

Staffing Committee Report – Response to Cllr Laura Jeuda

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East Council is committed to promoting staff engagement and wellbeing. Establishing and maintaining an engaged and motivated workforce that is able to meet future challenges and deliver high quality services to our resident's remains at the heart of the Council's Corporate Plan and Objectives.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to respond to questions raised by Councillor Jeuda, at Cabinet, on 13th June 2017, in relation to the treatment of staff and an alleged bullying culture.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The minutes from the Cabinet meeting on 13th June 2017 which this paper seeks to respond to are as follows:

Councillor Jeuda referred to a matter she had raised at the previous meeting regarding the treatment of staff and an alleged culture of bullying and in particular to the response given by the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy and Legal Services that a group had been set up under the Chief Operating Officer's chairmanship to ensure that staff were treated properly and fairly. Councillor Jeuda asked what progress had been made by the Group and when it was likely to submit its report on the outcome of its work. She also asked specifically about how many complaints had been received from members of staff over the last year, how many members of staff had been off due to stress, how many were facing disciplinary action and what HR was doing to support staff.

- 2.2 At the meeting, the Leader repeated her comments of the previous meeting that the Council's staff, were highly valued and that the Council was committed to their wellbeing. The matter was properly one for the Staffing Committee and she undertook to ensure that the matter would be considered at the Committee's next meeting.

3.0 Reassurance Working Group Report

- 3.1 The cross party Reassurance Working Group was established in May 2016 to provide assurance that the wellbeing of staff is aligned to best practice and organisational values.
- 3.2 The five stages of the review undertaken by the Reassurance Working Group were as follows:
- A desk based exercise to review the Council's policies and procedures, conducted independently by North West Employers;

- Independent research by North West Employers to ensure best practice was being followed;
 - Working Group consideration of whether staff survey results inform the review;
 - Quick wins identified and implemented; and
 - Interviews and focus group with staff and views sought of Elected Members through the Working Group
- 3.3 The Reassurance Working Group Project outcome report was taken to Cabinet on the 14th March 2017 and work continues through the Staff Survey Governance Group to ensure that ongoing matters raised through the project are addressed.
- 3.4 Furthermore, the Reassurance Working Group recommended that the appropriate HR Policies and Procedures would be updated by March 2017 to reflect agreed policy changes. All policy and procedure revisions have been made, approved and implemented.
- 3.5 Members also recommended that appropriate training and development will be made available for all staff to reinforce fairness and respect to reduce negative behaviours in the workplace. A bespoke e-learning package is being developed for Cheshire East Council as a direct response to the work of the Reassurance Project. This package will be focused on workplace bullying, dignity at work and fairness and respect. It is intended that this will be mandatory training for all staff, with a launch planned for September. This will form part of the wider induction process for new staff to the Council as well as a roll-out to all existing staff. The take-up and completion of this package will be tracked, monitored and reported to Heads of Service.

4.0 Staff Survey Governance Group

- 4.1 The purpose of the Staff Survey Governance Group is to develop and progress the staff survey corporate commitments and track implementation of local service action plans. Progress against delivery of all staff survey action plans is monitored by the Staff Survey Governance Group which is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer. Membership includes Officers, Members and Trade Union representation. The governance group meets every six weeks.
- 4.2 The Staff Survey Governance Group is also promoting the Council's responsibilities to ensure all staff and members are aware of reporting procedures should they wish to raise a matter of concern or a complaint.
- 4.3 Both corporate commitments and local actions plans (for all services) have been agreed and are in the process of being implemented to improve or address findings from the staff survey which ran in June / July 2016. In total 24 service plans have been developed with the following progress rated as 18 green, 75%, 5 amber 21%, 1 red 4%. The reason for the amber and red status on progress has been primarily due to restructuring in the services.

4.4 The three main areas for improvement across the all the action plans has been:

- **Communication** - communication at all levels has been an area of focus including one to ones / supervision, performance development reviews and team meetings. A number of services have developed focus groups to look at specific issues and ensuring that information has been cascaded effectively has been the focus for one service. Increased visibility of positive feedback received from colleagues, the wider council and residents have become a feature of some team meetings.
- **Engagement** - various forms of engagement events have been held across services including workshops with attendees invited from across teams and levels to whole service events. These have all been well received.
- **Visibility of Managers** - much activity has been seen in this area with senior managers visiting teams, conducting back to floor sessions and attending workshops. One service has conducted “stay in touch meet the manager” sessions which have proved equally beneficial for the staff and the manager. Managers are also working from different locations on a regular basis.

4.5 To obtain an insight into progress since the last survey a series of staff survey focus groups are planned during July 2017 to provide a forum for a two-way dialogue to engage staff and seek their views. Five broad themes will be explored during the focus groups - Leadership and Management, Development and Opportunities, Communication and Engagement, Health and Wellbeing, Culture.

4.6 A summary report will be provided to Cabinet and Staffing Committee once the focus groups are concluded.

5.0 Workforce Statistics

5.1 The following information is provided in relation to this report for the period 1st June 2016 to 31st May 2017 (staff headcount on 31st May 2017 was 3,648):

- The number of staff who raised grievances was six.
- The number of staff who reported absence due to stress was 184
- The number of staff subject to disciplinary action was ten
- The number of staff dismissed due to disciplinary action was three.

5.2 The number of staff who reported absence due to stress in this period is not untypical in an organisation of this size and type. The underlying reasons for absence due to stress can be complex and may be due to a number of work or non-work related factors. Staff and managers are actively assisted by HR and Occupational Health Service (delivered through People Asset Management) to prevent where possible stress related absences from occurring, support staff during their recovery and enable a successful return to work.

5.3 A range of workforce statistics are provided to Staffing Committee on a quarterly basis. Further workforce information can be found in section 13 of the HR and Health and Safety Update Report.

6.0 Support provided to staff

6.1 The Council is highly committed to the wellbeing of its staff and has a duty of care to staff that find themselves subject to, or involved in, grievance or disciplinary matters and ensure that staff are fully supported during these difficult times.

6.2 Staff are offered the right to be supported whilst investigations are underway and accompanied / represented at any interviews or meetings by a Trade Union Officer or work colleague.

6.3 Staff can also access support from Occupational Health Service (delivered through People Asset Management), and will be signposted to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which provides confidential 24/7 online and telephone support. In addition, the EAP also provides counselling services which are available to all staff.

6.4 In addition the Council seeks to reduce stress through a range of mechanisms for example flexible working options, the use of stress risk assessments, training and e-learning in building personal resilience and managing stress.