

Minutes of the Meeting of the HUMAN RESOURCES PANEL held on 4 July 2016

PRESENT -

Councillor Hannah Dalton (Chairman); Councillors Rekha Bansil (as nominated substitute for Councillor Peter Webb), Alex Clarke, Robert Foote, Guy Robbins (for item 4) and Clive Smitheram (as nominated substitute for Councillor Jean Steer)

In Attendance: Sam Beak and Andrew McCuaig (Staff Representatives)

Absent: Councillor Jean Steer and Councillor Peter Webb

Officers present: Shona Mason (Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development), Fiona Cotter (Democratic Services Manager), Sam Beak (Leisure Development Manager) and Andrew McCuaig

NOTE: The meeting was preceded by a meeting with staff representatives at 5.00p.m. The meeting was not open to the public.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Councillors in items on this agenda.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Human Resources Panel held on 18 November 2014 and the Minutes of the Panel (meeting as the Joint Staff Committee) held on 13 October 2015 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3 ANNUAL REVIEW OF HR MATTERS

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Shona Mason, gave a brief introduction to the role of her small team in the context of the new organisational structure and the significant budget challenges facing the Council. In the area of Human Resources, this had resulted in freezes in recruitment and learning and development.

Whilst there was a recruitment freeze between August 2015 and March 2016, activities associated with recruitment continued to be a significant part of the team's work in order to ensure that posts were filled when the freeze came to an end. A total of 61 recruitment campaigns (a slight increase on 2014/15) had been run in 2015/16 attracting a total of 631 applicants overall. Eight campaigns related to more than one vacant post.

In regard to Recruitment Equal Opportunities Monitoring, interrogation of the data had not flagged up any issues and the work force profile was broadly representative of the Borough. Whilst not a statistic that was monitored, it was confirmed that many employees lived on the borders of the Borough or commuted in from further away.

All posts were advertised in Surrey Jobs and Jobs Go Public with specialist websites/publications being used if necessary. Whilst it was considered that the organisation was attracting a good calibre of applicants, it was confirmed that HR was starting to analyse which routes attracted the strongest applicants. Some very specialist roles continued to be challenging to recruit. Agency staff were employed in the case of short term immediate requirements. The ability to employ agency staff gave a bit of flexibility and were an important competent of the workforce. Such staff were not necessarily more expensive to employ. The Council was currently looking to set up a procurement framework for this area.

A total of 6.75 days on average had been lost to sickness in 2015/16. This was below the CIPD average of 8.2 days but was on the increase. The Council had a robust sickness absence policy which balanced the needs of the organisation against providing help and support for those with genuine long term health problems. It was evident that physically demanding jobs were more likely to have an impact on sickness levels which is why Operational Services (also the Council's largest department) accounted for 50.96% of cases. In terms of the top ten reasons for absence in 2015/16, chest infections had risen by 19% which was largely attributed to one case of long term sickness. Cases of anxiety/stress were slightly down (by 9%) on last year but were still considered a high risk to the organisation. Such cases tended to represent an interrelationship between finding work to be stressful in addition to contributing stresses from home life. Occupational Health was a medical intervention used by the Council to assist the organisation in managing sickness with clear advice and practical support. If stress at work was flagged as an issue, a risk assessment would be undertaken and the Council also provided access to counselling via the Employment Assistance Programme. The organisation was mindful of the effect of long term sickness on staff morale and recognised the need to support managers in dealing with sensitive cases and supporting return to work as soon as possible. It was agreed that sickness absence should be the subject of more detailed discussion between staff, councillors and officers.

Staff turnover was on the increase and remained above the UK average. Exit interviews were held in cases of voluntary exits from the organisation. It was generally a range of personal reasons which led to voluntary resignation from the authority. However, it was confirmed that should a trend emerge regarding particular issues within a department, these would be dealt with appropriately either in consultation with the Head of Service or Directors and appropriate support would be given. It was noted that staff turnover in the HR department was relatively high. Staff turnover in Customer Services was industry standard and parking services was a challenging role. It was requested that consideration be given to seeking exit interviews in the case of non-voluntary leavers to give a more balanced view of issues affecting employment with the Council.

It was commented that the loss of staff through retirement could affect institutional memory and queried whether there was a mechanism which ensured return on investment if the organisation had invested in training a member of staff. Positions vacated as a result of retirement were not necessarily back-filled. It depended on the nature of the job and whether it provided the opportunity to change the role. Staff who obtained work-related qualifications with the assistance of the organisation signed a training agreement.

The report highlighted that the Council carried out regular pay benchmarking exercises. These were considered value for money as a means of ensuring pay rates were competitive and comparable to similar authorities. This information was currently only shared with senior management. A full review of salary scales and performance appraisal scheme was currently being undertaken and it was confirmed that the Staff Consultative Group would receive a report on the key issues arising from it.

The Learning and Development Budget had been significantly affected by the financial challenges facing the Council and there had been a freeze on training between August 2015 and March 2016. Consideration was currently being given to broadening the use of e-learning.

4 LEGAL UPDATE

The Panel received and noted a report which provided an overview of recent employment legislation and its impact on the Council in regards to shared parental leave, the living wage, exit/termination payments and gender pay gap reporting.

A Shared Parental Leave policy had been developed and implemented in response to this new statutory right. It was noted that to date, no applications for this had been received.

The National Living Wage of £7.20 per hour came into effect on 1 April 2016. This would increase to £9 per hour by 2020 and the Council needed to be mindful of this and take this into account as part of the wider review on pay and performance.

It was anticipated that capping of exit payments in the public sector would come into force in October 2016. This was a fairly complex area but it was highlighted that redundancy payments and redundancy costs were likely to be included.

It was noted that it was likely that the public sector would be exempt from proposed provisions on gender pay gap reporting which would already be publishing pay information as part of complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Nevertheless, the Council needed to be mindful of these provisions. Whilst there was not a conscious gender pay gap within the organisation, this was a complex area and the review of pay and performance would take this into consideration and highlight any issues.

The meeting began at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.47 pm

COUNCILLOR HANNAH DALTON (CHAIRMAN)