



## Staffing Committee

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

**Present:**

Peter Wharf (Chairman)

Hilary Cox (Vice-Chairman), Ray Bryan, Andy Canning, Janet Dover and Rebecca Knox

Officers Attending: Sara Collinson (HR & OD Business Partner), Kirsty Hillier (Senior Communications Officer (internal)), Paul Loach (HR and OD Business Partner), Christopher Matthews (Service Manager - Advisory Service), Jim McManus (Chief Accountant), Matthew Piles (Service Director - Economy, Natural and Built Environment), 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 **Wednesday, 12 September 2018**).

### Apologies for Absence

24 Apologies for absence were received from Steven Lugg and Jonathan Mair (Service Director, Organisational Development).

### Appointment of Vice-Chairman

25 **Resolved**

That Hilary Cox be appointed Vice-Chairman for the remainder of 2018/19.

### Code of Conduct

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

### Terms of Reference

27 The Committee noted their Terms of Reference.

### **Noted**

### Minutes

28 The minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2018 were confirmed and signed noting the following:-

- The Chairman asked for the deletion of the word 'just' from the 4th paragraph of Minute 20; and
- The HR Specialist Service Lead advised that following the last meeting, future reports regarding redundancy costs, starting with the report to this meeting of the Committee, now included a redundancy payment column and a separate column showing the pension strain figure, to ensure clarity of the total package.

### Public Participation

29 **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.

### **Headcount, FTE Figures and Non-Directly Employed Contract Workforce - Quarter 4 2017/18**

30 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 4 2017/18 (ending 31 March 2018). There had been a small reduction (32.4FTE) in directly employed staff overall between March 2018 and March 2018. Spending on agency workers had increased in Quarter 4 compared to Quarter 3 and consultancy costs had also risen over the same period. These short-term increases had arisen from a variety of reasons and were outline in section 3 of the Service Director's report.

The HR Specialist Services Lead commented that during a period of such transformation, ordinarily organisations would expect the number of directly-employed staff, consultants and agency workers to increase. But the council had achieved a 62% reduction in the number of direct employees since the end of 2009, in response to sustained cuts in funding since that time. In respect of consultants, members were advised that the amount spent was looked at and reviewed regularly with directorate management teams but at the present time it was a difficult market in which to operate.

The Chief Accountant provided members with a summary of the latest financial position as at the end of June 2018. It was noted that a predicted underspend on the overall staffing budget was expected, but with individual pockets of difficulty, however, it still showed positive progress from the same position last year. He made reference to the number of vacant posts in the organisation, joint work done between Finance and HR to monitor vacancy levels, and that some posts were vacant in the light of Local Government Reorganisation.

The Chairman noted the success of recent recruitment to social worker posts and added that whilst the more junior social workers might not necessarily have the greater experience levels of previous agency workers employed, they would have more of a stake in the future of the organisation as part of the permanent workforce of the Council.

One member expressed concern that the cost of living and the cost of people moving to this area for employment was not being addressed. He felt it was essential to ensure children's and adults services posts were seen as high priority, and made reference to the importance of key worker housing. With the start of a new council imminent, he was keen to explore other opportunities and identify more in-house training for the roles that were required to maintain services.

The HR & OD Business Partner advised members that work was underway nationally to create an apprenticeship scheme for social workers, and it was hoped that the 'Step-up to Social Work' programme would also be kept in place. Salaries were periodically compared to those in use in other authorities, but it would not be helpful to be in a pay race with other employers. However, Labour Market Increments (LMIs) had been added to some posts in the County Council to make them more attractive where labour market conditions could be shown to be problematic. The Chairman asked for further information on induction for new employees at a future meeting.

In respect of affordable housing, at the last meeting of the Staffing Committee, members approved an updated policy on relocation expenses for new employees. The new Dorset Council would bring together five housing authorities so it was anticipated that, at a future point, more effective measures to help workers moving into the area could be developed.

One member commented that the stress of jobs like social work was well understood, and felt that the pressure of such jobs needed to be kept in view so that effective employer support could be provided. There were more issues than just financial gain when seeking to attract new staff into difficult roles, and he felt that employees needed to be made to feel part of a strong and supported team. He was not criticising officers, but hoped that more lateral thinking, in respect of exploring the ways in which relevant issues could be addressed, was needed. In a period of transition, he felt the authority was vulnerable to losing staff, and hoped to see evidence of measures to ensure key people who were essential to the new authority would not be lost.

