

## **CABINET – 15 SEPTEMBER 2020**

### **WORKFORCE REPORT AND STAFFING DATA Q1 2020/2021**

#### **Report by Director of Human Resources**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to note the report.**

#### **Executive Summary**

2. Our workforce is the most valuable asset the council deploys. It is our people that make a difference to our residents and our communities. The very nature of the work, and the services we provide, is people intensive. Our residents are reliant on the professionalism of our workforce to deliver high quality services and the Council's future ambitions. This statement has never been starker than in the first quarter of 2020/2021 when we truly have experienced unprecedented times as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic.
3. Within a matter of days, we experienced a complex public sector organisation move its operations from a very traditional office/building/face to face delivery model to a home working environment reliant on a range of digital technology to deliver services. The digital technology has been fundamental in our ability to continue to deliver services and our workforce has been truly outstanding in its response and adaptation to the new ways of working.
4. This report provides an update of HR activity and refreshed workforce data for Quarter 1, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at Appendix 1 as well as some COVID related absence data which is provided at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.
5. The update on HR activity focusses in the main on the HR response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

#### **Human Resources – Quarter 1 overview of activity.**

6. The following is a snapshot of the areas of work for HR in Quarter 1:
  - HR support in response to COVID 19
  - Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing response to COVID 19.
  - Resourcing response to COVID 19.
  - Launching the Children's Services Transformation consultation.
  - Further work on the HR dashboard and data set.

## **Quarter 1 – Overview of HR activity**

### HR response to COVID 19.

7. Throughout the pandemic, the HR team has continued to work very effectively from home with little impact on the services provided. This is not to say that some team members have not experienced additional challenges as a result of home working and caring responsibilities but flexibility has enabled the impact on the delivery of the service to be minimal.
8. The HR team is made up of a range of specialists including H R Business Partners and Advisory, Reward, Resourcing, Business Systems and Data Analytics, Corporate Health and Safety and Wellbeing. In addition there is a team of Organisational Development (OD)specialists.
9. The team has been tracking and responding to the impact of the pandemic on our workforce and its operations from the outset. We have drawn upon the professional knowledge and skill sets of the whole HR team to support the transition of our workforce to work from home where possible and to adapt our service delivery approaches accordingly.
10. To provide immediate support and help, the HRBP and Advisory team developed a range of workforce related FAQ's which distilled the latest Government information and guidance into a library of easy to read, relevant advice and guidance for all, this has been a significant piece of work and resource intensive. Weekly manager's briefings produced by the OD team were circulated containing regular business as usual items along with a wealth of information and top tips for managers on the practical issues of managing a remote workforce and the range of employee wellbeing support that was available.
11. The Advisory team has directly contacted every member of the Council's staff who was shielding to ensure that as an employer we have maintained independent contact with our most vulnerable employees during this time, working with their managers to ensure that any concerns or anxieties could be addressed quickly. A significant response and development of school specific FAQ's were provided for staff and leaders in maintained schools working alongside our colleagues in the Education team. Whilst advisory services for schools are provided through the Hampshire partnership, the COVID pandemic required an Oxford specific response.
12. The team has focussed on the resolution of complex employment situations arising as a direct result of the pandemic and those business as usual situations that became more difficult to manage due to the pandemic and those circumstances where action could not be postponed or indefinitely delayed. The Business Systems and HR service desk had to review some of our business as usual practices which are driven by the Hampshire IBC partnership and were not deemed to be conducive to the COVID 19 situation and as a result took on additional work to ensure that the Council had much swifter access to data to inform planning and delivery decisions.

13. Fortnightly, informal meetings with all trade unions has worked well throughout Q1 to maintain good communication and collaboration and this has ensured that any concerns have been resolved quickly.
14. The Organisational Development team have provided practical, technical and behavioural advice for individuals and teams and as well as guidance for the management of remote teams has produced advice on maintaining motivation and resilience. On-line Bitesize coaching sessions have been offered to all staff. This offer is a joint initiative with CDC as both organisations have a pool of qualified coaches who are available to deliver coaching sessions to anyone from either authority on request. The OD team co-ordinate the content of the weekly Manager's Briefings.

