

Report to the Resources Select Committee

Date of meeting: 14 December 2015

Subject: Update Report: Apprentices
Graduate Trainee
Shared Services – HR
Mast Money Budget
Employee Engagement



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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Committee notes the update report on Apprentices; the Council's Graduate Trainee; Shared Services in Human Resources; the Mast Money Budget and Employee Engagement activity.

Executive Summary

This report provides the Committee with an update on various Corporate projects and areas of work carried out by the HR Team. The update includes the following areas;

- Apprentices
- Graduate Trainee
- Shared Services – HR
- Mast Money Budget
- Employee Engagement.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To update members on activity across a number of Human Resources work streams.

Other Options for Action

This is an update report therefore no other action is appropriate at this time.

Report:

Introduction

1. The Committee wished to be provided with further information regarding a number of areas managed by HR. This report provides members with an update on activity within the following areas;

- Apprentices
- Graduate Trainee
- Shared Services – HR
- Mast Money Budget
- Employee Engagement

Apprentices

Cohort 1 - 2013/2015

2. In 2013, at the Leader's request HR developed an Apprenticeship Programme for the District's young people. Funded from the Council's Corporate Improvement Budget 7 Business Administration apprentices and 2 multi trade apprentice roles were established, forming the first apprenticeship Cohort.

3. The business administration roles would provide the apprentices with a range of transferable skills and offer more opportunities for employment with the Council once they had completed the Programme. Housing Repairs identified the requirement to recruit multi skilled apprentices as a priority.

4. The Business Administration apprentices were issued with fixed-term contracts for a maximum period of 2 years, the multi skilled apprentices were issued with a two year fixed-term contract to ensure the necessary training was completed. The aim of the apprenticeship programme was to ensure that the apprentices were recruited to permanent positions in the Council.

5. The Council worked with the County's NEET Team (Not in education, employment or training) who processed the initial applications and provide the Council with a 'long list'. Those applicants who made the long list attended a 2 week pre-employment training course which included a range of subjects relevant to 16-18 year olds, i.e. behaviours, time management, dress code, team work, interview skills etc. The applicants also received feedback from the interviews and support with career advice.

6. During and following the training a short-list was drawn up in conjunction with the Council and Epping Forest College. The advantage of this approach is that even though some candidates dropped out at this stage, they received experience of completing an application and attended an employability training course which they can put on their CV.

7. Those candidates who made the short-list were interviewed by the Council's Learning and Development Manager along with two other Assistant Directors.

8. Once appointed the Business Administration Apprentices completed 4 x 6 month placements across the Council, the multi skilled apprentices were placed in the Housing Repairs Team only.

9. Throughout the Programme all the apprentices were allocated a coach/mentor from the Council's pool of qualified coaches/mentors. As part of their development each of the apprentices had their own Personal Development Plan, devised by the Council's Learning and Development Manager, which they discussed with their mentors/supervisors and completed during the Programme.

10. The Business Administration apprentices were required to complete a NVQ level 2 or 3 in Business Administration and/or Customer Care, the level and subject was determined by the level of education already attained and the needs of the Council. The multi-skilled apprentices were required to complete a relevant NVQ/technical qualification. The Council worked with Epping College who delivered the Business Administration and Customer Care training and with Harlow College to provide the multi-skill/construction training.

11. All apprentices attended relevant training from the Corporate Training Programme, which was identified by the Learning and Development Manager and set out in their Personal Development Plan.

Cohort 1 - Outcomes

12. Of the 7 Business Administration Apprentices, 3 left the Council before completing the

full Programme. As far as the Council is aware 2 are in employment. The remaining 4 Apprentices have permanent roles within the Council, in the Resources and Communities Directorates. The 2 Multi-Skilled apprentices have also successfully completed their programme and have permanent roles with Housing Repairs.

