
Employment Panel

Report of the meeting held on 3rd February 2016.

Matters for Information

14. STAFF COUNCIL

The Staff Council has informed the Panel of changes in its membership following the election in January 2016. Out of the total of eleven, six are new members. The induction process has already commenced and training will be provided as appropriate.

15. WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT (QUARTER 3)

The Panel has received a quarterly report on Human Resource matters impacting on the performance of the organisation during the period 1st October to 31st December 2015. The report includes the latest position and trends relating to:

- employee numbers;
- salary costs; and
- sickness absence reporting.

In reviewing the workforce information, the Panel has been informed that the workforce headcount has increased slightly since the last quarter as a result of staff joining the Council through the new Shared Service arrangements. Similarly, the monthly salary cost during the quarter increased but this does not take into account the fact that budgets associated with the Shared Services also have transferred to the Council. To accommodate such changes associated with Shared Services, the reporting format will be revised for the future.

Members have been advised that the number of sickness days has increased by 354 days when compared to the previous quarter. The total days lost in the Quarter is the highest absence rate ever recorded. This is mainly owing to a very high level of long-term sickness. In the circumstances Members have questioned what the causes of the reported trends are and what is being done about them. In response, they have been informed that it is largely an inherited position and the Executive Councillor for Organisational Change and Development has developed proposals, which are expected to show an improving trend in the next quarter.

A key change to reduce sickness levels is the adoption of a more consistent approach by management. In addition, there are a range of measures in place in relation to stress. With regard to the latter, the Panel has emphasised the need to identify stress as early as possible. More generally, they also have drawn attention to the fact that the

Council has an ageing workforce, which is likely to result in higher levels of absence through sickness.

Four employees have retired from the Council's service who had a combined length of service of 44 years. Members have placed on record their recognition of, and gratitude for, the excellent contributions the individuals have made during their employment in the local government service.

16. LGSS QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING REPORT (QUARTER 3)

The Panel has received data on 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 October to 31st December 2015.

LGSS' performance is measured in four areas, namely:

- General Service Standards;
- HR Strategic and Advisory;
- Recruitment and Payroll; and
- Organisational Workforce Development.

The Panel has paid particular attention to the arrangements for training. The Council has centralised the coordination of training and there has been a consequential change in the requirements of LGSS in this respect. Discussions are taking place to ensure resources are available to meet the training requirements identified in service plans. LGSS have indicated they are prepared to be flexible and, as far as is reasonably possible, to accommodate changes to the training provided. In order to make the best use of the contract, the take-up profile of training is likely to be very different next year.

17. EMPLOYMENT MATTERS WITHIN SECTIONS

In order to focus on the Key Metrics contained in the Workforce Development Strategy Plan on a Page, the Panel has introduced regular attendance at its meetings by Heads of Service. The purpose of this is to update Members on their service areas in relation to appropriate Key Metrics. It will also ensure significant issues are addressed and challenged where necessary.

Mr A Merrick, Interim Head of Operations, has informed Members that he has been tasked with introducing into Operations a new operating model centred on the customer. This has involved becoming more strategically driven with a greater focus on priorities. It also has been necessary to establish a new management structure and restructure the workforce. The latter has resulted in increases in employees' motivation and direction. An Operations forum is to be introduced shortly to obtain employees' views. In addition, sickness levels are being tackled by requiring teams to carry out their own sickness monitoring and holding weekly meetings with LGSS. Furthermore, advice on healthy lifestyles is provided.

Mr C Stopford, Head of Community Services, also has addressed the Panel. He has referred to the key issues facing his section, which include sickness, restructuring of elements of the section, professional development and other training and staff turnover.

The Panel will next receive presentations from the Heads of Customer Services and of Development.

18. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY ON A PAGE

The Panel has been acquainted with the progress that has been made relating to the Workforce Development Strategy and with the Workforce Development Strategy Plan on a Page, which has been produced to give staff and Members an overview of the full Strategy.

Various pieces of work to drive forward change and improvement have been completed, including:

- the introduction of a new appraisal process;
- centralised coordination of training;
- more robust management of the LGSS contract;
- all services now have a service plan with clear links to the Corporate Plan and the Customer Service Strategy;
- improved Council-wide communications;
- full staff access to the HDC network is now available at partner sites; and
- analysis has been undertaken of all employees' working patterns in order to facilitate further hot-desking opportunities and generate income from space utilisation.

Having examined the purpose of the introduction of Net Promoter Scores, which involves asking the same questions of employees at regular intervals to gauge trends, the Panel has endorsed the Workforce Development Strategy Plan on a Page.

19. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2016/17

With the assistance of a report by LGSS (the report is reproduced as Item No. 4(b) on the Council Agenda) the Panel has endorsed for submission to the Council, the content of a proposed Statement of Pay Policy for 2016/17. The Pay Policy Statement provides information about the Council's policies relating to the pay and reward of Chief Officers and other employees, as required by Sections 38-43 of the Localism Act and Government guidance. The Statement will be published on the Council's website together with data on senior salaries required by the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.

20. EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY ACTION PLAN

The Panel has been updated on progress with the development of an Action Plan in response to the results of the Employee Opinion Survey. The Action Plan has been drafted following consultation with staff. A focus group has subsequently been held with a cross-section of employees from across the organisation, including a representative

from the Staff Council, where many of the proposals have been discussed and additional suggestions put forward. The Corporate Management Team has reviewed the actions and agreed responsibilities and timescales for them.

Having concurred with the view that delivering the actions contained in the Plan will contribute towards the continuing improvement in morale and help further to improve the working environment for employees in all services, the Panel has endorsed the terms of the Employee Opinion Survey Action Plan.

21. GRIEVANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Panel has considered and endorsed a revised Grievance Policy and associated procedure, which has been streamlined and clarified. What cannot be raised as a grievance has been defined to avoid misuse of the Policy and it makes clear that financial compensation will not be one of the potential outcomes. Furthermore, it places greater emphasis on resolving grievances quickly and effectively through more use of informal mechanisms, by specifying that grievances cannot relate to incidents more than 12 months old and through the removal of the second stage of appeal.

Other changes include:

- grievances will be raised through management rather than through HR;
- the stages of the procedure have been revised and are clearly stated;
- mediation can be used at any stage; and
- the Council is not obliged to hear grievances from former employees.

Finally, the links to the Disciplinary procedure are stated. This applies where an employee raises a grievance as a direct result of disciplinary action being taken against him/her, where an employee raises a grievance at the same time misconduct is alleged against him/her or where the disciplinary procedure is invoked against another employee following investigation of a grievance.

22. DISCIPLINARY POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Panel also has reviewed and endorsed the contents of a revised Disciplinary Policy and procedure. The purpose and when it applies have been clarified and its scope remains the same. The changes include:

- greater clarity on the right to be accompanied at different stages of the procedure;
- there are now only four levels of disciplinary actions; and
- there is now no second right of appeal but the right of appeal to a higher authority remains.

The documents contain new sections on special circumstances to be taken into account, on links to other procedures and on advice and support.

J W Davies
Chairman