

## **Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 22nd January, 2015.**

**Present:-** Councillors Brooker (Chair), Dhaliwal, N Holledge (Vice-Chair), Plenty, Sandhu, Sharif and Zarait

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor Chohan and Coad

### **PART 1**

#### **20. Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **21. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th October 2014**

**Resolved -** That the minutes of the last meeting, held on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014, be approved as a correct record.

#### **22. Temporary Agency Staff- Progress on Implementation and Baseline Monitoring**

Claire Portsmouth, Procurement and Contracts Analyst, introduced a report updating Members on the Temporary Agency Staff Contract with Matrix. Members were advised on the key points of the report, which included:

The total invoiced amount for the year to date (April to December 14) was £8,010,106, with the forecast for the full year therefore approximately £10.4m. Although this was more than the total spent last year with Matrix (£7,804,937) the figures for this year included 'Off Contract' staff spend that had been moved to Matrix. By moving this staff to Matrix, the figures were more transparent, and were easier to manage and report on.

Over the last 6 months, efforts had been made to secure agencies to provide services under 'Professional/Executive' category posts, which mainly included staff working in niche posts or those over level 9 where specialist skills may not be available from a general recruitment agency. This agency base would continue to grow over the length of the contract, and would assist in the council having fewer requests for 'Off Contract' spend. The trend of 'Off Contract' spend was showing a marked decline overall, with a 50% reduction in those staff outside of the Matrix contract vs. the previous financial year.

In addition, a re-procurement exercise was undertaken to decrease margin costs for staff that had been employed for more than 12 weeks. Figures for the period July to September showed 97 placements were re-procured, with savings totalling almost £19k so far.

The majority of agency staff were found within the Wellbeing directorate. It was recognised that a national shortage of qualified social workers was a

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challenge that Slough continued to face. The shortage meant that Slough was required to compete against other Local Authorities in order to secure the best qualified staff able to provide the desired quality of service. This had contributed to difficulty reconciling pay parity between agency and permanent full time staff, though permanent staff did now receive a market supplement to reconcile this. Successful permanent recruitment in social care would help to alleviate these issues.

Matrix SCM had carried out a survey of Matrix users, however, responses were too small to draw any meaningful conclusions. In the future, the Council would take an active part in promoting such surveys in order to obtain a better response.

The Committee was concerned over the amount of money being spent on agency workers, and asked a number of questions, including:

Q. What was the difference in pay between an agency and non agency worker?

*A. As an example, the per hour pay for a Children's Social Worker agency worker was circa £30 -35. This figure, extrapolated over a year, was broadly similar to the annual salary of a level 7 permanent employee, which included National Insurance and Pension contributions. However, the real cost was to service delivery and continuity when staff are regularly leaving, and new staff joining. Permanent staff would ensure greater service continuity, and therefore better outcomes for cases.*

Q. What measures were being undertaken to reduce agency worker spend?

*A. A recruitment campaign for social workers was currently underway, to employ full time social workers and therefore reduce the requirement for agency workers in these roles.*

Q. What will be the impact of future staff restructures and savings plans?

*A. To avoid staff redundancies from future restructures a large number of vacancies were deliberately being held back from permanent recruitment. This would enable staff displaced through restructures to obtain other employment with the council and avoid redundancy*

Q. What were the margins due to the Matrix contract?

*A. Matrix mark-up was 8p per hour, on top of Agency fees. Matrix provided a way for the council to manage downward the margin charged by agencies. Matrix's own forecast showed that savings would be made through the length of the contract, though an independent review of order fulfilment and margin rates would be required to validate this.*

Q. Why does Slough use non-qualified agency Social care staff ?

*A. Roles dictate what staff are required. The majority of non-qualified staff being used were shift workers who were called in at short notice. In particular, those staff were used within residential centres to cover illnesses etc.*

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The Committee was concerned that, following previous meetings of the Employment & Appeals Committee, Officers had advised Members that spend on Agency workers would be reduced, however the figures showed that costs had increased. Members also raised concerns at the impact of temporary agency workers on the quality of service being delivered. Members requested that a further, detailed report be prepared for the next meeting, and that the Chief Executive and Senior Directors be invited to attend and present this report.

In addition, concerns were raised at the level of detail provided within reports about agency staff. The Committee asked for greater context and detail on reports, particularly those reports dealing with figures comparing and contrasting spend within current and previous time periods. A request was made for such detail to be included on all future reports.

- Resolved** -
- (a) That the report be noted.
  - (b) That a further report on Temporary Agency Staff, Matrix, and Spend be brought to the next E&A Committee meeting. That the Chief Executive and Directors be invited to attend and present the report.
  - (c) That future reports include further context and detail, particularly regarding monetary figures when comparing and contrasting different time periods.
  - (d) That a more in depth survey of Matrix users be commissioned, with steps taken to ensure staff participation.

### **23. Sickness Absence Performance Update**

Surjit Nagra, HR Business Partner, updated the Committee on the Council's performance in reducing sickness absence, which the Committee had requested should be reported to all future meetings. It was noted that since the last report to Committee in October there had been an increase in days lost in August (+0.2 days) and September (+0.1 days), whilst October had remained static at 0.8 sick days per FTE. No explanation for the rise in sick days had been identified.

The Committee considered a summary of the balanced scorecards by Directorate, up to October 2014, which indicated that Slough BC's absence was reducing. The overall management score for the Council was 74.9 which was a significant improvement when compared to previous score of 64.6 in October. This demonstrated that the Council was positively managing sickness absence.

Managers would continue to undertake formal meetings with employees when trigger points were hit, and the Committee was advised that 97.9% of managers and supervisors had attended Sickness Absence Training.

