

RESOURCES AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Steve Weisinger (Chair), Steve Allsopp, Vinay Manro, Adorabelle Shaikh, Timothy Swinyard, Caryl Sydney-Smith and Rahul Tarar

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Brian Mattock and Claire Crilly.

7. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

8. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th June 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

9. Public Question Time

There were no public questions submitted.

10. Supporting our People - an update on initiatives relating to our workforce

The Committee considered a report outlining the progress made on initiatives relating to the Council's workforce. Ms Sam Mowbray, Director of Performance, Organisational Improvement and Communications, Ms Julie Walsh, HR Operations Manager, Ms Rachel Wilson, Talent and Resourcing Manager and Ms Jennifer Conway, HR Business Partner, were in attendance and responded to matters raised by members relating to each section of the report as follows.

Workforce attraction, recruitment and onboarding

Developing our Employer Brand

- The launch of the Council's careers website in January 2019 as part of the new Employee Value Proposition.
- Plans to improve the user experience once beyond the front pages of the careers website, which will include re-mapping processes and migration to a more customer focussed platform.
- Inclusion of the Council's Gender Pay Gap information on the careers website as a tool for attracting candidates.

Recruitment to Resourcing

- The Audit Team's successful recruitment and retainment of staff following the creation and introduction of an internal training and development programme.
- The recent restructure of the Recruitment Team having enabled a move away from reactive appointments (replacing like for like) to utilising long term strategic plans, focussing on skills gaps, and making use of existing talent.
- The launch of the Social Care Academy in November 2019 which will be

training and developing social care staff.

- How the two Senior Resourcing Advisors will be partnered with service areas to understand their key drivers, priorities and workforce development plans, which in turn will help their work in attracting the right candidates for positions.
- That the Council attempts to recruit locally, where possible, unless skills gaps or staff shortages requires extension in to a wider field.

Process Review

- The recommendations made for changes to the authorisation and clearance parts of the recruitment process in an attempt to shorten its length of time and ensure candidates do not lose interest. The Committee noted that monthly reports will be produced on the time and costs of staff hire and that the internal Key Performance Indicator of five working days from verbal to written offer is being consistently met.
- How the length of time associated with any given recruitment process is dependent on the role, Directorate, advertisement period and the selection method chosen. Further information on timings will be sent to members of the Committee subsequent to the meeting.

Temporary Workers Contract

- That the change in contract for temporary staffing requirements has made £468k savings to date compared to the pre-contract spend.
- The proposed initiatives for reducing the temporary workforce by 5% in the current financial year, including the work being done to attract permanent social workers in Children's Social Care Services.
- The numbers of staff that have changed from temporary to permanent positions, the details of which will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.
- The targeted recruitment campaigns to attract passive viewers as well as using a direct approach through a variety of media such as Facebook. The Committee noted that the Council has partnered with Community Care, a specialist in social care recruitment, and that officers will be attending a careers fayre in London.

The workforce experience

Supporting equality and diversity

- How the Council has closed its gender pay gap from 3.69% to 2.03% and the work undertaken with partners and organisations across Swindon to reduce gender pay gaps in other sectors.
- The increased openness helping to remove any remaining stigma attached to mental health issues, assisting staff and their managers to work through challenges and difficulties.
- The work done by officers on the Council's disability and inclusion policies that will be circulated to members subsequent to the meeting.

Supporting our workforce's health and wellbeing

- The rate of absence having dropped from sixteen days per year per employee to ten days being attributed to improved monitoring and tracking across the Council. The Committee noted that issues with particular departments have been highlighted and those managers are being trained on

the correct procedures for the return to work process (which is key to reviewing the reasons for absence).

- The recent Staff Survey had identified that 79% of the Council's employees know where to get help and support for any health and wellbeing issues they may have.
- The Occupational Health provider that staff are referred to depending on different triggers relating to the nature or length of their absence.
- The Agile Working Policy adopted by the Council and how the nature of some roles does not allow this.
- The management of those on sickness absence to ensure they still feel part of the workplace and are not away longer than they need to be.
- The current upgrades to the Wi-Fi that will help improve access to the Swindon Borough Council network.
- The feedback received from the Staff Survey regarding the Council's family friendly policies.
- The Committee noted that the introduction of Absentia in January 2020 will bring about a change in the recording of staff absences. All managers will be required to receive training on the new system to ensure there is a consistent approach. Employees will be required to telephone a number and speak to an experienced adviser to record their absence.
- How the introduction of Absentia will also improve the consistency and availability of absence data, allowing issues to be flagged earlier.

Supporting workforce learning and development

- Where learning and development activity at the Council is partnered with external organisations. The Committee noted that apprenticeships are a joint exercise with the colleges in Swindon, higher level apprenticeships are a joint exercise with the University of the West of England, and the Social Work Academy is a bespoke programme commissioned from the Open University. The Future Leaders and Aspiring Leaders programmes also utilise Swindon networks to support staff.

Supporting our leaders

Officers

- The Committee noted that the 'Introduction to Swindon Manager' course is a mandatory one-day course for all new managers. Managers also have access to eight online self-learning modules, and are expected to do a skills scan with their Line Manager against the eight competencies as part of their performance development conversation.
- How those showing aptitude for leadership would be directed to the Aspiring Leaders programme.

Members

- The difficulties faced by those councillors in full time employment in attending briefings or presentations held during office hours.
- The proposals for a digital space for councillors once access to the Council's intranet on members' iPads has been established in 2020. The Committee noted that this will include access to online learning modules.
- The importance of seeking feedback from attendees at training sessions and changes to future courses being implemented as a result.

Ensuring equitable pay and conditions

- The Committee noted that the Council's levels of pay are comparable to other public sector organisations and that at entry level it is competitive with other sectors. The terms and conditions are being reviewed and things such as increasing the level of purchased annual leave available from ten to twelve days will ensure the Council's offer is attractive on work / life balance.
- The opportunity provided to staff to raise their development requirements or qualification requests through the appraisals process, which can go up to MBA level.
- The efforts being made to maximise the number of new apprenticeships to attract funding from the Apprenticeship Levy Fund.
- That the introduction of a yearly retention payment for Children's Social Workers was a retainment strategy and there are no plans to extend this to other departments.

Managing performance

- The percentage of staff receiving a Performance Development Plan having increased from 64% to 82%. Further cultural change is required to tackle those who think the exercise is futile if remuneration is not attached, and acknowledging that team performance conversations can and should take place where one-to-one conversations may be difficult.

Improving the working environment

- The Committee noted that all Social Workers will be brought in to Wat Tyler House, leaving two Early Help Hubs off-campus.
- That financially the Council will benefit from bringing the majority of its staff in to Wat Tyler House by avoiding future spend on repair costs for other buildings. It also assists with the strategic ambitions of the Council.
- That the Civic Offices are now mainly meeting rooms and that a new training suite will be built in Wat Tyler House (with the DMJ building being repurposed). The Committee noted that the site at Waterside has not yet been reviewed.
- Where cultural change is being achieved through the change from PCs to laptops and having a greater number of staff than physical desks.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to them via the Committee Clerk.

11. Work Programme 2019-2020

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Chief Legal Officer setting out the topics for inclusion in the 2019/2020 Work Programme, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 17th June 2019 and updated during the course of the Municipal Year.