

Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Human Resources Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2011

Present:

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

Councillor Priest – Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

RG/HS/11/01 Substitution

Decision

To agree that Councillor E Newman shall act as a member of the subgroup in place of the existing vacancy.

RG/HS/11/02 Minutes

Decision:

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2010 as a correct record.

RG/HS/11/03 Financial Settlement 2011/12 and 2012/13, Workforce Issues

A report of the Chief Executive, City Treasurer, Assistant Chief Executive (People) and City Solicitor was submitted. The report set out the steps required to achieve a reduction in the numbers of staff employed in the Council's workforce as a result of the Government's financial settlement for 2011/12 and 12/13. It proposed the use of the existing Voluntary Severance Scheme (VSS) as amended (comprising Voluntary Early Retirement (VER) and Voluntary Severance (VS)), in support of m people and to secure cost reductions and structural and functional transformation.

The proposals had been agreed by the Executive and Personnel Committee on 19 January 2011 and the report was due to be submitted to Council on 2 February to approve the release of the required sums from reserves in 2010/11 and 2011/12 to fund the proposed schemes.

Decision:

To note the proposed introduction of an amended Voluntary Severance Scheme.

RG/HS/11/04 M People - Progress

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted. The report provided an overview of the m people programme, how it has been implemented as part of the integration of human resources and organisation development functions and proposals for future development. The Chair stressed the importance of the m people approach in meeting the challenges posed by the financial settlement.

A member noted that Target Operating Models would be introduced across the Council, setting out the skills needed for the future operation of each directorate. She asked how the models would be standardised and consistent. The Assistant Chief Executive (People) advised that the models may be different to reflect the business needs of the differing directorates but that as the m people process applied Council-wide, the application of this to the models should be consistent. Supporting staff would be available, and workshops would be run, to support a consistent application.

Members stressed the importance of flexibility in the m people process to be able to manage the changes that lay ahead for the organisation.

Decision

To note the progress in developing and applying the m people programme.

RG/HS/11/05 People Strategy (Refresh)

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted. The report set out that, given the introduction of m people and the scale of transformation now needed for the council's workforce, it was timely to refresh the Strategy. The objectives of the refreshed People Strategy should be furthered by the workforce plans included in business plans next year and enhanced guidance would be available for Heads of Service to do this.

The Chair supported the importance attributed to the Strategy through the workforce plans, and felt that there were some good examples in the report about how service areas were implementing the Strategy. She asked if the quality of plans varied across service areas. The Subgroup were advised that Human Resources Strategic Business Partners would be available to support services to produce consistent high quality plans in the future.

Decision:

To note the proposed refresh of the People Strategy and to register the importance the subgroup attaches to high quality workforce plans that underpin the delivery of the Council's People Strategy.

RG/HS/11/06 Human Resources Support to School Governing Bodies

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted summarising the arrangements for supporting Headteachers and governing bodies with human resource management. The report focused on support with disciplinary hearings and in job evaluation. A former member of the subgroup had requested this report so that the subgroup could ensure that schools could receive sufficient support to enable them to carry out human resources functions legally, effectively and in a timely manner.

A member asked whether the number of officers carrying out the service was due to decrease following the local government settlement. The Head of Management Support to Schools advised that resources for the service depended on demand as schools had to purchase the service if they required it. He forecast that demand should remain steady over the next few years or even increase.

Members noted the statistics setting out the rates of closure of cases, and felt that the statistics showed that the service was operating well. Some cases did take a number of years to close, but this was largely due to external factors, such as waiting for criminal proceedings to conclude. Cases involving attendance rates also took longer to resolve.

Members asked whether academies and independent schools were purchasing the service, and how it was advertised and promoted. The Head of Management Support to Schools advised that some academies purchased the service, and that this was increasing. Some independent Islamic schools had recently purchased the service, and some analysis of this was being carried out to see if sales to independent schools could be expanded. He added that brochures and leaflets were sent out to schools, but that the majority of marketing was done through the relationships that staff already had with Headteachers across Manchester schools.

Decision:

To record the Subgroup's satisfaction with the way in which Human Resource support to schools and their governing bodies is being delivered.

RG/HS/11/07 ICT Staffing - Update

A joint report of the Chief Information Officer and Strategic Director of Transformation was submitted summarising the progress of recruitment to the new ICT staffing structure and how the new structure would support the ICT needs of the Council.

Since the report had been published there had been some progress in recruiting candidates to one of the three senior management positions in ICT; it was recognised that it would be necessary to look outside of the Council's existing workforce to find suitably skilled staff. A member asked how the Council would advertise the external recruitment. The Chief Information Officer advised that this

would be mainly web based as this had a lower cost and it was reasonable to expect candidates for a senior management position in ICT to have access to the Internet.

Members noted that it was not felt that internal recruitment to these posts would be possible, and asked whether the spread of technical skills across existing ICT staff was sufficiently wide. The Chief Information Officer said that in some areas the Council had continued to use outdated ICT and that some retraining was required to bring existing staff up-to-date on new and emerging technologies.

The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources commented that although this was desirable, money for training would be restricted and that the Council would find it much harder to honour its Skills Pledge in light of the financial settlement with government.

The Chair commented that the move to consolidate departmental ICT teams in a centralised team had taken a long time, and that it should be completed before May 2011.

Decision:

1. To note progress in recruitment to the new ICT staffing structure and how the new structure would support the ICT needs of the Council, and to urge the Chief Information Officer to consolidate departmental ICT teams quickly.
2. To request that appendix A to the report be circulated to Committee members.

RG/HS/11/08 Managing Attendance (Real Time Absence Reporting)

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted briefing the subgroup on the corporate approach to recording of real time sickness absence data. Members noted the data recording system was being piloted in three sections of the Council and had been working well. The recording system complemented payroll systems and the use of return to work forms following absence. It was planned to roll the system out across the Council in April 2011.

The Assistant Chief Executive (People) commented that there was a downward trend in long-term absence, and that following the introduction of the pilot system over 150 members of staff who had been on long-term sickness had returned to work. The Chair supported the collection of data of this kind, and asked for a progress update six months after the system is rolled out across the Council.

Decision:

To support the collection of data of this kind and request a progress update six months after the system is rolled out across the Council

RG/HS/11/09 Flexible Working Policies

A report of the Assistant Chief Executive (People) was submitted informing members of the Council's policy on flexible working and the accompanying guidance issued to staff, particularly around time recording.

A member said that he had experience of managerial posts being filled on a jobshare basis which had led to a drop in the level of service provided by the post. He urged caution in filling managerial posts through a jobshare arrangement, as problems could arise if the two post holders had different approaches to management. He requested that the subgroup receive information about the number of managerial posts filled on a jobshare basis.

The Assistant Chief Executive (People) added that only jobs that were deemed suitable for jobshare were filled on this basis. The Council considered all applications for jobshare on their merits. Over the past years the scheme had allowed the Council to make savings and to retain staff with valuable skills who might otherwise have had to leave the Council.

Members noted that the flexible working policies did not allow for staff to smoke during working hours except whilst on a break. The Executive Member supported this policy, adding that smoking results in a great cost to the health service.

Decision:

To support the Council's flexible working policies and to request that the subgroup receive information about the number of managerial posts filled on a jobshare basis.

RG/HS/11/10 Work Programme

The Subgroup's current work programme was submitted.

A member requested that if the Subgroup continued its work next year it should look at restructures taking place across the Council to ensure they are being done in a way which achieves the necessary savings whilst retaining the highest possible quality service to the city's residents.

Decision:

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