### Corporate Health and Safety and Wellbeing

15. The Health and Safety team continues to work alongside managers across the organisation to ensure we meet our obligations to manage and control workplace risks, including protecting our people and others from the risk of COVID-19 infection.
16. Work has been undertaken to ensure managers have been provided with relevant procedures, risk assessments, tools and PPE to ensure all our work activities including our schools are properly assessed and that safe systems of work are developed in line with government guidance.
17. The team have been fundamental in providing guidance and advice to enable staff to work from home including arrangements for the distribution and supply of equipment e.g. chairs, and advice on how to set up and make the best use of your home as a work base.
18. Robust risk assessment processes have been developed to protect our staff and volunteers who are at higher risk of COVID-19 and disproportionately affected by the virus, for example those who have underlying medical conditions, over 70 years of age or our Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues, by completing individual risk assessments before returning to work and where necessary identifying additional measures to put in place to reassure and keep them safe.
19. As we move into a new phase of supporting a safe return to work and restarting some services our focus has been on ensuring our buildings and services are 'COVID-Secure compliant' in line with social distancing regulations and guidelines. It must be noted that the pandemic and government response is evolving and changing and therefore we continue to monitor the situation closely and adapt accordingly.

20. Improving workforce resilience has been a key driver by offering health and wellbeing support including team and individual counselling to staff who may be anxious or worried about working during the pandemic and giving an opportunity for staff to openly share concerns and develop coping strategies. In addition we have provided a range of options for staff who may have become increasingly socially isolated as a result of working from home including a virtual car sharing pool and other opportunities to allow for some more informal activities. We have also held webinars and training to provide managers with skills to enable them to have effective wellbeing discussions with their staff.

### HR Resourcing

21. The HR Resourcing team routinely supports hiring managers with critical areas of recruitment activity to offer targeted strategic and advisory support.
22. During the pandemic, this small team supported a range of COVID specific recruitment activity as well as ensuring that critical business as usual recruitment could continue. The following are just three examples of the work of this team in Q1.

### **Heyford Park Temporary Place of Rest**

23. The team resourced the Heyford Park Temporary Place of Rest facility. This required a sensitive search approach for candidates to fulfil roles that do not ordinarily sit within a local authority remit. It was essential to recruit at pace but on a low key basis with none of the normal advertising or agency approaches utilised to fill these posts. Stringent clearance processes had to be undertaken with the team working over the weekend to ensure this progressed given the short window of time available to induct and train staff in on-site protocols. This was achieved to enable the facility to open on time with an experienced manager recruited from the NHS.

### **Responding to emergency hiring requests**

24. The team also dealt with a wide range of emergency hiring requests for additional temporary resource in response to the pandemic. The team with support from colleagues in Communications quickly got messages out via social media and handled the response from over 70 candidates with workers interviewed virtually, vetted and in roles within a matter of days. The campaign was also used as a means of promoting the Council to candidates who are likely to enter the recruitment market in the next few months as many of the candidates were due to become fully qualified.

### **Remote assessment centre for newly qualified social workers**

25. Children's Services have a recruitment campaign which runs three times a year for newly qualified social workers, utilising job fairs and university tours to attract good quality applicants. None of these avenues were available due to COVID 19, so the entire attraction campaign was built online. The process usually involves shortlisted candidates attending a full day assessment centre which wasn't possible during the pandemic. The team therefore built a fully virtual assessment centre process. This involved coordinating 21 interview panellists,

redesigning the assessment day formats and questions and the creation of 64 MS Teams meetings to operate the assessment day online. 25 candidates attended, 12 were offered roles. The team received positive feedback from the participating candidates.

26. In conjunction with the OD team, Resourcing colleagues also produced a guide for hiring managers to support them to confidently continue with recruitment and onboarding activity remotely.

