

Finance Scrutiny Committee – Human Resources Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2015

Present:

Councillor Ollerhead – In the Chair
Councillors Russell and Siddiqi

Councillor Flanagan, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources
Councillor E Newman, Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Reid, Chair of the Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee
Councillor S Newman, Executive Member for Children's Services
Councillor Akbar, Assistant Executive Member for Children's Services

Apologies

Councillor Hackett.

FS/HS/15/01 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meetings held on the 4 December 2014 as the correct record.

FS/HS/15/02 Attendance Monitoring

The Subgroup considered a report on attendance monitoring which provided an update on employee attendance across the Council since it was last considered by the Subgroup in December 2014. The Head of HROD Service Delivery introduced the report. He gave an overview of the trends in attendance across the Council and the activity that was taking place to reduce sickness levels.

The Subgroup discussed attendance within the Children and Families Directorate. The Subgroup welcomed Councillor E Newman, Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee, to the meeting. He considered the information in the report relating to the remit of the Health Scrutiny Committee, noting that it was not possible to tell what related to adult social care and what related to the teams dealing with children. He asked what managers were doing to prevent the musculoskeletal problems that employees developed. The Business Delivery Operations Manager explained that the department provided training for staff, particularly those involved in lifting. She said some staff were on restricted duties, but this put pressure on other staff. The department would also be recruiting a number of apprenticeships, which was likely to bring younger people into the workforce.

The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources said that the management in Children and Families needed to be stronger, for example, return to work forms were not consistently completed. The Executive Member for Children's Services said it was not simple, and these trends were not new. She agreed that

sickness levels in Children and Families were too high, but pointed out that a front line children's social worker was an extremely difficult job which went some way to explaining, while not excusing, this. She said it was important to ensure that managers were managing staff, not relying on the HROD team. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources added that it was not just social workers, and low attendance levels were also present within certain areas of Neighbourhood Delivery Team, for example the sickness levels in one team had increased by approximately 40% following the introduction of weekend working. Management was key, as was considering how changes are introduced. The Subgroup asked for further breakdown of sickness levels by area within Children and Families at the next meeting. The Strategic Director of Children's Services said that Manchester was not an outlier in sickness levels for social workers, and that managers in the service, and ultimately her, had responsibility. Managers needed to be aware of their responsibilities and were required to have training on this.

The Subgroup welcomed Councillor Reid, Chair of the Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee. She suggested the Subgroup consider patterns of sickness within weeks, for example whether they increased on Mondays and Fridays. The Subgroup agreed to request this information.

The Subgroup discussed return to work forms, which managers were required to fill out for all absences. Members were not satisfied that, where intranet-based recording and reporting is used, approximately 85% of these were completed across the organisation, with 69% within Children and Families. The Subgroup asked for a breakdown of this by team in Children and Families to be provided to the next meeting.

The Subgroup discussed long term sickness levels. The Head of HROD Service Delivery explained that the managing attendance policy provided the principles for managers, but it was important that managers build good relationships with their staff and used common sense. The policy included trigger points for when managers should carry out certain actions, for example refer staff to occupational health if appropriate. He explained that HROD monitored compliance with the triggers, although this data was not yet complete. The Subgroup asked for this data to be provided when it showed an accurate picture, along with information on how HROD was encouraging managers to comply.

The Subgroup discussed reporting of disability among staff. A member asked whether managers were provided with a definition of "disability" when filling out return to work forms. The member also asked to be provided with a demonstration of the intranet guidance pages available to managers. The Head of HROD Service Delivery said that the HROD intranet pages were being reviewed, so it would make sense to demonstrate them once this was completed. He confirmed that they would include guidance on the definition of disability. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources said that it was up to individual employees to report that they were disabled, but he felt it was underreported. He said that people needed to be comfortable to report it, and said HROD was working with the trade unions on this. The Assistant Executive Member for Children's Services said that employees do not always want to be seen as disabled and it came down to management and staff having the confidence to disclose this information. The Subgroup asked for a

breakdown of the percentage of employees recorded as disabled by department. The Head of HROD Service Delivery confirmed that this could be provided at a relatively high level.

The Head of HROD Service Delivery said that a toolkit for carers had been developed, which included guidance on special leave. The Subgroup asked to see this at the next meeting.

