

This Report will be made public on 27 May 2020.

Report Number: **P/20/01**

**To:** Personnel Committee  
**Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020  
**Status:** Non-executive Decision  
**Head of Service:** Andrina Smith, Chief HR Officer

**SUBJECT: HR ANNUAL REVIEW (2019/2020)**

**SUMMARY:** This report presents a review of the HR function over the last financial year 2019-2020.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report set out below.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. To receive and note Report P/20/01.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The HR Service has now been back in-house at Folkestone & Hythe for 8 years following a period of out-sourcing to the East Kent HR shared service. This report is written to give Committee members an annual overview of the service and the HR developments that are in place to support managers in achieving their council objectives.
- 1.2 A report is presented to the committee on an annual basis in order for members to be satisfied that the HR team is appropriately supporting the council.

## 2. HR STRUCTURE AND SERVICE

- 2.1 The HR team structure has remained stable during the 2019/20 financial year due to the ongoing investment made into the Organisational Development (OD) team not only to support the ongoing transformation programme within the council but also to provide a contracted service to other local authorities (see further detail in section 5). The current HR Team structure can be seen in **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 The service continues to maintain a Business Partner approach to supporting managers to enable a greater understanding of particular service areas, however as they are also generalist advisors they also provide advice across the whole business.
- 2.3 The HR Business Partner and HR Manager continue to have monthly meetings with their Assistant Directors and Chief Officers along with some Lead Specialists to discuss a standing agenda of HR items, including recruitment, absence management, casework, restructuring and corporate developments. They will also attend the relevant managers meetings within the service areas when required. The HR Manager and Business Partner each have a fortnightly 1-2-1 with the Head of HR. The whole HR team also have a fortnightly team brief to share knowledge, discuss casework and receive corporate information.
- 2.4 The HR team continue to work flexibly from home whenever possible and hot desk across the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors. In order to maintain confidentiality when needed the team also have access to a smaller confidential hot desk facility on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor and have access to the small meetings rooms on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors for ad hoc private discussions.

## 3. CASEWORK

- 3.1 During 2019/20 the HR team have supported the following cases:
- 8 disciplinary cases resulting in 1 verbal warning, 6 written warnings, and 1 final written warning. Under section 4.4 of the disciplinary procedures a penalty can be agreed outside of a disciplinary hearing if the employee is in agreement. Seven of the eight case numbers mentioned above were issued in this way.
  - 1 capability cases resulting in the members of staff leaving before the process concluded.
  - 0 grievances was raised during the year.
- 3.2 As a comparison, during 2018/19 the following cases were dealt with:

- 3 disciplinary cases resulting in 2 written warnings, and 1 final written warning. Under section 4.4 of the disciplinary procedures a penalty can be agreed outside of a disciplinary hearing if the employee is in agreement. Two of the three case numbers mentioned above were issued in this way.
- 3 capability cases resulting in two members of staff leaving under a settlement agreement due to performance and absence issues and one member of staff left under ill health retirement following a prolonged period of absence due to deteriorating health conditions.
- 1 grievance was raised during the year which was not upheld. There was no appeal to the outcome.

3.3 These figures show an in the number of disciplinary investigations for minor misconduct. The continuation of the use of section 4.4 to enable warnings to be issued and recorded without the need for a formal hearing continues to reduce the amount of time being spent on formal hearings and the associated preparation time.

