

IN-DEPTH SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP - STAFFING

Scrutiny Committee - 13 November 2018

Report of Cllr Brown (Chair - In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group)

Status For Consideration

Key Decision No

This report supports the Key Aim of the effective use of Council resources

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Fleming

Contact Officer Jim Carrington-West, Ext. 7286

Recommendation to Scrutiny Committee:

That the Scrutiny Committee consider the report and the work of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group and if necessary, decide appropriate recommendations or feedback to be made to Cabinet.

Introduction

- 1 At it's October 2017 meeting the Scrutiny Committee resolved to set up a working group to look in more depth at matters relating to staffing within the Council.
- 2 The group had a particular focus on recruitment, retention, and flexible working. While sickness has been covered during meetings, this is a substantial topic and was not the focus of the enquiry (for data on this topic, see Appendix E - sickness absence as of February 2018 and data in relation to occupational health).
- 3 The working group is made up of the following members of the Scrutiny Committee:

Cllr Cameron Brown (Chair)

Cllr Elizabeth Purves

Cllr Lawrence Ball

Cllr Michael Hogg
- 4 As part of it's work, the group met with the following people.

- Dr Pav Ramewal - Chief Executive;
- Jim Carrington-West - Chief Officer Corporate Services;
- Nuala Beattie - HR Manager;
- Kirsteen Allen - Director Ten 2 Two Recruitment Agency;

Background

- 5 Sevenoaks District Council is recognised as a high performing local authority, having achieved a number of awards in recent years including LGC Council of the Year, Guardian Public Service Awards - Overall Winner and CIPFA Awards - Grand Prix winner to name but a few.
- 6 All of these awards in some way reflect the approach and attitude of staff and culture of the organisation in delivering excellent services. This culture reflects a hard working approach from staff and does in part rely on a significant amount of good-will to achieve. In respect of recognition as an employer, more directly reflecting the approach to it's workforce, the council has also achieved:
 - Investors in People Platinum accreditation - the first Local Authority to do so and still only one of two in the country. SDC prides itself on the training programmes generally for its staff (see for example application form for the approval of a course leading to qualification and data in relation to training, appendix A and B. Five degrees have obtained by staff currently working at SDC - SDC will pay for training, although this is repaid if staff then leave within two years);
 - Best Companies - Top Local Authority in the not-for-profit organisations category, based entirely on staff feedback (see also attractive staff prospectus, background document);
 - National Association of Civic Officers - Civic Office of the Year. Recognised for excellence on a shoestring.

Challenges and current approach

- 7 Alongside the record of achievement for the organisation, there are a number of challenges in relation to the workforce in terms of both recruitment and retention of staff. These relate to: -
 - a. Sevenoaks' geographic location and consequential factors such as house prices. For example, most council staff do not live within the immediate area due to high house prices, with an average value well in excess of that found nationally;

- b. Proximity to London, with higher competitive salaries available likely to be a contributing factor to any difficulties relating to recruitment and retention. Some 32 staff moved on last year (103 over three years - see appendix C) - approximately 8% of the workforce - and the primary reason for leaving when giving reasons was salary (see appendix D). Data shows that recruitment to senior and middle management, certain service areas (democratic services) and professionally skilled roles is the most problematic. The market place is extremely competitive and other local authorities are not keen to share data with SDC. This is of course in the context of trying to find savings across the Council.
- 8 These issues can have significant knock on effects on SDC finances - see for example cost of agency staff (appendix G).

How does SDC combat these issues?

(1) Recruitment Campaigns

- 9 When it comes to recruitment, posts are widely advertised in a number of different ways dependent on the role, including JobsGoPublic, social media, trade press and where necessary via recruitment agencies (see example of job advert, appendix H).

