



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on 17 November 2022 at 9:30am

PRESENT: Councillor M Butt (Chair), Councillor M Patel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Donnelly-Jackson, Grahl, Knight, Krupa Sheth and Tatler.

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lorber.

2. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interests made by Members.

3. Deputations (if any)

There were no deputations received.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 18 July 2022 be approved as an accurate record.

5. Matters arising (if any)

There were no matters arising.

6. Recruitment and Retention of Children and Young People Social Workers

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director for Children and Young People (CYP) that provided the Committee with an update on the challenges faced in the recruitment and retention of social workers. The General Purposes Committee were asked to agree the continuation and extension of the previously approved recruitment and retention initiative packages (previously approved by the General Purposes Committee in October 2018) to support the department in employing permanent social workers to ease the financial pressures of sourcing agency staff and to support a stable workforce in CYP.

In presenting the report Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools) supported by Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director for Children and Young People) detailed the current position regarding social work staff recruitment and retention within the department, with particular reference to current challenges and pressures within the Looked After Children and Permanency (LAC & Permanency) Service, along with the proposed approach outlined in order to address the issues identified.

Whilst noting that the availability of suitably qualified Children's Social Work staff remained a national issue, members were advised that the package of measures outlined in the report had been designed to enable Brent to continue competing in what remained an increasingly competitive market for qualified and experienced social work staff. The impact and effectiveness of the measures outlined would also be subject to further review early in 2023, in order for feedback to be shared at a future General Purposes Committee meeting.

In welcoming the report, members acknowledged the competitive environment across London in the recruitment and retention of social workers, noting the value in seeing the process through to achieve an appropriately qualified sustainable workforce within Children and Young People's services in order to continue supporting positive outcomes for service users. Whilst keen to support the work in developing a London wide approach members were also aware of the importance in Brent exhausting all options available to overcome the social work recruitment challenges and on this basis the Committee RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee agree to extend the two recruitment and retention initiatives, which were agreed for the most hard to recruit teams in the Localities Service, to six Care Planning Teams in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service as follows:
 - To increase the one-off payment to newly recruited permanent social work staff on grades PO1 – PO7 from £5,000 to £7,500, on satisfactory completion of probationary period and repayable where an employee leaves the council's employment within 12 months of receiving the payment. (Currently, in the Care Planning Teams in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service the one-off payment is only made to social work staff in grades PO3 to PO7).
 - To increase retention payments for all qualified social work staff on grades PO1 to PO7 from £1,200 to £4,500 per annum (currently the retention payment is made to social work staff in grades PO3 to PO7)
- (2) That the Committee agrees to increase the maximum amount payable to provide relocation package support to key social work qualified posts from £5,000 to £6,000 in line with cost of living increases.
- (3) That continued discretion is provided to the department in how recruitment and retention payments are offered across the department with a continued focus on hard to recruit posts.

7. Zero Hours Report

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director of Governance that sought to provide the Committee with information on the Zero Hours Justice Campaign following Council's confirmed support of the Zero Hours Justice Campaign motion put to Full Council on 11 July 2022.

In presenting the report Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform) outlined the measures already in place across the Council enabling Brent to meet the criteria in order to apply for Silver

Employer accreditation, which recognised the Council would not employ any individual directly on a zero hours contract and was committed to actively encouraging any third party contractors, parties or agencies to phase out the use of zero hours contracts in any services they provided.

In welcoming the report, the Committee recognised Councillor Chan's lead on the campaign and commended the Council's proactive approach in leading the way as one of the first local authorities to apply for accreditation and in supporting Brent's position as a good employer in terms of equality and employment practices. Given the nature of accreditation being sought, which would include working with third parties as part of Brent's supply chain, it was noted that further details would also need to be presented to Cabinet although members were advised that where the Council continued to require specialist workers at short notice and without a clear end date, that had been confirmed as remaining within the spirit of the accreditation.

Having noted the content of the report the Committee **RESOLVED** to support the Council's application to become a Silver Member of the Zero Hours Justice Campaign.

8. Voluntary Redundancy Scheme Update

The Committee received a report from the Head of Paid Service updating the Committee on the council's position following the 2022 Voluntary Redundancy Scheme. In presenting the report Councillor Milli Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance Resources and Reform) advised that the scheme had been put in place as a result of ongoing budgetary pressures in an attempt to achieve savings whilst continuing to ensure the delivery of key services. As a result of the process the Committee were advised that 45 applications for voluntary redundancy had initially been accepted, although this number was subject to change as some applicants had recently withdrawn from the scheme.

In the ensuing discussion members noted that the payments proposed in relation to seven individuals under the scheme required approval by General Purposes Committee as the redundancy and severance payments when added to the pension strain costs which the Council were required to bear under the Pension scheme rules, totalled over £100,000. Members also recognised the significant savings that were projected associated with the approval of the voluntary redundancy applications received, which it was confirmed would result in an aggregate payback period of less than two years (net of any savings reinvested as part of any restructure) which remained within the agreed benchmark for long term financial consideration.

In considering the recommendations the Committee noted the details provided within the exempt appendix accompanying the report and **RESOLVED**

- (1) To approve the severance payments set out in the exempt Appendix to this report.
- (2) To note that none of the payments in respect of individuals pursuant to the voluntary redundancy scheme included any element in addition to sums calculated in accordance with the council's Managing Change Policy and

the strain payments that would arise under the Local Government Pension Scheme as unreduced pensions were required to be paid.

- (3) To note the overall outcome of the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme that ran during September 2022.

9. Appointment to Sub Committees/Outside Bodies

There were no appointments to be considered in relation to any of the General Purposes Sub Committees.

10. Exclusion of Press and Public

There were no item that required the exclusion of the press and public.

11. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

The meeting closed at 10.12 am.

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT
Chair