
Employment Panel

Report of the meeting held on 18th September 2013

Matters for Information

6. FIRST CONTACT SERVICE – UPDATE

Further to Item No.3 of the Report to the meeting of the Council held on 18 September 2013, the Panel has received information on the use of the First Contact Service during the period January 2011 to August 2013. This confidential service was introduced in 2001 as part of the Council's overall stress management arrangements as an alternative means of support for employees. It is available to anyone whose problems (whether work related, personal or a combination) are affecting their ability to work effectively. Details of the use of the Service, the current membership of the First Contact Group and the training which is undertaken by the volunteers to enhance their skills and existing knowledge have been provided.

Having noted that the service continues to be well used by employees and that it provides a valuable addition to the existing support services offered by the Council to its employees and Members during times of difficulty, the Panel has acknowledged the positive contribution and benefit that the First Contact service brings to the organisation and its employees' well-being. The Panel has also expressed their appreciation for the support provided and work undertaken by the First Contact team and would like to encourage more employees to get involved.

In terms of the future development of the First Contact Service, Members were pleased to note that work will continue over the next few months to further improve the service and promote it both to employees and managers. Efforts will also continue to recruit more male volunteers to the Group, together with volunteers in the One Leisure Service. To assist in this respect, the Panel has asked the One Leisure Management Team to take steps to encourage more staff to volunteer.

7. TRANSGENDER AND GENDER REASSIGNMENT – STATEMENT OF GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES

To fulfil an outstanding action within the Council's Single Equality Scheme and to support and protect employees who are proposing to undergo a process of gender reassignment, the Panel has reviewed and endorsed the contents of a new Statement of Guidance for transgender and gender reassignment in the workplace. The guidance, which is based on best practice, provides practical steps

and assistance for both managers and employees on issues relating to transgender, transexuality and gender reassignment.

8. USE OF CONSULTANTS, HIRED STAFF AND TEMPORARY STAFF

Having regard to the recent changes in their terms of reference the Panel has been provided with details of the Council's expenditure on consultants, hired and temporary staff during the period 2012/13, in comparison with the previous year. The information has also been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) who have made a number of observations. (Item No.8 of their Report to the Council refers).

Having recognised that spending on these categories was not necessarily bad and that there are specific situations where there is a positive benefit for the Authority, the Panel has asked the Assistant Director, Finance & Resources to prepare a policy framework to define 'Consultants' 'Hired' and 'Temporary' Staff and to provide guidance on how and when these types of staff should be used. Members have suggested that this should be linked to the Authority's Redundancy Policy and should outline the procurement processes to ensure that value for money is obtained.

9. EMPLOYMENT REPORT

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;
- ◆ 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 decreased in the last quarter to 8.7, although this remained higher than the corresponding period in the previous year and continued to be an area of focus for the Human Resources Team. Members have been reminded that a new Sickness Absence Management Policy had been introduced in April 2013 but it was still too early to establish what impact this had had. Nevertheless the increase in the number of active cases being undertaken by the HR Team was a direct reflection of changes to the trigger points in the new sickness policy.

The highest cause of sickness absence continued to be stress, depression, mental health and fatigue and Members have been reminded that work is currently underway to investigate a work-based support service for staff who are experiencing stress at work. Further information is expected to be available for the next meeting.

In terms of the other reasons for sickness absence, the Panel has discussed the increase in musculo-skeletal problems and have

emphasised the need to address the number of absences which continue to be recorded as 'other'. In recognising that some of the highest levels of sickness absence were recorded in the Customer Services and Operations Divisions, Members have requested further information on the cost implications of this absence for the Authority. The Panel has also suggested that where there is a requirement for a member of staff to have a level of fitness to undertake a specific job role, consideration should be given to a process for ensuring that those returning from sickness are fit for work.

Finally, the Panel has placed on record its recognition of, and gratitude for the excellent contribution made by Mr T Wakelin during his 18 years employment in the local government service and conveyed its best wishes to him for a long and happy retirement.

10. LGSS PERFORMANCE

The Panel has considered the performance of LGSS Human Resources, Payroll and Organisational Workforce Development services across the key service measures agreed under the current contract during the period 1st April to 30th June 2013. LGSS performance is measured in four areas namely -

- ◆ General Service Standards;
- ◆ HR Strategic and Advisory;
- ◆ Recruitment and Payroll; and
- ◆ Organisational workforce development.

To assist the Panel in monitoring the performance levels and to create a balanced and impartial report, feedback from the LGSS Contract Manager and the views of District Council staff on each of these service areas also has been provided.

Whilst the majority of service standards had been met, the Panel discussed the concerns which had been raised by managers about some general aspects of the recruitment service and have been informed that work was ongoing to address these. It was anticipated that the introduction of a Recruitment solution in the Autumn will address a number of these areas of dissatisfaction and the Panel has been assured that the new system had been tested and developed at workshops involving District Council staff. Members will continue to monitor the service issues raised by staff and the remedial measures taken by the District Council to resolve these.

In terms of LGSS' priorities for the next quarter, Members have been informed that these will include support for the ongoing pay review, delivery of the Workforce Development Strategy and preparations for the new requirement for automated pension enrolment. The Panel has requested further information on the proposals for the Workforce Development Strategy at a future meeting.

11. 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 had concluded at the end of August. The Panel has expressed their appreciation to all the staff involved.

LGSS have now commenced work on the next stage of the project (Stage 2) which includes -

- ◆ pay modelling and development of a new pay and grading framework;
- ◆ policy development; and
- ◆ the consultation process.

Having noted that it was proposed to consult with staff on the new pay and grading framework and the appeals process in October 2013 with a view to implementing the proposals in April 2014, the Panel has been advised that Management were currently in discussions with the Staff Council about the ways in which they could support the consultation process.

Having been advised that the Second Stage of the project was progressing well, Members have been informed that a Communications Strategy has been developed to sit alongside the Project Plan to ensure that all staff have access to timely and accurate information,

In recognition of the fact that it might be useful for all Councillors to have a better understanding of the pay review process and the potential impact on District Council employees, the Panel has suggested that a briefing for all Members might be useful and this will now be built into the Communications Strategy.

S Cawley
Chairman