

REPORT TO PERSONNEL COMMITTEE CULTURE AND WORKLOAD



Report Reference P-22-05
Meeting Date 13th September 2022
Agenda Item 6
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

In response to the December 2021 staff morale survey (and the subsequent June update), the committee has been working to address the issues raised. To date it has completed a review of employment terms and salary evaluations. The remaining workstream is to improve the member/officer relationship, ensure staff feel valued by the council overall and effectively manage workload.

The external staffing review included some recommendations designed to address the issues raised through the morale survey and discussions. Additionally, the Town Clerk has considered matters based on discussions with staff. It is noted that, compared to five years ago, there are now a number of staff who have little interfacing with members whereas historically all staff routinely met the majority of members; it is likely that it is through this change and the natural growth of the council that the perceived disconnect between members/officers has arisen. Central to resolving this, therefore, is to rebuild this contact. Many of these recommendations aim to develop the overall culture to a 'one council' team culture where members and officers fully appreciate their respective roles in delivering an excellent organisation to serve the local community. The success factors will be improvement in the staff moral survey scores for "I feel I am valued by the council overall" and "I feel councillors understand how the office works"

2.0 RELATIONSHIP AND VALUE RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 STAFF REPRESENTATIVE ATTENDING PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

It is recognised that the Town Clerk's presence at meetings is not that of a staff representative as, whilst as manager he will be aware of staff views on matters under discussion, his role is to advise the committee and implement its decisions. There will be occasions where there is conflict between the opinion of staff and the direction of the council.

The recommendation is:

- 1) That staff be invited to appoint a representative from amongst them to attend meetings of the Personnel Committee
- 2) That there be a standing item on ordinary committee agendas for the representative to make a report and take questions from members

This would be similar to public participation at other committees and provide an opportunity for a representative to make a report to the committee on staffing matters particularly those pertaining to the items under discussion. The staff representative would not be permitted to remain in confidential

sessions.

2.2 POLICY OF REGULAR JD AND SALARY REVIEWS

Staff noted that there was no formal process for requesting a review of their salary and that as a result the process was delayed and disjointed (the Town Ranger role being reviewed urgently, some officers requesting regrading for an extended period). Whilst it is not anticipated that there would be significant change to job descriptions and roles, it is recognised that over time things change and that without periodic reflection things can go unrecognised.

It is therefore recommended that:

- 3) It be policy to undertake a biennial review of each staff member's job description and salary benchmarking/evaluation. This would be undertaken by the Town Clerk and reported to the Personnel Committee should any changes be recommended.

The review would involve a discussion over the job description and evaluating what changes there have been (if any) to the role in the past two years and whether this would change any metrics feeding into the formal evaluation scoring recently undertaken. The aim of undertaking it biennially ensures that all staff will have either recently had a review or be looking forward to a review and aims to prevent the need for ad hoc reviews (save any planned substantial changes to roles).

2.3 UPDATED MEMBER/OFFICER PROTOCOL AND ROLE DESCRIPTIONS FOR MEMBERS

A clear understanding of the roles and expectations for members and officers is central to fostering a positive relationship. There have been occasions where frustrations have arisen out of one side having an expectation which is not matched by the other side's understanding of their role. The council has a Member/Officer protocol which, whilst a useful policy document, could be updated to be a more user-friendly. Alongside this, role descriptions would be created to ensure a clearer understanding of the different roles (non-staff) within the council. These would form part of the Member/Officer Protocol and be used as part of member inductions in 2023. Alongside this, Civic Protocol would also be revised; this contains similar/additional civic guidance for the Town Mayor.

This recommendation is that:

- 4) The Town Clerk and Town Mayor produce an updated Member/Officer Protocol and Civic Protocol, with role descriptions for members, the town mayor, committee chairmen and personnel committee members, for approval by Full Council

2.4 STAFF LIAISON PANEL

The recommendation to introduce a staff liaison panel was set out in the external staffing review report and the committee has already resolved to introduce this.

The purpose of the panel would be to exchange views and information about the work of the council and how officers are responding. It would be a conduit for exchanging information and members would feedback to Council/committees as appropriate. The panel would be led by the Town Mayor.

It is suggested that the panel meet twice per year during office hours on a day that all staff usually work; it could run over lunch with sandwiches (or similar) for those present. All staff would be encouraged to attend and the Town Clerk and Town Mayor would prepare a loose agenda to guide

discussions but it would mainly review recent council activity providing an opportunity to discuss successes/issues and look forward to future activity.

