

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

26 January 2023

HR Matters Relating to Place

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr J Haynes, Corporate Development and Transformation

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides an overview of a range of data and interventions taking place regarding key HR matters, in the Place Directorate.

Sick Absence continues to be above the Dorset Council average. There are a range of interventions detailed within the report to demonstrate work that is taking place to support a reduction in sickness absence.

Staff Turnover remains high in the Place Directorate. There are a range of interventions detailed within the report to give background on the difficulties faced when recruiting and retaining employees and initiatives that have been deployed to reduce turnover and increase employee retention.

Mandatory training continues to be a priority for the Place Directorate. Detailed in the report are the activities and engagement initiatives that we are carrying out with employees to encourage them to complete mandatory training and develop a learning culture within teams and individually.

Outstanding DBS checks remain a priority for the Place Directorate. Detailed in the report are a range of interventions that are being carried out to ensure we educate our employees on the process and comply with the Dorset Council DBS Policy.

Recommendation:

Committee to review the contents of this report and raise any comments as relevant. Decide if any further action is required.

Reason for Recommendation:

To provide assurance to the Committee that appropriate robust HR systems and processes are in place.

Report

1. Workforce Context

- 1.1 The Place Directorate has a headcount of 2196, (1715 FTE). Services within the directorate are clustered within five areas, each led by a Corporate Director. These areas are, Place Based Services, Economic Growth & Regeneration, Assets & Properties, Libraries & Cultural services, and Climate & Ecological Sustainability. Services provided are very diverse and include customer services, libraries, climate, ecological, planning, highways, assets and properties, passenger transport, environment & wellbeing, community & public protection, waste operations, and waste strategy.
- 1.2 The age demographic shows that 55% of employees in Place are over 50 years of age. The gender data shows an almost equal split with 48% female and 52% male employees. This compares to just over 47% of Dorset Council's whole workforce being over the age of 50 and a whole workforce gender split of 64% female and 36% male.

2. Sickness absence



- 2.1 Sickness absence in the Place Directorate is currently an average of 9.74 days lost per FTE. 5.39 Short term and 4.35 Long term. This compares to a whole council position of an average of 8.85 days lost per FTE, with 4.79 days lost to short term absence and 4.06 to long term absence.
- 2.2 Due to the nature of the work undertaken within the directorate, it is often common for sickness absence levels to be higher than typical office-based areas of working. This is supported by national benchmarking.
- 2.3 Officers have analysed the sickness absence data which shows the following:
- The top 3 reasons for sickness absence overall in the Place Directorate have been Covid, Musculoskeletal (MSK) and Mental Health (MH). (See appendix 1.2)
 - The top 3 reasons for short term sickness absence Covid, Digestive System and respiratory absences. (See appendix 1.3)
 - The top 3 reasons for long term sickness absence have been musculoskeletal, mental health and cardiovascular. (See appendix 1.4)

3. Interventions

- 3.1 Various interventions have been used to reduce sickness absence and these include:
- i. Working in collaboration with Health & Safety colleagues to carry out manual handling training with individuals/teams in high-risk roles and identified individuals with high absence related to MSK. Since the first week in December, 72 operatives have refreshed their manual handling training. This will potentially help to reduce MSK absence.
 - ii. Digestive short-term absence is particularly high in Waste. The hygiene messaging has been refreshed around using the hand wipes after eating, smoking, or using the facilities and washing hands with soap and water as soon as able. Also around washing of PPE. Health & Safety colleagues have agreed to carry out an inspection of hygiene regimes.
 - iii. We are supporting and growing the existing network of mental health & wellbeing champions of which there are 56 representatives in the Place directorate. We are currently expanding our network and have arranged training from 17th January 2023. Our Mental Health Champions play an important role in raising awareness of emotional health issues, offering a listening ear and signposting individuals to the most appropriate type of support and resources, promoting mental health campaigns and initiatives and challenge the stigma of mental health.
 - iv. Working with the wellbeing team to produce tailored “Toolbox talks” around Wellbeing support for our digitally disconnected colleagues. Introducing posters and leaflets with details of the Wellbeing offer.

