

Overview and Scrutiny Human Resources Sub Group

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2019

Present:

Councillor Russell – in the Chair
Councillors Clay, Rowles and Stanton

Also present:

Councillor Ollerhead, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources
Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children and Schools

RGSC/HRSG/19/12 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2019 as a correct record.

RGSC/HRSG/19/13 Children's Services

The Sub Group considered the presentation provided by the Strategic Director Children's and Education Services.

The Strategic Director Children's and Education Services referred to the main points and themes within the presentation which included: -

- An overview of Children's Services Structure and Teams;
- A description of the various teams and their respective remit;
- A description of the nine service priorities to meet identified risks and challenges and to maximise available opportunities;
- How this work and activity supported the Corporate Plan;
- A profile of the workforce and how this resource was utilised across the service;
- Data on the use of agency staff and the work to reduce agency spend;
- An overview of workforce development;
- An update on activities to support apprenticeships;
- Data on days lost as a result of staff absence and the work to address this;
- Data on the number of capability and conduct cases;
- Feedback from the b-Heard survey and the response to the feedback received; and
- Describing the identified challenges, opportunities and achievements.

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

- What were the numbers of BAME staff at grade 10 or above;
- Did the service have enough capacity and was the service structure appropriate;
- What was the approach taken to undertaking exit interviews to understand the reasons staff left the service;

- What were the predominant reasons for staff leaving and was there any analysis of where staff went to;
- Was the use of consultants on the senior management team normal practice;
- Consideration needed to be given to the overall employment package to attract social workers to work for Manchester, such as the terms of employment and progression opportunities;
- Had consideration been given to adopting a policy of retention payments for newly qualified social workers to encourage them to remain working for Manchester once they had gained experience;
- More activities needed to be undertaken to engage with local schools and colleges to promote social work as a viable and attractive career option and to encourage local talent, further commenting that would address the issue of social workers leaving Manchester once experienced to return to their original home area;
- Apprenticeships should be used to support the future work force planning of social workers; and
- The importance of recognising that social workers dealt with very challenging case work, noting that the main reason for absence was Stress/Depression.

The Strategic Director Children's and Education Services responded to Members comments by stating that the capacity of the service was regularly reviewed, stating that it was important that the correct ratio of managers to staff was established to ensure that staff were adequately supported. In respect of social worker retention, he stated that there was no issue with recruiting newly qualified social workers, however the challenge came once they had gained experience. He said that staff were encouraged to engage in exit interviews with Team Managers, however they were not mandatory. He informed the Members that the predominant reason for experienced social work staff leaving was for them to return to their original home area, adding that this was a positive reason, and the experience obtained by working in Manchester made experienced social workers very attractive for other employers, and the market and demand was currently such that Social workers had a lot of options as to where they chose to practice. He also stated that agency pay rates were also an attractive offer for experienced staff.

The Strategic Director Children's and Education Services commented that consideration was being given to address the issue of experienced social workers leaving the Authority. He said that it was important that the stability of social workers and teams was maintained to reduce potential risk and maintain confidence, build effective relationships and deliver support to young people. He further commented that by establishing and retaining teams would also reduce the spend on agency staff.

The Strategic Director Children's and Education Services stated that he was confident that improvements had been made across social work teams, in terms of both caseloads, the ratio of managers to staff, morale and a sense of team spirit. He stated that whilst this was welcomed this was constantly reviewed and opportunities for improvements were always considered, adding that Ofsted also considered such factors when undertaking inspections. He further commented that he did not support the notion of retention payments for newly qualified staff, adding that in his experience staff left as soon as such payments ceased and staff should be

encouraged and supported to remain working in Manchester because they were committed to Manchester, its values and delivering improvements for Manchester citizens.

In response to a comment from the Chair regarding the importance of informal methods of recognition and gestures to ensure staff felt valued, similar to that used in other industries the Head of Workforce Strategy stated that whilst there was no formal corporate policy, Managers were encouraged to do this. The Strategic Director Children's and Education Services commented that the staff awards and recognition offer had been improved and he was considering ways to celebrate the achievements of newly qualified social workers, adding that small gestures and behaviours by managers and leaders were equally as important to ensure the correct message and values were relayed to staff.

The Strategic Director Children's and Education Services acknowledged the question regarding the number so BAME staff employed at grade 10 and above. He stated that it was recognised that this needed to be addressed and BAME staff development and mentoring programmes had been established and the directorate continued to challenge itself regarding this area of activity.

The Head of HR Operations commented that the approach to social work recruitment was currently being reviewed across Greater Manchester as the recruitment and retention trends experienced in Manchester were not unique, adding that the benchmarking data used for this review process and pay grade information would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The Interim Director of HROD commented that it was recognised that the issue of future workforce planning across the wider Health and Social Care landscape needed to be addressed and consideration was being given to how to do this. In response to the discussion regarding the use of exit interviews and the low response rate to this offer she stated that she would take the action away from this meeting to consider how this could be improved.

