
Employment Panel

Report of the meeting held on 19th June 2013

Matters for Information

1. ROLE OF THE PANEL

Following review of the arrangements for the consideration of employment matters which were approved earlier in the year, the Chairman has reminded the Panel about their new role and terms of reference.

The purpose of the new Panel is to provide a strategic overview of people management and workforce issues within the Council, giving Members the opportunity to investigate and explore a range of employment matters and improve understanding of their role as an employer.

In considering potential areas for investigation, Members have suggested a number of ideas which might form the basis of a work programme for the year. These included the culture of the organisation and the ways in which Managers managed their teams and staff grievances. Further suggestions were invited by the Chairman at any time.

In terms of their future relationship with the Staff Council, the Panel has noted that the Chairman and Vice Chairman will continue to meet informally with employee representatives and that there would be opportunities for the Staff Council to raise issues with the Panel. Democratic Services undertook to clarify the process by which representatives could present directly to the Panel. The terms of reference and constitution will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Panel.

2. MANAGING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

As part of LGSS' commitment to review five policies and procedures per year, the Panel has reviewed and endorsed the content of a new policy for Managing Employee Performance. In discussion, the Panel clarified aspects of the policy and the ways in which new starters were directed to Human Resource policies and information.

The new Policy provides guidance to managers on how to help employees achieve and maintain good performance levels and where this falls below acceptable standards ensures that any potential issue is dealt with promptly, sensitively and consistently. It also provides guidance to employees where performance standards are not

reached and the potential consequences for their continued employment.

Training on application of the new policy will be extended to all managers across the organisation.

3. EMPLOYMENT REPORT – QUARTER 3

The Panel has received a quarterly report on Human Resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation. On this occasion, the report has included the latest position and trends relating to:-

- ◆ employee numbers
- ◆ salary costs
- ◆ employee turnover
- ◆ sickness absence reporting; and
- ◆ the Human Resources caseload.

In terms of tackling sickness absence, the Panel has noted that the average days sickness per FTE employee had increased to 8.9 days during the last quarter, which is higher than the corresponding period in the previous year. In response to a request made at a previous meeting, the Panel has received information on sickness levels being experienced by other public sector organisations and has noted that there was a general upward trend, although it was difficult to achieve a full picture as reporting on sickness levels was not a statutory requirement. Attention was drawn to a reduction in sickness levels at South Cambridgeshire District Council and it was suggested that there may be some lessons to be learnt there.

However the number of absences recorded as 'Other' had significantly declined which may have had some bearing on why other areas had increased as they may have become more accurately recorded.

As the highest cause of sickness absence continued to be stress, depression, mental health and fatigue, the Panel has noted the intention to offer additional training for stress management. Members emphasised the need to adopt a proactive approach towards tackling stress and to encouraging employees to take up training courses and other services if required. Concern also was expressed about those divisions within the Authority which appear to have a sickness rate higher than the average.

Having noted that work was being undertaken to investigate a workplace based support service for staff who were experiencing stress at work, the Panel has discussed the support which is currently available to staff from First Contact and Occupational Health services. Members have been assured that these proposals would provide an additional work based service and that there was no desire to change the existing arrangements. The Panel has requested further information on the existing services and an update on the proposals for work based counselling at a future meeting.

4. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HR, PAYROLL AND ORGANISATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The Panel has considered the performance of LGSS Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational Workforce Development services across the key service measures put in place at the start of the contract during the period May 2012 to 31st March 2013. LGSS performance is measured in three areas namely:

- ◆ HR Strategic and Advisory;
- ◆ recruitment and payroll; and
- ◆ organisational workforce development.

Whilst general service standards had been met, the Panel noted that there was further work to be done in Organisational & Workforce Development to encourage a greater take-up of training courses (only 304 places had been delivered out of a target of 500 in an 11 month period). LGSS will be working with Managers to help address this issue. Members' attention also has been drawn to LGSS' priorities for the next quarter, which included support for the ongoing Pay Review, delivery of the Workforce Development Strategy and planning for an E-recruitment solution.

The Panel has been assured that feedback on the LGSS contract is requested from managers and staff. Having noted that a number of issues have been raised through this route predominantly about the recruitment process, the Panel has been informed that LGSS are currently restructuring their recruitment processes and the development of an E Recruitment Solution could help in this respect. Members have been reminded that the LGSS contract represented a change in culture for many Managers and an expectation that managers are required to be more self sufficient. Further work is required to help staff understand their new roles and responsibilities, and this will be addressed as part of the training on new policies. The reinvigoration of the Council's Leadership programme will also help in this respect. An outline of the support provided by LGSS to Managers also has been noted.

5. PAY REVIEW PROJECT

(The following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.)

The Panel has received an update on the progress being made on the Council's Pay Review Project. Members were informed that Stage 1, the evaluation and moderation process was nearing conclusion and was expected to be completed by mid July. LGSS will then commence work on the next stage of the project (Stage 2), which includes:-

- ◆ pay modelling/development of a new pay & grading framework;
- ◆ benchmarking;
- ◆ pay policy review;
- ◆ the consultation process; and

◆ the Appeals Procedure.

Members understood that the new Managing Director would be overseeing the second stage of the project.

Having raised a number of questions about the reason for the delay in concluding Stage 1, the Panel has received an explanation of the process which had yet to be undertaken and the intensive nature of the job evaluation process for those involved.

In response to comments made by representatives of the Staff Council and Members regarding the need to improve communications on the subject and to bring the process to a close as quickly as possible, the Panel was informed that the current timetable for the remainder of the project was to be considered by the new Managing Director. In this regard, the Panel has agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman should meet with the new Managing Director to seek to progress the matter further and that in the interim staff should be updated as to the current position.

S Cawley
Chairman