#### Children's Services Transformation

27. The consultation phase for the Children's Services transformation project including the Family Safeguarding model launched on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020, concluding on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020.
28. The proposals spanned a total of 398 in-scope staff across Children's services. This was a large and complex piece of consultation to undertake and required rigorous planning and attention to detail as due to the pandemic it needed to take place remotely. The HR Business Partner worked closely with senior managers in Children's Services and the trade unions to ensure that this could go ahead during the pandemic and not be delayed further.
29. Overall, 92% of the in-scope staff engaged during the consultation period with 100% engagement from staff on long term sickness or absence and maternity leave. Where requested by staff, priority one to one meetings were arranged and took place.
30. The consultation paper was substantial with a detailed proposal for each of the five transformation workstreams and included information about the proposals to transition to and embed the new model. In addition, a live start and end broadcast summarising the proposals and the conclusion of consultation were recorded with the links sent to all in-scope staff so they could re-listen to the information at a time of their choice. A dedicated sharepoint site was set up for all documentation and updates including an FAQ section built on staff questions and input, again available to everyone in-scope.
31. Weekly consultation meetings took place with the trade unions and the Interim Director of Children's Services and her senior management team to ensure that high levels of meaningful engagement took place throughout the consultation period. Dedicated in-boxes were set up for HR and Service related questions and a regular newsletter was circulated.

#### Cycle Scheme

32. As previously reported the Cycle Scheme is now available throughout the calendar year for staff and members. In Q1, a further 42 applications were made representing a value of £44,472 and a further saving to the Council. As seen by the national press, cycle manufacturers have seen unprecedented demand during the lockdown period and OCC participation in the scheme seems to be

following this trend. This demand is likely to be attributed to the desire to avoid using public transport and the need to look for alternatives to gyms.

#### Further work on the HR data set

33. Further work and fine tuning continue to be carried out on the HR data set provided in Appendix 1 of this report.
34. In Quarter 1, a key focus has been the gathering of weekly sickness absence data to help support the operational areas to plan more effectively during the pandemic. This can be seen at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of this report.
35. Some work has been undertaken in Quarter 1 to try and benchmark the Council's data with other comparable county councils and whilst some benchmarking data is included in Appendix 1, it should be noted that this comes with a range of caveats, not least that the data provided by Local Government Inform is based on 2018/19 data and not in year and it includes School Support staff. There is similar difficulty in benchmarking sickness absence rates across the sector with LG Inform and the Office of National Statistics varying considerably in the numbers. Further investigation is required to identify a reliable data set that will allow us to benchmark effectively and set new sickness absence targets by which we can produce a key performance indicator. Unfortunately, little progress has been made in Quarter 1 to review the type of support available to managers to improve confidence and 'know how' in managing sickness absence but this will remain a priority for the team in the final part of Quarter 2 and Quarter 3.
36. A new exit questionnaire has been designed to provide better data on the reasons why staff leave the organisation and we are working to adjust the timing when staff who resign complete this information. This is made more complex by the arrangements currently in place for handling resignations within the Council. This will provide a better understanding as to why staff choose to leave and if there are areas of concern which need to be addressed.
37. For Q1, further information has been provided on Apprenticeship data. Further work is required around apprenticeships to develop and link career pathways within the organisation. This work needs to be picked up in Quarter 2 and 3 to increase the level of apprenticeship levy funding.

### **Quarter 1 Staffing Data (1<sup>st</sup> April – 30 June 2020)**

#### Introduction

38. Appendix 1 of this report provides staffing data relating to the workforce profile, sickness absence, turnover, apprenticeship numbers and agency spend.
39. Workforce data and trends are published in more detail on the Council's intranet. This includes a breakdown of staffing numbers and trends over the past five quarters by Directorates and Schools, including temporary and part time employees, turnover and sickness rates along with diversity and salary profiles.

This data provides information by service and includes the spend and use of agency workers.

