



Staffing Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park,
Dorchester, DT1 1XJ on Monday, 9 April 2018

Present:

Peter Wharf (Chairman)
Rebecca Knox, Ray Bryan and Janet Dover

Officers Attending: Jonathan Mair (Service Director - Organisational Development (Monitoring Officer)), Alison Crockett (Acting Specialist Services Lead), Sam Dewar (Principal HR and OD Adviser), Paul Loach (HR and OD Business Partner), Tracy Scott (Principal HR & OD Advisor), Carl Wilcox (HR Specialist Services Lead) and Fiona King (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

(Notes: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Staffing Committee to be held on **Monday, 9 July 2018**.)

Apologies for Absence

14 Apologies for absence were received from Andy Canning and Hilary Cox.

Code of Conduct

15 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

16 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2018 were confirmed and signed.

Public Participation

17 Public Speaking

There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2).

Petitions

There were no petitions received at the meeting in accordance with the County Council's Petition Scheme.

LGR Update

18 The Leader of the County Council provided an update on the work in relation to the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The work of the Dorset Joint Committee was highlighted, and it was noted that if the structural change order was confirmed as expected there would only be 2 more meetings of this joint committee.

The Acting Specialist Services Lead reported on the progress with work on the HR workstream and confirmed that it was operating pan Dorset. A major part of the work was in relation to TUPE and the aim was to be working in step with both the Dorset area and the Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch area. Good progress was being made, a common timetable and a process for disaggregation had been developed. A detailed communications timetable was being pulled together as part of this work. Officers were continuing to meet with Trade Union representatives and it was noted that a fortnightly forum was now in place.

In respect of the Dorset area, the collation of the various terms and conditions and people management policies was progressing. Analysis of this information was being undertaken to help understand the current position and shape proposals for consideration by the Shadow Authority in relation to any TUPE measures and terms and conditions for new recruits to the Dorset Council. Work was also ongoing to shape a consistent offer to maintain workforce wellbeing and build resilience.

Following a question about the loss of staff prior to the new Authority being in place, the Acting Specialist Lead confirmed that officers were monitoring staff turnover in the different councils which ranged between 10 and 16% at present. Work was ongoing in respect of communications and engagement it was important to think about how to retain the people already in Council employment through the transition.

In response to a question from a member about whether staff had a choice between redundancy or transferring to a new authority, the Acting Specialist Services Lead noted that this was not the case. The Leader of the County Council added that staff would transfer on their existing terms and conditions. Members felt it would be important to send out a positive message to staff throughout the county.

The Chairman asked that in his role as the Cabinet member for Workforce he be kept in the loop in respect of any communications with staff to ensure consistency.

The Chairman advised members that this would be the Acting Specialist Services Lead Officer's (Alison Crockett) last Staffing Committee meeting. He was sad to see her retire but wished her well and proposed a vote of thanks from all members for all her knowledge and help over the past years.

Resolved

That Alison Crockett, Acting Specialist Services Lead be thanked and commended for her years of service to the County Council.

Headcount and FTE Figures and Non-Directly Employed Contract Workforce - Quarter 3 2017/18

- 19 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development which covered the different aspects of workforce resourcing in the period up to Quarter 3 2017/18 (December 2017). There had been a small reduction in directly employed staff overall (25 FTE) between January 2017 and December 2017.

Members were advised that following the last meeting of the Committee, which the Chief Accountant attended, further work had been carried out to ensure that information on overall spend and forecast spend on resourcing was made available and regularly updated for Group Finance Managers and Senior Leaders.

The HR Specialist Services Lead highlighted to members that in 2009 the County Council employed 7,147 staff, now there were just 4,010 who were employed which showed that the number had been decreasing steadily. Agency workers and consultants were not a first option but were used when a particular expertise was needed and the current workforce did not possess it.

One member was pleased to note the fall in agency workers/consultants as she felt the current staff had a lot to offer. The Leader of the County Council reminded members that sometimes there were such unique qualities that were needed by the Authority, that would not be needed in the long term, but was pleased to see it was being monitored. The management of staff did sometimes require an independent expert and felt this would certainly be the case in the coming year.

Officers' attention was drawn to the substantial increase in numbers in Adult and Community Services and hoped that this was not a trend. The HR Specialist Services Lead advised members that this was one of the few indicators that had climbed and that the majority of the rationale was the adult services transformation and the Sustainability Transformation Plan (STP) work.

One member commented that they were totally committed to the staff that were currently employed and felt they were lucky to have the staff that were working for the County Council. The Chairman echoed these comments and advised members that he met with staff regularly and acknowledged their reliance on them.

Noted

Management of Attendance - Quarter 3 2017/18

20 Members considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development which reported that sickness absence across the County Council had reduced from 8.53 days per fte to 7.95 days per fte during this quarter. Long term sickness had reduced by approximately a third.

The HR and OD Business Partner highlighted the positive results and positive trends in the report which showed the steady reduction in sickness absence for the last 12 months.

