commitment to investigate areas where there were high levels of stress.

The committee heard that front line staff tended to experience relatively higher stress levels but the situation was being kept under review. It was acknowledged that forthcoming organisational changes were likely to increase staff stress levels.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that approval be given to the new stress policy;
- (ii) that the HR Director in consultation with the Chief Executive and then consultation with the relevant trade unions, be authorised to make such other changes as may be necessary from time to time to the policy to ensure it remains 'fit for purpose'.

7. Localism Act 2011 - Pay Policy Statements

The purpose of the report from the Director of HR was to members of the arrangements that have been put in place to meet the requirements of Section 38 (1) of the Localism Act 2011 which required local authorities to produce a pay policy statement on an annual basis by 31 March. It was the intention to take the report to the meeting of Full Council in March 2015. The pay policy statement for the council was appended to the report and the statement was consistent with the specific requirements of the Act and set out all the factual pay information in relation to those requirements.

RESOLVED:

that approval be given to the draft Pay Policy Statement attached to the report from the Director of HR as an accurate and factual representation of the council's pay arrangements for 2015/16 prior to consideration and approval by the Full Council in March 2015. Any amendments required during the year would be brought back to a future meeting of the General Purposes Committee and Full Council for approval.

8. Review of polling places 2015

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the report which proposed polling places for the forthcoming General Election in May 2015 in the light of a review based on experience at the previous election and investigation into the availability of premises.

The committee discussed the use of the Pakistan Community Centre, Marley Walk NW2 for Polling District CDU6 in place of a temporary polling station in the vicinity and noted concerns set out in the report regarding the suitability of using this location. Members expressed the view that as a community centre, it should be open to all, noted that at a recent meeting of the Cabinet at the location, they had been made very welcome and reiterated the need to celebrate and value diversity. On the possibility of using the former Douglas Avenue Resource Centre as the polling place for Polling District NWC4 given its disabled access advantages, members noted concerns expressed regarding visibility of the centre and lack of direct access for cars from the Ealing Road. The committee noted the continued unavailability of the Father O'Callaghan Centre for Polling District NFR1 and agreed to the use of Holy Innocents Church Hall on the basis of reverting to the Centre in future years once the building works were completed.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that Bethel Community Centre, 197 Ealing Road, HA0 4LW replace Alperton Community School as the polling place for polling district NAL3;
- (ii) that Christ for the World Mission, Clifford Way, NW10 1AN replace the hut at St Catherine's Church, Dudden Hill Lane as the polling place for polling district CDU2;
- (iii) that Holy Innocents Church Hall, Bacon Lane, NW9 0PG replace the hut outside Father O'Callaghan Centre NW9 0NG as the polling place for polling district NFR1;
- (iv) that Oliver Goldsmith School, Coniston Gardens, NW9 0BD replace the hut outside 195-197 Edgware Road as the polling place for polling district NFR5;
- (v) that John Keble CE School, Crownhill Road, NW10 4DR replace St Matthew's Church, St Mary's Road as the polling place for polling district CHA4;
- (vi) that the Roundwood Club, 49 Longstone Avenue, NW10 3UN replace John Keble CE School, Crownhill Road as the polling place for polling district CKG1;
- (vii) that Hazel Community Centre, Hazel Road, NW10 4PP replace Harlesden Assembly, Purves Road as the polling place for polling district CKG6;
- (viii) that the meeting room at Haridham Hindu Swaminarayan Temple, Woodcock Hill, HA3 0JH replace St Gregory's Science College, Donnington Road as the polling place for polling district NKE4;
- (ix) that the Royal British Legion, 15 Peel Precinct, NW6 5DT replace the OK Club, Neville Close as the polling place for polling district HKI4;
- (x) that Wembley Christian Centre, Carlton Avenue East, HA9 8LX replace Preston Manor High School, Carlton Avenue East as the polling place for polling district NPR3;

- (xi) that St Joseph's Wembley Pastoral Centre, 339 High Road, HA9 6AG replace the former Brent House One Stop Shop as the polling place for polling district NWC1;
- (xii) that Ealing Road Methodist Church Hall be retained as the polling place for polling district NWC4;
- (xiii) that the Pakistan Community Centre, Marley Walk NW2 4PU be recommended to replace the hut outside Cassandra Court as the polling place for polling district CDU6;
- (xiv) that the polling places approved at this meeting be adopted for the General Election on 7 May 2015;
- (xv) that in the event of any polling place becoming unavailable before the May 2015 elections, authority be delegated to the Democratic Services Manager to make any further changes required to polling places for these elections in consultation with the leaders of the political groups on the Council.

9. **Appointments to Sub-Committees / Outside Bodies**

None.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm

M BUTT
Chair