13. Eight of the 9 apprentices passed their qualifications. The one who did not had left early in the Programme.

Cohort 2 – 2015 -2016

14. The process outlined above was used to recruit the Council's second apprenticeship Cohort in 2015. However, following a review of the Programme a number of changes were made, namely;

- The pre-employment course was reduced to 1 week.
- The original contracts are fixed term for 1 year. This will be extended for a further year if the apprentices successfully complete the first year of the Programme.
- The Programme started earlier in the year.
- Timekeeping and sickness absence would be a regular discussion at the apprentice's monthly review with the Learning and Development Manager and their supervisor.
- The apprentices will be graded by the Learning and Development Manager on behaviour, their college work and work performance.

15. Due to funding the Council only intended to recruit 5 Business Administration apprentices and 1 Multi Skilled/Construction apprentice to the second Cohort. However, a number of Housing Associations on the Council's Preferred Supplier List began to contribute to a Community Fund which allowed, potentially, a further 4 Business Administration apprentices or 3 Business Administration and 1 Construction apprentice to be recruited.

16. Following the Council's recruitment process for the second Cohort, 7 Business Administration apprentices and 1 construction apprentice were recruited. Two of the placements are funded by the Community Fund. The new Cohort have settled well into their work placements which are currently in ICT, Resources Support/ Invoices, Council Tax and Benefits and both administration teams for Neighbourhoods and Housing Repairs.

17. They are progressing well with their college work and qualifications. They have also been involved with organising and attending a careers fair at St Johns School in Epping.

18. The partnership with the Housing Associations (sponsorship of 2 apprentice roles) is going well. One of the partners, B3Living, invited all the apprentices to their Community Day at the Lea Valley White Water Rafting Centre in October.

19. The Council is working with Higgins Homes and Hill Group to provide work placements for the apprentices. This will be a great opportunity for our apprentices to gain experience in both the public and private sectors.

20. In addition to the above Programme which is corporately funded within the Governance Directorate, Planning Support, a further three apprentices are undertaking a number of administration tasks. These roles are funded by Governance. They also have a mentor and supported by the Learning and Development Manager.

Graduate Trainee

21. The Council agreed to participate in the National Graduate Development Programme (NGPD) which is a 2 year national management trainee programme for high calibre graduates with the potential to become senior leaders in local government within the next 10 years. The Local Government Association (LGA) coordinates the programme nationally and provides the

infrastructure for its delivery. The LGA recruits/assess/selects the final candidates, it manages and commissions the training element.

22. The placements and training programme are carried out in parallel so that the graduates can implement their learning whilst working on real projects. The formal training programme is delivered by Solace and Inlogov from the University of Birmingham. The graduates attend 6 residentials over the 2 years where they will gain a Diploma in Strategic leadership (ILM Level 7).

23. Management Board agreed to participate in this Programme in 2014 as officers considered it too early to take on a further cohort of apprentices in terms of management capacity and therefore a resource at a more senior level in the organisation was believed to be the better option to build further capacity into the authority. It was felt that the NGPD was a viable alternative to the existing apprenticeship scheme as the main objective of the programme was to progress a number of appropriate projects specifically in areas where the Leadership Team had identified a number of reviews to be carried out.

24. The Council employed one graduate for a fixed term of 2 years through this Programme. During the two year placement they are required to carry out 4 projects/placements in various parts of the Council covering front line, operational and strategic roles/reviews. They have been allocated a mentor with the Council's Learning & Development Manager identifying other appropriate training as necessary.

25. Managers were required to bid to have the graduate for 6 months, and they have fully completed 2 of their 4 placements; review of the scrutiny function and develop an employee engagement strategy and carryout a staff survey. Currently they are working in Communities researching the impact of an aging population on the Council's services. Their final placement will be working with the Head of Transformation.

26. The Trainee is also completing an ILM 5 qualification in coaching and mentoring and is currently mentoring three apprentices.

27. No decision has been made as to whether the Council participates in the National Graduate Development Programme 2016.

Shared Services – HR

VineHR

28. The Council's Human Resources (HR) Team has participated in the Essex network of the Heads of HR the Essex Strategic HR Partnership for a number of years. The Partnership assisted authorities to work together on projects, policies and training. At this time the Partnership was not a legal entity and could not procure, contract or own products, this meant it has to rely on other Essex authorities to carry out these functions on its behalf. In 2010 the Partnership reviewed its governance arrangements and agreed to develop it into a not for profit company.