He drew members' attention to the work of the wellbeing services including a number of workshops that had been held to help employee's manage life pressures and stress and to help build up resilience. Wellbeing services were targeting their support to teams with higher levels of stress related absence .

The Chairman highlighted that 78% of return to work interviews had been completed and noted that some areas results were not as good as others which was a concern. The HR and OD Business Partner advised that HR have asked Audit to focus investigations on these areas. A summary of the audit would be presented to members of the Staffing Committee at their next meeting.

The Leader of the County Council felt it would be helpful to have further information on the wider impact of working days lost on a particular service and the community. Evidence of this impact specifically would help in relation to the new SEN policy that was being drafted. Members discussed specifically the roles of Passenger Support Assistants and School Crossing Patrols. The HR and OD Business Partner advised they were working with colleagues in the Environment Directorate to review job design. It was noted that these two roles not only had fairly high sickness absence rates but also had a low completion rate for return to work interview forms.

One member felt it would be helpful to show an average sickness cost in future reports. It would be interesting to compare the numbers across borough/district colleagues in readiness for the new Authority.

Following a discussion about the causes of mental health illnesses the HR and OD Business Partner advised that officers had to act upon the basis of employee's self-reporting of their reasons for absence. For a mental health related absence the trigger for their absence could be work, family, finance, life event and could therefore be complex. People were not obliged to go into detail and there was a need to respect confidentiality. However, if an employee had a good relationship with their line manager, they may feel more comfortable to disclose the background circumstances in full.

The HR Specialist Services Lead advised that he had been reflecting recently on the figures for the past 9 months of the employee counselling service where counsellors

were asked to record their assessment of the situation. The feedback showed that two thirds of the customers for the counsellors reported their concerns were in relation to personal and family related stress, the percentage for work related stress was a great deal lower.

The Chairman highlighted the work of the Mental Health Champions and drew members' attention to the Mental Health Awareness week, 14-20 May. He suggested holding a training session for all members, on mental health, to raise their awareness. One member commented that it was important for staff to realise there was someone they could talk to and that there was a good network of different avenues available where people could seek support.

Resolved

1. That the sustained better than average performance of Dorset County Council in managing sickness absence levels in comparison with other local authorities be noted.
2. That an Internal Audit of Sickness Management be conducted which will be informed of any findings of concern that the audit might identify, in particular concerning parts of the organisation not conducting return to work interviews to a satisfactory extent, be noted.

Reason for Decision

To provide a focus for the effective management of attendance within the Council.

Redundancy Costs - Quarterly Report

- 21 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development which considered the costs for redundancy dismissals effective from 1 July to 31 December 2017 (quarters 2 and 3).

In respect of severance packages over £100,000, the Chairman felt he should be included in the consultation in order to give him a complete picture. He felt that the list of total costs was slightly misleading as two-thirds of the costs were probably due to pension strain costs. For future reports he would like to see a cash payment column and a column showing the pension strain figure to make the total package clearer.

Following a comment about a review of redundancies over the past 5 years and the need to ensure there was no duplication of deleted roles, the Principal HR & OD Advisor advised that HR officers worked closely with colleagues in finance to ensure the redundant posts were taken out of the system and the associated budgets also removed.

In respect of the proposed payment cap for public sector exit payments, the County Council could not implement a pay cap without it being backed by the force of law. The HR Specialist Services Lead advised that this had not as yet progressed and when it did the County Council would be bound to meet the requirements of any new legislation.

The Monitoring Officer reflected that the report showed there had been 16 redundancies with the money being recovered in 9 months which represented a considerable saving for the public purse.

Resolved

1. That members considered the costs reported in respect of redundancies and severance packages in excess of £100,000.
2. That the Chairman of the Staffing Committee be added to the consultation in respect of severance packages over £100,000.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the effective management and appropriate scrutiny of redundancy costs within the organisation.

Relocation Expenses

- 22 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development which summarised the key changes and anticipated improvement to the provision of relocation expenses.

Officers advised members that the current policy had been in place for at least 20 years in its current format and the proposed changes had been initiated following comments from recruitment managers in respect of hard to fill roles e.g. children's social workers. Officers had been mindful of LGR in this process and had looked at the packages across the district and borough councils also. It was noted that there had only been 9 cases in the past twelve months where this provision had been used.

One member felt that compared with industry standards there could perhaps be more done and felt there was a need to look at how much it cost people to live in Dorset, and to perhaps think about accommodation for key workers. The Leader of the County Council noted that this policy would move into the LGR programme where the best policy from across the councils would be adopted. In respect of the private sector she recognised that the County Council's policy was not comparable as there was a limited budget.

Resolved

That the revised relocation expenses provision/guidance which would be available for managers to use with immediate effect for any new appointments to eligible roles be approved.

Reason for Decision

To assist the Council to recruit to its hard-to-fill roles that meet the eligibility criteria.

Questions from County Councillors

- 23 No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 11.40 am