

Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Tuesday, 20th October, 2015.

Present:- Councillors Brooker (Chair), N Holledge (Vice-Chair), Arvind Dhaliwal, M Holledge, Morris, Plenty, Sharif and Zarait

PART 1

13. Declarations of Interest

None.

14. Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2015

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June 2015 be approved as a correct record.

15. Introduction to new HR structure following appointment of new AD Human Resources

The Committee was introduced to the newly appointed Assistant Director of Organisational Development and Human Resources, Christina Hefferon.

Ms. Hefferon confirmed that she was happy to have joined Slough Borough Council, and was beginning to settle into the role. The new OD/HR structure was beginning to take shape, though this was still in its formative stages. It was confirmed that the AD would be supported by Surjit Nagra, now OD and HR Business Partner, and a new OD/HR Business Partner Sangeeta Jerath.

16. Matrix Contract Report

Roger Parkin, Director of Customer and Community Services, introduced a report on temporary Agency Staffing, the key points of which were:

Historically, the Council had difficulty in managing agency staff. Matrix had been introduced to improve governance and visibility over agency staff and agency spend, and was continuing to drive down costs on agency staffing. However, as the contract was due for renewal in the next 12 months, a review would be conducted to determine whether it has been successful, and whether it should be renewed.

Figures for the first two quarters of the 2015 financial year (April–September), showed the total invoiced spend on agency staff was £5,592,192. This was approximately £500,000 above the spend for the same period in 2014. The increase was due to additional agency staffing requirements within Children and Families, with agency staff required to provide service continuity whilst the move to the Children's Services Trust was completed. With the Trust now in place, it was expected that they would recruit their own staff to permanent positions, thereby reducing their spend on agency staff.

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The tenure of agency staff was set out via the tables in Figures 1 and 3. The tenure of staff in driving positions was highlighted, and Members were informed that these particular staff were highly trained, specialist drivers for children with complex needs. Their retention was important, and so the length of their tenure as agency staff was not a concern.

Members asked a number of questions, including:

When was it expected that the agency spend would start to consistently reduce?

The majority of the increased spending had been seen in the Children and Families department. With the move to the Trust, a recruitment drive was underway to convert temporary staff to permanent staff. However, until this was concluded, spend would need to be maintained at the current level to ensure service continuity. It was expected that the recruitment drive would be concluded circa February/March 2016, and the reduction in spend would by extension be seen at that time.

Was the Trust's budget now separate from the Council's budget?

Yes. The Children's Services Trust's budget was set at £21m, with a budgeted overspend of £2.2m over the last 18 months. As the Trust became more established, it was expected that their spend would reduce to the baseline budget of £21m. In addition, the Trust was tasked with making the same 35% savings as the rest of the Council, as set out in the Financial Strategy within the 5 Year Plan. Future reports to the Committee would separate the budgets.

What was the Council's view on zero-hour contracts?

The Council did not employ staff on zero-hour contracts. The Council did, however, have some 'casual workers', in effect 'as and when' workers with no formal contract of employment but letters of engagement.

What progress had been made to recruit new social workers?

The Council was faced with the same national shortage of skilled social workers as other Authorities. A campaign to recruit more social workers was underway, together with the Council's 'Grow Your Own' scheme whereby social workers would be trained and hopefully retained for the long-term, this being through the ASYE scheme. The importance of retaining skilled social workers to provide stable continuity of service to clients was recognised.

Had the Council explored offering affordable/social housing to social workers to encourage them to settle within Slough?

The relocation policy of the Council currently was to offer relocation to staff at Senior Management level. However, as part of attracting Social Workers in the Children Services it was agreed to extend this scheme to this group of

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staff as part of the recruitment offer. Unfortunately, the scheme has had limited impact and to date, 4 social workers have expressed an interest.

Councillor Sharif confirmed that the Cabinet had recently approved a new home buying scheme for first time buyers. Although the scheme was open to all, the possibility of adding greater incentives for key workers could be explored. Social workers would be informed of the scheme as part of the general advertising campaign.

Resolved - (a) That the report be noted.
(b) That a further report be brought to the next meeting of the Employment & Appeals Committee.

17. Staff Wellbeing Update

Surjit Nagra, HR and OD Business Partner, provided an update on staff wellbeing, the key points of which were:

Policy Compliance

Policy compliance equated to 50% weighting of the overall management score. Figures for Q2 2015 (April-June) showed a marked decrease in compliance across the authority. This was predominantly due to Managers not returning their sickness absence tracker sheets. To address this, efforts were being made to ensure Managers were submitting their tracker sheets in a timely fashion.

Training Attendance

This equated to 25% of the overall score, and showed stable figures across the Q2 period. Managers were attending training, whilst those still requiring training were being identified and booked onto the relevant courses.

Occupational Health Referrals and Attendance

OH Referrals and Attendance equated to 25% of the overall scorecard. The data was stable and high, showing that the majority of Managers were referring staff to OH upon hitting a trigger (number of days absent).

However, the number of staff not attending their OH meetings had increased. Steps had been taken to ensure that such occurrences were not repeated, and it was expected that the data for Q3 would show an improvement.

In response to questions asked at previous meetings of the Committee, Members were informed that the Council's OH provider was OHWorks, for whose services the Council paid a fixed price. The contract had originally been tendered for 3 years, and had been extended for a further year, pending a review.