The HR & OD Business Partner advised members of the ongoing work that was being done with managers when dealing with stress. The Vice-Chairman was concerned about the impact on staff of vacant posts and felt this needed to be reviewed. In respect of vacancies the HR & OD Business Partner advised members that the manager performance dashboard was updated regularly to show those vacancies that were being actively recruited to and those being held for budget savings. The Chairman felt it would be helpful for the Directors for both Children's and Adults Services to attend the next meeting of the Staffing Committee to explore this further.

### **Resolved**

1. That further information on staff induction be provided at a future Staffing Committee meeting.
2. That the Directors of both Children's and Adult Services be invited to attend the next meeting on 12 September 2018 to discuss how stress was being managed along with staff vacancies.

### **LGR Update**

- 31 The Leader of the Council updated members on progress made towards the new Dorset Council.

In respect of the earlier discussion on the Headcount report, she advised members and officers to take caution to not put more stress on staff by having the same conversations in several different places. The Governance arrangements for the new council were expected to be established later this week. She highlighted the importance of getting messages through to the relevant task and finish groups regarding conversations which arose from this Committee. One of the main drivers to the advantages of the unitary was housing and the housing debate now needed to become more strategic.

The Leader advised members that she had recently attend the Local Government Association's (LGA) conference where the emphasis was on adult and social care. For many previous years, planning and place-shaping had consistently had greater prominence, so this recent emphasis on care showed an important shift.

The Shadow Executive Committee of the Shadow Dorset Council had met for the first time and work was now moving at pace, and each committee member now had an area of oversight. She highlighted the importance of people knowing what was happening on the first day of the new structures in April 2019.

Following a discussion on the cost of living in Dorset, the Leader noted that the average wage was not the national average wage and that more work was needed

with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) on this. It was not just about looking at growing businesses but also – and just as importantly - growing skills to keep people in the local area.

One member commented that housing equalled economic growth and highlighted the importance of getting the balance right. Dorset was a low skilled economy and this needed to change. The Chairman added that work was ongoing to make part of the Innovation Park at Winfrith a technical area of excellence.

### **Noted**

#### **Management of Attendance 2017/18 - Quarter 4 (January to March 2018)**

32 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development, which highlighted an increase in seasonal causes of employee sickness absence during the Quarter 4 winter period. Sickness absence cases caused by respiratory and ear, nose and throat conditions had notably increased since Q3. Despite the overall increase, from 7.95 to 8.25 days per FTE, the rate was still slightly lower than one year ago and significantly lower than the average of 10.5 sickness absence days per annum for local government workers.

The HR & OD Business Partner highlighted the wellbeing work for staff currently being undertaken in the run up to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). He also drew members' attention to sickness absence targets which he proposed for removal. He proposed to replace these with other interventions to make the data more meaningful. One member expressed concern over the loss of information if headline targets were removed from the high-level performance dashboard. The HR & OD Business Partner explained that only the sickness days lost column would be removed, as there was no evidence to show this made any difference. The main area of difference was what managers did as a result of an absence, aimed at reducing future absence levels. Following discussion, members felt a sickness target should be retained, but suggested that 2 or 3 targets be retained that reflected the type of work.

Members discussed mental health absence and the possibility of having data showing a separation of work and home issues causing stress, anxiety or depression. The HR & OD Business Partner noted that Resilience training for staff was offered to help them handle the impacts in work and home life.

The HR Specialist Services Lead advised members that he monitored data from specialist employee counsellors retained by the County Council. They record every case under 3 headings: work-related, home-related or a combination of both. Past experience in other organisations usually showed the 'combined' category as being the most frequent, but that data on counselling caseload in the council over the past year showed a very different picture. Most cases were home-related stresses or combined, with work-related accounting for less than one-third. He felt that, despite the LGR uncertainty for staff, these figures showed that Council staff were being supported and kept well-informed, but that this must be sustained and there was no room for complacency.

Members asked for this information to be included in future reports. They also requested further breakdown of the existing data, showing percentages, and comparison numbers over the past 3 years to show longer-term trends in the data. Officers undertook to provide members with further detail in future reports on attendance management.