Decision

1. To request that the following information is provided to the next meeting of the Subgroup:
 - the breakdown of sickness levels by team within the Children and Families directorate;
 - the breakdown of percentages of completed return to work forms by team in the Children and Families directorate;
 - data on patterns of leave, for example whether it increases on Mondays or Fridays; and
 - a breakdown of percentage of employees recorded as disabled by department.
2. To request that the Subgroup is provided with a demonstration of the HROD Intranet pages when the current review has been completed.
3. To request that data on the compliance with the managing attendance policy is provided when it is complete enough to share, along with information on how HROD was encouraging managers to comply.

FS/HS/15/03 Progress Update on the 2014 Time Limited Voluntary Early Retirement and Voluntary Severance Scheme and Overview of M People Monitoring Information

The Subgroup considered a report of the Head of HROD Service Delivery and Strategic Business Partner (Workforce Strategy) which provided an update on the progress of the time limited Voluntary Early Retirement and Voluntary Severance Scheme (VER/VS). The Strategic Business Partner (Workforce Strategy) introduced the report.

A member noted that the report indicated that the funding for the VER/VS scheme would not require the full amount set aside in the budget. The Strategic Business Partner (Workforce Strategy) said that the final figures would not be known until all the service redesigns were completed, but that it was anticipated that it would be less than originally thought given the changes in required savings since November.

A member asked how long it would take for the 23 people not in structured roles or placements to be put into roles. The Strategic Business Partner (Workforce Strategy) said it would vary and the number fluctuated. She noted that some were on maternity leave, but reassured members that the others were working.

A member noted that there were a significant number of staff who had applied for the VER/VS scheme who would be turned down, and asked what plans there were to motivate them. The Strategic Business Partner (Workforce Strategy) stated that there were some roles where it was unlikely requests would be able to be supported due to the specific skills required and the amount of turnover. Staff have been fully aware of these considerations throughout the operation of the scheme. She confirmed that there was an action plan to support the motivation and engagement of staff who will be remaining with the organisation. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources said that officers could leave the Council at any time, and could also opt into *m people*.

A member asked if any analysis had been done to identify patterns of teams with people applying for the scheme. The Strategic Business Partner (Workforce Strategy) said that this was up to directorates to identify and reflect on and the Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources said there were lots of different reasons people wanted to leave, so making comparisons was difficult. The Strategic Business Partner (Corporate Core) confirmed that hotspots had been identified within the Core and that she had discussed this with heads of service.

Decision

To note the report.

FS/HS/15/04 Agency Usage Update

The Subgroup considered a report of the Strategic Director (Reform) which provided an update on the use of agency resources across the Council. The Head of HROD Service Delivery introduced the report. He noted that an earlier version of this item had been considered by the Finance Scrutiny Committee, which agreed to refer it to the Human Resources Subgroup.

A member said that the £72,800 spent on audio typing within Legal Services seemed high, and asked whether outsourcing this had been considered. The Head of HROD Service Delivery explained that Legal Service had a particular business support requirement which historically the Council had not been able to provide from its workforce. The Strategic Business Partner (Corporate Core) said that a piece of targeted work was needed for Legal Service to reduce its need to audio typing and the Subgroup's comments would be taken on board in this.

Decision

To note the report.

FS/HS/15/05 Shared Parental Leave Update

The Subgroup considered a report of the Strategic Director (Reform) which provided an overview of the new Shared Parental Leave Regulations, their impact on the Council and a draft Shared Parental Leave Policy.

A member asked why so few members of staff currently took up paternity leave. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources said this could be a number of reasons, such as a historical resistance to taking it or the age of the workforce.

The Subgroup discussed the decision to not offer enhanced payment for staff taking up Shared Parental Leave, when the Council continued to pay enhanced maternity leave. The Employee Relations Manager explained that Shared Parental Leave was more complicated and enhanced payments would incur additional costs estimated to be around £1.1m. Members queried this figure, particularly as the current take up of paternity leave was so low. The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources said that if Shared Parental Leave included enhanced payments, the take up would be higher, and that that this was not related to gender but that the Council could not afford to pay enhanced Shared Parental Leave.

The Subgroup recommended that HROD work with the Communications Team on the policy to ensure that it is written in plain English and to consider whether the inclusion of a timeline explaining what actions happened when would be helpful.

Decision

To recommend that HROD work with the Communications Team on the policy to:

- ensure that it is written in plain English; and
- consider whether the inclusion of a timeline would be helpful.

FS/HS/15/06 Work Programme

Decision

To note the work programme.