

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY – PROGRESS REPORT

Report By: Head of Human Resources

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To receive an update on progress against the Council's Human Resources (HR) Strategy

Background

2. The Human Resources Strategy was agreed in 2002, with baseline and improvement targets derived from the Staff Opinion Survey 2001, plus local and Best Value performance indicators. The cross-Council HR Strategy Group has met twice yearly (in line with the availability of data) to monitor progress. Since this date, two further Staff Opinion Surveys have been carried out in 2002, and 2003 enabling changes over time to be tracked.
3. The agreed format for performance 'exception' reporting provides for reporting on any indicator + or – 10%. However, small percentage point improvements in HR data can sometimes be significant, the full report is attached at Appendix A, with strategic area highlights picked out in points 7-12 below.

Considerations

4. Many of the results from the annual staff opinion survey are used to track performance against the HR Strategy. It perhaps should be noted at the outset that within this year's staff opinion survey most write-in comments (55%) were around job evaluation - the need to improve the process and value employees more. Last year 72% felt very or fairly motivated, compared with 46% in 2003. Despite this more employees felt the results of the Survey would be taken seriously in their area (44%) than those who did not (35%). A more detailed breakdown of initial Survey findings is contained in the Staff Opinion Survey 2003 Headline Report attached to this report.
5. Many of the HR Strategy results remain high despite the reduced percentages this year – for example 87% of respondents enjoy their jobs, compared with 91% in 2002, about the same as 2001 rate.
6. On all benchmarked questions (National ORC Benchmark Group 2002 data) the Council is within the average range of responses and above or well above the average for Local Government on all except one area - awareness of the organisation's long-term goals. See the attached report. 2003 comparison data is not yet available.
7. Achieving Management Excellence. In this section of the HR Strategy, performance

highlights are:

- Employees saying they feel their work is valued –43% compared with 59% in 2002, and 51% in 2001 (target is 50%). 60% of respondents believe the Council is good to work for, against 79% in 2002;
- Employees agree they know how their work contributes to organisational priorities – 62% against 60% in 2002, and 51% in 2001 (target 55%);

8. Promoting Equal Opportunities. In this section of the HR Strategy, performance highlights are:

- There has been a year on year improvement in the employment of people from ethnic minority groups (0.73% to 0.96%) and people declaring disability (1.25% to 1.47%);
- It is worth noting that action on awareness of issues, rights and entitlements can often result in a negative before a positive impact. Staff views on equalities have seen a shift to the negative on all five indicators, of between 2% and 5%, and in all cases this is lower than 2001 levels. It should be noted, however that views that the Council treats people equal and fairly remain in a relatively high agreement range – between 67% and 75%;
- Satisfaction with terms and conditions - 61%, from 73% in 2002, 63% in 2001 (target is 63%). Satisfaction with earnings (new question in 2003) is 39%. 21% of employees agreed the Council was committed to supporting them through Job Evaluation (new question in 2003).

9. Improving Communications. In this section of the HR Strategy, performance highlights are:

- Employees agreeing communications in the organisation work well – 32%, against 39% in 2002, 27% in 2001 (target 60%). In contrast, the percentage of employees agreeing that communications work well in their service area was 62%;
- Employees agreeing managers communicate well – 48%, against 55% in 2002, and level with 2001 (target 60%).

10. Improving Recruitment and Retention, Making Best Use of Skills and Potential. In this section of the HR Strategy, performance highlights are:

- Employees agree that they can develop their skills and potential –59%, against 57% in 2002, 48% 2001 (target 75%);
- Employees agreeing opportunities for developing and keeping their job interesting are good – 54%, against 60% in 2002, 48% in 2001;
- Staff Review and Development completion rate for the year to date is 68%, 80% for 2002/3 (target of 100% for the full year);
- Staff turnover has fallen from 13% in 2001-2 to 9.6% in 2002-3. A new baseline has been established of 15.57% for leavers in year one of employment. The Council faces significant challenges in recruitment and retention (e.g. Social Care, Youth Services). There is a low rate of employment of Modern Apprentices – 6 in 2001-2, 8 in 2002-3. Exit survey

information will be available by the end of 2003 to enable recommendations on further improvements in resourcing;

- The Occupational Skills Mapping exercise is a piece of work that will require a dedicated resource. It was originally set to complete by 2005, but was brought forward at Members' request. With Job Evaluation a priority for Human Resources over the next six months, the target of completing this exercise by end of 2004 needs to be reviewed, and the recommendation is the original time frame.

11. Promoting Flexible Working. In this section of the HR Strategy, performance highlights are:

- Issues with the Council's ICT infrastructure to enable Council-wide flexible and remote working are being actively considered by the Information Policy Group. Actions that may be possible to take in the interim (e.g. awareness session on flexible working, project in Revenues and Benefits) are being discussed in that forum;
- The trend on views about flexible working is positive. Employees agreeing that there is flexibility to meet home/work commitments – 73%, up from 68% in 2002, and 65% in 2001. Views on ability to work flexibly have remained high at 82% in 2002 and 2003;
- The pre-assessment against the Work Life Balance Standard is being considered, the target for achieving the Standard is 2005.

12. Ensuring a Safe and Supportive Working Environment. In this section of the HR Strategy, performance highlights are:

- *'Reviewing lessons learned from complaints and comments, and publishing lessons learned, to learn from what has been done'* has been highlighted by the HR Strategy Group as an area for action to enable cross-Council learning and help meet the Council's improvement objective 'Organisational Development and Learning';
- Employees agreeing they know when they have done a good job - 74%, against 59% in 2002, 58% in 2001 (target 70%);
- Recorded violent incidents to staff have fallen from 342 to 148 (these are mostly incidents in Pupil Referral Units and Care Establishments); reportable incidents fell by 9, from 22 to 13 year on year; days per FTE lost to sickness absence have fallen from 9.32 to 8.6. There has been little change in levels of bullying and harassment. Staff confidence in managers taking steps to reduce health and safety risks rose from 70% in 2001 to 80% in 2002 but fell in 2003 to 72% in 2003, still above 2001 levels.

13. Investors in People

Info in Herefordshire has obtained the Investors in People Standard. County Secretary and Solicitors plan to gain the award by the end of March 2004. Another two areas have actively considered it (Policy and Community, Planning). The Customer Care Strategy has committed certain services to gaining the award. The HR Strategy group has considered a corporate rather than service led approach due to the organisational performance benefits they believe this will bring. Further

analysis of this approach is to be conducted.

14. A presentation on the Staff Opinion Survey is being arranged for members, and work is in hand with the Council's Key Managers to implement actions to improve performance in five priority areas identified by the Staff Opinion Survey:
- increase confidence in senior management's leadership;
 - help employees feel more valued;
 - improve internal communications and ensure employees feel involved, consulted and informed;
 - increase belief that the results of the Survey will be taken seriously, and things done as a result;
 - improve confidence that things are getting better within the Council.

Recommendation

THAT the Committee consider and note the contents of this report.

Appendices

- HR Strategy Performance Report November 2003
- Staff Opinion Survey Preliminary Report 2003

Background Papers

- None