Overall Management Score

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Considering the above criteria, the overall score was seen to have decreased during Q2. The main contributory factor for this decrease was the non compliance of managers in submitting absence trackers.

Staff Absences

Since the last report to the Committee, data for sickness days lost across the Authority in Q2 had remained at 0.6, a decrease in comparison to the same period in 2014.

Days lost per FTE were broken down by Directorate, with 3 of the 4 Directorates meeting their targets. The Regeneration, Housing & Resources Directorate did not meet their target, in some part due to the limited return of the tracking data.

Reasons for absence remained similar to previous reports, with the top 3 being 'Not Stated', Skeletal breaks/sprains' and 'Infections'.

Absences due to skeletal breaks/sprains had reduced and further analysis was being conducted to see if this was due to the Physiotherapy Clinics that had been introduced. Absences due to infections were expected to rise with the advent of the winter months, though to address this, a programme of flu vaccinations was being offered to staff. In addition, the Council was due to become a 'smoke free' Council in line with a new smoking policy, as of April 2016. It was hoped that this would further lessen absences due to throat or respiratory issues.

Steps were being taken to further identify the reasons for absence and thereby reduce days lost due to sickness.

Members asked a number of questions, including:

Members felt that the 25% weighting for this Manager Training was too high. Could this be amended before the next report?

Human Resources would look into this and feed back to the Committee at the next meeting.

With regard to the reasons for staff absence, the 'Not Stated' category was a concern to Members. How could the Council act to reduce absences, if it did not know the cause?

The Council was unable to remove this category. However, with the move to the new HR Management system detailed in agenda item 7, there would be a wider variety of absence reasons to choose from. Managers were being trained to ensure they were properly reporting the reasons for absence.

Feedback from the Housing Directorate, situated at Landmark Place, was that the working conditions were unpleasant. A large number of staff were enclosed within a small space, which could contribute to the spread of

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infections. In addition, morale was low, which in turn could contribute to work absences. Could this be reviewed?

This matter had been noted following discussions with staff, and conversations with senior management on how to resolve these issues were ongoing.

In the private sector, staff absences were closely aligned with performance and appraisals. Could this be implemented within the Council?

The Chief Executive and Senior Management teams were closely reviewing staff absences with a view to reducing the number of days lost. The new AD, and the OD/HR Business Partners, will be working with CMT and SMTs to increase the focus on reducing absence.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

18. Updated Employee Code of Conduct

Surjit Nagra, OD and HR Business Partner, introduced a report on the updated draft Employee Code of Conduct.

Members were informed that the Chief Executive had asked that this be noted as a working draft, as there was now a requirement to update and revise all employment policy documents to ensure that they were simple and easy to understand, and that they would align with the new ERP.

Following presentation of the draft Code at the previous meeting, references to contractors, consultants and volunteers had been rewritten to remove any ambiguity. The wording within Section 1.3 confirmed that the Code applied to all listed therein, and the Committee was asked to note the Code as a working draft as part of the wider policy review.

Resolved - That the updated Code be note by the Employment & Appeals Committee as a working draft.

19. Implementation of a new Financial and Human Resources System

Surjit Nagra, HOD and HR Business Partner, updated Members on the Council's move to a new integrated Finance and Human Resources system.

Currently the Council was operating two separate systems for Finance and HR, which were loosely integrated. The HR system, provided by Frontier, lacked self-service functionality and quick reporting processes, which had led to a lack of timely and accurate HR data. The Finance system, provided by Oracle, was now out of support.

A project to deliver a new, integrated HR and Finance system was therefore commissioned, and was scheduled to be launched in two phases:

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1. The Finance and Procurement element of the system was to go live in by the end of 2015.
2. The Human Resources and Payroll element of the system was to go live as of 1st April 2016.

The benefits of the new integrated system were set out as per the report.

The project was commissioned in line with the Chief Executive's request for a review of all HR Policies and Procedures, with the aim of ensuring that all policies were simple and easy to use, with added self-sufficiency. It was expected that this in turn would lead to less reliance on HR staff, and therefore additional efficiencies and savings. The integrated system would support this drive.

Members asked a number of questions, including:

How would staff access the system? Would non office-based staff have access?

The system was digital, and would be accessed through a computer portal. All staff would be issued with a username and password. Staff that had limited access to a computer could use an app designed for Smartphones/tablets. As part of the move to a digital system, paper forms such as payslips would no longer be provided. Instead, staff could access their payslips via the system, and print copies if necessary. Staff would be trained on how to use the system.

At times, Staff and Councillors will need paper copies of forms such as payslips, P60s. How will these be provided?

In an instance where the staff member cannot access the required forms, HR would provide these. Similarly, Councillor's P60s could be forwarded via the post.

How would staff be restricted in accessing sensitive information?

All staff were restricted by permissions, that would limit their access and power to apply changes on the system. For example Managers would have a digital sign-off according to their budgetary permissions., in line with their job description.

What kind of resilience will the system provide?

The system included a backup, with resilience and disaster-recovery options. Support from the service provider would also be in place.

The Council currently provide payroll management for schools. Will the new system cover schools?

There would be no change to current school processes.

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Resolved - That the report be noted.

20. Member's Attendance Record

The Member's Attendance Record was noted.

21. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as being Thursday, 21st January 2016.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.33 pm and closed at 8.03 pm)