

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, 4 April 2022

PRESENT: Councillor J Eagle (Chair)
Councillor(s): D Burnett, R Beadle, D Bradford, T Graham, M Hall, I Patterson, S Ronchetti, J Simpson and J Turner

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): J Wallace, L Caffrey, P Foy, S Green and K Wood

CR64 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

CR65 AGE PROFILE OF THE WORKFORCE

The Committee received a report on the age profile of the Council's current workforce and to advise of action being implemented to support succession planning and issues relating to an ageing workforce.

29% of the Council's workforce are in the 55 – 64 age bracket. There are a number of services with a significant number of employees aged 55 and over, in particular Environment and Fleet, Property and Assets, and Integrated Adults and Social Care. This presents challenges for the Council in relation to succession planning to ensure that services have staff with the right skills and experience to deliver an effective service.

A number of apprenticeship programmes and roles are being implemented in order to support succession planning and ensure services are developing staff with the necessary skills for the future.

These are as follows:

- Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care have introduced a Social Work Apprenticeship Programme and have appointed 4 apprentices to date.
- Adult Social Care are also in the process of recruiting three Trainee Social Workers. Successful candidates will be offered a career pathway which includes undertaking a social work apprenticeship.
- Highways & Waste Services have introduced an Urban Driver Apprenticeship Programme which is being offered to 12 employees across the service. This is to support succession planning due to the number of staff close to retirement and also the current shortage of HGV drivers nationally.
- Fleet and Environment have introduced an Arborist apprenticeship which is currently being recruited to.

In addition to apprenticeships, other job roles and development opportunities are being offered, for example within Adult Social Care three Graduate Management Roles have been established and the service has also appointed two Kickstart placements which is a government scheme providing funding to create new jobs for young people aged 16-24 who are at risk of long term unemployment. Adult Social care also offers T-Level placements. T-Levels are a two year qualification equivalent to 3 A-Levels and incorporate classroom learning and 45-day work placements. This allows students to gain practical experience and an understanding of the job roles within their chosen sector.

Workforce Development are also currently leading on or supporting a number of initiatives to support succession planning as follows:

- In relation to Social Work, the council is part of the regional group developing and supporting the Aspiring Leaders and Manager Programme. Two cohorts have been delivered across 12 local authorities with 2 learners from each organisation. The third programme is due to start in May 2022. This programme is specifically for Social Workers.
- Work is also underway to develop a Leadership and Management Programme in line with the corporate programme currently being rolled out to Service Directors and Service Managers. This will aim to support employees already in a management role, and those interested in moving into a management role to gain the necessary skills and knowledge.

Further work to support succession planning is currently in development as follows:

- Social Care Career Pathways are being developed which will include apprenticeships at Level 2 through to Level 6
- Joint Health and Social Care Apprenticeships are being developed in conjunctions with the NHS QE Foundation Trust
- Adult Social Care are planning to establish a Trainee Occupational Therapist role
- Within Construction Services, Workforce Development are working with the service to develop five-year plans across the different trades to ensure the service is recruiting the necessary number of apprentices to address future skills gaps
- Waste Services are introducing new roles below the level of supervisor. This will support succession planning by enabling staff to be developed with a view to progressing to a supervisor role as staff retire. A similar approach is being developed within Highways in relation not the Team Leader roles.
- Career starter apprenticeship are being explored in service areas which previously have not had apprenticeship roles, for example Trading Standards
- Leisure and Libraries are currently undergoing a transformational review, and this includes exploring options for both entry level posts and management career pathways.

A comprehensive review of the Council's approach to recruitment and retention is currently underway. The review will incorporate a robust appraisal of marketing and communication methods, employee benefits, career pathways, including our approach to work experience and university placements in a bid to encourage early interaction with Gateshead as a local employer of choice.

In addition, the review will evaluate current community engagement methods ensuring there is a strong link between the Thrive Agenda, the Health and Wellbeing strategy and Gateshead as an employer. Increasing our presence within the local community and actively encouraging applications will also positively support our ambition to increase

workforce representation, which is reflective of the community we serve.

The actions which are being taken were welcomed, it was suggested that we could also look at inter-generational job sharing so younger people shadowing those already in the job. It was also requested that a further update be brought back to the Committee with a split around gender and other different types of equalities data.

