



Open Report on behalf of Andrew Crookham, Executive Director - Resources

Report to:	Overview Scrutiny and Management Board
Date:	01 July 2021
Subject:	HR Management Information and Workforce Plan Update Report

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the HR Management Information (HRMI) and on corporate HR projects.

Actions Required:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board is asked to seek assurance on HR Management Information and the progress on corporate HR projects.

1. Background

The regular review and monitoring of HR Management data at both Director Leadership Team (DLT) level and by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) enables oversight of workforce and HR performance at both a local level and for the organisation.

The HR Service provides quarterly updates of HR management information to DLT's. The Council is also required to publish information on the internet about the workforce in an annual gender pay gap report and in the annual Workforce Report, summarising equality and diversity performance in line with statutory requirements.

This report provides a summary of the most recent data available from the 2020/2021 Quarter 3 HR Management Information report (October to December 2020).

The report also includes a high level summary update of corporate workforce projects and the plans for the new People Strategy.

2. Corporate Workforce Management Information

Together with other organisational information, the data about the workforce informs the priorities for the Council's HR and Workforce projects and the solutions required to

address current and future workforce challenges, in particular to attract, recruit and retain skills in high risk areas.

The following summary highlights the key information gathered during Quarter 3 (Q3) of 2020/2021 (01/10/2020- 31/12/2020). Illustrations of the data can be seen in Appendix A.

2.1. Number of employments

At the end of Q3 2020/2021 the Council had 4,576 employment contracts covering 4,092 full time equivalent (FTE) roles. The number of FTEs reached the lowest figure in March 2017 (3,429.)

There have been small fluctuations in staffing numbers over the last year. The Q3 2020/21 figure of 4576 is 38 employments higher than Q3 2019/20. There has been a slow rate of increase over the last two years.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, recruitment was limited to priority roles. This restriction was lifted at the end of June so recruitment has returned to normal levels.

2.2. Agency spend

Services within the Council use agency workers to provide flexibility on a short-term basis. This may be to cover a role pending permanent recruitment, to cover a secondment, for peaks in demand, specialist skills or to cover absences such as paternity leave, holiday or sickness.

There are therefore circumstances where using agency workers is beneficial to the organisation as an effective way to fill short term absences or vacancies. There are situations where longer term use of agency workers has proved to be a cost effective and appropriate way of resourcing. This includes roles such as Educational Psychology and Family Learning Tutors. It also helps to attract individuals into hard to recruit areas, such as Adult Social Care, where they have a chance to experience working in services before they apply for a position.

Agency usage can however impact team stability and staffing costs so it is important to continue to monitor agency usage, review recruitment and development opportunities and to replace with employments where possible.

The agency spend under our current provider contracts for 2020-2021 was £3,924,260 which shows a £1.15 million decrease in agency spend compared to 2019-2020. The total agency spend including other contract arrangements was £4.89 million, which is £2.2 million less than the previous year.

This has been achieved by reviewing the agency arrangements in place, offering contracts of employment to agency workers where there is an on-going demand and successful recruitment campaigns.

Further review and comparison of agency usage with other authorities will assist the Council to ensure that the on-going level of agency usage is proportionate, appropriate and providing valuable flexibility to the resourcing of professional roles.

2.3. Voluntary turnover

The annual voluntary turnover figure for Q3 is 6.38%. When it was last reported in Quarter 1 2019/20, the voluntary turnover was 8.7% and had remained at a steady rate over the last two years, between 8% and 10%. In the last year, voluntary turnover reduced as employees chose to remain in their jobs during the uncertainty of the pandemic. Early indications suggest that this will increase again. Both local and national intelligence suggests that the working population are re-evaluating their working lives and some may choose to make changes. This may include reducing working hours, changing jobs or retiring earlier than planned. This is likely to have an impact on the Council and therefore regular monitoring of leavers and the attraction and retention of staff will be an important part of the new People Strategy.

2.4. Days lost due to sickness absence

The days lost due to sickness absence for Q3 is 6.35. The current target is 7.5 sickness days per FTE. The data shows that in the majority of areas absence levels have reduced during the pandemic where individuals have had less contact with viruses and in some cases have felt more able to manage both short term and longer term conditions from home.

The management of sickness absence continues to be a key priority for all Executive Directors and line managers, where individual cases are monitored and any trends are investigated.

2.5. Reasons for sickness absence

We track 5 groupings of sickness reasons:

- Cold/flu/virus (including respiratory, infections, headaches and migraines)
- Mental health (including stress, depression and mental illness)
- Musculoskeletal (including back and neck problems and other muscular issues)
- Surgery related (including post-surgery recovery)
- All other reasons (including cancer and accidents)

It can be seen that when comparing 2019 to 2020 data how the absences for each category were affected.