- v. From 1st December, all absence that is related to covid-type symptoms will be recorded under the category of 'Respiratory', alongside other illnesses with similar symptoms, for example flu. This is in line with national guidance on the subject.
- vi. A four-year Wellbeing plan has been produced by the Place Health & Wellbeing group which consists of 21 representatives from the Place Directorate (including Trade Union representatives and corporate service colleagues). It is linked to the Dorset Council Wellbeing strategy, People strategy and feedback from the Health & Wellbeing HIVE survey.
- vii. Focusing on reintroducing regular 121 conversations to inject the human element into manager/employee relationships. Managers having a conversation to discuss any support needed or possible interventions to support an employee to remain at work can support a reduction in sick absence. Building relationships with their team will enable managers to understand their employees' circumstances and enable them to offer support and interventions on an individual basis.
- viii. Managers promoting an 'Open door' policy gives individuals the confidence and pathway for raising a wellbeing issue with their manager. It encourages an early-intervention approach for all absence reasons, reduce stigma of MH and help prevent MH crisis.
- ix. Improving employee Voice. Managers need to be aware of the feelings and views of all employees. We are working on interventions to improve participation in the 2023 Hive survey to enable us to get a balanced view of feedback from all services. To support change managers will be encouraged to build action plans within teams based on the feedback from the survey. Teams will regularly review the plan and ensure employees receive feedback on 'You said, we did'.
- x. Ensure employee networks which can have a big draw and provide a different type of support, are communicated to all. Women, Disability, LGBTQI+, BAME, Ethnic minority, Carers, and Armed Forces networks are all operational within the council.
- xi. Continue Menopause awareness training sessions for all managers.
- xii. Regularly promoting the Employee Offer - Discounted health services, gym and leisure passes, and other staff benefits to aid financial wellbeing to improve physical and mental health.
- xiii. Regularly promoting the support on offer for Financial Wellbeing -Ensure employees have access to the right support and information to manage financial difficulty and reduce stress.
- xiv. Promoting Wellbeing Health MOTs through Livewell Dorset. Ensure physical health problems are detected early, especially in higher risk groups. Considering a targeted approach e.g., those with higher identified risk.
- xv. Celebrate success of teams and individuals on Place webinar and in "Place maker" newsletter.

4. Staff Turnover and Recruitment

- 4.1 Our current employee turnover rate is 15.44% with 30% of leavers over the last two years citing the lack of career development opportunities as their main reason for leaving. Within the Place Directorate we struggle to attract and retain employees in a variety of roles. This reflects the national skills shortages and particular recruitment challenges relating to Dorset as a place.
- 4.2 Within Waste Services we have previously had difficulty recruiting drivers. A Recruitment & Retention Scheme has been introduced to incentivise people to apply for roles and to ensure that they remain with us. This has been successful in aiding recruitment and retention over the last 12 months. The scheme has recently been extended to continue to aid retention in these hard to recruit roles in Waste Services.
- 4.3 The directorate are also experiencing difficulties attracting and retaining employees in professional roles within Planning and Engineering. This is in line with the national position. There are skills shortages nationally in these professions which shows no sign of abating in the years to come. To plug the gaps left by skills shortages and the difficulties attracting and retaining employees, the planning service are forecast to spend a total of £239,408 on agency staff for the financial year ending 2022/23. The cost of this is being met through a combination of: vacant posts; a budget line for agency staff, and planning reserves that we can use for staff-related costs. We are continuing to work to reduce our reliance on agency staff, including holding some posts vacant where we can, and using positive recruitment campaigns to fill essential posts with permanent employees.
- 4.4 We are working in collaboration with our Recruitment & Attraction consultant to set out how we can maximise our ability to attract and hire new employees in Place, as well as how we will retain our existing workforce. It is linked to our priorities, behaviours and values and underpinned by our People Strategy, Employer Branding, our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy as well as the work being carried out on Talent Management, considering our skills gaps, internal mobility, development opportunities and succession planning.
- 4.5 With no immediate foreseeable change in the recruitment climate, it is necessary to retain employees through demonstrating they are valued and by providing progression opportunities.
- 4.6 At the council we encourage where possible when recruiting, an increase in flexible working options to attract a diversity and larger number of candidates. However, due to the large number of customers facing roles delivering front line services to our communities in the Place Directorate, this is not always possible.

4.7 When recruiting for roles where it is an option, we are considering offering hybrid working, compressed hours, job shares and part time roles. This can widen the recruitment and talent pool beyond our borders. It is acknowledged that work is an activity not necessarily a location and a flexible approach can support the council's objectives regarding the Climate and Ecology Emergency into our recruitment process making Place Directorate a more attractive employer in a competitive recruitment market.

5. Succession Planning and Talent Management

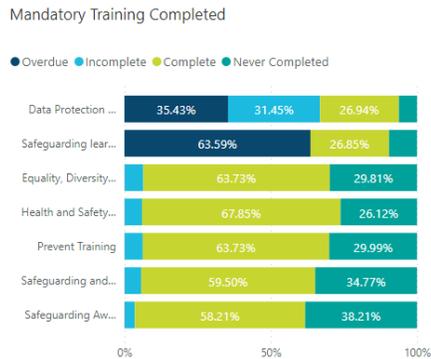
5.1 Where skills shortages are evident, apprenticeships and work-based learning are encouraged to grow our own talent internally and use workforce planning to plan for future need. We are working to grow the number of apprentice roles within all services in the Place Directorate. There are currently 88 live apprentices in the Place Directorate.

5.2 We are holding quarterly Leadership Development and networking sessions with Heads of Service and the Place Leadership team. To develop our leaders to achieve their full potential ensuring they and their teams are competent and confident and empowered in their roles.

5.3 We have identified and are growing talent to fill leadership and business-critical positions in the future. We are working in collaboration with Learning & Development, Leadership Management Development academy (LMDA) to support the learning and development of our managers. We want to support managers in their personal development and career aspirations to feel confident and competent in their roles. We aim to achieve this through promoting a learning culture. Encouraging managers to use My Road Map, Dorset Council's established performance and development tool, to establish development plans to improve leadership and management capability and competency.