It was queried whether it would be possible for children to experience areas of work in services such as Highways or would it be an issue with regards to Health and Safety.

It was suggested that the Council need to look at vacancies within each service area and need to dig deep to see why we are losing workforce in Gateshead if they are going to other Councils who are paying better salaries so we can look to address what's going on.

It seems that employees in leisure seem to do one job in leisure then go and do another job in leisure but it doesn't address the issues in leisure. If some of the issues are around bad planning we need to address this as well. We also need to identify pay and conditions. Overall we definitely need to look at it in a different way.

It was noted that it is fair to say we face challenges on recruitment across the Board.

It was queried whether job vacancies are advertised with an open ended end date. It was noted that some vacancies have been listed with an open ended closing date, however, some do have specific closing dates.

It was queried whether when people are leaving we are asking why they are leaving. It was noted that we do have a process for exit interviews, however, this process is being strengthened at the moment as whilst the process has been in place for a long time it hasn't necessarily been consistent across all areas.

It was noted that one thing local government is good at is having officers who have transferable skills, is there open days for the Council where we can get former local government officers to talk about their roles, something that isn't always projected through adverts. It was also suggested that we need to look at pay grades, it was noted that a recent advert for a petrol station operative was £27,000. It was noted that we are planning a recruitment event jointly with the QE and are also looking to take part in an event run by Gateshead College.

It was queried whether there was any data to see how we compare with our regional neighbours. It was noted that we don't have comparable data as some of our neighbours no longer deliver the same types of services. It was noted that we do minimise the number of agency staff, however we do have some issues as some social workers do not want to be directly employed and would rather work through an agency.

In terms of work experience we are looking to overhaul this and are looking to engage with parents we feel if the parents are engaged it helps the young person as well.

It was noted that during the pandemic a few people were redeployed and found new interests, it would be good to see if people feel that have a different vocation there was support there for them to carry this out.

It was noted that some of these roles were directly related to Covid response, now that we are in recovery there are some roles, such as the Covid support officers who were undertaking some lower level enforcement work have been retained and offered a longer term contract. It was also noted that some staff who were redeployed into the community

hubs and have stayed their long term, services have tried to facilitate this as far as possible.

It was queried whether the Council are using its full allocation for the apprenticeship levy, it was noted that we haven't been but we do have an arrangement in place where we can passport to voluntary organisations, to date there has only been a couple of levy transfers as the governance has only recently been finalised.

It was suggested that we have an annual update on this item as part of the work programme, including gender profile. It was noted it would also be interesting to see if there are any links to sickness numbers.

It was queried whether we go into schools maybe to do "A day in the life" kind of presentation.

RESOLVED - (i) That the comments of the Committee be noted.
(ii) That an annual update on this area of work be brought to the Committee

CR66 IMPACTS OF RUSSIA AND UKRAINE CONFLICT

The Committee received a report to advise on the impact of the situation in Russia and the Ukraine on areas relevant to its remit.

In February, Russia began military invasion to Ukraine, this is the largest military conflict in Europe since the second world war.

A number of Trade Sanctions were imposed which together with the war itself are impacting both regionally and locally and on the Council's commercial activities and resource implications. The committee were advised that in terms of the wider contextual issues including Covid-19, Brexit and other world-wide events are cumulating in material shortages, price instability and huge rises and further challenges to already strained supply chains and commissioned services.

Sanctions are penalties imposed by one country on another to stop it acting aggressively or breaking international laws. They are among the toughest actions nations can take, short of going to war. A wide range of sanctions have been imposed on Russia by the UK, the EU and the USA.

There are a number of companies who are pulling out of Russia. Work has been undertaken at a regional level by the North East Regional Enterprise Partnership to determine the impact of the war on Ukraine on the local economy. The local economy is not facing huge direct detrimental impact, however, individual sectors or organisations will be hit harder than others and knock on impact on the global supply markets will impact the local economy.

