Minutes of: **EMPLOYMENT PANEL**

Date of Meeting: 23 September 2026

Present: Councillor S Thorpe (in the Chair)
Councillors M Walsh, T Tariq, L Smith, D Green, D Hill, K Hussain, A Quinn and A Arif

Also in attendance: Kate Waterhouse – Exec Director of Transformation and Strategy
Sue Williams – Assistant Director of People and Inclusion
Nicole Howarth – Strategic Lead, HR
Jacqui Dennis – Exec Director of Legal and Democratic Services
Kelly Barnett – Joint Elections and Democratic Services Officer

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: None received.

The Chair welcomed Sue Williams, the new Assistant Director of People and Inclusion to the meeting and Sue Williams introduced herself.

EP.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence are noted above.

EP.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tariq declared an interest in all items considered due to his role as Chair of the North West Employers.

EP.3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was agreed that the notes of the meeting held on 20 July 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

EP.4 ANTI-RACIST ORGANISATION STRATEGY

The Panel considered a report presenting the proposed Anti-Racist Organisation Strategy.

Sue Williams introduced the report and strategy and explained that the strategy aligned with work being undertaken by other Greater Manchester local authorities. The purpose of the strategy was to ensure that the Council remained an inclusive organisation and took a proactive approach to tackling racism and promoting equality within the workforce.

Members heard that a workforce that felt psychologically and physically safe was essential to attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. It was noted that a representative and inclusive workforce would also strengthen relationships with local communities and encourage residents to engage confidently with Council services.

Councillor Walsh expressed strong support for the strategy but felt there should be explicit recognition of Christianity and Christian communities within the document and commented that all faith communities should be reflected appropriately.

Councillor Tariq welcomed the report and suggested that reference should be made to the Public Sector Equality Duty. He also referred to the North West Employers Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Charter and encouraged the Council to consider engagement with that framework. Councillor Tariq emphasised the importance of ensuring the strategy delivered tangible and measurable actions rather than broad statements of intent.

In response, Sue Williams advised that the strategy formed only one part of a wider programme of inclusion work and highlighted that there is a robust response to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. She suggested that a future report could be brought back to the Committee outlining the broader inclusion framework.

Councillor Quinn highlighted concerns regarding rising hostility and discrimination experienced by Jewish communities nationally and locally. He stressed the importance of education and community understanding, noting the impact such issues could have on people's feelings of safety.

Councillor Khalid echoed comments regarding the importance of recognising all faith communities and ensuring that Council policies reflected the needs and concerns of those communities.

Councillor Thorpe acknowledged the challenges faced by Jewish communities and supported the points raised.

Kate Waterhouse advised that there was separate work underway relating to community cohesion, including activity led through VCFA partners and the use of recovery funding. Members were reassured that community cohesion issues were being considered through appropriate forums.

Councillor Walsh reiterated the importance of ensuring all faith communities were explicitly recognised and offered to engage further with partners regarding representation of Christian communities.

Councillor Smith reminded the Committee that the Employment Panel should be specifically looking at the strategy through the Council's role as an employer and suggested that the policy should be considered primarily through that workforce lens.

Sue Williams confirmed that a key objective of the strategy was to ensure the Council's workforce became increasingly reflective of the communities it served. She advised that workforce data was being collected and analysed to understand recruitment and progression trends.

Councillor Arif asked whether future reports would be brought to the Committee to monitor progress against the strategy. Sue Williams confirmed that regular updates, including workforce data and outcomes, would be provided.

In summarising the discussion, Members acknowledged broad support for the strategy and recognised its potential benefits in strengthening recruitment, retention and inclusion within the workforce. It was agreed that further information on the wider inclusion agenda and supporting workforce data would be brought back to a future meeting.

The Employment Panel agreed:

1. To note the content of the new 2-Year Anti-Racism Organisation Strategy.

2. That further information regarding the wider equality, diversity and inclusion framework, together with workforce data and progress updates, be reported to a future committee meeting.

EP.5 ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ALL-AGE COMMISSIONING FUNCTION

The Committee considered a report regarding the establishment of an All-Age Commissioning Function.

Members were advised that the proposal arose from a wider organisational review and had previously been considered through various Council governance processes. The report sought support for the implementation of recommendations and outlined temporary arrangements for a two year period.

It was explained that the proposed model would bring greater alignment across commissioning activity, achieve efficiencies and support improved outcomes through a more integrated approach. Members were informed that some elements of the proposal fell within delegated officer powers but that the matter had been brought to the Committee due to its importance and the changes to the operational model.

Councillor Thorpe referred to work undertaken by Impower and noted that one of the recommendations had been to develop stronger links between children's and adult services commissioning. He highlighted the importance of improving capability and managing growing demand pressures across both service areas.

Councillor Tariq welcomed the proposals and noted the significant achievements already delivered through commissioning arrangements in adult social care, particularly in relation to efficiencies and savings. He welcomed the fact that the proposal did not create an entirely new role and believed the arrangements would deliver benefits across a range of service areas.

The Employment Panel agreed to:

1. Support the establishment of a new All Age Commissioning function within the Council.
2. Note the temporary expansion of responsibilities for a period of up to 24 months to allow the current Director of Adult Social Services and Community Commissioning to develop this function.
3. Support an honorarium payment in accordance with Council policy for the duration of these additional responsibilities.
4. Support consequential interim arrangements to ensure continued operational leadership of Adult Social Care services.
5. Note that a full review of the operating model and leadership arrangements will be undertaken following implementation.

EP.6 POST REDESIGNATION LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The Panel considered a report regarding the redesignation of the Head of Legal Services post to an Assistant Director role.

Members were advised that following the departure of the previous postholder, a recruitment exercise had been undertaken but had not resulted in a successful appointment. Benchmarking had subsequently been completed across Greater Manchester and other local authorities, which demonstrated that the salary level offered was not reflective of the current market.

The proposal therefore sought to redesignate the role to Assistant Director level in recognition of the breadth and complexity of responsibilities and to improve recruitment prospects.

Jacqui Dennis informed the Panel that market testing and benchmarking had been undertaken and that advice received indicated that the Council's offer was not competitive. She outlined the significant scope of services within the directorate, including legal services, democratic services, registrations, information governance, complaints, safeguarding and performance. She highlighted the increasing demands associated with governance, improvement activity, housing services work and major corporate projects.

Councillor Green sought clarification that the previous recruitment campaign had failed to secure appointable candidates and that the redesignation was intended to attract candidates with the required skills and experience. Officers confirmed this was the case.
Councillor Walsh supported the proposal and commented that salary levels played an important role in attracting suitably qualified applicants.

Jacqui Dennis advised that members of the appointment panel had determined that none of the candidates interviewed during the previous recruitment exercise met the required standard. Recruitment agencies subsequently confirmed that the salary level was below market expectations.

Councillor Hill asked about the risks associated with the vacancy remaining unfilled and what mitigations were currently in place. In response, Jacqui Dennis explained that responsibilities had been redistributed across the department, temporary support had been secured to assist with complex legal matters, and she had personally taken on additional responsibilities to ensure continuity of service.

The Employment Panel agreed to:

1. Approve the redesignation of the vacant Head of Legal post to Assistant Director of Law & Governance, reflecting the strategic breadth of responsibilities and market expectations for senior legal leadership roles.

EP.7 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR S THORPE
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 7.50 pm)