- From the beginning of the pandemic, all sickness absence was lower overall.
- There was a peak in Cold/flu cases in March and April at the beginning of the pandemic lockdown, reflecting early suspected cases of COVID-19.

- Mental health related cases remained higher than 2019 up to June as individuals were coming to terms with the pandemic, but this then started to reduce and remained lower for the rest of the year.
- Other than a period over the summer Musculoskeletal issues remained lower than 2019.
- The surgery and 'other' categories had a dip in the middle of the year as a number of hospital appointments were postponed.

Although the figures have been lower it is still important to ensure that employees have access to the support and working environment to keep them well.

Mental health awareness and support remains a priority as part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and has been a particular focus during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alongside our usual support arrangements, which are the Employee Support and Counselling service and the Employee Assistance programme available through Sodexo, we have developed a number of additional resources covering key areas including, coping with change, grief and loss, recovering from trauma and financial wellbeing. The Employee Support and Counselling service is now offering group counselling sessions to support teams who require additional support. There are also webinars, apps and other online support signposted for employees to access.

Employees also have access to an emotional support telephone line run by Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (LPFT), the county's mental health and learning disability NHS trust, and if they require treatment for a mental health condition they can be referred to the LPFT talking therapies service steps2change. This service provides National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommended, evidence based interventions for people experiencing depression and a range of anxiety disorders.

There are a number of additional initiatives planned as part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy which focus on the mental health of the workforce. We have identified a cohort of 45 employees who have volunteered to receive mental health first aider training and a further 20 who are already trained. By the end of 2021, we will have a valuable resource to help support and signpost any employee who needs help with their mental health.

2.6. Equality data

We had 5,137 employees in scope for the 2020 gender pay gap exercise.

The overall gender balance across the Council remains at approximately 1/3 male (32.65%) and 2/3 female (67.35%).

The 2020 gender pay gap report shows that the median gender pay gap is 3.6% and remains considerably below the national average of 15.5%.

The mean gender pay gap is the difference between the mean hourly rate of pay for males (£16.33) and females (£15.37).

Employees with disabilities

The number of employees stating that they have a disability has remained stable and at the end of Q3 2020-21 this was 4.26%. This remains below the latest local labour market data (2011) figure which was 5.6%; however 53.8% of employees have not declared their disability status. Although the provision of this information is voluntary, we plan to encourage more employees to update their details so that we can have a clearer picture of the workforce.

Employees with disabilities are supported to attend work and adaptations to their working arrangements and equipment are put in place where necessary through discussions with their manager and occupational health if appropriate.

Employees from BAME backgrounds

The proportion of employees from BAME backgrounds has decreased slightly in the last year and currently stands at 3.10%. The latest labour market data (2011) shows that 3.4% of Lincolnshire's working population were from BAME backgrounds. The impact of COVID-19 on people in the category has been identified at national level and additional risk assessment guidance has been put in place locally to ensure appropriate steps are taken to manage risk for this staff category.

2.7. Management of Employee Relations cases

The number of formal disciplinary and grievance cases open during Quarter 3 is 27 and 6 respectively. We are now using the new employment policies which were introduced in January 2021 to manage all new cases. We will be reviewing the implementation of these in the coming months, which will be aided by our new case management system.

The high risk employee relations cases are monitored by the Assistant Director for HR and Organisational Support on a monthly basis and where appropriate, challenge is made on how cases are being managed. Formal lessons learned are conducted for the majority of high risk cases to make sure that the relevant services can make any changes to practice where appropriate. This may lead, in some cases, to updating of employment policy guidance and training.

3. Corporate Workforce Update

3.1. People Strategy 2021- 34

The new 'People Strategy' which will incorporate priorities for recruitment, development and support of our people, aligned to the Corporate Plan outcomes, is currently under development. The new Strategy will be presented at the 30 September meeting of the Board. This will replace the Council's former Workforce Plan.

Paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 provide an update from the key activities in the former Workforce Plan. It is planned that both these activities will be included as on-going priorities in the draft Strategy and work programme.

3.2. Apprenticeship Strategy 2020–21

Lincolnshire County Council has achieved 120 new apprenticeship starts for the 2020-21 financial year. Due to the duration of the higher level apprenticeships, our number of apprentices on roll continues to be healthy as 217 staff progressed with their apprenticeship from the previous financial year. This brings the total number of staff having undertaken an apprenticeship to 337 for 2020-21 financial year.

