

MINUTES of the meeting of the **COUNCIL OVERVIEW BOARD** held at 10.00 am on 5 November 2015 at Ashcombe Suite, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2DN.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Wednesday, 2 December 2015.

Elected Members:

- * Mr David Munro (Chairman)
- * Mr Eber A Kington (Vice-Chairman)
- * Mr Mark Brett-Warburton
- * Mr Bill Chapman
- * Mr Stephen Cooksey
- * Mr Bob Gardner
- * Mr Michael Gosling
- * Dr Zully Grant-Duff
- * Mr David Harmer
- * Mr Nick Harrison
- * Mr David Ivison
- * Mr Colin Kemp
- * Mrs Denise Saliagopoulos
- * Mrs Hazel Watson
- * Mr Keith Witham

Ex officio Members:

- * Mrs Sally Ann B Marks, Chairman of the County Council
- * Mr Nick Skellett CBE, Vice-Chairman of the County Council

47/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from the Cabinet Member for Business Services and Resident Experience, Denise Le Gal.

Apologies were also noted from Dr Zully Grant-Duff, who arrived just after 10am

48/15 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 10 SEPTEMBER AND 1 OCTOBER [Item 2]

The minutes of the previous meeting were a true record of the meeting, subject to the following amendments:

10 September 2015: David Ivison had a number of queries about the minutes and would raise this outside of the meetings with officers.

1 October 2015: At the previous meeting a question had been put to the Chief Property Officer regarding whether land purchases carried out by a Surrey County Council Local Authority Trading Company needed to satisfy the “well-being requirement”. This point would be added to the minutes of 1 October and raised with the Chief Property Officer.

49/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were none.

50/15 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

There were no questions or petitions.

51/15 RESPONSES FROM THE CABINET TO ISSUES REFERRED BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE [Item 5]

There were two responses that had been included in the agenda papers. :

The Chairman of the Council Overview Board had attended the Cabinet meeting and noted the responses. He explained that the response stated that the Overview Board was “satisfied with the Council’s current policy position on airports”. However, he advised that it had been made clear to the Deputy Leader that the Board felt the Council should state explicitly that it felt the Council should change its policy to favour an additional runway at one of the shortlisted South East airports.

52/15 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE [Item 6]

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. The Chairman informed Members that he would be resigning as Chairman of the Council Overview Board and Transformation Sub Group. He thanked the Board Members and Officers for their work during the 5 months he had been Chairman.

53/15 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 7]

Key Points raised during the discussion:

The Board noted the Recommendations Tracker and Forward Work Programme.

Forward Work Programme:

- A new topic for scrutiny was suggested around Cyber Security and the IMT future schedule of work. This would be scheduled.
- Members agreed that the Leadership Risk Register would be added to a future meeting and reviewed periodically.

Further action/information to be provided:

None

Recommendations:

That Cyber Security and IMT, and the Leadership Risk Register be added to future Council Overview Board work programmes.

54/15 THE HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICE [Item 8]

Declarations of interest:

None.

Witnesses:

Carmel Millar, Director of People & Development

Ken Akers, HR Relationship Manager (Adults)

Rakhi Saigal, Strategic HR Manager

Managers with experience of restorative practice in the workplace:

Amy Howard (Adult Social Care)

David Sharpington (Environment & Infrastructure)

Lorraine Juniper (IMT, Business Services)

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Director of People & Development introduced the report and explained that a key aim of the HR&OD service was to look after the interests of managers, staff and the workforce. By doing so, the organisation would have happy, skilled workforces who give a great service to Surrey's residents.
2. Members questioned what the current issues being faced by Human Resources at Surrey could be described as. Recruitment and retention were highlighted as areas to be focused on. Certain services within the organisation had more difficulty recruiting – for example social care, procurement and chartered surveyors. Members were informed that a Surrey Social Worker academy had been introduced, as well intensive recruitment campaigns in Children's Services to deal with shortages in the social care workforce.
3. Officers explained that the HR&OD service had recently refreshed their lone working policy, following an increasing national trend in physical and verbal abuse against public sector workers. There was a clear no tolerance policy on violence, meaning that officers should never accept abuse as 'part of their job'. A number of refreshed policies were referenced, and it was agreed that it would be helpful to receive a briefing note once the current period of policy-review had been undertaken.
4. Members queried methods of retaining staff. The Director of People and Development explained the importance of understanding why employees were leaving the organisation, and advised that exit interviews were always undertaken. There was also a Best Companies Staff Survey being completed by staff at the moment, which would help understand what makes employees want to stay with Surrey County Council. It was explained that exit interviews suggested the top reasons for officers leaving the organisation were salary related, exceeding full potential within current role and seeking different opportunities.
5. The Board understood and stressed the importance of staff recognition, and ensuring staff feel valued and supported within their role. They saw the importance of appraisal in recognising staff potential.
6. Members noted that at peak periods, there were large numbers of vacancies across the Council. These periods of demand were sometimes addressed by employing agency workers. This was particularly the case in services such as Highways and Children's Services due to periods of demand and the urgency of their work. Agency working would be considered in more detail in the next item on the agenda.
7. The Senior Manager (Adult Social Care) explained to the Board, the current challenges she faced regarding staff retention, demand and vacancies. To tackle the challenges, teams were visiting different colleges and advertising roles locally to attract new talent.

