

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 23rd January, 2014.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Brooker, Chohan, Coad, Davis, A S Dhaliwal and Sharif

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Rasib and S K Dhaliwal

Apologies were also reported from the Chief Executive, who was attending another function on behalf of the Council.

PART 1

30. Declarations of Interest

None.

31. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th September 2013

Resolved - That the minutes of the last meeting held on 12th September 2013 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from a question on minute 22 [Settlement Agreements] the Assistant Director, Professional Services proposed to hold further meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee on a 6 monthly basis, to update the position on settlement agreements.

32. Reducing Sickness Absence - Performance Update

The Committee considered a report with an update on progress of reducing the Council's sickness absence.

The average full time equivalent (FTE) of days lost over the year from 1st December 2012 to 30th November 2013 was 7.5 days, an improvement over the 10.2 days for same period in the previous year, and inside the 2013 target of 8.5 days. Since the report to the last meeting, the decrease in sickness had continued during July and August 2013, but had risen in during September to November, reaching a plateau of 0.8 days in the last two months. Although there was generally an increase during periods of colder weather, no explanation of this specific rise had yet been identified. The sickness absence balanced scorecard has continued to be reported at CMT and DMT, enabling managers to report on absence and the action being taken.

The process is kept under review to ensure that data is reported in a timely fashion, that the reporting of sickness is accurate and that the correct reasons for absence are reported. Accurate reporting ensured that the triggers for appropriate action and intervention, as envisaged in the policy, were activated. As requested at the last meeting, a list showing the 15 main

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categories of sickness absence was contained within the report, and members expressed reservations as regards some of the categories.

The Committee recognised that the assistance of Occupational Health was a vital component in the support of absence management. Employees attendance at Occupational Health appointments was improving and the data showed that the percentage of staff who did not attend appointments had fallen from 8.8% and 9.5% in May and June respectively to 0% in both September and October.

Following discussion, the Committee identified a number of points on which further information was requested:

- The main categories of sickness, whether it was acceptable to have a “not stated” category and whether it was appropriate to include “appointment” as a sickness category.
- A percentage breakdown of the reasons for sickness per month and per Directorate, and a comparison with any national benchmark on sickness.

Resolved -

- (a) That satisfaction be recorded with the average of 7.5 days lost (within the target of 8.5 days) and the much improved attendance at Occupational Health appointments.
- (b) That the report to the next meeting include further information on the matters outlined above.

33. Temporary Agency Staff - progress on Implementation and Baseline Monitoring

The Committee considered a progress report on the contract with Matrix SCM to supply temporary agency staff for the Council, which had been in operation since January 2013.

The implementation of the new contract had a savings target for 2013/14 of £250,000. Expenditure on agency staff from 6th January to 31st December 2013 amounted to £6,959,913, giving an anticipated saving of £453,024 under the formula agreed with Matrix. Overall expenditure was lower than the estimate which was approximately £7.5m.

Joint work with the contractor and agencies had continued to develop a secure enrolment through the system for the supply of niche/professional posts. There were now approximately 109 agencies available for social care vacancies covering both qualified and non-qualified posts. 74% of agency workers were travelling less than 20 miles to their place of work (slightly down from the 81% reported at the last meeting). However, those staff travelling from within SL1-SL6 post codes had remained the same at 58%.

The Committee noted that the length of tenure of some agency workers continued to be an issue, although the number working for more than a year (33) had reduced since the last report. In response to members queries about

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this, and in particular the temp of six years duration, an explanation of the Council's difficulties in recruiting permanent employees, notably social workers, was given. Some temporary social workers preferred the option to remain as temps, for financial and other reasons, rather than take up a permanent position. Retaining temps over a longer period had advantages for the Council, however, in terms of continuity, particularly for services in adult mental health and children's social care. Although a premium payment to the agency was required for such temporary employees, the Council did not incur the on-costs associated with a permanent member of staff e.g. employer's superannuation contributions.

The Committee also noted the position as regards the number of temporary staff employed via the sessional/open process, which was the most appropriate way to cover short term absences of permanent staff or peaks in workload. It was recognised that more work needed to be done with Human Resources to find a solution to long term/permanent employment for those posts most commonly filled by temps. Consideration could be given to reviving the process whereby Directorates were required to justify the retention of any temporary for in excess of one year.

Resolved -

- (a) That the report be noted, including the improvements made and the reduction in overall spending on Temporary Agency Staff.
- (b) Additional information be brought forward for the next report on a comparison between the Agency cost for a Social Worker retained over the longer term and the cost of a permanent employee on full salary plus the necessary market supplement.

34. Workforce Strategy - Fit for the Future

This item was deferred for consideration at the next meeting.

35. Approach to Business Change /Keeping Staff Motivated and Committed

The Committee considered a report about staff motivation and performance and outlined the key factors that influence staff, including environment and job enrichment as well as the traditional areas of reward such as pay and incremental advance.

Using a model developed in the field of organisational psychology for understanding what motivates staff in an organisation, the report set out in tabular form the factors causing satisfaction or dissatisfaction among staff and a commentary on their application. Based on the research, these divided into motivator factors (those things that can create job satisfaction) and hygiene factors (things that if neglected can lead to job dissatisfaction) and were defined as follows:

Motivator Factors

- Achievement
- Recognition

Hygiene Factors

- Pay and Benefits
- Policies and how they are applied

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- Work itself
- Responsibility
- Promotion
- Growth
- Relationship with other staff
- Supervision
- Status
- Job security
- Working Conditions

The Committee noted the importance of ensuring that the hygiene factors were properly attended to in order to avoid any major causes of dissatisfaction. Most of the motivating factors relied on managers managing well and this highlighted the importance of an ongoing programme of development for managers. Arising from the ideas for improvement referred to in the report, Members commented on the need for good and effective staff communication throughout the organisation, the importance of recognition of staff efforts and achievement (whether or not it was embodied in a formal scheme) and the introduction of a staff suggestion scheme (possibly with a cash incentive). There were benefits to the organisation if staff were encouraged to develop, to adopt a positive approach to their work and were empowered to contribute freely to the Council's aims and objectives.

Whilst acknowledging that the Council's staff were a resource of great value, the use of the term resource and the title Human Resources was queried. The word 'people' or People Services was felt by some to be more appropriate.

Resolved -

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That progress on the development of ideas for improvement be reported to the next meeting, including the suggestion about possible use of the name "People Services" rather HR.

36. Human Resources Statistics

The Committee received an update on key HR statistics for the Council. The continued reduction in staff numbers was noted, with the number of staff (full time equivalent) falling below 1,000 for the first time. A big factor in the reduction had been the movement of Customer Services and ICT staff to Arvato. Staff turnover at around 10% was considered to be at an acceptable level. It was confirmed that all staff leaving the Council's employ were asked to complete an exit survey form for return to HR, and were offered the opportunity for an exit interview.

The Committee also noted significant decisions relating to redundancy for two senior officers during the last quarter of 2013.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

37. Attendance Record

The Committee received a report setting out Members' attendance over the past year.

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Resolved - That the report be noted.

38. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 7th April 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.55 pm)