

Shadow Executive Committee – 25 March 2019

Member Speaking at the Meeting

Question from Cllr Kate Wheller to the Lead Member for HR and Workforce in relation to Staffing

I am concerned that very experienced knowledgeable staff are leaving the authority, either by choice or design. Can you reassure me that unique knowledge will not be lost?

Answer

The loss of key knowledge and skills as the new council is formed is an identified risk that is monitored closely, both at Programme Board level and specifically as part of the Transitional Structures Review. We will continue to see organisational change as we bring the employees from six former councils together into the new Dorset Council, reducing duplication and management overheads. This will inevitably result in employees leaving the council, either through resignation, redundancy or voluntary release.

Measures put in place to mitigate the risk include the need to ensure all employees work sufficient notice periods and that knowledge transfer is a planned and coordinated activity across all areas to ensure that knowledge and skills held by individual employees are shared with colleagues before an employee leaves.

Any request for voluntary redundancy will be considered against a set of agreed criteria, ensuring that decisions take account of key skills and knowledge and are considered carefully and robustly.

At any point an organisation can lose long serving members of staff who have comprehensive corporate knowledge. As part of the LGR process to bring six organisations into one, we were always aware that this would have the potential for loss of corporate knowledge and understanding. In order to mitigate this we have undertaken the following, this is on top of working co-operatively as a Shaping Dorset Council programme supported by all six councils, where knowledge has been freely shared between all councils:

1. Full handover from serving team members to the new Executive Directors - having the Executive Directors in role ahead of the vesting day on 1 April, has allowed for full hand-over of responsibilities from previous post-holders/Interim Officers.
2. Where employees are known to be leaving their authorities we have also built into the exit process the handover of knowledge as part of this process.

At this point I think it would be right to thank those employees who have worked so hard to prepare the six councils for Dorset Council, regardless of whether they are part of the new council, or not, they have all committed to ensure the new council has the best possible start. This has been very much appreciated.

Question from Cllr Lucy Hamilton to the Lead Member for Children's Services regarding progress on the Base Budget Review of Children's Services

At Shadow Dorset Full Council on 20 Feb, councillors were told: At the time of writing this report there is an emerging picture of further costs in the Children's Services budget over and above the increased amount already built into the 2019/20 budget proposals. It is therefore recommended that a Base Budget Review exercise is carried out on this area as a priority in order to establish the on-going position with the new Executive Director of People - Children.

I understand that Dorset Council will need to make further savings in the region of £8 million as a result of budget shortfall. All social workers in Children's Services have been advised that compulsory redundancies will be necessary.

How many redundancies are needed? What is the impact on caseload? The figures that have been previously provided are calculated assuming that senior managers carry a caseload. Austerity is letting down our most vulnerable children, families and young people.

Answer

Statement from Shadow Executive Leader:

Under shadow procedure rules question are limited to 50 words or fewer. Cllr Hamilton's question is 175 words in length and so is more than three times the word the limit. Despite this I am exercising my discretion and allowing the question so that the important issue raised is addressed.

Answer from Cllr Steve Butler, Lead member for Safeguarding:

Cllr Hamilton's question is based upon the entirely false premise that social workers in Children's Services have been advised that compulsory redundancies will be necessary. It simply is not true that social worker redundancies will be needed. Instead it is key to protecting children and doing so cost effectively that we invest in employing and retaining social workers rather than employing expensive agency workers.

Questions like this destabilise our staff and only serve to undermine our success in attracting social workers to Dorset. Let me be clear, social workers are not at risk of redundancy.