As of the end of May 2021, the total number of apprentices on roll is 243, with a levy allocation of £2,150,969.00. 64% of training provision is being delivered by local providers.

The corporate approach is currently:

- Continuing to support take up of apprenticeships across all services and schools. For the Council, hard to recruit and retain areas remains the highest priority.
- Within our in-house apprenticeship centres:
 - Business Support delivers the City & Guilds Business Administrator Level 3 and Customer Service Practitioner Level 2 apprenticeships.
 - The Talent & Learning team in HR Services deliver the ILM Level 3 Team Leader / Supervisor apprenticeship and are currently planning for the ILM Level 5 Operations Manager / Supervisor that is scheduled to commence in the autumn.
- We continue to work with the Local Government Association (LGA), Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), local networks such as Compact and the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP), and as part of the East Midlands Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (EMAAN). This enables the Council to share and receive resources, refine good practice within the Council and participate in benchmarking exercises with other authorities.
- As part of the COVID recovery plans, we are working to ensure, wherever possible, that the Council is in a good position to support apprenticeships in Lincolnshire. One example of this is the work we have undertaken with the LGA to transform our levy funds transfer process which has recently been launched.

3.3. Review of all employment policies

As reported at the Board's meeting on 24 September 2020, the aims of the employment policy review were to develop and embed a refined, streamlined, clearer set of policy documents for all employees to refer to. The new policies reinforce the changes we want

to see in the approach, style and ways of working of the Council and the way we support and manage our workforce, changing in a way that reflects the more responsive and agile working culture.

The new employment policies and processes were launched in January 2021 and:

- Reflect principles that guide decisions. Separate 'how to' guides and toolkits for managers have been developed, and factsheets/information for employees, where necessary.
- Support a culture of early resolution of issues through open and honest discussion – a 'people centred' approach rather than 'process centred' approach. The aim is to promote and develop the capacity to resolve matters as much as possible, informally, before the need to use formal procedures.
- Support the de-escalation of issues – particularly, across the Employee Relations suite of policies, making resolution less hierarchical and lengthy.
- Enable Managers to look across the organisation (to colleagues/peers) if independence needed in hearings/issues resolution, rather than automatically going up the hierarchy.
- Enable Managers to be more empowered and accountable to take decisions in the business context in which they are operating.
- Continue to evolve in line with changes to ways of working, such as agile working.

3.4. Monitoring and Evaluation

The HR Service is monitoring feedback on the new policies through queries received from Managers through the HR Advisory Service and through regular engagement meetings with trade unions. For this initial year, we will be reviewing this feedback on a quarterly basis including feedback sent through the policy site on the intranet so that we can continue to take any necessary actions required.

Although it is early days, generally the feedback has been positive. 47 comments on policy content have been received and changes have been made.

There has also been positive feedback on the new format of the policies which are hosted on the Council's internet. The policies are easier to search and written in a much shorter and more accessible style. All policies include guidance from the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to help us to provide a healthy and productive workplace. There has also been positive feedback received from Managers and Trade Unions on the Managers toolkits which are held separately.

The analysis of the Manager Training evaluations from the 1537 responses received across the four policy workshops reflected a high percentage of improved confidence as a result of attending the training. A further survey will be undertaken with Managers after 12 month's operation of the new policies. Feedback will also be obtained through the biennial employee survey which will be undertaken in November 2021.

4. Conclusion

For data up to and including Q3 2020-21, there has been a small upward trend in the number of employments and FTEs. There has been a positive reduction in the use of agency workers overall alongside a recognition of the value and flexibility that agency usage provides to the organisation.

Sickness absence has reduced particularly during the pandemic while a number of employees have been working from home. The health and wellbeing of the workforce remains a priority and although overall the number of cases have reduced, mental health issues remain a concern for some.

In order to support the mental health of the workforce, a significant amount of additional resources have been put in place ranging from information and advice to webinars, apps and online sessions, counselling and other talking therapies and a Mental Health First Aider training programme for staff.

The regular review and monitoring of HR Management data at both DLT level and by CLT is enabling oversight of workforce and HR performance at both a local level and for the organisation. This is enabling CLT and Directors to identify priorities and solutions required to address current and future workforce challenges, in particular to attract, recruit and retain skills in high risk areas. It is planned that the next report to the Board in September 2021 will provide highlights from 2020/21 Q4 HRMI data and an introduction to the new People Strategy.

5. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Not applicable

6. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Corporate Workforce Management Information illustrations Corporate Workforce Dashboard – Quarter 3 2020/21

7. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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