

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

8 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT

Councillor J. Bennett (in the Chair).

Councillors A.M. Whyte (Vice-Chair), D. Acton, A. Akinola, S. Anstee, C. Boyes, M. Cordingley, J. Holden and R. Thompson

In attendance

Sara Saleh	Corporate Director of Strategy & Resources
Angela Beadsworth	Head of Workforce and Core Strategy
Bev Norton	Head of HR Operations
Kate Sturman	Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Rigby

9. MINUTES

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

10. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

11. EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Corporate Director of Strategy & Resources gave an overview of the update that had been circulated as part of the agenda. The Committee's attention was drawn to the steady decline in absences over the last six months and the available work force was very high at 96%. The Corporate Director thanked the Health and Safety team for their hard work during the pandemic as they had been instrumental in supporting the Council, schools, and other partner organisations to ensure that their premises were safe. The Council were working at a 20% occupancy rate and this was expected to rise up to 40% by the end of October. There had been excellent feedback from the workforce and those who had been working at the town hall had followed the measures in place to reduce the risk of infection. The EPIC manager programme had continued to be delivered virtually during the pandemic and the engagement agenda was also continuing to be delivered with more engagement sessions planned throughout September and October. The Epic Manager Programme and engagement sessions had both received excellent feedback with many of the sessions being oversubscribed.

Policy development had been focused on supporting managers and the workforce in planning workforce reintegration and supporting staff members working from home who had caring responsibilities.

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Employment relations case management was running as normal and the backlog of cases that had amassed during the pandemic was being cleared with hearings up and running again. The Council was in the process of reviewing the resource hub so that we have a more agile way of redeploying staff going forwards as well as making the Council a more attractive employer to work for.

Following the overview, Committee Members were given the opportunity to ask questions. Councillor Thompson asked whether any staff members had tested positive for COVID recently and what the response had been to the protocols around self-isolating by staff. The Corporate Director responded that yes some staff had tested positive recently although the Councils approach had been very successful with only three cases of COVID 19 throughout the Pandemic and a number of staff were self-isolating as a precautionary measure. There was a situation where five staff members were told to work from home due to possible infection but none of the five were infected. Bev Norton noted the excellent work of the health and safety team in conducting risk assessments and providing effective procedures to ensure that staff remained safe. Managers had also played a role through supporting their team members to work from home where possible.

Councillor Acton asked if many staff had been affected by the guidance on traveling abroad. The Corporate Director responded that there had been a number of staff affected by the guidance, in particular when the restrictions on travel from Spain were introduced as some staff members were in Spain at the time. The Council kept track of all countries where quarantine restrictions were, or were likely to be, in place. In addition the Council were supportive of any staff members who had travelled to areas that did not require quarantine but felt that they should quarantine themselves to reduce risk. Councillor Acton followed up his question by asking whether all staff were following the guidance to contact their manager before travelling abroad. The Corporate Director stated that she was not aware of any issues that had arisen where a member of staff had gone abroad and failed to inform their manager. It seemed that members of staff were generally cautious about travelling due to the risks involved and the Council were benefitting from that cautious approach. The Corporate Director added that they were not certain but would look into this further and assured the Committee that the guidance to staff had been reinforced on many occasions.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the efficacy of the travelling abroad guidance be reviewed.

12. AGENCY SPEND 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT AND 2020/21 Q1 REPORT

The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence gave an overview of the two Agency Spend reports that had been circulated with the agenda which covered 2019/20 and Quarter 1 of 2020/21. The Committee were informed that the overall spend in 2019/20 was 2.7M which was an increase of £700,000 on the previous year. There had been reductions in the Governance and Community Strategy, Place, People, and Finance and Systems directorates. The increase was mainly from the Children and Young people's directorate with the majority of the positions being social workers. The shortage of social workers was an ongoing

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issue locally and nationally. Due to the Council's framework provider not having adequate staff available other providers had been used and the cost to the Council for those agency workers was higher. A lot of work was being done in order to increase the Council's own workforce and decrease their reliance upon agency staff although it would take time for the impact of this work to be seen. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence informed the committee of the various ways in which the Council was attempting to increase their workforce including training staff to become social workers and encouraging agency staff to join the Council. The Council had not needed to use any staff members who were not from the framework provider since July 2020, which was a sign of improvement.

