

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Licensing and General Purposes Committee
<b>Date:</b>	19 April 2021
<b>Title:</b>	Staffing Digest – April 2020 to March 2021
<b>Report of:</b>	Human Resources Manager
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To consider the human resource activities and issues through the 2020/21 financial year.

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**Recommendation:** It be **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

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### Introduction

1. This Staffing Digest covers the period April 2020 to March 2021, aiming to give Members an appreciation of progress in the field of staff management.

### Recruitment

2. Recruitment has remained active during this period despite the challenges of the pandemic. Turnover for the first six months of this year was 3.13% and for the second half of the year was 7.42%. Difficulties around professional post recruitment have been raised with Members previously and remain a concern. However, we remain successful in filling posts, but it is not without issues.

### Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) – TUPE

3. The Joint Waste Contract central client team have successfully transferred to Wealden District Council as of 31 March 2021 who are now the lead authority for the partnership.

### Employment Relations

4. There has been one investigative hearing undertaken during the year. The outcome of the hearing was that the complaint was considered unfounded and no action was necessary.
5. We have introduced a Human Resources (HR) Liaison Group, made up of members of staff from each of the service areas, who meet regularly to discuss HR matters. These meetings have proven to be an effective way of communicating upcoming HR changes or projects and also in providing valuable feedback to the HR team on a range of topics from all areas.
6. An all staff survey was conducted in September 2020. The survey was developed by HR alongside independent body Valuentis. The survey asked a range of questions relating to staff satisfaction, engagement and our COVID-19 response. Results were anonymous and submitted to Valuentis directly,

who then collated this information for the Council. Whilst results were generally positive, the survey has provided insights, which will allow us to develop a targeted action plan for making any required improvements.

7. Members will be aware that most of the workforce have been working from home during the pandemic. In order to encourage communication, HR have introduced a monthly newsletter containing information about staff achievements and highlights from the past month, including celebrating staff achievements, both inside and outside of the workplace. This initiative has been well received by staff.

### **Employment Initiatives**

8. Apprenticeships – We currently have six apprentices occupying various roles and service areas around the authority. We have been delighted with the success of this scheme and looking forward to continuing with this success. Since its introduction, six apprentices have successfully completed and three have secured employment with the Council.
9. We continue to invest our efforts into an HR and Payroll extension to the new Unit 4 finance system. The payroll section went live in July 2018 and we have continued the development work on the HR side, which should be live by the summer 2021.
10. The HR team and the Transformation team have developed an online annual leave solution for staff. Following testing, this has now gone live in one of the service areas and will be gradually rolled out across the whole workforce over the coming months. This will save a considerable amount of effort in maintaining the previous manual system.

### **Training**

11. Due to the pandemic, in house training was put on hold, with training providers not initially set up for online delivery. However, online training has taken place through the iHASCO system on the topics of GDPR and Cyber Security. We are looking to expand this to a wider range of topics to allow staff to undertake their continuing professional development online. Trainers are now beginning to open up to more online courses and we have been utilising this form of training to good effect.
12. Sussex Training Consortium (STC) – STC has now completed the move from Rother to Arun District Council, who will now lead the service. During the pandemic they have not offered training courses, however as lockdown restrictions have eased, we have seen this pick up again and courses will become available to our staff.

### **Health and Safety**

13. We had four minor staff accidents reported during this year. This is up one from the previous year. All have been investigated and no further action was found necessary.

14. We continue to provide refresher training for our first aiders as their qualifications expire. We also have a waiting list should anybody decide not to renew their qualification.
15. Mental Health - We have trained seven staff volunteers as Mental Health First Aiders to help support any staff dealing with poor mental health. Alongside this, HR have released supporting information to aid staff in identifying mental health issues and signposting where help can be found through outside agencies or via our Employee Assistance Programme. HR have also provided support and coaching to managers in identifying and dealing with mental health of their staff.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

16. As referred to earlier, the impact of the pandemic has resulted in homeworking being made mandatory for the majority of staff for a significant period of time. Following easing of lockdowns, homeworking continues to remain in place and has proven effective in maintaining business operations during this challenging period for us all. The facilities team have continued to work from the Town Hall throughout the pandemic in order to maintain access to the building and ensure the security of our staff.
17. Following the easing of lockdown restrictions, risk assessments, guidelines and measures have been developed and put in place and in order to maintain the safety of staff entering our buildings and when carrying out their duties. We are looking at the opportunities for continued homeworking (in part or full) and the impact this would have on our accommodation needs. Consultation will be undertaken as appropriate with staff and unions before any decisions are taken.
18. With the move to homeworking, meetings are now conducted via Microsoft Teams which continues to be an effective way of holding meetings while we are not all able to attend the offices.
19. In the early stages of the pandemic, the HR team volunteered to assist with the community hub, also supporting other areas of the business when possible.

### **Temporary Restructure**

20. A minor temporary restructure has been put in place as of 1 February 2021 in order to ease pressure on one of our larger service areas. This resulted in the creation of a new Head of Service role to lead Neighbourhood Services. This is to be reviewed during the upcoming corporate restructure project.

### **Policy**

21. No new policies have been brought forward in this period. Our Pay Policy was updated in line with the pay award for 2020/21.
22. We are in the process of introducing "factsheets" to outline the key points along with a new online policy index to aid accessibility. HR are working with the Transformation team in order to develop a self-service platform to make

our policies more accessible to staff following the move from the RIBS platform to Microsoft Teams.

23. In June 2021, our policies are due to be independently reviewed by an outside body who will provide feedback and comments on any adjustments should they be required in order to ensure an up to date, robust policy framework remains in place.

## Conclusion

24. The reports highlights that, in addition to dealing with the impact on staff of the pandemic, it has been possible to make significant progress in a number of areas to improve staff relations and management. The next year is likely to be busier than ever with adapting to the long term effects on how we work post pandemic. Maintaining open and constructive dialogue with staff will be essential to ensuring any changes are successful.

<b>Other Implications</b>	<b>Applies?</b>	<b>Other Implications</b>	<b>Applies?</b>
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		
Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston		
Report Contact Officer:	Maria Benford – Human Resources Manager		
e-mail address:	Maria.benford@rother.gov.uk		
Appendices:	None		
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None		
Background Papers:	None		
Reference Documents:	None		