

HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE

Strategy and Performance Advisory Committee – 28 January 2014

Report of Head of Human Resources

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Fleming

Contact Officer(s) Syreeta Sandhu (Ext. 7403)

Recommendation to Strategy & Performance Advisory Committee:

Members note the work of the Council's Human Resources team over the past year.

Reason for recommendation: To ensure Members are informed of the work of the Council's Human Resources team and are able to advise on any areas they wish to see improved.

Introduction and Background

- 1 This report provides an update to Members on the key Human Resources strategies and their impacts.
- 2 The Human Resources team has played a key role in managing the result of staffing changes that continue to take place within the organisation and will continue to support the delivery of challenging future budget savings that remain to be a pressure due to the economic environment we are operating in.
- 3 The new senior management structure took effect in September 2013, with the deletion of 2 director posts and the creation of the SMT (Strategic Management Team) consisting of the chief executive and seven chief officers. The Human Resources team have worked with other teams across the council to ensure the transition to the new structure has been seamless, and that communication has remained effective and transparent. The new structure has been positively embraced by staff at all levels, and continues to go from strength to strength.

Staff Turnover

- 4 The economic downturn and reduced budgets within the public sector have led to a significant reduction in the number of vacancies arising across Local Government. This Council is experiencing similar issues with an overall reduction in the number of posts due to budget savings.
- 5 The Council has successfully implemented partnership working with Dartford Borough Council in respect of its Revenues and Benefits, Audit and Fraud and

Environmental Health services. With one partnership operating out of its Argyle Road office, and one out of Dartford's civic centre office, the Human Resources team continue to support staff as all levels to ensure the partnerships work effectively for both councils. We are currently exploring partnerships for our Building Control team which could result in greater resilience within the team and further improve the efficient use of the Council's resources.

- 6 During this period when the council's staffing numbers continue to decrease, the requirements placed on staff are increasing. There continues to be pressure for the council to deliver more for less. In doing this, it is essential that the council is able to retain the best staff. High staff turnover is disruptive, makes it hard to maintain service standards and results in expenditure on recruitment and temporary staff.

Staff Retention

- 7 In overall terms the analysis of officers leaving the authority over the past three years shows that staff turnover has reduced slightly. The number of leavers as a percentage of staff in post has decreased from 7.8% in 2012/13 to 5.5% to the end of December 2013/14. This does not include retirement, end of casual contracts or health capability dismissals.
- 8 The average length of service at Sevenoaks District Council is a fraction over 12 years. This is a positive figure for the organisation overall as it shows the authority is a good employer with market competitive and fair benefits.
- 9 In 2012/13 the Benefits service has experienced recruitment difficulties and skills shortages. Members may be aware that it has been reported nationwide that there has been an issue recruiting to posts such as benefits assessor due to ever-imminent changes expected with the introduction of Universal Credit. This has led to people looking to leave the sector and seek other areas of work and has created uncertainty for our own staff and an increase in work loads as the Council work hard to recruit to vacant posts and adopted innovative solutions such as the capacity grid which is able to process benefit claims on the Council's behalf.

Workforce Planning

- 10 The Council is working on a revision to its Workforce Development Plan. This will better enable the authority to identify key areas of resource need and plan strategically for any skills shortages and cross training requirements over the short, medium and long term.
- 11 The Human Resources team are currently working on the delivery of a Leadership Masterclass programme for 37 managers across the organisation. The programme consists of 36 modules ranging from core to enhanced areas of learning, which will help ensure there is a consistent style of management across the organisation and that all our managers are well equipped to face any future challenges.

Managing Sickness Absence

- 12 Short term sickness in 2012/13 was reported as an average of 4.4 days per full time equivalent member of staff. This is an increase from the 3.8 days recorded

the previous year. Short term sickness to the end of November this year is recorded at 2.3 days per FTE and on target to be lower than last year.

- 13 Long term sickness in 2012/13 was reported as an average of 5.5 days per full time equivalent member of staff. This is a decrease from the 6.8 days recorded the previous year. Long term sickness to the end of November this year is recorded at 3.6 days per FTE and is likely to be at similar levels to 2012/13 come year end.
- 14 The Human Resources team with the aid of the onsite occupational health nurse, attending once a fortnight, ensure officers are seen as soon as possible after operations and long bouts of sickness to make sure a planned phased return to work is implemented. This is alongside on going support and professional medical guidance.
- 15 The onsite occupational health provision has been tailored to support officers back to work following absence for reasons such as cancer and stress or anxiety. The support and on-going professional advice being of paramount importance due to absences such as this being protected under the Equality Act 2012. A number of health and well being events have been conducted over the year, and these have led to issues such as high blood pressure and cholesterol levels being picked up at very early stages, to ensure effective intervention at an early stage.

Investing in People

- 16 The Council was reassessed and once again recognised with the Gold Award and Champion status by Investors in People. Less than 1% of organisations manage to retain both Gold and champion status, and all those involved in the assessment were delighted to learn of our award. The feedback from the assessment in relation to improvements to cross team working and communication have been built in to an action plan to ensure areas such as these can be monitored.
- 17 The New Choices approach to the Investors in People scheme allows an organisation to tailor its assessment to focus on its key business priorities. However, as in previous years the Council chose to assess itself against a high majority of all categories.
- 18 The important messages that came back from the assessment were that employees feel valued and empowered, consultation with the workforce is good, and coaching is embedded within the organisation. The assessors recommended that recognition and reward strategies could be reviewed to better enable and encourage continuous improvement.
- 19 Receiving these awards ensured Sevenoaks remains a key employer within Local Government and ensures that it continues to retain, motivate and recruit the best and most talented officers. This can be difficult in challenging economic times.
- 20 The Council successfully launched an NVQ programme in March 2012, teaming up with Synergy and Nescot College to enable 117 participants to be accredited in NVQ level 2 customer service skills. To date 87 people have successfully completed and been award for the qualification. The Council saw a tremendous amount of cross-departmental working with officers working together to complete

their portfolios and gain their individual accreditations. The Council is the first local authority to launch and complete such a scheme.

- 21 The Council launched a coaching scheme in May 2012 aimed to increase productivity and morale through one to one sessions focused on improving performance through becoming self aware as to how to problem solve, and knowledge sharing within the organisation. To date, 40 people have accessed the twelve trained coaches within the organisation. The council hopes to train a second cohort of coaches later this year.
- 22 Staff morale and motivation were a key feature of the recent Peer Challenge which took place in December 2013. The Challenge team found that staff were productive and motivated, though they did highlight concerns in relation to capacity.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

None

Key Implications

Financial

None.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

None.

Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	There are no equality impacts arising.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	No	
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		Not applicable

Conclusions

- 23 The Council's recruitment and retention and sickness absence levels are likely to remain challenging in the coming year. However it is hoped through careful and effective strategic planning the overall impact will be maintained within manageable levels.
- 24 The actions of the Human Resource team in collaboration with managers throughout the organisation to address staff retention and workforce development continues to deliver significant benefits.
- 25 In overall terms the Council has ensured that in comparative terms it has maintained good levels of recruitment and retention. The Council has continued to build on its excellent reputation as a good employer.

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Dr Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive