

## **Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Human Resources Subgroup**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2010**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Watson – In the Chair  
Councillors Clayton, B Fisher and Trotman

Councillor Priest – Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

#### **RG/HS/10/20      Minutes**

#### **Decision:**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2010 as a correct record.

#### **RG/HS/10/21      Transformation Programme: New Ways of Working**

A report from the Strategic Director of Transformation was submitted outlining the progress made to date on implementing the Town Hall Transformation Programme and the new ways of working that this had introduced. The Director highlighted some of the major changes including:

- a reduction in absence levels,
- more collaborative working between teams due to the open-plan lay out and
- less organized meetings and new measures to reduce printing costs and reduce waste.

The open-plan layout had made it more difficult to ensure that confidential information was stored in a secure way, and this was now being addressed.

Members noted that the customer service centre was operating well. Customers' queries would be addressed by staff at the desk unless the customer needed specific specialist knowledge, in which case an appropriate officer would be called to answer the query. As staff at the customer service centre became more experienced it was anticipated that fewer specialist staff would be called. This would be monitored to ensure staff had appropriate workloads.

A member asked what security arrangements were in place to carry out financial transactions and to support the proper handling of any conflicts that might arise at the service desk. The Director responded that appropriate training for conflict resolution was available for staff, and that trained security staff were on-site at First Street. All cash transactions were received at a particular desk, where appropriate arrangements were in place to ensure security, including a bullet-proof screen.

The Subgroup turned its attention to telephony arrangements, and noted that a new one-number system was being introduced, supported by a few other numbers used to access services directly. Members noted that staff would help to direct customers to the appropriate service where they had called about matters that were not related to the Council. A queuing system was used and a target was in place that 80% of calls would be answered within 20 seconds. No voice-over system requiring customers to enter numbers to speak to specific sections of the Council had been introduced.

A member asked what would happen to commonly used numbers, such as the Environment On-Call hotline. The Programme Manager advised her that the number would be maintained for a few years, and would then cease to appear on published material to phase out its use.

The Chair felt that the introduction of the small library and the crèche facility were good ideas and were working well.

**Decision:**

To support the changes in the ways of working being brought about through the Town Hall Transformation Programme.

**RG/HS/10/22      Information and Communication Technology (ICT)  
Staffing**

A report of the Strategic Director of Transformation was submitted updating the Subgroup on staffing arrangements in ICT and work to reconfigure the service's structure. The new structure, which had been agreed by Personnel Committee, involved four senior officers with responsibility for different functions relating to ICT reporting to the Chief Information Officer.

The Strategic Director introduced the report and stated that the implementation of the transformation agenda had revealed that, due to the scale of change needed for ICT in the organisation and the low levels of outsourcing, more senior management was required. Members asked what effect the reorganisation might have on staffing levels in ICT. The Chief Information Officer advised that he was hoping that the number of staff in the ICT section would remain constant, but that this would depend on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Members asked how many of the four senior officers had been recruited. The Chief Information Officer advised that the post of Head of Operations had been filled, recruitment to the other three posts was underway. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources advised that external advert may be required for some of the remaining posts due to the specific, technical nature of the skills needed.

Members noted that part of the restructure process would involve a skills analysis to record what skills staff in different sections of ICT possess, and how the service could make the best use of those skills.

## **Decision**

To note the work to restructure the ICT service and to request an update on recruitment to vacant posts at the subgroup's next meeting.

## **RG/HS/10/23 Management of Attendance**

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted briefing the Subgroup on the corporate and departmental approach to reducing absence levels. The Assistant Chief Executive highlighted that a lot of the work focused upon empowering managers to manage absence well, this included a new Managing Attendance Policy, better information for managers through the Manager's Desktop software application and good quality training. Following this recognition of the importance of absence monitoring amongst managers had increased and so had the numbers of return to work interviews carried out.

A member highlighted that absence in all Directorates seemed to be decreasing except for Children's Services. The Assistant Chief Executive said that none of the changes in attendance levels so far had resulted in long-term trends. It was also recognised that as managers complete a higher level of return to work interviews after absence, this will impact on absence statistics and make it look like absence is increasing, when in fact it is the recording of absence that is increasing.

The Chair noted that the Diagnostic Health Solutions Pilot carried out in Adult Services had led to the conclusion that there was no evidenced link between the provision of advice from a qualified NHS nurse on medical conditions and reasons for absence and early resolutions to absence. However it was noted that managers welcomed and benefited from access to real-time sickness absence data, and the Council was investigating whether such a system could be developed internally. The Subgroup asked for an update on this at its next meeting.

Members noted that absence levels in the Customer Service Centre at One First Street had reached zero for a while and asked whether absence information of this nature was recorded so that officers could speak to services about the practices and approaches that had supported them in achieving very low absence levels. The Personnel Advisory Manager, Neighbourhood Services advised that the capacity to do this was being developed.

The Subgroup noted that Personnel Committee had agreed to externally commission an Occupational Health service, and that details of this would shortly appear in the Council's Forward Plan.

## **Decision:**

To note the progress and request an update on the introduction of real-time sickness absence data at the subgroup's next meeting.

## **RG/HS/10/24 Workforce Analysis and Intelligence**

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted providing an update on the size and demography of the Council's workforce (excluding schools.) Members noted the changes in the workforce that had been brought about first to make efficiency savings and subsequently to address funding reductions. The measures to bring about these changes included a reduction in agency staff, reduced spend on consultants and very limited external advertisement of jobs. This had led to an increase in the rate of people leaving the Council and a reduction in the rate of people joining as well as a reduction in the overall payroll costs.

The Chair asked the Treasurer to comment on whether the Council was on track to achieve the savings it needed to make in this area. The Treasurer advised that these practices need to be taken further to speed up the process of making savings so that savings targets can be met.

Members noted that there was a policy that entry-level jobs that might be attractive to Manchester residents were still advertised externally. Part-time entry-level positions were sometimes advertised internally if it was felt that this was a more cost-effective way of finding a suitable applicant.

The Chair asked the Assistant Chief Executive (People) what effect she felt the changes had had on staff morale. She advised that the increase in the numbers of jobs advertised internally had been well received, along with the proactive support on career development for employees as part of the M People approach. The Subgroup noted that graduate and apprenticeship schemes were still being run.

### **Decision:**

To note the progress and urge the City Treasurer and Assistant Chief Executive (People) to take actions to speed up the achievement of the necessary reduction in payroll costs.

## **RG/HS/10/25 Coalition Government Budgetary Measures: Pay and Pensions**

A joint report from the City Treasurer and Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted outlining the implications for pay and pensions in the Council of the recent emergency budget announcement. Most significant among these was the two year pay freeze for all public sector workforces from 2011-12, except those earning less than £21,000. Members noted that Will Hutton, Vice Chair of the Work Foundation, was also leading on a review of fair pay in the public sector. A full report on pensions was due to be submitted to the meeting of Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee in November.

Members asked whether recent changes had affected the Council's policy on early retirement. The Treasurer advised that early retirement was often an appropriate

solution where this did not impact negatively on service delivery or budgets. Requests for early retirement based on a medical opinion were not subject to management discretion and were always granted.

**Decision:**

To note the information provided in the report.

**RG/HS/10/26      Integration of Human Resources (HR) and  
Organisational Development (OD) Services**

A report from the Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted outlining the progress in implementing the integration of Human Resources and Organisational Development services. The Assistant Chief Executive (People) advised that nearly all senior posts within the structure had been filled and that an induction process was taking place today. The Head of HR/OD Strategy could not be appointed internally and external recruitment for this post was proposed. Members noted that the reorganisation had resulted in savings of half a million pounds.

The new amalgamated service would lead on the delivery of the M People approach. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources confirmed that he was satisfied with the approach and the progress in its implementation.

**Decision:**

To note the update and to support the use of the M People approach to achieve the Council's objectives for its workforce.

**RG/HS/10/27      Accommodation at Etrop Way**

A note for information from the Head of Corporate Property was submitted updating the Subgroup on attempts to address the accommodation concerns at Etrop Way. Members noted that the staff would be moved to Etrop Court in 2011. As the staff at Etrop Way see a lot of their service users at an accessible venue they have agreed to remain at Etrop Way until the move. They have also asked for some help making the premises more accessible, as well as training on heavy lifting.

Members requested that they be advised of the tenure on Etrop Way, and whether appropriate training was provided to staff who need to lift people.

**Decision:**

To note the proposals for Etrop Way and to request responses to the questions asked.

## **RG/HS/10/28      Work Programme**

The Subgroup's current work programme was submitted.

A member requested that an item be added to the Committee's work programme on the Council's policy on time recording when staff leave Council buildings and are not on lunch break or Council business. The Chair commented that the Subgroup should receive information setting out how the policy relates to home-working as well.

### **Decision:**

To agree the work programme subject to the revisions made in this meeting.