#### 4. ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

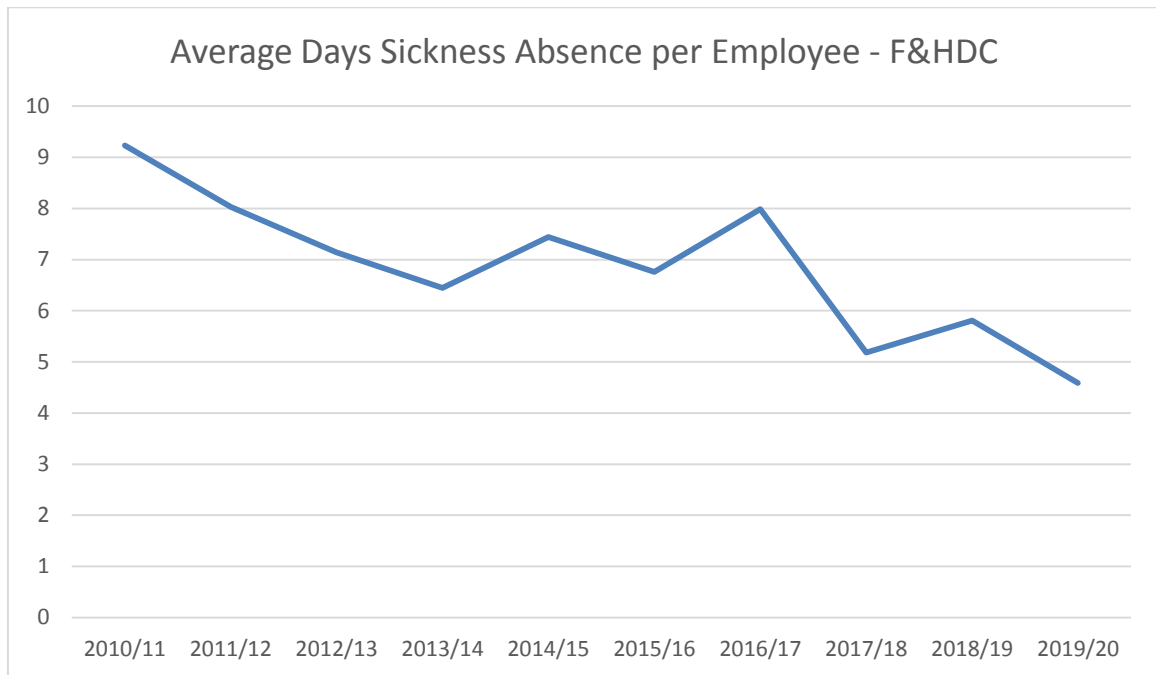
4.1 In 2019/20 there was an average of 4.6 days sickness absence per employee (based on an average headcount of 363). During the year, 2% of working time was lost due to sickness absence. This represents a decrease in sickness absence levels in comparison to last year (5.8 days), is below the national average, and compares favourably with similar organisations.

Reporting absence in terms of average number of days per employee is a widely used formula across different sectors and enables a comparison to be made using data collected by professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

4.2 In previous years the figures have been as follows:

- 2012/13 – 7.1 days absence per employee
- 2013/14 – 6.4 days absence per employee
- 2014/15 – 7.4 days absence per employee
- 2015/16 – 6.7 days absence per employee
- 2016/17 – 7.9 days absence per employee
- 2017/18 – 5.2 days absence per employee
- 2018/19 – 5.8 days absence per employee

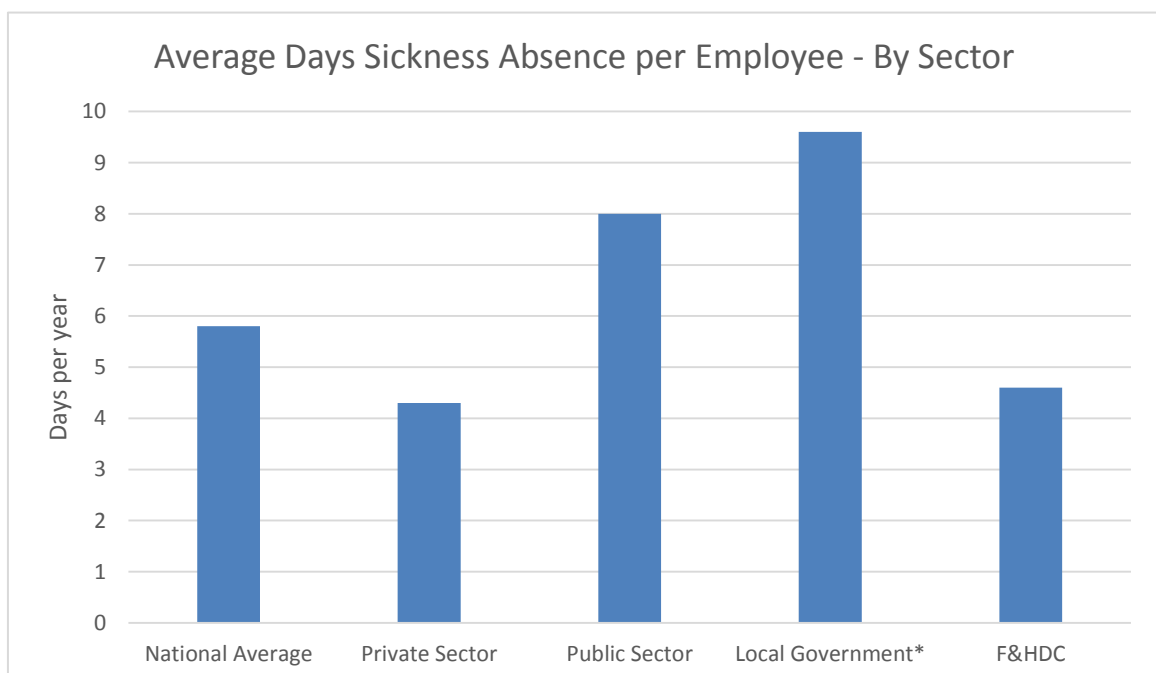
This year's figure represents the lowest since 2010/11, which is as far back as HR have analysed this data. Indeed, sickness absence levels have halved in the past 10 years:



