

Overview and Scrutiny Human Resources Sub Group

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 29 November 2019

Present: Councillor Russell (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors: Clay and Stanton

Apologies: Councillor Rowles

Also present:

Councillor Ollerhead, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

Councillor Stogia, Executive Member for Environment, Planning and Transport

RGSC/HRSG/19/17 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2019 as a correct record.

RGSC/HRSG/19/18 Legal Services Workforce HR Plan

The Sub Group considered the presentation provided by the City Solicitor and Deputy City Solicitor.

The Deputy City Solicitor referred to the main points and themes within the presentation which included: -

- An overview of the structure of the legal services department;
- Providing an overview of the workforce profile;
- Data on the levels of sickness and the work undertaken to address this;
- Information on the use of resources and the work to reduce agency spend;
- An update on apprenticeships and training and development;
- Feedback from the b-Heard survey and the response to this; and
- Identified challenges, opportunities and good news.

Some of the key points that arose from the Sub Group's discussions were: -

- Welcoming the introduction of flexible working arrangements for staff and enquiring what measures were in place to ensure staff were not working over their contracted hours;
- Recruitment adverts should promote the offer of flexible working arrangements;
- What was being done to recruit to vacancies and information was sought on vacancies that were not being recruited to, noting that vacancies could contribute to stress levels experienced by staff; and
- Welcoming the Autism training for staff and managers.

In response to questions and comments from Members, the Deputy City Solicitor stated that staff had responded positively to the introduction of the flexible working arrangements. She stated that staff workloads were monitored through regular supervision meetings with managers and the system for the recording of work was robust to ensure that staff were working appropriately. She further commented that the culture and message to staff was clear in regard to workload and expectations regarding hours worked.

The Deputy City Solicitor commented that the market for solicitors was very competitive. She said that to address this, market supplements had been awarded to posts that were difficult to recruit to and it was anticipated that this would help with the recruitment and retention of staff. She further commented that the marketing of vacancies had been refreshed to attract prospective candidates and further consideration would be given as to where posts were advertised, including the use of social media. She further stated that the legal department worked closely with local universities to attract and retain local talent and they were committed to developing existing staff and utilising apprenticeship and work experience opportunities.

The Deputy City Solicitor further informed Members that a number of vacancies reported related to administrative posts, and a review of the legal services' support function would be undertaken in the new year.

In response to comments regarding the reasons for staff absence being stress and depression, the City Solicitor stated that this was not uncommon amongst the profession, especially within Children's Services. The Subgroup commented that Children's Services did not in fact have the worst rate of absence, and enquired as to whether there was a relationship between the levels of vacancy within a group, and the sickness absence rate. To address this the City Solicitor stated that staff were encouraged to talk openly with their managers and not to suppress any mental health difficulties they were experiencing. Members were informed that to further support this a number of staff had been trained to become Mental Health First Aiders, noting that the role of the Mental Health First Aider was to listen, reassure and respond and signpost the individual to the support that was available. The City Solicitor stated that all absences and the reasons for this were monitored and recorded across the different teams.

The Deputy City Solicitor, in response to a question regarding the use of agency staff informed the Members that agency staff were employed for time limited periods, notably to cover maternity leave and periods of long term sick. She stated that the cost of this agency spend was £30 per hour. The Subgroup expressed some concern that there remained ongoing vacancies, and queried why more permanent posts were not being filled. In response to a question regarding the take up rate of job offers following successful application the Deputy City Solicitor reported that this was approximately 80%. The Subgroup recommended that further analysis of why job offers were not taken up by successful applicants should be undertaken and reported.

Decisions

The Subgroup

1. Note the presentation;

2. Request a progress report in 6 months. This update report will include information on vacancies not recruited to; information on levels of sickness and absence and further analysis of the reasons why job offers are not taken up following a successful application.

RGSC/HRSG/19/19 Highways Workforce - update

The Sub Group considered the presentation provided by the Director of Highways.

The Director of Highways referred to the main points and themes within the presentation which included: -

- Providing an overview of the workforce profile;
- An update on the flexible working arrangements;
- Providing an overview of health and wellbeing arrangements;
- Providing an overview of people management and development; and
- An update on the service redesign.

Some of the key points that arose from the Sub Group's discussions were: -

- Requesting an update on Performance Managements cases;
- Requesting an update on staff absences;
- Requesting an update on vacancies and the approach to filling these;
- The cost of the use of consultants;
- Clarification was sought as to the reasons why the reported Boards had been established; and
- Did staff receive appropriate training.

The Head of Transformation (Highways) informed the Members that following the previous report to the Subgroup in February 2019 there had been a change to the configuration of the service. She stated that Highways Maintenance, formally known as Manchester Contracts no longer sat within the Highways Department. She stated that this service now sat within the Commissioning Service of Neighbourhoods Services, and Parking Services had transitioned to the Corporate Core. She further provided an update regarding the number of Return to Work interviews completed which was currently 89% for Highways Maintenance (formerly Manchester Contracts) and 96% as of Quarter 2 for 2019/20 for the Highways Department. She stated that the average days lost per Full Term Equivalent was currently 8 days per year which was higher than the corporate average, noting this was accounted for due to a number of long term conditions and due to a number of recent RTW expects this figure to decrease.