Following a question from a member regarding how the figures compared to the national average of sickness for employees in the private sector, the HR Specialist Services Lead advised that the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) published data annually on this. Engineering and Manufacturing industry absence figures were

usually very low, sometimes only around 4 days per employee per year, well below public sector levels. The rest of the private sector was usually not hugely different to the levels consistently being achieved by better-performing local authorities such as the County Council, at around 7 days per employee per year.

The Chairman drew members' attention to the summary of recommendations from the sickness audit report, which he felt was very helpful. He wished to see a regular update of progress made with these recommendations at future Staffing Committee meetings.

Following a request from members at their last meeting, the Service Director for Economy, Natural and Built Environment updated members on the improvements to sickness absence recording in Dorset Travel. The Service Director explained that this was a very diverse service with a headcount of 629 employees, including 270 passenger assistants or drivers. Since the audit, resources had been put in place to ensure that passenger assistants called in daily, and this was monitored. Work was ongoing to ensure that a better system was in place for the start of the autumn term. The Chairman made reference to the need to improve return-to-work interviews, and encouraged more effort to be put into this. The Service Director highlighted that there was a lot of concern about LGR at the present time, and that he was spending time talking the whole team to try to address their concerns.

### **Resolved**

That 2 or 3 relevant sickness targets remained to reflect the type of work. Also, managers would be held to account for their interventions e.g. return-to-work-interviews, wellbeing and occupational health referrals and appropriate use of formal procedures. More emphasis on return to work interviews and a target set for those areas not achieving.

### **Reason for decision**

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

## **Performance and Development Review Completion 2017/18**

33 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development which provided councillors with the Performance Development Review (PDR) completion rates for all Directorates. The overall completion rate for Dorset County Council was 88% compared with 86% last year. However, it was noted that it was not feasible to achieve 100% PDR completion rates as some employees at PDR time, were either absent, had recently joined or had left the authority.

Monitoring of PDRs in specific areas seemed to be working well but it was highlighted that more improvement was needed in Children's Services. The Chairman asked that the Director from Children's Services be invited to attend the next meeting of the Staffing Committee on 12 September 2018, with a written report provided in advance, to be shared with members stating what measures were currently being taken.

One member highlighted that it was not just the quantity of PDRs but also the quality of them. The HR & OD Business Partner advised that reference to the quality measure was included in the Service Director's report.

The Service Director, Economy, Natural and Built Environment, advised members that in his service everyday provides opportunity for feedback on employees' performance and development, and that he encouraged his team not to wait for their PDR to raise any issues. He highlighted the importance of having the time to work through the development of an individual.

### **Resolved**

1. That the Director from Children's Services be invited to attend the next meeting of

the Staffing Committee on 12 September 2018.

2. That an interim report by the Director for Children's Services be circulated to members prior to the September meeting detailing the measures currently being taken to address the number of completed PDRs.

### **Redundancy Costs - Quarterly Report**

34 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development, which looked at the costs for redundancy dismissals effective from 1 January to 31 March 2018 (Quarter 4). The Principal HR & OD Adviser confirmed that there were no cases this quarter where the severance package had exceeded the £100k overall cost threshold.

Officers confirmed that the average amount paid out in redundancy over Q4 had been around £14k per redundant employee, with a further average of £8k in pension strain costs. The majority of redundancies were due to restructuring in order for directorates to achieve financial efficiencies.

Following a question from a member, the Principal HR & OD Adviser stated that those packages with a payback period of more than 24 months went back to the relevant Director for further discussion. The Chairman added that the redundancies mentioned in the Service Director's report were paying for themselves in less than a year and that a number were as a result of the transformation agenda.

### **Noted**

### **Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Employer Discretions - Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions**

35 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director, Organisational Development which focussed on the council's approach to additional pension contributions, or additional voluntary contributions (AVCs), and a proposed change to existing arrangements to provide greater financial benefit to both employees and the County Council.

Following a question from the Chairman, the Service Manager, HR Operations, explained the shared cost arrangement which also introduced National Insurance benefits, to members. He added that the Government fully supported this scheme and that other local authorities that had experience of this shared cost scheme, had found that as the number of employees accessing the scheme increased, so did the value of average contributions, as employees often opted to reinvest the National Insurance savings they had achieved.

### **Resolved**

That the change in the County Council's approach to additional pension contributions and the publication of an amended employer discretion policy be agreed.

### **Reason for decision**

The Staffing Committee oversee matters relating to staff terms and conditions and people management policies.

### **Questions from County Councillors**

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