

HUMAN RESOURCES AND COUNCIL TAX COMMITTEE

21 OCTOBER 2020

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (OPERATIONS & DELIVERY)

A.3 THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 FOR THE WORKFORCE

(Report prepared by Katie Wilkins)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update Members of the Human Resources and Council Tax Committee on the various initiatives and policy arrangements introduced to support the workforce in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and resulting containment measures, the Council has been required to move at pace to make significant changes to the way it operates to ensure the delivery of essential services.

In March 2020, the Council initiated its GOLD and SILVER command arrangements in line with protocols for the command and control of emergencies under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and other associated legislation. This two-tier command and control structure developed robust plans and processes in line with Government guidance, to protect the most vulnerable residents and ensured that our response aligned with national requirements.

The Council's strategic response continues to be led by the Chief Executive at GOLD level, with senior officers (Corporate Directors and Assistant Directors) taking responsibility for specific elements of our response.

The tactical SILVER group focuses on the delivery of three key functions:

- Response & Recovery
- Welfare
- Information & Support

Human Resources colleagues led the Welfare Cell at both the strategic (GOLD) and tactical (SILVER) levels throughout the height of the Pandemic and continue to do so. The primary role of the Welfare Cell is to ensure staff welfare is protected throughout our response.

Throughout these exceptional circumstances, the Council has worked hard to maintain communication to ensure that staff are informed and key advice is provided to keep them and our residents safe.

Working with Union colleagues, key policies and procedures have been updated in line with Government guidance and measures have been put in place to ensure staff safety and well-being. This includes ensuring sufficient levels of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), appropriate risk assessments for safe working, a suite of online well-being initiatives and a timetable of online fitness classes (via Zoom), delivered by the Council's Fitness Instructors, to support both physical and mental well-being.

Managers continue to be supported with key people related issues; attendance at work, pay, time off work to care for dependents, enhanced flexible working arrangements and the significant shift to managing remote teams.

As the Council prepares to reopen its buildings, albeit on a revised and reduced basis, a working party has been brought together to lead on these preparations, with their agenda informed by the findings of the recent staff survey.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended:

That the contents of this report be noted.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The Council's vision, as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2020/24 is to '*put community leadership at the heart of everything we do through delivery of high quality, affordable services and working positively with others*'. The authority's efforts during COVID-19 have realised these aspirations throughout all levels of the organisation.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

There are no direct financial implications.

LEGAL

The Council must ensure compliance with Employment Legislation, the Equalities Act 2010, the newly introduced Coronavirus Act 2020 and Working Time (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

The Council has a legal duty of care to employees to ensure their health and safety at work, as set out in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and other related legislation.

The Constitution provides for agreement of key personnel policies, to the Corporate Director, Operations & Delivery in consultation with the Assistant Director, Partnerships.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

At the start of the Pandemic, the Council had a number of key factors to consider:

- How to maintain service delivery with the majority of staff working remotely;
- How to ensure those staff continuing to work on site and out in the community did so in a COVID-19 secure environment; and
- How to continue to deliver our Careline and repairs services whilst ensuring the safety of our staff visiting the homes of our residents.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

At the height of the Pandemic, there were huge challenges regarding the sourcing of PPE. Despite national shortages, Tendring has always maintained a six-month supply of PPE, which continues to ensure the safety of our workforce.

Community Hub

A significant number of residents relied on Council services for basic essentials such as food and medicines. The Council supported those most vulnerable by establishing two COVID-19 'Community Hubs'. These operated six days a week with a total of 36 Council staff redeployed to deliver this function. The Community Hub setup worked effectively at the height of the Pandemic and the Council has now been able to revert to ad hoc working in line with demand.

HR System Implementation

New Human Resources systems were quickly designed and implemented with the purpose of identifying the status of the full workforce. The status of staff ranged from those available to work (either in their current role or redeployed), symptomatic, self-isolating or unwell. Those who were symptomatic, or in symptomatic households were supported with testing arrangements.

This, along with the significant shift to remote working for the majority of the workforce, has not been without challenge, and IT colleagues have been fundamental in the development and delivery of the new remote working IT infrastructure.

The redeployment database, set up to monitor those staff who were redeployed in any capacity during COVID-19, reports that a total of 134 staff were redeployed from their substantive roles to support the authority's response to COVID-19.

Staff Policy and Pay Scheme

Staff guidance was developed in order to support managers (*in consultation with Human Resources colleagues*) to manage the more complex issues around attendance at work, pay, time off work to care for dependents, enhanced flexible working arrangements and the shift to remote teams.

The Council implemented a pay scheme to support staff in service closed areas (*permanent and casual*) and those self-isolating (*unable to work*) where redeployment was not possible. This sought to adopt the main principles of the Government's furlough scheme, whilst also taking into consideration the more specific challenges faced at a local level.

In a bid to minimise financial hardship for affected staff and ensure that the key skills of the workforce were retained, the Strategic Management Team agreed that 100% of historic average earnings would be applied rather than the recommended 80% (as in the Furlough scheme). The Council and the Senior Management Team have been praised by those impacted, for their support in difficult times.

Working Arrangements, Staff Engagement and Staff Survey

Government guidance remains that all employees who can work from home should continue to do so. It is therefore anticipated that in the short to medium term the majority of staff will continue to work from home.

In order to improve the sustainability of our remote working arrangements a staff survey was undertaken by Human Resources to gain further insight into the experiences and challenges of staff working from home, as well as those staff who have continued to work within the district and on site throughout the Pandemic. This has enabled the organisation to identify areas of concern and implement the necessary support.

Following over 300 responses, headlines from the staff survey are as follows:

- 75% of respondents agree they have achieved the correct balance between work and home life, with 50% of respondents reporting a better work/life balance;
- 72% of respondents agree their role makes a difference to local residents;
- 75% of respondents get a sense of personal fulfilment from their job;
- 84% of respondents feel proud to work for the Council;

- 40% of respondents feel more productive working at home;
- 90% of respondents reported that the Council has kept them well informed during the Coronavirus Pandemic;
- 80% of respondents feel supported by their line manager; and
- Almost 60% would like to maintain their current working arrangements indefinitely.

In addition, the following priorities have been identified by staff completing the survey:

- Prioritise return to the workplace for those who will benefit most (when it is safe to do so);
- Prioritise continued working from home for those most ready and able to continue;
- Balance preferences with organisational needs;
- Provide support for those who are most in need; and
- Identify what lessons we can learn for the future

In addition to the staff survey, the Human Resources team have (*working with a number of third parties*), developed a suite of well-being initiatives for staff (*as outlined in the Workforce Update Report*). All Staff emails, FAQ's, Vlogs and the regular 'Together@TDC' newsletter (*developed by staff with the aspiration of keeping everyone connected whilst working remotely*) has ensured regular communication is maintained with staff on both COVID-19 and non COVID-19 related matters.

A Reception(s) and Office Working Group has been established to review all risk assessments and prepare for a return to office use (*albeit on a revised and reduced basis*) with the anonymised findings from the survey informing this process.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Staff Survey Infogram

COVID-19 STAFFING SURVEY HEADLINE RESULTS



have achieved the correct balance between work and home life

Over 300 Responses



reporting a better work/life balance



72%

agree their role makes a difference to local residents



THREE-QUARTERS

get a sense of personal fulfillment from their job

84%
PROUD
to work for the Council.



feel more productive working at home

90%

reported that the Council has kept them well informed during the COVID-19 Pandemic



4/5

feel supported by their line manager

ALMOST
THREE-FIFTHS

would like to maintain their current working arrangements indefinitely

Tendring
District Council