4.3 The national average reported by the CIPD is 5.8 days per employee per annum. While absence levels have decreased generally over the last 10 years (the national average was 7.4 days in 2010), absence rates across the country as a whole have not changed significantly in the last two years.

Nationally there is a considerable variance across sectors, with the public sector reporting an average 8 days per employee when compared to 4.3 days in the private sector. The most recent data for the local government sector reported 9.6 days sickness absence per employee per year.

There is also a correlation between the size of the organisation and absence levels, with larger organisations reporting higher levels of sickness. The national average for an organisation of the council's size is 6 days per employee per annum.



4.4 Since the 2014/15 annual report the HR team have provided a breakdown of sickness absence figures in terms of long-term and short-term cases.

Long-term absence is classed as four weeks or more.

The instances of absence and amount of days lost to sickness will be influenced by fluctuations in staffing levels. The average number of days per employee column therefore gives the most accurate indication of the relative impact that short or long-term absences have had on the organization.

“Days lost” refers to the amount of working days lost to sickness absence.

“Ave. days” refers to the average amount of days sickness absence per employee.

Year	Short-Term Absences			Long-Term Absences		
	Instances	Days Lost	Ave. Days	Instances	Days Lost	Ave. Days
2014/15	425	1031.5	2.72	36	1788	4.72
2015/16	349	1016.89	2.65	33	1562	4.06
2016/17	375	985	2.62	29	2021.5	5.37
2017/18	345	951.5	2.58	18	957	2.60
2018/19	258	675	1.87	30	1424	3.94
2019/20	294	879.5	2.42	16	787.5	2.17

4.5 In 2018/19, 10% of absences were long-term and this equated to 68% of the total time lost due to sickness. However, over the past year instances of long-term sickness have nearly halved and are at their lowest level since HR started analysing this data in 2014/15. While the actions outlined in paragraphs 4.6 and 4.8 below have supported a reduction in long-term sickness, in 2018/19 we experienced some very serious illnesses and, sadly, we lost two colleagues to cancer during that time. This would have undoubtedly had an impact on the sickness absence figures produced for that year and may make any direct comparisons between 2018/19 and 2019/20 misleading. However, there remains a clear overall trend of reducing sickness absence.

4.6 As with 2018/19, the biggest reason for long-term absence over the past year was ‘stress, depression, fatigue or mental health’, which accounted for 44% of our long-term sickness cases. There is a mixture of work and personal stress related cases and while the team work to get people back into work as quickly as possible such cases have to be handled appropriately, including ensuring sufficient recovery time, in order to enable an effective return to work. The prominence of this type of absence is not unique to Folkestone & Hythe and the CIPD report shows mental health as the most common cause of long-term absence across the country, with stress related absences particularly prevalent in the public sector.

With this in mind, the council has implemented a number of measures to support employees in the workplace, proactively manage mental health and prevent stress related issues:

- Specific Learning & Development sessions focused on resilience, managing and reducing the causes of stress, and promoting well-being.
- Access to an online wellbeing centre, which includes a range of health and wellbeing advice and resources, and an Employee Assistance Programme available through F&H Rewards. Staff can access counselling services, including face-to-face counselling sessions, and specialist information and support on a range of personal and professional issues that could be affecting them in their work or their health and wellbeing generally, including financial, debt and legal advice.
- A range of resources and support on a dedicated health and wellbeing intranet page, including access to 'My Wellbeing' which provides staff with a weekly programme of information aimed at improving overall well-being.
- Health and wellbeing activities including Zen yoga classes, free swimming at Hythe Pool and discounted gym memberships available through the council's reward platform, 'F&H Rewards'.
- Promoting world mental health day, which included championing the campaign across the council's social media platforms and providing our staff with focused mental health information.
- Utilising our occupational health providers and resources such as HSE risk assessment questionnaires to understand the causes of stress and take targeted actions to mitigate these effectively.
- Promoting flexible working options and other policies that may support work/life balance.
- Undertaking staff surveys, which can help us identify organisation wide issues and assess the positive steps taken to address these.