12% of Slough workforce had met the 6 day trigger period over the last 6 months, and data available through the scorecard indicated that staff being

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managed through the formal process following this trigger had increased from 39.2% in August to 58.3% in October. Whilst this was a positive trend, it also demonstrated that there remained room for improvement.

Of the staff that had met the 6 day trigger, 61.9% had been referred to Occupational Health. However, there remained a number of staff who had not attended their Occupational Health appointments, although this did include a staff member who had subsequently been dismissed, whilst a review of another staff member was currently ongoing.

The Wellbeing directorate showed the greatest number of days lost, although it was highlighted that sickness absence within this workforce would be higher due to the nature of the work undertaken by staff, i.e. frontline support to vulnerable clients. A review of the absence target had therefore been undertaken, and had been found to be unrealistic. As such, a revised target of 9.4 days lost had been set for March 2015 for the Wellbeing directorate.

The Officer discussed the most common reasons for absence during the period 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2014, with skeletal, breaks/sprains having the highest levels of absence, common in the Wellbeing Directorate. To help prevent this, additional physiotherapy support had been arranged through the Occupational Health service for this group of staff. This included early intervention and specialist staff clinics & sessions to manage aches and pains and prevent exacerbation of musculoskeletal disorders. Examples of this additional support included organised back care clinics which involved a mix of Pilates, Yoga and Functional Exercises focussing on the promotion of back care, flexibility and core stability.

Mental health problems such as stress, depression and anxiety contributed to a significant number of days lost. To combat this, work was being developed as part of the Employee Wellbeing Project to identify initiatives via the Community Mental Health team, to identify mechanisms for staff to cope with stress and assistance for managers to address mental health problems.

The 'other' category contributed to a significant number of days lost, however work with managers was being undertaken to ensure that managers continued to look more closely and better record the true reasons for staff absences.

The Committee requested details about on the timeliness of Return to Work interviews, and were advised that these were not currently recorded centrally, however a snapshot survey may be possible. Members asked that this be considered and a report brought to a future meeting.

- Resolved** - (a) That the report be noted.  
(b) That a Return to Work interview snapshot report be undertaken.

## 24. Staff Wellbeing Programme Update

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Surjit Nagra, Hr Business Advisor, updated the Committee on the Council's initiatives to support the Wellbeing agenda, as part of the wider Workforce Strategy.

The Committee was advised that the Wellbeing Project had been re-launched following key personnel from the original project leaving the organisation. A 'Wellbeing Champion' had then been drawn from the members of the last Management Development Programme, as it was agreed that the skills they had acquired during the previous programme would aid them in supporting the new project.

A new project board met in April 2014 to agree new terms of reference, project leads, and key initiatives, and over the last 9 months the group had supported several Wellbeing Initiatives, which included:

**Wellbeing Calendar** – posted on Slough's internal website, to notify staff of forthcoming Wellbeing activities.

**Love Your Office Campaign** – developed as a response to considerable workplace absences due to infections, the campaign focussed on making the office a healthier place. Sanitising wipes were placed around the office so that staff could clean their desks regularly, thereby preventing the spread of germs and infections. Small business cards were also placed on every employee's desk, at all sites, to promote the initiative.

**Workout At Work Day** – all staff were invited to join a free outdoor workout hosted by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. This was supported by the distribution of leaflets highlighting simple exercises that staff could do while sitting at their desk. In addition, a free one hour lunchtime yoga session was provided, run by a qualified instructor from SBC's Lifelong Learning team. The session was aimed at beginners and provided a gentle introduction to yoga. Both activities were well attended and indicated that staff were keen to keep fit and active.

**Health Checks** – the NHS provided free, confidential one to one health checks with health professionals, which covered issues relating to cholesterol, diabetes, blood pressure, and weight. Staff were able to discuss these issues with the NHS professional and receive advice and information booklets, where necessary. The NHS provided SBC with a summary report which highlighted that employee health was affected by poor diet and not enough physical exercise. The data from the summary report would be used when considering future initiatives.

**Physical Activity Sessions** – Following the health Checks undertaken, efforts were made to address the physical activity of staff members. In order to promote further activity, Montem Leisure Centre offered six weeks of fitness sessions at a reduced rate of 99p per session. Sessions included classes for Zumba, Spin and Yoga, whilst swimming at Montem and Langley Leisure Centres was provided for free. All sessions were well attended though Zumba

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proved to be the most popular. As such, Zumba sessions were continuing at the slightly increased rate of £2 per session.

**Flu Jobs** – Following 2014/15 Guidance from the Department of Health, Slough had promoted flu vaccinations to all staff that work with vulnerable clients, via the Occupational Health contract.

**Future initiatives** - the Employee Project Board had identified further initiatives which included:

- The Commit to Quit project, to encourage staff to quite smoking;
- Stress Control Workshops, hosted by Public Health and CMHT colleagues;
- Increased Physiotherapy Sessions and Back Care Clinics, to address high levels of sickness absence within the Wellbeing directorate.

The Committee requested further detail on the success of the flu jobs in improving absences.

**Resolved** – (a) That the report be noted.  
(b) That further detail on flu jobs and absence statistics be brought to the next meeting.

## **25. Forward Work Plan**

The Committee considered items for inclusion at the final meeting of the municipal year.

**Resolved** - That the Agenda for the meeting to be held on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2015 include:

- A report on Temporary Agency Staff, Matrix, and Agency Worker Spend;
- A report detailing the results of the next survey of Matrix users;
- A further sickness absence performance update, together with detail on flu jobs and subsequent absence statistics;
- A report on staff restructures;
- A report on the SBC Accommodation Strategy, including detail on the impact on services and staff during and after the various office moves.
- A report on Return to Work Interviews.

## **26. Members Attendance Record**

**Resolved** - That the report be noted.

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### **27. Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.36 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)