In regard to performance management cases the Head of Transformation (Highways) stated that there was one member of the workforce subject to informal performance management. There are two conduct cases in Highways Maintenance, one of which had concluded with a warning for misconduct and the second, a gross misconduct case had progressed to the hearing stage.

The Head of Transformation (Highways) reported that following the service redesign, that included growth in staff numbers, there were currently 29 vacancies that they were actively recruiting to and it was anticipated that these posts would be filled by the summer of 2020. She further advised that the Department were using 33 consultants employed at a projected cost of circa £1.8m for 19/20, noting this needed to be understood in the context of the number and scale of projects to be delivered across Manchester, the recent service redesign and the core and flex resourcing model that is being introduced. She stated that it was envisaged that the number and subsequent cost of consultants would reduce as vacant posts were recruited to, but that it was anticipated that there would be an ongoing spend of around £500k/year on consultants because of the project-based nature of the work. The Director of Highways stated that the service redesign had recently commenced and the first two senior appointments made in the Highways Department are female. The Director also noted that consultant numbers reflected a necessary response to the increase in major projects and not currently having internal sufficient skills in the area of project management.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the recruitment of staff by the summer of 2020, the Head of Transformation (Highways) stated that historically they had experienced challenges to recruiting to technical posts. She stated that they had recently delivered a careers event that engaged with local universities, Walking With the Wounded and Women in Construction groups that had generated a high volume of interest and applications. That event was then followed up with an assessment centre day that had proven very positive and resulted in staff being appointed. She described that they were also keen to develop their own staff and lessons learnt from previous approaches to recruitment campaigns would be implemented further noting that they were keen to promote diversity across the service. She stated that the salary and benefits packages had not been identified as an issue in regard to recruitment, adding that the salary was very competitive.

The Director of Highways stated that the approach to recruitment was to promote Manchester as an employer of choice, offering the city as an exciting place to work with a number of large scale and high profile projects. He further commented that they were also planning for the recruitment to posts to future proof the service to assist with the planning and delivery of future anticipated projects.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of HR Operations stated that the lessons learnt, case studies and good practice in regard to recruitment by the Highways Department would be shared with other departments. She said this would be done in addition to the recommendations arising from the BAME review to develop a tool kit, adding that this would include all protected characteristics.

The Director of Highways stated that the decision had been taken to align the Highways Maintenance staff with the Grounds Maintenance staff. He stated that this allowed for more employment opportunities for staff within those teams and the similarities between the two sets of workforce. He further commented that applications to the vacancies within the Highways Team from these staff was encouraged and welcomed. He further clarified that all teams remained strongly connected and for example still used the Customer Relationship Management

System to respond to requests for services. The Chair stated that she welcomed the development of Council staff.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Transformation (Highways) stated that the most up to date figures regarding staff absences, following the service redesign would be provided following the meeting. She confirmed to the Chair that absence rates had increased in the Highways Department, predominantly in the City Wide Network Management service. The Director of Highways commented that this could be explained due to long term sickness absence due to surgical procedures and it was anticipated that these figures would improve in the next quarter. The Chair expressed some concern regarding this, given the number of interventions in place in the department, and that absence was a major focus of their previous report and it would have been expected to reduce in the intervening period.

In response to a question regarding the number of Boards that were described that were responsible for performance and productivity management, The Director of Highways stated that these were appropriate to ensure the necessary levels of governance and assurance were provided to the Highways Improvement Board. He further stated that this level of oversight and assurance demonstrated to managers and staff the importance of accountability and following Council due process. The Head of Transformation (Highways) provided a description of each Boards remit and composition.

The Director of Highways reassured Members that all Health and Safety staff training was current and up to date, with refresher training scheduled. The Director also confirmed that the previous day the Highways Health and Safety Board had met and confirmed the key risk assessments and mitigations to improve safety.

Decisions

The Subgroup

1. Note the presentation;
2. Request an update report in fifteen months time, which should provide sufficient time for the redesign to be fully implemented. Noting the service redesign this update report will include comparative, disaggregated data across all reported activities, including vacancies and sickness absence rates, for a three year period.

RGSC/HRSG/19/20 Work Programme

The Sub Group were invited to consider and agree the work programme. The Chair commented that she would consult with Officers regarding the timing of the 'Outcomes of the BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) review' report that was scheduled for the next meeting and a date and time for the meeting would be confirmed.

She further commented that following the discussion at this meeting consideration would be given to scheduling the report listed as 'Review of the Council's Recruitment policy and processes'.

Decision

To agree the work programme subject to the above comments.