

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 29 July 2008

Subject: Corporate Support and ICT Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mitchell Cohen

Item: 6(e)

Recommending:

That the report of the Corporate Support and ICT Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

Springboard Women's Development Programme

We completed our first Springboard Programme (of 4 workshops) in June 2008. The programme is designed to give (mainly non-managerial) female staff the confidence to develop at work and in their personal life.

The programme was delivered in response to previously low levels of female staff being employed at senior grades. It was also felt that the programme would assist female staff in dealing with issues such as stress and work/ life balance, which had been previously noted as high reasons for sickness absence in female staff.

The programme included inspirational guest speakers from senior EFDC female staff, directors and, on the last workshop Councillor Lesley Wagland was involved in this. All the guest speakers were well received by the women on the Programme as they provided an honest insight into how they got to where they are today, the highs and the lows.

27 women completed the programme. HR is conducting a full evaluation to measure the impact of the programme. However the feedback so far on benefits to the individuals and the Council has been excellent (see below).

A second programme will be run, starting in November 2008. HR already has a waiting list of staff that wish to start.

Below is a sample of the feedback we have received:

'I thought the course was most useful. It has certainly made me more positive about myself. I start my training in my new area next week – which I am sure Springboard gave me the courage to say 'yes' to. Thank you!'

'I would like to thank you for arranging such an excellent self-development course for women. It was interesting to hear, as the sessions moved on, how women spoke of their new self awareness and how some had seen opportunities and taken them'

'For me the course came at the right time and has provided an excellent opportunity to meet other members of staff throughout the Council'

'I feel more motivated, positive & confident in my ability & dealing with others'

'As a result of the course, networking with colleagues in different departments has improved. This creates better working relationships and support at work'

'I am now more likely to take on additional tasks and be progressive'

'I feel much more proactive and valuable'

'The Springboard Programme made me think about personal goals I had forgotten about and made me initiate new achievable goals for the future'

Management Development Programme – October 2007/May 2008

Ten middle managers have participated in the EFDC Management Development Programme with no dropouts. The programme, which is based on the Essex Leadership Centre model, includes performance coaching, action learning and formal training input, including 'Masterclasses'. The formal input included areas such as communication, project management and performance management. The Programme culminated in May 2008 with the 3 action learning groups presenting their reports on BVPI improvement areas to CEF.

The results of the programme thus far have been that 4 of the 10 managers have taken on additional responsibilities including additional staff due to the restructure and are proving to be extremely capable managers. Feedback from their line managers has shown these participants benefited from the programme and are performing to a good standard. The delegates themselves have fed back that the performance-coaching element in particular has been invaluable to them and is having a positive impact on their performance.

Evaluation of the programme took place on 20 June 08 which included the participants and the coaches. The findings will be published as a report and fed back into the 2008/2009 Management Development Programme, Cohort 2. It is planned to start Cohort 2 in October 2008 and Brentwood Borough Council have shown interest in 'buying' a small number of places on our programme. This development is currently being explored and will add benefits to the programme in widening the participants' experience, increasing their networking skills and reducing costs.

It is planned that this programme along with other management/ leadership development opportunities is in future promoted as part of a benefit package for staff recruitment and retention.

New Institute of Leadership and Management Certificate – to be offered from Feb 2009

HR has recently been working to develop this new accredited programme for first line managers. The course will be a blend of training days and work based assignments and will be suitable for staff in their first supervisory or management role or those who have no previous management qualifications. Subjects covered will be:

- q Effective Communication
- q Managing/ Motivating People
- q Managing performance
- q Organising & Delegating
- q Financial & Budgeting Skills

- q Managing Health & safety at work
- q Managing Stress at Work
- q Managing Conflict at Work
- q Developing self awareness/ developing diverse teams

This course will provide a theory base in management which is complemented by the emphasis on behaviours experienced on the Management Development Programme. On successful completion of the course participants will receive a certificate.

Trainee Scheme

Since 2004 the Council has operated a Trainee Scheme on a pilot basis. The Scheme has recently been reviewed and JCC will be asked to support a further cohort of four places to be established. These posts will be funded corporately from the Recruitment and Retention budget. In addition to the corporately funded scheme Directorates can introduce 'career grades' to enable them to 'grow their own'.

It is proposed any trainee will be subject to a structured development plan and assessment process. The Council hopes to work with local colleges and 'Connexions' and to investigate the possibility of external funding for their training.

Supernumerary Post

In June 2007 HR were approached by Employ-ability, a Harlow based charity promoting access to work for disabled people, with a request for a work placement for a young woman who is visually impaired. The individual completed a successful work placement developing general office skills and more specific skills in communications in ICT and Public Relations (PR), an area she had personal interest in. She showed a keen interest in working in PR for the Council and was given a challenging 6-month work trial in which she achieved success and performed to a high standard, meeting all objectives set for her.

HR worked with Employ-ability to identify funding from Jobcentre Plus which would support her part time salary & travel costs and the cost of any specialist equipment, should she be offered a role with the Council. Cabinet agreed in January 2008 to the establishment of a permanent Supernumerary Post, funded from the recruitment and retention budget. The aim of the post is to provide temporary employment (6 – 12 months), which is corporately funded, to enable an individual with a disability to develop and find permanent employment.

She started work in January 2008 in the role of Communications Assistant and is progressing well and her contract has been extended.

The benefits to the Council undertaking this support are as follows:

1. The arrangements provide an excellent opportunity for individuals with disabilities to build up their work experience to get a start in employment or in the career they desire.
2. Employing individuals on this basis will provide additional resources for the Council at minimum cost.
3. In Quarter 2 2007 KPI BV16a 'Employees with a Disability' was still under target and this activity will have positive effect on this indicator and in increasing diversity within EFDC in general.

4. This work encourages the removal of barriers to employment in the local community and working in partnership with agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and Employ-Ability.
5. This type of action would help EFDC gain the 'Two Ticks – 'Positive About Disabled People' recognition in the future.

Equality and Diversity

Epping Forest District Council is fully committed to equal opportunities. We are sensitive to the diverse communities we serve and seek to provide facilities and services that are free from discrimination and reflect the needs and diversity of our residents and service users.

The Council has previously adopted Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes in response to statutory requirements. The legislation from which these schemes derive is similar, and requires assessment of the relevance of individual functions and policies followed by full equalities impact assessments where required, backed up by monitoring and consultation. In order to take equalities matters forward in a 'joined up' way, the Council took the approach of carrying out combined impact assessments with respect to race, gender and disability when it commenced this process, thus avoiding duplication of effort.

In addition, the Disability and Gender Equality Schemes require consultation with minority, disadvantaged and seldom heard groups, as a means for the development of appropriate action plans. With respect to disability, officers have been meeting regularly with local disabled people and disability groups to consult them on the issues and concerns they have. Each meeting has focused on a particular Directorate, with relevant Directors in attendance to both provide information and be challenged to make improvements. This process is yielding valuable information, and will inform an updated Disability Equality Action Plan in due course. Consultation under the Gender Equality Scheme has commenced through engagement and consultation with delegates on the authority's 'Springboard' development programme.

Monitoring in relation to the Council's equality and diversity performance is undertaken by the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.

Our present diversity policy can be restated as "a commitment that the Council will continue to recognise and address the challenges of providing services and employment opportunities to a diverse range of customers and applicants". This Council remains resolutely and whole heartedly behind this restatement.