5.4 Within the Place Directorate we have many manual roles where a numeracy qualification is not required. To support individuals in these roles who wish to develop further professionally and personally, we are working in collaboration with our Learning & Development team and Weymouth College, to offer Place employees the opportunity to develop their numeracy skills in a free 12-week course following a recent government funding for developing Maths in the workplace. This is due to begin early 2023.

6. Mandatory Training

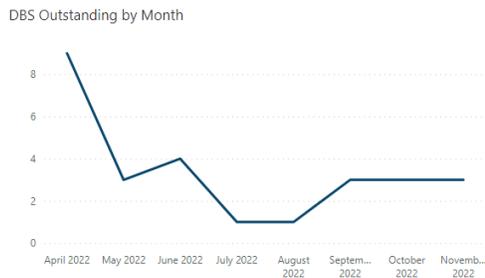


- 6.1 We are continuing to work with the L&D team and IT to improve the quality of our data to enable us to take an informed approach to our strategy.
- 6.2 Communications campaigns have taken place to encourage employees to engage and complete mandatory training in line with the culture of Dorset Council.
- 6.3 Working alongside the Leadership, Management Development Academy (LMDA) we are engaging with our managers to offer learning and development. This will enable them to build the skillset to use the learning hub to support their own, and their team's development and encourage the completion of mandatory training. This is encouraged with managers to build learning & development and mandatory training in as part of their culture and their 121 process and for our staff to take responsibility and ownership for their own learning and development with access to the tools they need.
- 6.4 We are promoting the use of the "Thrive" app to complete learning assignments. Thrive is available to download and can be used on any personal smart phone or tablet. The app allows users to download and complete assigned mandatory training for instances where Wi-Fi isn't available, or data limits are reached.
- 6.5 We are broadening our offer by collaborating with Learning & Development colleagues, to look at ways in which we can be more inclusive in our learning & development offer. Offering more inclusive ways of engaging with and completing mandatory training for example, face to face training, and podcasts. This will support us to engage with hard-to-reach employees that have roles where access to technology does not form part of their core role. We are carrying out face to face visits to depots with digitally disconnected colleagues to engage with employees to understand their views on best methods to complete any training.

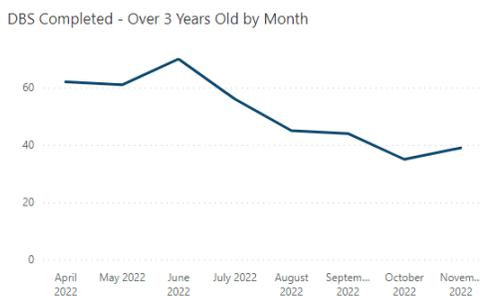
7. Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS)

7.1 A DBS check supports us in considering whether a person is suitable to work in some roles within Dorset Council. DBS checks are relevant for some, but not all roles within the directorate. They are largely required for roles that work with or come into contact with children or vulnerable adults. The certificate will contain details of convictions and conditional cautions that are considered unspent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974. There are a significant number of positions within the council which have been identified as requiring a check. The Dorset Council policy is to carry out a DBS check for people in these identified roles when starting with Dorset Council. The DBS is then reviewed after 3 years, to ensure no criminal convictions have occurred.

7.2 DBS New Starters data



7.3 DBS Over 3 years data



7.4 Various interventions have been used to reduce outstanding DBS checks, and increase understanding of the process, and these include:

- Manager coaching on DBS process for new starters in progress due to be completed February 2023.

- Working with Service Managers to update the DBS status list to confirm that all roles have the correct status.
- Reporting quarterly to SWAP auditors on Place DBS position
- Working with individual teams who have outstanding DBS checks over 3 years to input process to monitor completion.
- Training with teams to ensure that there is an understanding of the “Update service” process.
- Working with Leisure to identify casual employees who have an outstanding DBS and need their contract ended as they haven’t carried out any work recently and are for example at university.
- Identifying under 16s in leisure who don’t need a DBS and diarise 16th Birthday to complete a timely DBS.

8. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report

9. Environmental Implications

As set out in the report, a flexible approach to recruitment can support better environmental outcomes supporting the Council’s climate change objectives.

10. Well-being and Health Implications

Having fair and robust processes and policies in place to ensure our employees stay healthy and well in their roles reduces sickness absence and ensures our employees and managers have the support they need if are sick to return to the workplace.

11. Other Implications

No further implications

12. Risk Assessment

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: No risk

Residual Risk: No risk

13. Equalities Impact Assessment

As set out in the report there is consideration given to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in the flexible approach to recruitment and work being carried out in collaboration with Learning & Development to look at ways in which we can be more inclusive in our learning & development offer. Engaging with hard-to-reach employees that have roles where access to technology does not form part of their core role. Carrying out visits to depos

with digitally disconnected colleagues to engage to understand their views. We recognise that our people are our biggest assets and work with them to support and develop to reach their full potential. Giving access to the resources and support needed to carry out their work effectively. In our plans and interventions, we give value to diverse backgrounds, skills, and personalities. Our aim is to develop a positive working culture that is flexible and enhances the health and wellbeing of our employees.

14. Appendices

Attached

15. Background Papers