29. The Partnership looked at various options, with continuing advice and support from Essex County's legal team and worked with a Solicitor who specialised in Commercial law. They recommended that the Partnership establishes a wholly owned company on a not for profit basis, which the Partnership has agreed.

30. The aim of setting up a not for profit organisation is so that;

- it could generate its own income so it becomes self-sufficient,
- it could provide value for money for the member authorities in any contractual arrangements,
- Heads of HR can work more collaboratively and achieve greater savings for their authorities, and

- It provides a formal framework for the Heads of HR, limiting the risks and liabilities for individual authorities.

31. The Partnership established VineHR and there are currently 7 Directors managing the business. Since the establishment of VineHR, it has undertaken 2 significant procurement exercises for the following;

- E-Learning Platform
- Framework of management training providers

32. Using the framework, the Council has trained 54 number of managers and potential managers through the ILM management and leadership programmes and our internal coaches/mentors, of which we have 15, also attend ILM coaching/mentoring programmes. We are able to provide this training by working with others collectively.

33. The Council used the training framework to commission a Leadership Development Programme for Management Board which saved time, as only a mini competition process was required, and money as the rate was competitive. Other Councils in VineHR have also uses the training framework for their management development which saved them considerable time and money.

34. The Council's Assistant Director (HR) took the lead to commission mental health awareness training for managers on behalf of VineHR which 140 of its managers will attend as part of the sickness absence improvement plan.

35. The Council's Learning and Development Manager is a member of VineHR's Training Project Team who successfully put together the ILM programmes and commission/organise a range of Masterclasses on a wide range of subjects.

36. VineHR has a pool of associates that can carry out ad hoc pieces of work, investigations, mediation, and coaching at a cheaper rate than the market.

Procurement of a HR/Payroll IT System

37. Back in 2014 Cabinet agreed a capital bid of £80,000 to purchase an integrated HR/Payroll It system as the current system is not fit for purpose.

38. Officers entered into discussions with Chelmsford Borough Council to investigate the possibility of working with them to use the IT system they had recently procured and implemented. Unfortunately, due to contractual reasons we were not able to progress this any further.

39. Around the same time, Colchester, who currently provide a Payroll/HR IT system to Braintree, were required to go to the market as their current contract was ending in March 2016. The Council have been working with Colchester and Braintree Council's on the tender documents and process with the aim of jointly procuring a system. The evaluation process is due to be finalised before Christmas with an implementation/start date early in the new financial year.

Broxbourne

40. Officers in Hr have had initial discussions with Broxbourne Council to identify potential areas of working together to find efficiencies specifically at this stage regarding training and providing more specialist expertise that either one authority may not have.

Mast Money Budget

41. The Committee may be aware that the Council receives money from leasing space on the Civic Offices roof for a communications mast. When the mast was initially located on the

roof staff raised health and safety concerns and the potential dangers it posed. Members agreed that any money from this lease would be allocated to projects which would benefit staff.

42. Following last year's agreement to purchase £20 M&S gift cards at Christmas, discussions have taken place at the Joint Consultative Committee regarding projects for future expenditure of this budget. In addition an initial employee consultation exercise was carried out towards the end of 2014. There were a limited number of responses to this consultation so a section was included in this summer's Employee Survey. The outcome of the Survey showed that the 3 most popular suggestions were; Gift Cards; a Benefit Portal and Health Checks.

43. The current budget is £79,000 as there has been a rental increase and recently a one-off back payment of £30,000 has been received. The approximate cost of the gift card is £20,000 (which includes the costs for Benefit in Kind Tax and NI) and the Benefit Portal is £3,330 (based on £4.90 for each employee). HR will discuss the provision of the Health Checks with SLM and obtain a cost.

