

Finance Scrutiny Committee – Human Resources Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2014

Present:

Councillor Flanagan – In the Chair
Councillors Ollerhead, Siddiqi and Watson

Apologies

Councillors Clayton and Hitchen

Councillor Smith, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

FS/HS/14/01 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meetings held on the 26 September 2013 as the correct record.

FS/HS/14/02 Attendance Monitoring

The Subgroup considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (People) which provided an update on corporate and directorate absence trends and the actions undertaken to increase attendance since the Subgroup last met in September 2013.

Members welcomed the improvements that the report detailed and thanked the officers for providing a good report which presented the information clearly. Members were reassured that attendance monitoring was being managed effectively to make the necessary improvements.

A member noted that the benchmarking against other local authorities used an older method of measuring the data, which was not as accurate as the improved method used by the Council. Officers acknowledged this, and explained it was because the other authorities only used this method, so Manchester had to use it in order to be included in the benchmarking. Officers said they were working with North West Employers to encourage other authorities to use and develop robust performance measures.

The Subgroup discussed the Employee Health and Wellbeing Strategy. A member asked if there were class or clubs for exercise other than running. The Occupational Health Contract Manager confirmed there were a range of activities, including fitness classes. She added that there would also be a new focus on emotional wellbeing, which members welcomed as there were a number of staff on long term sick leave because of mental health conditions.

The Strategic Business Partner for Children's Services described various pilots taking place in children's services on mental health and developing resilience. She said the

data on stress did not always reflect the difference between absence as a result of work and non-work related issues. The pilot also included increasing use of mobile technology to increase flexible working; health trainer champions and encouraging staff to use the flexible hours contracts. Members welcomed and noted that staff needed to be confident that they could talk to their manager.

The Head of Business Delivery gave an overview of the work taking place in the Directorate for Families Health and Wellbeing. She said attendance clinics have been held in every service to look at all the cases of long term absence. The directorate had also reviewed the documentation around absences, which had been helpful and led to improvements. The directorate had also focused on the 12 longest term absences. Of these 12, eight were back to work, one had been dismissed and one had retired. The remaining two were absent due to incidents at work, and a separate piece of work was focusing on supporting staff to deal with this.

A member noted that the Town Hall Extension did not have a gym or room dedicated to fitness for staff. The Assistant Chief Executive (People) confirmed this, but noted that staff could access discounted gym facilities through their Manchester+ card and fitness classes ran in the Town Hall Extension. A member noted that although staff could access reduced gym induction and joining fees, the monthly membership fees were not reduced. The Assistant Chief Executive (People) stated she would look into this and report back. The Subgroup asked that when the next update report is provided, officers consider whether a room dedicated to staff fitness in the Town Hall complex would be feasible. Members also asked that it be considered as to whether changes could be made to the food available within the Town Hall to make it easier to make healthy choices, such as a salad bar in 104, rather than having to ask the staff to do it which took longer and ensuring fruit juice not syrup on fruit salad.

A member asked whether the 41% of staff who had not had a sick day in the last 12 months were recognised. Officers confirmed that they received a letter from their strategic director and that there were local communications. Officers also confirmed there was a generous flexitime scheme and managers had the discretion to, for example, allow staff to book a flexi day off on the day itself.

Decision

To request that when the next update report is provided it considers the following:

- whether having a room in the Town Hall Complex dedicated to staff fitness would be feasible.
- whether the food choices available for staff could be improved to encourage them to make healthier choices, for example a salad bar.

FS/HS/14/03 Update on the Time Limited Voluntary Early Retirement and Voluntary Severance Scheme

The subgroup considered a report which provided an update on the time limited voluntary early retirement and voluntary severance (VER/VS) scheme. The Assistant Chief Executive (People) explained that the most recent scheme, which ran between December 2012 and February 2013 had taken the learning from the previous scheme to improve its operation, including identifying replacements where required,

before approving release. There had been a longer time period for managing exits in the last scheme, with a more flexible approach, which had enabled a smoother transition.

The Subgroup acknowledged the difference, noting that under the previous scheme the organisation had lost a significant number of people very quickly, which took time to recover from, which was not the case with the more recent scheme. Members expressed concern that if the Council was required to reduce its workforce again, it was difficult to see where there could be further flexibility.

Decision

To note the report.

FS/HS/14/04 Work Programme

Decision

To note the work programme of the Human Resources Subgroup.