The Strategic Director Children's and Education Services informed the Members that the issue of succession planning was being discussed with The Greater Manchester Social Work Academy. He added that Care Leavers were being encouraged to consider social work as a career and noted the comments that attracting home grown talent would address the issue of workers returning to their original home town. He added that opportunities for developing and promoting the number of apprentice social workers were being discussed, adding that it was important to acknowledge the importance of getting the correct balance of experienced and newly qualified staff in teams to ensure the correct support and mentoring could be appropriately given.

The Interim Director of HROD referred to the discussion regarding staff absences and stress, noting the increased awareness in the city of trauma. She informed Members that in addition to the informal support offered by colleagues and managers within teams, staff could also access specialist commissioned support and counselling. She stated that this was usually available for six sessions, however this could be extended if required, adding that the contract for this service was currently

under review. She further commented that options for wider resilience training across the whole directorate were being considered.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools said that capacity within teams was challenged when experienced staff were required to work on specific projects and transformation work. He informed the Members that he regularly visited teams to meet and discuss issues with staff to understand any concerns or emerging issues. He said these were invaluable opportunities for staff to talk openly with him, adding that this practice was also replicated by senior managers across the service, ensuring that they were visible and accessible to staff.

Decision

To note the presentation.

RGSC/HRSG/19/14 MPeople update: Redeployment

The Sub Group considered the report of the Head of HR Operations that provided Members with an overview of the refreshed approach to the Council's practice to supporting staff to identify alternative roles within the organisation when displaced through either organisational structure changes or for medical reasons.

The main points and themes within the report which included: -

- Providing a background and overview of the MPeople approach that had been developed jointly with the Trade Unions and agreed by Personnel Committee in November 2010;
- Information on the review of the MPeople approach that had commenced in September 2017;
- Information on the key features of the refreshed approach agreed following this review;
- Progress to date;
- Current position by Directorate; and
- Next steps.

The Members welcomed the report and commented that they fully supported the approach adopted.

Decision

To note the report.

RGSC/HRSG/19/15 Overview of Council vacancies

The Sub Group considered the report of the Head of HR Operations that provided Members with an overview of current vacancies across the Council.

The Head of HR Operations referred to the main points and themes within the report which included: -

- Information and data relating to current vacancies;
- Information on whether posts were being actively recruited to; and
- How long posts had been vacant for.

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

- Clarification was sought regarding the definition of a true vacancy, commenting that consideration needed to be given to terminology used to assist the lay reader;
- Consideration needed to be given to providing context for the data provided within reports, including a breakdown by grade, levels of sickness and employee capability cases per directorate;
- Information and analysis of factors relating to staff retention would assist the understanding of this subject;
- What were the circumstances that required the services of an Executive Search partner and what was the cost of employing those services;
- Further information was sought on the time taken in respect of the Parks Service redesign;
- Recognising the impact that vacancies had on existing staff and teams in terms of managing workloads; and
- Further information was sought on the use of agency staff to cover and unfilled vacancies, this to include where and when used and costs.

In regard to the comments from Members regarding additional data and analysis, the Chair stated that officers had provided the information that had been requested and she would discuss with officers the scope and content of any future update report.

The Interim Director of HROD informed the Members that the term true vacancy was used to describe those posts that were not actively being recruited to or being held. The reasons for these were various, including historical issues regarding the recruitment to social worker posts and ICT positions; the complex nature of the organisation and the range of functions undertaken, including seasonal work and the timing of income and grant funding for posts. Members were informed that these vacancies were regularly reviewed and vacancies over 12 months old would be challenged to ensure they were still valid.

In response to the time taken for the redesign of the Parks service, the Head of HR Operations acknowledged that both this and the Highways service redesign were outliers. Members commented that a summary of all redesigns and lessons learnt be provided. The Interim Director of HROD stated that the reasons for the time taken to deliver service redesigns could be complex and varied and that she would speak to the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) to understand the reasons and feed back to the Members.

The Interim Director of HROD advised that Executive Search partners would only be employed as a last resort when all other avenues for recruiting to the post had been exhausted and used for specific specialist roles. She said that she would analyse

how long staff recruited using this method remained with the Council and feed this back to the Members.

Decision

To note the report.

RGSC/HRSG/19/16 Work Programme

The Sub Group were invited to consider and agree the work programme.

The Chair informed the Members that following discussion with officers regarding the timing of reports she had agreed to defer the 'Outcomes of the BAME review' report from the meeting of 26 November to the 25 February 2020 meeting.

The Chair recommended that a report on the Legal Services Department be included for consideration at the meeting of the 26 November. The Sub Group endorsed this recommendation.

Decision

To agree the work programme subject to the above amendments.