



Overview Scrutiny Committee

Reduction in staff numbers and impact on staff Topic Review

Report – January 2018

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Foreword

Following the changes that have taken place within the council over recent years, the Overview Scrutiny Committee felt that it would be beneficial to explore how the impact on the service changes and reduction in staffing numbers has impacted on staff across the council. Whilst there is a drive to maintain services and performance levels as far as is possible, there has been a concern that this has resulted in existing officers of the council having extra pressure placed on them. The topic review has sought to explore how the council is currently supporting its officers to ensure they are able to continue to undertake their roles throughout the council.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the officers involved in the review for their time and assistance in providing comprehensive information which has enabled Members to discuss, debate and identify potential improvements for consideration.

Cllr David Hurley

Chairman of the Sub-group

Introduction and Summary of Recommendations

1.1 In July 2017, the Overview Scrutiny Committee selected the subject of *Reduction in staff numbers and impact on staff* for a topic review. The terms of reference for the review focused on:

- Review the council’s most recent report in respect of the Investors in People (IIP) Accreditation scheme (this takes account of staff feedback in a number of areas) and the ways in which staff are able to engage with the council.
- Review and analyse the sickness statistics for the council as a whole. Information will be provided to detail the levels of sickness and also the breakdown of sickness types/periods across the council.
- Review the council’s performance framework (this is the framework by which team meetings, one-to-one’s etc are undertaken to assist in the management of all staffing issues).
- Discuss with the trade union Branch Secretary, any potential issues relating to staffing capacity or sickness that have been raised (all information will be anonymised where necessary).
- Discuss and agree any potential recommendations coming out of the discussions of the group for consideration by the Cabinet.

1.2 Throughout the review, Members of the sub-group have been provided with a significant amount of information to review and analyse, which has prompted in-depth discussions about the support mechanisms that are currently in place for officers of the council.

Summary of Recommendations

1.3 In summary, the Scrutiny Topic review of *Reduction in staff numbers and impact on staff* has identified five recommendations for Cabinet consideration

RECOMMENDATION		Report page
1.	Ensure that the actions identified in the IIP Internal Assessors report to Management Team are implemented	6
2.	Explore the development of a training tool/buddy system to assist new and newly promoted Managers in undertaking their managerial responsibilities.	7
3.	Develop a staff briefing on stress to outline the key drivers for stress but also, the support mechanisms that are in place.	9

	RECOMMENDATION	Report page
4.	Ensure that regular 1-2-1 meetings are held with all staff (as appropriate) to ensure staff have the opportunity to raise concerns with their managers.	9
5.	Ensure that regular communication with all staff continues to take place across the organisation.	10

1.4 Further information to support these recommendations is contained within the body of the report.

2. Review Findings

Workstream One – Review of the council’s most recent report in respect of the Investors in People (IIP) Accreditation scheme and the ways in which staff are able to engage with the council.

- 2.1 The most recent IIP Report produced for the council was in 2015 and provided the council with a ‘Gold’ standard. The next IIP review, scheduled for 2018, will assess the council against the new IIP standards which are considered to be tougher and introduce a new ‘Platinum’ service standard. Given that the previous IIP accreditation was two years ago, the internal IIP assessors group have been undertaking a review of the new standard with a view to identifying potential improvements that may be required in order to maintain the current IIP rating. The group also undertook a staff survey and presented their findings to Management Team.
- 2.2 It was recognised by members that whilst the previous IIP report highlighted some very good working practices across the council, there are some areas identified in the report to the council’s Management Team where further action is required in order to continue to improve and prepare for the 2018 IIP review.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Ensure that the actions identified in the IIP Internal Assessors report to Management Team are implemented.

In preparation for the IIP Assessment in 2018, it is important that the council addresses the actions identified in the review undertaken by the IIP Internal Assessors, in order to ensure that the council is not only meeting the standards set by the IIP accreditors, but also to ensure that staff are fully supported in their roles across the council.

- 2.3 Specifically, within the IIP report and internal assessment undertaken, members highlighted a concern regarding the support that is provided to officers receiving promotions within the council. It is clear that managing staff can be very difficult and potentially, more so when an officer is promoted and becomes a manager of their peers. Whilst there is a process in place to support new managers, it was felt that it would be beneficial to explore the opportunity of implementing a more specific training programme or buddy system to support managers.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Explore the development of a training tool/buddy system to assist new and newly promoted Managers in undertaking their managerial responsibilities.

To ensure that all new managers are fully supported in their new roles, explore the potential of developing either a training tool or a buddy system to ensure that Managers are also able to voice any concerns or questions they have when undertaking their new managerial duties. It is important to ensure that new managers have an 'outlet' to voice any concerns or queries they may have in their new role.