It could either comprise the members of the personnel committee or comprise members representing (e.g. chair/deputy) of the council's committees. The latter option would mean they can take any committee specific matters back to their committees for formal discussion/resolution and this would also widen the member/officer interactions. This also separates it more from the Personnel Committee and therefore provides better clarity of function. A panel comprising representatives of the committees is therefore considered the better option.

It is recommended that:

- 5) The committee establishes a staff liaison panel comprising representatives of the committees
- 6) That the panel meet during the day with lunch provided for the panel
- 7) The terms of reference for the panel be:
 - a. The panel shall comprise the chairmen of each standing committee (in their absence they may depute a committee member to attend in their stead), the Town Mayor, the Deputy Town Mayor and all staff.
 - b. The panel shall meet twice per year in June and December.
 - c. An agenda to guide discussions shall be prepared by the Town Clerk and Town Mayor with input from staff and panel members
 - d. The purpose of the panel is to exchange information and discuss council work.
 - e. The panel has no authority to make decisions on behalf of the council. Matters agreed/raised at the panel shall be referred through ordinary channels for decisions where necessary.

2.5 DEVELOPING MEMBER/OFFICER FAMILIARITY

The staff liaison panel will contribute to ensuring more members and officers interact routinely which will help build a mutual relationship and understanding. In addition to the business focused interaction, encouraging more social interaction would further help build the relationship. Social interaction will enable officers to better get to know members, their motivations as a councillor and their character which may be unseen from the formal meeting settings. The interactions will also enable members to get to know officers, their outside interests, ambitions and personality. Ensuring that staff and members know the *person* not the title will help ensure a 'one council' team culture.

The council already hosts an annual reception in December for members and officers. It is suggested that this is developed as one of two annual social get togethers for members and staff hosted by the Town Mayor where all are encouraged to attend specifically with the objective of thanking everyone for their respective work for the council and providing opportunity for members/staff to get to know one another. A second could be held in the summer, shortly after the new mayor takes office.

The recommendations for this heading are:

- 8) To host an annual summer/Christmas social where all are encouraged to attend
- 9) To host a member/officer social following the elections in 2023 as part of inductions (as the '23 summer session)

2.6 ENCOURAGING MEMBER RECOGNITION

Having achievements and successes recognised is a key aspect of building a motivated and dedicated workforce which in turn drives performance. The power of minor tokens of genuine appreciation, such

as an email thanking someone for their work, in ensuring one feels valued cannot be understated. The recognition of officers' value from members will help engender a 'one council' team culture.

It is recommended that:

- 10) All members, but particularly committee chairmen, are encouraged to take time to thank staff for their efforts as appropriate (for example sending an email thanking them for completing a project, passing on praise to line managers/at committee etc)
- 11) The Town Mayor send a birthday card to staff each year
- 12) The Town Mayor ensures a card is sent to staff from the council for key occasions (e.g. engagement, birth of a child)
- 13) Members of the Personnel Committee take the time to welcome new staff – either in person or by sending a 'welcome' email.

3.0 WORKLOAD

A high workload is a continue issue raised by some officers and the continued recognition of this by members is appreciated. There are a variety of pressures within individual officer workloads and, admittedly, the Town Clerk has been challenged to find the time within his own workload to provide additional support and prioritisation to other officers, in part due to the additional demands of the recent staffing issues. The workload of the Events Officer in particular had been assisted by the one-day a week intern who has recently departed, and the Town Clerk will be advertising for a volunteer/intern to see if this can be replaced. Additional pressures will be created by the impending departure of the part time Administration and Support Officer (recruitment lag of at least 3 weeks expected) and the planning and Facilities Officer's shared parental leave (six weeks, Nov/Dec).

A time management and delegation seminar was recently hosted by Cllr Forbes and the Town Clerk will be working with each officer on task prioritisation to ease the pressure of high workloads and shall continue to seek guidance from the Town Mayor where necessary.

4.0 INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

At the July committee meeting it was resolved that the Town Clerk investigate obtaining Investors in People status for the council. The Town Clerk has researched the requirements and obtained a quotation for accreditation which is £6,673 for a three-year period. It is considered that this does not represent value for money and that the expenditure would not be commensurate with the benefit.

5.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

The committee should consider the recommended actions to develop a stronger culture within the council, enhancing the sense of mutual respect and appreciation.