It is estimated that over the last 4 quarters:

- North East goods exports and imports to Russia account for 1% of the North East total, but 29% of North East petroleum and related products imported
- North East exports to Russia were valued at £154m, this was 1.3% of the North East's total exports

- North East imports from Russia were valued at £121m, this was 0.94% of the North East total imports
- 8% of England's exports to Russia were from the North East whilst 2% of England's imports from Russia were to the North East
- 33% of the North East's exports to Russia were classified as power generating machinery, 12% as road vehicles
- 52% of imports were classified as petroleum products and related materials, this was 29% of the North East's total petroleum imports.
- 16% of England's imports of petroleum were from Russia

Trading with Ukraine

- North East goods exports to Ukraine were minimal but Ukraine accounts for 1.4% of imports including 43% of North East iron and steel imports
- North East imports from Ukraine were valued at £176m, this was 1.4% of the North East's total imports
- 7% of England's exports to Ukraine were from the North East, whilst 27% of England's imports from Ukraine were to the North East
- 66% of the North East's exports to the Ukraine were classified as road vehicles.
- 97% of the North East's imports were classified as iron and steel, this was 43% of the North East's iron and steel imports
- 5% of England's imports of iron and steel were from the Ukraine

The Council have no direct links to Russian banks or financial institutions.

The UK, EU and USA has also imposed sanctions on hundreds of members of the Russian regime and wealthy business leaders (known as oligarchs) who are considered close to the Kremlin.

We have been provided by our bank (Barclays) with a list of companies and individuals who have been subject to UK Sanction and the Council does not make or receive payment from any individuals or organisations on that list.

Western countries have frozen the assets of Russia's central bank to stop it using its foreign currency reserves. Other international sanctions have also been introduced as detailed in the report.

Prior to the 24 February 2022, the UK was already in the midst of a global energy crisis due to record market high gas prices set by international markets. The conflict situation caused prices to surge by 60% within a day. The UK is not as dependent on Russian gas supply as our single largest source of gas is from the UK Continental Shelf and the majority of gas imports come from other European countries such as Norway. There are no gas pipelines directly linking the UK with Russia and imports from Russia typically make up less than 4% of the UK gas supply. Countries who import gas from Russia are trying to seek alternative sources and this is adding to the market pressure.

The Council's energy suppliers Corona Energy, The Gateshead Energy Company

and EDF have confirmed they have no trading or any other relationships with Gazprom or any of the Russian oil and gas producers. The Gateshead Energy Company also procures energy that it requires from Corona Energy.

There is currently a huge price increase in the cost of petrol and diesel, hitting historic highs. Prices were already rising before the situation in Russia and Ukraine and they have continued to rise due to concerns around supply and increases to the global cost of oil. There is also the possibility of fuel shortages on garage forecourts if the public begins to panic buy (as we saw during Covid).

In terms of Council requirements we have been assured by our supplier that importers have guaranteed that they will be able to deliver contracted volumes to the authorities that participate in the NEPO contract, providing that the Councils all stick to their usual buying patterns. Any unusual ordering activity will be questioned and potentially refused to ensure continuity of supply to all authorities.

There will be a huge impact on food. Ukraine has some of the most fertile soil in Europe and is the third-largest exporter of corn. It is also a primary exporter of sunflower oil, barley, corn, rice and potatoes. It is therefore inevitable that there will be a disruption of supplies of specific food stuff together with rising prices due to the shortages.

The shortage of food and unprecedented price rises impact directly on Gateshead residents, and it is also greatly impacting on the Council's School Catering service. The School Catering service has previously been dealing with significant price increases linked to Covid-19, Brexit and rising costs in packaging, energy and distribution and the issues with the war in Ukraine are further exacerbating the situation.

The Committee were advised that even if the conflict ended now it is anticipated that the impact will continue for at least a further 18 months.

RESOLVED - (i) That the information contained within the report be noted;
(ii) That the Committee did not require a members seminar on any further issues at this point

CR67 WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22 AND DEVELOPMENT OF WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022-23

The Committee received a report on the current work programme and proposals for the Development of the 2022/23 work programme. The Committee were advised that the intention is for 2022/23 to have a business as usual approach and a full programme of meetings for 2022/23.

The following items were requested to be included on the work programme:

- An update on Old Town Hall
- Implications of Hybrid Working / Locality Working
- An update report on the age profile of workforce to include gender profile

- Community Wealth Building and a link to the spend analysis

It was also queried about whether it would be possible to get benchmarking information and if so can it be included in reports. It was noted that this will be built into the performance management framework where the information is available.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the 2021/22 Work Programme be noted
 - (ii) That the comments of the Committee be incorporated into the 2022/23 Work Programme

Chair.....