

Minutes of **Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Recruitment and Staff Retention**

Meeting date **Thursday, 19 October 2023**

Committee Members present: Councillor Michelle Le Marinel (Chair), Councillor Ryan Towers (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Gordon France, Christine Heydon, Alex Hilton, June Molyneaux, Dedrah Moss and Kim Snape

Committee Members present virtually (non-voting): Councillor Samantha Martin

Officers: Hollie Walmsley (Head of Human Resources) and Clare Gornall (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillor Karen Derbyshire

13 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14 Minutes of the last meeting - 3 October 2023

Members considered a revised draft copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2023, which had been circulated on 18 October 2023.

Resolved:

That the revised minutes of 3 October 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

15 Interview with Lesley Miller, UNISON Branch Secretary

The Chair welcomed Lesley Miller, UNISON Branch Secretary, to the meeting.

Lesley was asked if, in her discussions with Chorley Council staff who were UNISON members, there had been any general patterns / trends in respect of views expressed on recruitment and staff retention.

Lesley referred to a meeting held the previous day where she had been chatting to apprentices and the following trends were identified from the feedback given:

- There appeared to be some inconsistency when comparing the apprentices' experiences in different departments, for example comparing customer services with 'back office' functions such as revenues and benefits.
- Customer services apprentices felt that due to more experienced staff leaving, staff training was being left to less experienced staff.
- Customer services apprentices felt that pressure to meet performance indicators (e.g. in relation to answering phone calls) was impacting on their capacity to learn effectively. They also said that they did not feel sufficiently confident or experienced enough to deal with the volume of calls.

Hollie Walmsley, Head of HR acknowledged some of the issues associated with Customer Services, provided some context and explained ways in which the Council had addressed those issues. She indicated that there had been a planned review of customer services at Chorley, which was then delayed due to the move to shared services. During that period, a number of people left the Council and in addition, as the experience gained in customer services was often in high demand, staff in the team tended to quickly move on to other areas in the organization.

Hollie indicated that the shared services arrangement had now been implemented, and a number of vacancies had been filled. The Council had identified the need, and now appointed, a dedicated Training Officer for the customer services team. She also stressed that this year was the first time a cohort of 18 apprentices had been taken on, and the lessons learned will lead to an improved experience next year as part of long term plan.

A member of the Task Group asked Lesley if she was aware of any situation where lack of staff in post; wrong skill mix / level training; terms and conditions, pay or morale - have led to service failure or poor level of service that have affected the running or reputation of this Council.

Lesley indicated that she was not aware of any specific instance where the above issues had led to service delivery failure. However, she was aware of instances where staff had left the council for increased pay and that subsequently services had suffered due to staff leaving. She said that a lot of services had been cut right to the bone. She cited the example of Housing Options, where experienced staff had been lost. Salaries at Chorley were often less competitive than other local councils e.g. Preston City Council.

Lesley stressed that dedicated staff work very hard to prevent service delivery failure. The feedback from staff was a general feeling that some services were close to the edge.

The Chair enquired as to whether figures could be obtained regarding staff sickness and where this attributed to staffing levels. Hollie Walmsley indicated that absences due to mental ill health are complex and often there are a combination of factors. The Vice Chair however felt strongly that the information would be helpful to the Task Group.

Lesley indicated that the feedback she had received from apprentices in customer services was that that they were just about managing to meet their time allocation for learning and development associated with their apprenticeship, compared to other departments such as Council Tax and Revenues and Benefits where apprentices were allocated specific time for this purpose (which should be 20% - about 1 day per week).

Lesley acknowledged that for the first cohort of apprentices, there was less paperwork whereas for the second cohort, a training officer had introduced personal development plans so it was an improved experience, however some of it was being completed in their own time not work time.

Hollie Walmsley indicated that the 20% time allocation was part of their employment contract and she would prioritise addressing this following the feedback received. It was also planned that apprentices would meet with their line manager to see what their aspirations are and how the Council can better support them e.g. if they want to move to another service area.

The Task Group then discussed issues arising from Aged Debts (which had been identified in a report to Governance Committee). Hollie Walmsley explained that the Council had been pulled up on its ineffective processes in that individual services had not been chasing up / collecting on their debts, and it was customer services' role to keep a record of those debts. The Council was to implement a solution where ownership was taken by each service of their debts – the issue was not specifically related to recruitment or retention of staff.

The Task Group also discussed staffing levels in procurement; Hollie Walmsley informed members that this had been addressed with the creation of two extra posts.

The Task Group discussed the issues of recruitment and retention more generally, with a view to identifying positive measures the Council was not already taking. It was noted that Chorley Council offered an excellent benefits package e.g. discounts at local businesses. It was acknowledged that due to the current financial climate and cost of living crisis some people would prioritise salary over other benefits. However, in comparison with other Lancashire Councils, the Chorley offered very good terms and conditions particularly in the area of mental health and wellbeing. Hollie Walmsley informed members that this included the following:

- Signposting
- Emotional wellbeing support
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Counselling
- 1-2-1 discussions with line manager, identifying what we can do as an organisation to support employees, and to try and remove any barriers

Resolved:

1. That the Task Group thanks Lesley Miller for her attendance and representations and asks her to pass on thanks to UNISON members;
2. That figures be obtained regarding staff sickness to indicate where this linked to issues with recruitment and retention in specific services;
3. That the Task Group recommends that the Council actively promotes health and wellbeing (including mental health) support available as part of its overall employee benefits package.

16 Recruitment Strategy update - new recruitment website

Hollie Walmsley, Head of HR presented a working draft of the new recruitment website which was to go live on 1 December 2023.

Hollie explained that :

- the site will contain job descriptions, videos, and employee stories;
- applicants will be able to register, login and upload their CVs, allowing the Council to search for skills;
- enable monitoring of equality and diversity information. The Council had also been assisted in its Recruitment Strategy by the learning experiences of Leicester University, which had spotted trends e.g. on interview panels, and how they were able to improve their recruitment practices by having more mixed and diverse panels.

The Task Group thanked Hollie for her presentation. One comment was a request that the website be made more colourful before it went live. Overall, members were very positive about the website.

Resolved –

That the presentation be noted.

17 Living Wage Accreditation

The Chair clarified that it was agreed at the last meeting that Hollie Walmsley, Head of Human Resources would investigate the feasibility of adopting the Living Wage Accreditation.

All the information available has now been related to the Task Group, and members have agreed this action for inclusion in its final report.

The next stage will be for the proposal to go to Shared Leadership Team.

Resolved – That the position be noted.

18 Data on Pulse survey

Emily Monk, Transformation Officer provided the following Pulse Survey data for Chorley Council:

Response Rate:

June 2022 – 103

May 2023 – 103

Employee satisfaction:

June 2022 – 68%

May 2023 – 82.52%

Resolved – That the information be noted.

Chair

Date