44. The advantage of all three suggestions is that they can apply equally to all staff regardless of their location.

45. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Consultative Committee, G Greenwold and Cllr Lion respectively, have supported the decision to purchase One4All Gift Cards for Christmas which allows employees to redeem the card in a range of high street stores. A card will be purchased for all staff employed by the Council on the 18 December and the cards will be circulated to managers during the week commencing the 14 December.

46. Essex County Council has procured a rewards portal which enables other Essex Councils to participate with. A portal will offer employees a range of goods and services at discounted prices. The price is £4.90 per employee regardless if the individual uses the portal or not, there is no reduction in price. It is proposed that the portal is demonstrated to the Leadership Team in the new year with a launch across the Council soon after.

47. HR will liaise with SLM to provide Health Checks and it is proposed to launch the initiative as part of a health and wellbeing week in January/February 2016.

Employee Engagement

48. Earlier this year the Council's Graduate Trainee carried out a review of employee engagement across the Council. The outcome of the review would be an agreed Strategy and Action Plan, the purpose of these would be to create an all-inclusive and engaging culture within the Council, also to avoid the perception of it being a responsibility of HR with limited involvement from employees and directorates.

49. To involve staff in this process Employee Engagement Workshops were run from April to June 2015 to gain feedback from employees on a range of engagement centred topics. There were 62 employees who attended the workshops across five different sessions. The workshops were targeted to include a range of employees across the authority e.g. different; locations, grades, roles and areas of work. There were a further two more workshops presented to Leadership Team and JCC.

50. The consultation with employees was concluded with a final workshop being held to present draft versions of the Engagement Strategy and Action Plan. Employees were asked to comment on both documents to help ensure they were fit for purpose and easy to understand. Participants expressed a need for further clarity on some of the action points which was completed before submission to Management Board.

51. The Strategy and Action Plan have recently been agreed by the Joint Consultative Committee and once agreed by Cabinet will be published for staff to read.

Employee Survey

52. As part of the work on the Engagement Strategy the Graduate Trainee was tasked with carrying out the Employee Survey. During the workshops referred to previously employees were asked their views on obstacles to completing the survey, they suggested;

- having smaller surveys that were not as time consuming – breaking the survey down in to less questions and having them run throughout the year (as opposed to a large survey once per year). Only 3 sections were included in the recent survey.
- having an incentive for staff to participate in the survey – having a prize drawer in place for staff who enter the survey. Staff suggested vouchers, a pair of cinema tickets and additional annual leave. Other authorities have implemented an incentive with good results that have been based on a prize draw with four winners per survey. The first two questions of the survey (name and email address) have been included as optional questions for people who want to be entered in to the prize drawer. If they would rather remain anonymous then these questions do not need to be completed. This was done for this survey.
- including topics that are current and relevant to staff – the draft survey has included topics that are considered current and relevant to staff i.e. spending the mast money and employee engagement.
- improving accessibility to the survey – a range of methods were used including a QR code, booking the IT suite, providing support to staff to complete the survey.
- Being able to complete the survey during working hours and reminding managers of this so that it can be communicated and reinforced to staff – this was reinforced through all communications regarding the survey
- Having an advanced warning of the survey – An advert was placed in an early District Lines edition, a special survey focused edition of District Lines was published and reminders sent.
- having reassurances over confidentiality – Information was provided via a special edition of District Lines to reiterate the confidentiality of survey responses
- Not being too Civic Office focused – the questions include encouragement for non-Civic Office based members of staff to participate e.g. the mast money section.

53. Unfortunately, despite taking all the above comments on board, the response rate was lower than the previous staff survey (58% in 2013 compared to 32% in 2015). The Joint Consultative Committee has requested that those employees who did not participate are asked why they did not

54. The HR Policy and Projects post will be taking forward actions from the Employee Engagement Action Plan and the Survey.

Resource implications:

No additional funding is required.

Legal and Governance Implications

N/A

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications

N/A

Consultation Undertaken

N/A

Background Papers

N/A

Risk Management

No risks identified.

Due Regard Record:

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

This is an update report and therefore no comments are provided.