
Employment Panel

Report of the meetings held on 8th October and 19th November 2014

Matters for Information

9. EXPENSES AND ALLOWANCES POLICY

The Panel has reviewed and endorsed the contents of a new Expenses and Allowances Policy. The Policy has been developed to provide a transparent and consistent framework for allowances within the Authority, to provide guidance and a process for employees to claim expenses and to recognise changes as a result of moves to share services with neighbouring authorities. The new Policy applies to all those employed on the District Council's terms and conditions and to non-employees (i.e. student placements and volunteers) where appropriate.

10. JOB EVALUATION POLICY

The Panel has endorsed, for implementation, a revised Job Evaluation Policy for use by the District Council. The Policy has been refreshed to draw on experience gained during the pay review, to clarify the job evaluation process, reflect best practice and provide an equitable framework for the Authority.

11. STAFF COUNCIL

The Panel has received an update on the four day training programme which has been arranged by the East of England Local Government Association to help Staff Council representatives to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and to better support the Council's employees. Having noted that the provision of additional specialist employment support is being considered, Panel Members have welcomed the steps which are being taken to support the Staff Council in their roles and have suggested that the provision of training should become an annual event.

12. EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY 2014

The results of the 2014 Employee Opinion Survey have been presented to the Panel. Members were reminded that the survey was undertaken during a period of significant change within the Council and that the period of transition in senior management and the outcome of the pay review had had an impact on the results. It is hoped that many of the outcomes will improve over time as the new Senior Management

Team gain the trust of employees and the Council is seen to be more open and honest in engaging and communicating with staff.

Members were informed that the results of the survey had been presented to staff, together with the actions proposed to address the issues which had been raised. The Panel has welcomed the preparation of a comprehensive action plan to respond to the issues / areas of concern which had been identified and the intention to repeat the exercise in 2015.

In reviewing the specific actions within the action plan, Panel Members have welcomed the commitment which has been made to fill vacant posts as soon as approval is granted to help reduce time pressure on existing staff and the introduction of a 'back to the floor' programme to enable the Senior Management Team to spend time experiencing what teams do. Panel Members have also expressed reservations with regard to the proposal to introduce an 'employee of the month' scheme to recognise success within the organisation and it has been suggested that this should be given further consideration.

In response to Member concerns about communications with staff, the Panel has been assured that the Council is committed to improving the way in which the Authority communicates and to work with staff to come up with ideas for improvement. The Chairman has suggested that, notwithstanding the responsibilities of District Council Managers, he would like to have sight of plans for engaging the Staff Council as a channel of communication in their own right.

In discussion it was suggested that it was important not to draw too many hard conclusions from the survey results given that different questions and answers could be interpreted as meaning different things to different individuals. Given the challenging and volatile environment in which the District Council is currently operating it was of no surprise that employees did not have a clear understanding of the Council's vision and objectives. Following the appointment of a new Senior Management Team, it was hoped that employee perceptions of the management of change will also improve.

Finally the Panel has been encouraged to see that employees generally have a positive perception of their line managers. However Members were concerned to identify a number of inconsistencies in the figures for those staff who receive performance development reviews and those who receive feedback on their performance.

13. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Further to Item No.3 of their Report to the meeting held on 30th July 2014, the Panel has received an update on progress to develop a Workforce Development Strategy for the District Council.

The Panel has endorsed the content of an outline project plan which sets out the stages of work for the development of the Strategy and a timetable for their completion. Having noted that Stage 1 – the background research is nearing conclusion, it is now intended to consult with key stakeholders to ensure that the draft Strategy reflects

the views of a range of interested groups. The draft Strategy will be presented to the next meeting of the Panel for consideration.