4.7 While over the past year we have seen a decrease in long-term sickness cases, short-term absenteeism (absences of less than 4 weeks) has increased slightly. However, instances of short-term sickness remain relatively low overall when compared to previous years.

When considering reasons for short-term absence minor illnesses such as viruses (inc. e.g. vomiting, diarrhoea etc) and colds are the most common causes. These are in line with the most common causes of absence across the country.

4.8 An outcome of the 2017-2020 Corporate Plan, under 'delivering excellence', was to have sickness absence at less than 7 days per employee per year. This has been consistently achieved since 2017/18.

In addition to the initiatives outlined in paragraph 4.7, a number of other measures are in place to ensure that we continue to meet this target:

- A robust absence monitoring system. The line manager notifies the generic HR email address when an employee is absent from work. This notification includes the reason for absence and the expected duration of the absence. The HR Assistant or HR Officer monitors this email address daily, ensuring swift interventions from the team.
- As the expected duration of absence is included in the notification, HR can monitor the undertaking of return to work interviews, which form an integral part of effective absence management. If HR have not received a copy of the return

to work interview as expected reminders are sent to the line manager to ensure they are completed.

- There are clear absence triggers in place and the HR team provide dedicated and focused support to managers, including attending return to work interviews, if there is a cause for concern. At these meetings supportive measures may be discussed that enable the employee to return to work earlier than otherwise anticipated or, in the case of frequent absenteeism, attend work on a more regular basis. If appropriate, it is made very clear to the employee that if their absence(s) continue then we may take the decision to withhold occupational sick pay and formal processes may also be instigated.
- The HR Business Partner and HR Manager review absence data and cases with relevant Directors, Assistant Directors, or Chief Officers as appropriate on a monthly basis.
- Alongside a case management approach and providing focused support to line managers, HR also provide general training on absence management as part of the manager induction process. There was also a specific session on effective absence management as part of the 2019/20 Manager Development Programme.
- Occupational Health services continue to be utilised and, through increased contract monitoring, focused KPIs and closer working relationships, we believe we have overseen an increase in quality of medical advice and effective support received as a consequence.
- The HR team continue to promote the council's Employee Assistance Programme available through F&H Rewards.
- The HR team have continued to work with other external organisations and sources of support, such as Access to Work, and relevant internal departments to improve health and wellbeing and support absence management. For example, Health and Safety have supported on a number of cases where the working environment may have an effect, such as on musculoskeletal and migraine issues.

To reduce short-term absenteeism the council offered all staff free 'flu vaccinations at the Civic Centre. Staff unable to attend these vaccination sessions because of their job role (such as staff on duty at Hythe Pool, working in the Grounds Maintenance team in a different part of the district, or working night shifts) were offered vouchers to obtain a vaccination from a local pharmacy.

## **5. APPRENTICESHIPS / TRAINEES**

- 5.1 During 2019/20 we have continued to offer Level 2 apprenticeships in Customer Services and maintained our link with Ashford College for the provision of the apprenticeships.
- 5.2 We have also continued our relationships with local schools and universities offering work placements of 1-4 weeks for local young people in a variety of departments across the Council. Our partnership with Kent University also means that students occasionally attend training events with officers.
- 5.3 The 'Grow Our Own' scheme has now concluded with our final trainee (in Planning) completing her 5 year part-time degree in Planning in April 2020.

- 5.4 With the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2016/17 Personnel Committee agreed to shift our focus away from trainees and onto apprenticeships. Apprentices are either trained by us in-house or access relevant courses with external training provider.

As a council, we decided to become an accredited Apprenticeship Training Provider, so that we can deliver our own apprenticeships and draw down on Apprenticeship Levy funds to pay ourselves to do so. This has the dual benefit of bringing in an income to the council and allowing us to carefully tailor our courses to meet the specific needs of local government.