40. Appendix 2 of this report provides a Q1 snapshot of absence data broken down into the COVID absence categories of isolation working, isolation non-working and sickness due to COVID compared to other sickness.
41. Appendix 3 of this report provides COVID related absence data by Directorate.

## **Quarter 1 Update**

### Staffing

42. Staffing numbers have shown a small decrease between Quarter 4 (5079) and Quarter 1 (5052), (4108.33 FTE) which includes our retained fire service but excludes schools.
43. Overall staffing numbers have remained relatively stable in the last year however comparing Q1 19/20 to Q1 20/21 there is an overall increased headcount of 60 and an overall increased FTE of 60.94.
44. The workforce gender split remains consistent with two thirds women and one third men. The age profile highlights a slightly older workforce with 53.86% aged 45 years and over however overall the age profile for the council is reasonably well dispersed across all age bands.
45. Included in this report is the staff ethnicity profile which shows that further work is required to identify the reasons why we do not hold ethnicity data for over 6% of our workforce. Further work on the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion project will focus on this as well as a better understanding why over 1% of our workforce choose not to disclose their data.

### Turnover

46. The Council's Directorate rolling turnover rate for the last 12 months is 11.5%. Across the whole workforce (including schools), the 12 month rolling turnover rate increases to 17.5%. To note that Academy conversions, (which skew the turnover data) that were due in Q1 were postponed until later in the year due to the pandemic. The Council's turnover rate when compared to Local Government Inform data is at the lower end compared to other English County Council's. The highest turnover rates exist at Somerset and Devon County Council's where it is 19% but to note this data includes teaching support staff in Schools.
47. Turnover in Quarter 1 has dropped to 1.9% compared to 2.6% in Quarter 4, this is not surprising given the pandemic. Compared with Q1 19/20, turnover for Q1 20/21 is down by 0.8%

### Spend on agency workers

48. Agency workers are a critical part of the council's workforce. They can provide a cost effective and flexible solution to cover temporary work demands. The Council has a managed service contract with Comensura which focuses on the

provision of temporary agency and interim workers through a central electronic portal to an approved supply chain of compliant tiered agencies.

49. A managed service provides the following benefits:
- Improves oversight of agency spend and trends and helps to improve demand management and the consideration of alternative resourcing solutions
  - Secures the most competitive terms with agencies
  - Grows the supply chain to respond to temporary orders quickly
  - Reduces the time managers spend liaising with agencies and negotiating terms of business
  - Ensures all suppliers understand and comply with council vetting requirements
50. Demand for agency workers is sometimes due to the need to cover hard to fill vacancies and in these circumstances, can be more costly than direct employment. Measures continue to be taken through recruitment initiatives to keep this number to a minimum.
51. The total spend on agency workers via the Comensura contract for Q1 has increased by £8,000 (compared to Q4) to £3,211,140 which given the pandemic has not seen a great fluctuation. Of the 52 new bookings made in Q1, 18 were to cover a vacancy and 14 were as a direct result of COVID.
52. Off contract spend (agency usage outside of the Comensura contract) has reduced by £400k in Q1 and remains just less than it was in Q1 2019/20. HR are continuing to work with managers to reduce off-contract spend and will be taking a proposal to CEDR in the next month to address this further.
53. The majority of the off-contract spend is within the Planning and Growth Directorate (£239k) but this can be attributed to the use of a company that provides specialist contractors at a competitive rate equal to Comensura.
54. The main reason for requesting an agency worker continues to be to cover a vacancy followed by project work and current temporary workload. By far the biggest spend on agency staff is for qualified social care workers followed by interim cover for Corporate Directors whilst waiting for permanent appointments to start and where transformation activity is imminent.

## **Conclusion**

55. HR will continue to develop the HR data in this report and review and adjust the targets in line with sector norms. This will continue to be provided quarterly along with a summary of key HR activities.

KAREN EDWARDS  
Director Human Resources



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**Contact Officer: Karen Edwards, Director Human Resources**