(2) Market Related Payments

- 10 As an employer, Sevenoaks District Council operates on National Terms and Conditions and utilizes recognised job evaluation schemes when evaluating the salary bands for posts across the organization. This ensures consistency across the organisation but does not take into account market conditions for different skill sets at any given time.
- 11 In order to try and compensate for this, there is a Market Related Payment (MRP) scheme in place. This allows an additional sum to be offered on top of base salary where difficulty in recruitment is experienced and market conditions dictate. Each instance to apply a MRP to a post is considered on a case by case basis by the Strategic Management Team (SMT) and is required to also include benchmarked data for comparison. Agreed MRPs are then reviewed by SMT every two years.

(3) Other Benefits

- 12 Even with an excellent reputation and this wide ranging approach to advertisement, there can still often be difficulty in attracting staff. This would appear to be related in most instances, directly to salaries and despite measures such as MRPs mentioned earlier, a shortfall when

compared to the wider market. This is especially noticeable where the role may be in competition with the private sector in areas including Planning, ICT or Legal.

- 13 Despite the limitations on direct pay benefits, the organisation has sought to look at other, non-pay related benefits that can be offered to try and encourage both recruitment and retention.
- 14 As examples, these include the following. A full list of staff benefits can be seen at appendix I:
 - a. Flu vaccinations;
 - b. Eye care;
 - c. Child Care vouchers;
 - d. Health checks;
 - e. Visiting Osteopaths and reflexologist (payment required but service available in the building)
 - f. Discounted leisure membership;
 - g. Cycle to work scheme;
 - h. Discounts with high street and online retailers (Costa Coffee and Ashford Designer Outlet);
 - i. Competitive car loans;
 - j. Season ticket loans.

(4) Flexible Working

- 15 The Council also has a good current approach to flexible working (some 34/39 requests approved, 2015 - 2018, see appendix F). There are numerous examples of flexible working arrangements, facilitated by current technology, that enable effective services to be delivered but at the same time balance individual circumstances with operational requirements.
- 16 As technology has developed and systems are available remotely along with the ability to interact with the public, this trend has increased and is seen as a useful tool to maintain both services and an effective workforce. There are however clearly some service areas that are more able to make use of this approach than others.

Suggestions for Consideration

- 17 Based on the work of the group and the challenges set out above, the following are made as suggestions to the Scrutiny Committee for discussion and recommendation to Cabinet as appropriate.
- a. Wider use of flexible working arrangements, particularly the 10-2 market/ job shares where those coming back to the work place can be extremely well qualified but do not wish to commute to London, and the ability to work from home;
 - b. Increasing the period where staff have to pay back the costs of training from 2 to 3 years, including where they move to another local authority as opposed to the private sector, as currently occurs;
 - c. Widen the radius for the relocation allowance (Currently 10 miles from District boundary);
 - d. Review of structures, roles and responsibilities, and use of market related payments (reviewable every two years) - where finances permit;
 - e. Improvement of the kitchen areas for staff;
 - f. Introduce a lower rate for car loans (Currently 2.55%);
 - g. Extend the period before which MRPs are reviewed;
 - h. Offer free use of pool and gym facilities at Sencio leisure centres;
 - i. Create a recruitment microsite for the Council to better advertise vacant posts;
 - j. Review structures as part of the current Customer Redesign initiative, introducing career grades to support career development and succession planning;
- 18 Many of these suggestions are operational in nature and sit as part of the remit of the Head of Paid Service. If recommended to Cabinet, the Committee would be seeking for Cabinet to note the recommendations and ask officers to investigate further and implement as appropriate as operational decisions.

Key Implications

Financial

Sevenoaks District Council operates within a balanced, 10 year budget. Any recommendations would therefore need to be subject to further investigation to remain within current allocated budgets.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Appendices

Appendix A - Post Entry Training Form

Appendix B - Training Data

Appendix C - Leavers Data

Appendix D - Exit Data

Appendix E1 - Sickness Data

Appendix E2 - Occupational Health

Appendix F - Flexible Working Data

Appendix G - Agency Costs 2017/18

Appendix H - Sample Job Advert

Appendix I - Staff Benefits

Background Documents

[Employee Prospectus](#)

Cllr Cameron Brown

Chair - In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group - Staffing