In September 2019 we had our first Ofsted Monitoring visit. Ofsted do not grade training providers on their first visit but did say that they were pleased with the work we were doing and that they would not need to visit for a further 2 years (this is the maximum time they can leave without visiting, highlighting their confidence in our service). Below are some of the many positive pieces of feedback they included in their report:

“Staff are highly qualified in their specialist area and are very proactive in continuously improving the provision in response to learners’ feedback and peer review support.”

“Apprentices’ work is of a high quality and all those who have completed the standard have achieved distinction.”

“Apprentices develop substantial new skills, knowledge and behaviours. They and their teams benefit from their improved management abilities”.

In terms of the specific apprenticeships we offer, we have 5 officers currently undertaking a Management Apprenticeship which also involves studying for an ILM Level 3 Diploma for Managers (we are an ILM Centre so deliver this ourselves). This is a year-long programme and helps develop our talent pipeline in terms of developing aspiring managers. All participants are at different stages as we have had staggered start dates for this course. Towards the end of 2019/20, there was an interruption in study due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, but we study will resume for those able in June 2020. For those who cannot study due to their involvement with the response effort they will be enabled to pause their study and resume it once they are able. In order to enhance their development our management apprentices have taken on additional management and cross-training responsibilities as well as shadowing budget managers to learn the basics of budget management.

In addition, we have 2 members of staff studying for a Learning & Development Practitioner Apprenticeship which we are also delivering in-house. In 2020/21 we are planning to add new apprenticeships to our portfolio of in-house offers for FHDC staff: Level 3 Apprenticeship in Business Administration and Level 3 Junior Content Producer.

Where appropriate we continue to use external training providers to support apprentices and in September 2019 we employed a Solicitor Apprentice who is studying for a Law degree whilst working with us.

- 5.5 In January 2019 the OD & Engagement Manager negotiated and signed 2 year contracts with Thanet District Council, Canterbury District Council and Dover District



Council to be the training provider for their leadership and management and business administration apprentices and undertake learning and development work for them. The delivery of these contracts began in February 2019 and during 2019/20 brought in £135,000 of income into the council. The cost of additional staff brought in to support with the delivery of these contracts has been more than covered with this income and our approach has given the OD team greater resilience, economies of scale, and a wider range of facilitators to appeal to different personalities. Working with other councils has meant that our staff have benefited from a more diverse learning environment, sharing best practice in management with participants from other local authorities. Feedback from the councils we are working with has been resoundingly positive and we have been fostering a deeper sense of community between F&HDC and our neighbouring authorities.

## **6. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

6.1 The Middle Manager and Team Leader development programme has, as usual, been updated to reflect the development needs of people managers (based on their feedback and input from our Senior Management Team). The majority of sessions are an hour long, with some longer, as needed. Topics covered have included:

- Risk management
- Competency Based Interviewing
- The post-election Political environment
- Recruitment and selection
- Complaints Handling
- Cabinet and Committee report-writing
- Absence Management
- Modgov Training
- Budget Monitoring
- Annual Service Planning
- Making the most of Audit
- FHDC Brand Guidelines
- Behavioural Assessments, Development Plans & our Performance Management Framework

In addition, in March a team of 6 Middle Managers attended the South East Employers Challenge. This intensive, day long training event forced the Middle Managers to think like a Directors' Team and solve fast-paced strategic challenges.

Managers are also offered ad hoc support and coaching with specific people management-related issues. For 2020/21 a new Learning Needs Analysis is being undertaken, in conjunction with the results of the competency-based interviews, to ascertain ongoing requirements for managers.

6.2 Over the course of the 2019/20 year we have offered a variety of development opportunities for staff at all levels via our Learning and Development brochure (published in June 2019), this is added to on an ad hoc basis depending on evolving development needs. the OD & Engagement team have run 60 minute to half day sessions on:

- Dealing with difficult conversations and people
- Stress, well-being and personal resilience
- Time Management
- Presentation Skills

- Building and Exhibiting Confidence
- Facilitation skills
- Using Skype
- Encouraging Customers to Self-Serve
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Professional training priorities reflect those of the Corporate Plan and this year have included:

- APM Project Management accreditation
- Asbestos Awareness
- Safeguarding training
- First Aid training
- Water Safety for Grounds Maintenance
- Conflict Training for staff dealing with customers
- Graffiti removal training for Area Officers

We also fund individual officers to undertake relevant technical training to support performance in their roles, including Project Management Qualifications, a Finance qualification, Democratic Committee Administration course, Community Safety BTEC, Arborist training and a variety of conferences.