- 2.4 A new **Joint Staff Forum** has been established in 2017-18 to enable officers to engage with the council more easily. The revised staff forum was set up following a recommendation from the IIP report.
- 2.5 The Forum is now more inclusive with minutes of meetings being circulated more widely, staff actively setting the agendas and generally being more involved in the meetings which take place every two months. The Joint Staff Forum is formed of officers from all departments and floors who have put themselves forward to be part of the forum. There are 14 people involved in the forum; manual and non-manual staff, union representatives and non-union staff, managers and apprentices. The meeting is chaired by the HR Manager and minuted by the UNISON Branch Secretary. Members of the council's Senior Management Team attend to be able to answer questions that are raised by staff.
- 2.6 Members were supportive of the revised model that is now being used for the Joint Staff Forum and were pleased to hear that the approach does seem to be working well across all tiers of the organisation.
- 2.7 In addition to the external assessment of the council, the Members of the sub-group also undertook to review the additional support mechanisms that the council has in place to support all staff:
- **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**
The EAP service is provided by Workplace Wellness. It is anticipated that this will continue. The current cost of service is £8.42 per employee per annum. The service provides a wide range of facilities and details of this are attached at appendix one to the report. The EAP service has proven to be very useful and a number of staff have accessed the services. **Given its significance to supporting staff, the EAP service has not suffered any budget reductions and is seen as a critical part of the support package for staff.**
 - **Occupational Health**
The Occupational Health service is provided if needed, through East Kent Health Trust. This service provides qualified nurses who come to the council offices every three weeks. Alternatively, appointments are made for staff at an alternative location with an Occupational Health Nursing advisor or Physician.

- 2.8 Members were supportive of the support mechanisms that are currently in place for staff and were encouraged by the plans for maintain the service for the future.

Workstream two – Review and analyse the sickness statistics for the council as a whole.
Information will be provided to detail the levels of sickness and also the breakdown of sickness types/periods across the council.

- 2.9 Members advised that they were concerned about the levels of sickness absence within the council, particularly in some of the key departments of the council. It is clear from the detailed sickness statistics that there has been an increase in sickness levels, but there are a number of exceptional circumstances that have added to this, including officers having long periods of sickness to recuperate from operations and time off associated to non-work related accidents. It was accepted that these are outside of the control of the council.
- 2.10 Members were also concerned that ‘stress’ was a potential issue amongst officers within the council, resulting in an increase in sickness absence. It was recognised by Members that stress can be caused by a number of issues both work and non-work related:
- There are a number of roles/activities that the council must undertake which naturally will be difficult for staff (homelessness, housing benefit, civil enforcement roles etc.). The stress the customer is under can often be off-loaded to staff who then find this very stressful themselves; some staff can handle this well and others need some support and it is not always possible to take away all of the stress-inducing situation.
 - Stress can be driven by a number of other reasons external to the control of officers; targets imposed by Government at very short notice which must be met by the local authority, technological changes which impact on staff activities, plus the fact that the council has had a significant reduction in budgets which has driven changes within the organisation. Local government has had significant changes over the last 6-7 years at a very fast pace and the key to managing this is communication with staff. The council has improved the way in which it communicates these messages to staff over recent years; it is felt that, as an organisation, we are much better at this now than we were five years ago.
 - Non-work related issues can also create stress. These could include things such as financial problems, family illness or bereavement etc. These are outside of the control of the council as an employee, but the council can support employees as detailed through the Employee Assistance Programme.
- 2.11 Members recognised that stress is an issue for the council and that the council has become a lot better in recent years about communicating change etc. to staff but this does not detract from the fact that it can cause stress for officers. It was suggested that, whilst the support available for staff has been previously communicated to staff, it would be beneficial to reiterate this but also to clarify all of the different things that can cause stress.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop a staff briefing on stress to outline the key drivers for stress but also, the support mechanisms that are in place.

It would be useful for staff to have some form of briefing to ensure that staff are aware of all of the potential causes for stress but to also reiterate the support mechanisms that are in place for officers of the council.

Workstream three – Review the council’s performance framework (this is the framework by which team meetings, one-to-one’s etc are undertaken to assist in the management of all staffing issues).

- 2.12 In simple terms, the Performance Management Framework (PMF) is a series of meetings that are held between the different officers within the council. A document detailing the PMF is attached at appendix two.
- 2.13 Members were pleased to understand the way in which the PMF operates across the council and recognised that there does need to be discretion with Managers about how this is actually operated within individual departments. However, it was felt that there did need to be a ‘push’ for one-to-one meetings for officers as this was an issue that was identified in the IIP report and the assessment undertaken by the IIP Internal Assessors. Whilst it is appreciated that formal, monthly 1-2-1 meetings may work in some teams, this may not be suitable in others.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Ensure that regular 1-2-1 meetings are held with all staff (as appropriate) to ensure staff have the opportunity to raise concerns with their managers.

It is important to ensure that all officers of the council have the opportunity to meet with their managers on a 1-2-1 basis, in order for them to raise any specific issues or concerns they may have about either their work or their personal situation. It is recognised however, that managers do need to have discretion about how best to undertake these types of meetings but it is important to ensure they do take place on a regular basis.