Councillor Boyes asked whether the reductions that had been seen in some directorates were expected to be achieved again during 2020/21. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that those directorates were showing signs that the reduction in spending was a trend and not a one off occurrence.

Councillor Holden asked how the training of frontline workers was being done during lockdown. The Head of Workforce and Core Strategy responded that the workers who had been brought in during lockdown went through a detailed induction process and received training which informed them of the standard policies, procedures, and other requirements to prepare them as much as possible. Although the e-learning training was not a substitute for face to face interactions it would enable staff to get up to speed quickly if and when standard service delivery was resumed.

The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence then moved on to the report for quarter one of 2020/21 £891,664 which was a decrease of around £20,000 on the previous quarter despite additional pressures due to COVID 19. The majority of spend during the quarter was on social workers. The Council had appointed the new Corporate Director of Children's services and they were looking at ways to improve recruitment and retention within the directorate.

Councillor Boyes noted that there had been a significant increase in costs relating to legal and solicitors during the last two quarters and asked why this was the case. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that it was a difficult area to recruit to as we have to compete against the private sector and there had been a large increase in work load due to the pandemic which had resulted in a need to recruit agency staff.

Following the Committee's questions the Chair stated that it was important that the Council completed and review exit interviews when staff left as retention was a key element in increasing staff numbers. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence added that a manager within Children's Services was focused upon reviewing that information to see how the Council could improve retention.

RESOLVED: That the reports be noted.

13. NEW UNSOCIAL HOURS ALLOWANCE POLICY

The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence gave a brief overview of the report which detailed changes to the Council's unsocial allowance policy. The overview contained a description of the types of work which were covered by the policy and explained that it was due to the situation in one particular setting that had created the need for the policy to be adjusted. This was due to the amount of unsociable hours being too few to be covered within the existing bandings and too many to be classed as ad hoc. The staff had been receiving an annual fixed sum in compensation while HR reviewed the situation to find a more permanent solution.

The solution reached by HR was to add additional bandings to the bottom of the current structure to accommodate those workers in a way that was in keeping with the approach used for other staff. The two additional bandings were a 1% uplift where 3% or more of a workers time was working unsociable hours and 2% uplift where unsociable hours represented 6% or more of their time. This was proportional to the higher bandings within the policy and took into account what their NHS colleagues were paid. The Council were consulting with unions and following those consultations staff would be consulted directly. The Chair noted that the staff that this change related to performed a vital role for the Council and welcomed the proposed changes.

Councillor Acton asked whether the new policy would be cost neutral. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence confirmed that the policy would be cost neutral as the staff members were receiving an annual payment which had been calculated using a similar level of compensation as the new policy.

Councillor Akinola asked whether there were any staff members who would be negatively impacted by the changes. The Strategic HR Lead Policy, Reward and Intelligence responded that they should not be but the service needed to ensure that rotas were set up so that all staff had the same level of commitment. The Head of HR Operations added that this solution had been reached after in depth work with the service to ensure that it was fair equitable and robust.

REOLVED: That the report be noted and recommendations agreed.

14. QUARTERLY REPORT ON EXEMPTIONS TO THE SICKNESS POLICY

The Head of HR Operations informed the Committee that in quarter one there had been six exemption requests, two of which were from the same person. All six of the requests were from Adult services and Children and Young People's service directorates and all had been approved.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

15. EXCLUSION RESOLUTION

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from this meeting during consideration of the remaining items on the agenda, because of the likelihood of disclosure of “exempt information” which falls within one or more descriptive category or categories of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, and specified on the agenda item or report relating to each such item respectively.

16. EMPLOYMENT UPDATE

The Corporate Director Strategy & Resources gave a presentation to the Committee which detailed a number of workforce proposals. The Committee were informed of the changes in ways of working that the pandemic had brought about, which many staff members had embraced, and how it was unlikely that the Council would revert back to the previous model. The Committee were also informed of the large financial pressures that the Council were under as a result of the pandemic. The Corporate Director stressed that all of the workforce proposals were voluntary and that the trade unions had been consulted in the creation of the proposals. The Committee were assured that the Council would continue to work closely with the unions going forward. The Head of Workforce and Core Strategy went through the information and timeline for each of the proposals.

Following the presentation Committee Members asked a series of in-depth questions relating to all of the proposals and the Corporate Director and Head of Workforce & Core Strategy provided detailed responses. The Committee were assured that further updates would be provided when more information was available.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and finished at 5.34 pm

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