8. The Strategic HR Manager informed the Board that since 2013, HR&OD had led a culture change programme of work, focussing on supporting the resolution of employee relations issues across services via a restorative approach. This was seen as an alternative to the formal disciplinary or grievance route. The approach involved encouraging staff to resolve conflict at work in a more informal manner.
9. Members heard from three team managers who had used restorative practice in their teams. This included an example where a restorative culture had led to a reduction in the number of disciplinary procedures, a case that demonstrated improved staff morale and a number of opportunities where outcomes had been improved for staff and managers.
10. The restorative practice approach would be promoted through workshops and presentations to different services and teams. HR Advisors had now all been trained on restorative facilitation, and the number of cases being dealt with through this informal process was increasing. Members queried whether the lack of written policy was an issue and whether this made it difficult to distinguish when matters should be taken through a formal HR policy route. Emphasis was given to the extensive training that HR staff had received on how to support managers. It was noted that some cases would still take a formal route, however, those formal conversations would take place in a more restorative manner.
11. The Director of People & Development explained to the Board that HR Advisors now spent around 50% of their time on restorative cases, and 12% on formal cases. This was in direct contrast to East Sussex, who still had a number of formal and compromise agreement cases. Members emphasised the importance of preserving the Surrey brand within the Orbis partnership (East Sussex and Surrey County Council shared services). Upon discussing the importance of building a culture of coaching and restorative practice, Members urged the need to have manager champions, who would maintain the ethos as the HR service moved into a shared partnership with Orbis. It was agreed that a future item could be brought to the Scrutiny Board on the culture of restorative approaches in Orbis.

Further action/Information to be provided:

Officers to provide:

- Statistics about the number of cases that is resolved through restorative approaches.
- A briefing note on major changes made to HR policies, following the current period of review and refresh

Recommendations:

That the Council Overview Board would receive a future item on: Recruitment and retention, vacancy management, “looking after our staff” and equipping managers to deal with HR issues.

55/15 AGENCY WORKERS [Item 9]

Declarations of interest:

None.

Witnesses:

Carmel Millar, Head of HR&OD
Ken Akers, Strategic HR Manager
Indiana Pearce, Contract Manager

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The report was introduced by the Strategic HR Manager, who summarised the usage of agency workers at Surrey County Council. He explained that agency workers were a key part of the evolving workforce, who could bring skills and expertise needed for short term vacancies.
2. It was stated that often one of the main aims when working with agency workers was to ultimately reduce turnover, by encouraging staff to become permanent. It was stated that agency work or bank contracts could be an attractive option as working hours were often flexible. Bank staff, on zero hour contracts were kept in a “pool” where they could be called upon by managers during times of short term demand.
3. It was highlighted that some agency staff had worked at Surrey County Council for five years or more. Some Members of the Board felt that long term use of agency staff could be demoralising and de-motivating to those employees, as they would not receive the same benefits that permanent staff received.
4. Members queried the true costs of appointing agency staff instead of permanent or fixed term contracts. They asked for further information about how agency staff salaries compared to those in a permanent positions.
5. The Chairman of the Economic Prosperity, Environment & Highways Scrutiny Board raised particular concerns about the use of agency staff in the Highways Service to fill vacancies following a number of reorganisations. Staff had provided anecdotal feedback that frequent changes in personnel led to a level of disruption and decreased morale. The Board stressed the importance of evolutionary change programmes and continuous improvement to avoid the need for frequent whole-scale restructures. It was agreed that the Board would make a recommendation to Cabinet, which is detailed at the end of this minute.
6. One Member stated that the organisation as a whole were not “anti agency workers”, however it was concerning when whole teams were made up of agency staff. The Strategic HR Manager stated that with better workforce planning in the future, it was aimed that employees would receive stability and reassurance in their jobs.

7. There was a discussion regarding the national shortage of qualified and experienced child protection social workers and educational psychologists. It was noted that educational psychologists remain a small but essential part of the agency work force. There was also a recruitment campaign underway to recruit up to 15 new Social Care managers.
8. The Director of People and Development stated they are constantly looking at new strategies to improve the Human Resources team and are very pleased with the progress they have made in the last five years.

Actions/Further Information to be provided:

- Further figures to be provided showing comparable costs of agency staff across the Council, to provide an estimate of the “true cost” of an agency worker (including the implications if that member of agency staff was not in post).
- More information to be made available regarding the difficulty of recruiting Educational Psychologists
- A breakdown of roles recruited as agency staff in Business Services to be circulated to Members.

Recommendations:

- The Council Overview Board wish to recognise the work being undertaken by the HR&OD team to address issues related to the use of agency staff, and note the need and importance of agency workers in some circumstances
The Council Overview Board Recommend to Cabinet, that:
 - The frequency of reorganisation within the Environment & Infrastructure Directorate be considered and managed to avoid an impact on:
 - The morale and wellbeing of Highways staff
 - The ability of the service to carry out priority highway maintenance

56/15 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC [Item 10]

That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information under the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

57/15 IN PRIVATE PART 2 [Item 10a]

It was decided by the Board that this item would be postponed until the next Council Overview Board meeting due to timing.

58/15 PAY AND REWARD CONSULTATION [Item 11]

It was decided by the Board that this item would be postponed until the next Council Overview Board meeting.

At the close of the meeting, the Chairman thanked the Director of People & Development for her contribution, as it was her last meeting before retirement.

59/15 PUBLICITY FOR PART 2 ITEMS [Item 12]

60/15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING [Item 13]

2 December 2015.

Meeting ended at: 12.33pm

Chairman