- 2.14 In addition to the regular 1-2-1-briefings with staff, it was felt that, whilst communication across the council has improved in recent years, there is a need to ensure that this continues with regular communication with all staff. The Joint Staff Forum has helped in ensuring that key messages are shared with staff, but this is something that needs to continue moving forward.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Ensure that regular communication with all staff continues to take place across the organisation.

The Joint Staff Forum has enabled information to be communicated with a greater number of staff but it is important that this continues moving forward. There is a need to ensure that staff briefings for all staff continue as and when required. This will ensure consistent messages for all staff, particularly if/when there are any key changes or messages that need to be communicated.

Workstream four – Discuss with the trade union Branch Secretary, any potential issues relating to staffing capacity or sickness that have been raised (all information will be anonymised where necessary).

- 2.15 The UNISON Branch Secretary was invited to attend one of the topic review meetings and a number of specific questions/concerns were directed to the Branch Secretary for their comment:
- Is the Joint Staff Forum operating well for staff?
The Branch Secretary advised that she had been part of the review panel in terms of updating the way in which the forum works and does feel that this is working well in practice. She felt that it was an improved working model from the previous Consultative Committee approach.
 - Is there any issue of stress-related sickness amongst staff?
The Branch Secretary advised that she has only been made aware of three stress-related cases. Through working collaboratively with the HR Team and the managers, one has resulted in a re-evaluation of the person's job role (which is currently underway), the second relating to a customer complaint about a member of staff which resulted in the staff member taking time off with stress and the third related to an officer who had been promoted who then decided that the job was not what they wanted and chose to leave the employment of the council.
- 2.16 The Branch Secretary advised the Members of the sub-group that the Union representatives work well with HR to look to resolve issues as soon as they are raised, and this is demonstrated in the case where a job evaluation is currently underway. There is a very good working relationship between the two groups of officers and the aim is very much to work together to get to the root-cause of any issues that are identified.

Appendices

EAP Service provided by Workplace Wellness.

Contract in place to 31 March 2018 with intention to move across to Medway council provision from 1 April 2018 with similar service provision. Present cost is £8.42 per employee per annum currently based on headcount of 496.

www.my-eap.com/login Log in ID GBCwell

Details of Service

Unlimited 24/7, 365 days per year. Freephone telephone access to immediate emotional support, debt management services and general advice and information

Helpline access number 0800 1116 387

Unlimited access to website offering information and downloads covering a variety of topics

An extensive range of practical support for callers with legal, consumer or financial issues in line with HMRC rulings available 8:30am to 8:30 pm Monday to Friday

Specialist management support available 8:am to 6:00pm Monday to Friday to assist managers with softer skills or managing teams and people issues.

Specialist career coaching via a pre-booked one hour telephone sessions, one session per employee per annum available 9:00am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday

Individual session based counselling sessions either by telephone, face to face or via secure online service. Up to 6 sessions per person per year.

Counselling/Case Management Services – initial counselling triage, full 24 hour case management and Red Flag support plus telephone Critical Incident Support

Immediate support and delivery through a Day 1 intervention for employees absent due to stress.

EAP cover for dependants of employees is as follows:

- 24 hour Telephone Helpline, Advice, Support and Information
- Counselling in specific circumstances, i.e. couples counselling, only as part of the employee counselling eligibility, where couple or family relationships are the issue.

NOTE: Dependants will not be offered counselling independently or Legal Support

An eligible dependant is:

- Your spouse or domestic partner
- Your unmarried dependants, under 21 years of age, who are dependant upon you for maintenance and support. this includes legally adopted children, stepchildren and children who are dependant upon you by reason of legal guardianship
- Your unmarried dependant children under 25 who are in full time education (they may live away from home)
- Your unmarried dependant children who are incapable of self-sustaining employment because of physical or mental disability, who became disabled prior to age 21

NOTE: Children who marry and later become divorced will not qualify for coverage as 'unmarried dependant children'

Performance Management Framework

The council's Performance Management Framework (PMF) is the way in which the council monitors its progress against action plans and performance targets.

In simple terms, the PMF is a series of meetings that are held between the different officers within the council. These are meetings such as:

- One-to-one's:** Meetings that are held between a manager/principal officer and an officer that reports to them. The purpose of the meeting is to review individual progress against action points, monitor individual performance but also to allow officers the opportunity to voice any concerns they may have.
- Team meetings:** Meetings that are held between whole teams in order for managers/principal officers to share information with everyone within their teams. This allows managers to ensure that officers within a team remain up-to-date on key issues.
- Departmental Management Team:** Meetings that are held within departments for all managers within the department. This enables the Directors/Assistant Directors to pass information on to all of their managers at the same time.

These types of meetings should have agendas and minutes should be kept as a record of the discussion that have taken place. Agendas should be based upon the information and priorities as set out in the business plans so that everyone knows how they work they are doing contributes to the council's overall objectives.