14. WORKFORCE REPORT (QUARTER 1 AND 2)

The Panel has received quarterly reports on Human Resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation during the periods 1st April to 30th June and 1st July to 30th September 2014. The reports included the latest position and trends relating to:-

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

In reviewing the workforce information, Members have been informed that the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts within the establishment has continued to decrease and that monthly wage salaries have decreased by £90k from the first quarter. Members have also been informed that it is the intention to include a breakdown of the reasons for voluntary resignations and to review the historical trends in terms of the average age of the workforce for future reports.

In terms of sickness absence, the Panel has noted that the average annual day's sickness per FTE has increased to 10.1 days in the second quarter which is above the CIPD Public Sector Average and the EELGA Authority Average. Members have been assured that the HR Team are working with Managers and Heads of Service to manage sickness and progress cases to the formal stages of the sickness absence procedure as appropriate. To further support managers, additional training on managing sickness absence will shortly be provided.

Members attention has also been drawn to the comparison which has been undertaken of the sickness figures of a neighbouring authority during their pay review. Whilst sickness levels had peaked on the launch of the pay consultation, there had been a steady decrease in the numbers of days lost following the implementation of the review.

Having noted that there has been a significant increase in sickness in the Operations Division, the Panel has noted that work is being undertaken within the Division to address this with the support of managers from other divisions and the occupational health service. It is envisaged that the removal of the attendance allowance may have had an impact in this area.

In reviewing the reasons for absence the Panel has noted that during the course of the last year there has been a marked shift between the numbers of long term and short term cases of sickness absence, such that the majority of cases are now of a long term nature. It has been suggested that the discrepancies in long term sickness absence between different divisions within the Authority may raise a broader management question. Members have been pleased to note that recent changes to sickness reporting categories have meant that

there is no longer any sickness classified as 'other' which will provide the Authority with more meaningful information going forward.

Members have discussed absences relating to stress, anxiety, mental health and depression during the period. Having noted that the majority of these related to personal related stress, the Panel has been informed that work is ongoing with Managers to help support personal as well as work related stress within the Authority. The Panel has also discussed the mechanisms which are in place to help employees suffering from stress and has noted that the Stress Management Toolkit and the First Contact Service are an integral part of the Council's absence management arrangements. In response to concerns raised by Staff Council representatives regarding the First Contact Service, the Managing Director undertook to give these matters further consideration outside the meeting.

Finally, the Panel has placed on record its recognition of, and gratitude for the excellent contributions made by Ms J Elliott, Ms M Evans, Ms M Lloyd, Ms M O'Hare and Messrs J Davies, C Lewis and P Hall during their employment in the local government service and has conveyed its best wishes to them for a long and happy retirement. The Panel has paid special tribute to the 40 years local government service achieved by Mr Peter Hall who had recently retired from the Local Taxation division.

15. 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 September 2014. 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 performance levels, feedback from Council employees on the service delivered by LGSS has also been provided to Panel Members.

Members have been pleased to note that there are no issues to report for the Strategic and Advisory, Transactional Human Resources, Payroll or Organisational Workforce Development elements of the contract. It is anticipated that the District Council's use of Strategic HR advice will increase during the course of the year.

With regard to the recruitment element of the contract, the Panel has noted that problems continued with the E-Recruitment system and has asked LGSS to prepare an action plan to address the issues which have been raised by Council employees. This has been presented to, and reviewed by the Panel at their November meeting. Members have been pleased to note that all the issues raised have now been addressed.

To assist Panel Members in understanding the system and to aid the discussions on the subject, the Panel has also received a presentation on the operation and functionality of the LGSS E-Recruitment system. This is a full e-recruitment system offering an end-to-end recruitment process which can be securely accessed from any internet enabled device. The Panel has also sought and obtained the views of those Managers who were in attendance at their meetings and had had cause to use the system.

Having noted that the Council will continue to utilise the issues log to bring service issues to the attention of LGSS, the Executive Leader has drawn attention to the absence of any formal mechanisms to scrutinise the Council's contract with LGSS to ensure that the Authority is receiving good value for money. This will be of particular importance as the Council begins to enter into shared service arrangements for the delivery of other Council services.

S Cawley
Chairman