Chief Officers, Assistant Directors and Corporate Directors are also offered coaching and bespoke training courses provided by respected organisations such as universities, Roffey Park Institute and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

- 6.3 Following each development session, a review is undertaken to evaluate the success of the topic. Workshops are evaluated based on the extent to which participants felt that they had increased their competence and confidence in the topic area of the workshop. The majority of participants reported that the workshops have increased their competence and, to a lesser extent, their confidence which develops as they begin to put into practice what has been learnt during the sessions.
- 6.4 e-Learning modules have been promoted to all staff in order to comply with our duties for providing relevant Health & Safety and statutory training. We also continue to offer face to face training on key statutory topics such as Safeguarding, Risk Assessments, First Aid, and being a Fire Warden. In 2020/21 we are reviewing our e-Learning provision to ensure we include in-house e-Learning courses on Safeguarding (Adult and Child) and Modern Day Slavery.
- 6.5 We have continued with the delivery of our recognition scheme. The peer-nominated scheme recognises those who have noticeably displayed behaviours aligned to our core values. We also focus on embedding our core values through the corporate induction (which we have updated with a new induction video) and our behaviour framework.
- 6.6 Part of our role in OD & Engagement is to facilitate a vibrant culture. Building on our improved employee engagement survey results in January 2019, we have engaged staff in creating an inclusive events programme (Christmas Party, Summer Social, Quiz Night) and changed the way we run staff briefings so that they are quarterly and repeated three times so that all staff can attend. Staff have commented on the much improved format of these briefings which includes entertaining and informative video content as well as a variety of speakers.

In the 2019 staff survey staff highlighted a desire for better ICT systems, more annual leave for new starters, increased internal communications on the Transformation Project and more training and development. All of these elements have been improved, showing that we really listen to our people and take on board their concerns.

- 6.7 We have delivered on a communications and engagement plan for the Transformation programme that has included well-received launch events, video content to explain various elements of transformation and how new technology works, training, and surveys to check understanding.
- 6.8 As an organisation we were encouraged by the positive survey results and decided to set ourselves a stretch-target to enhance our employer brand by entering the Sunday Times top 100 best not-for-profit organisations to work for survey. We are planning to do a baseline survey in 2020/21 in order to understand where we need to concentrate our efforts in terms of the survey criteria. We will then put in place an action plan and look to do the formal survey in 2021/22 as we are keen to benchmark ourselves against other organisations and strive for best practice.
- 6.9 The OD and Engagement team have also run Away Days for teams to help them review progress and plan for the future. These have included Grounds Maintenance, Business Support, Customer Services and Communications and the Senior Management Team (which has regular meetings including Corporate Directors, Assistant Directors and Chief Officers). We have also supported meetings of the wider management team, engaging Middle Managers in the organisation's strategic thinking and planning. In addition, we have supported Councillors where requested and facilitated the Cabinet Away Day and Corporate Plan Working Group.
- 6.10 A comprehensive training programme was arranged for Councillors following the May 2019 elections. Subsequent to this Councillors have undertaken more tailored activities depending on their individual needs.

Councillors have points of contact within the HR team and Committee Services team in order for them to be able to request any individual training or conferences.

Councillors also have a specific page on the Learning Zone of the staff intranet. All training presentations are uploaded after each session has taken place to enable those who could not attend to view the materials.

- 6.11 In March 2020 the OD & Engagement Team were all required to work from home due to the Covid-19 global pandemic in line with the government guidance. The team have been proactively supporting various areas of the council (particularly Communications and the Social Response team) as well as focusing on staff well-being. As of the time of writing this annual update in May 2020, training sessions are beginning to resume, albeit it in a remote manner, using platforms such as Zoom. The team have been supporting Councillors and Officers to use Zoom and will continue to exploit new technologies to enhance both employee engagement and development.
- 6.12 As part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, staff surveys have been undertaken by the OD & Engagement Team to gather information on the wellbeing of our staff and how they are coping working from home. We have used the staff surveys

to also act as a 'temperature check' on the culture at the council with one of the most telling questions being whether the staff member would recommend working at the council to their friends and family. This is often referred to as the Net Promoter Score (NPS) and is a nationally recognised measure of engagement. Whilst at the time of writing this report the survey containing this question is still open however the initial indications show a marked increase in our NPS when compared with 12-18 months ago which is a clear indicator of the progress we have made towards embracing a positive culture across the council. An update on this will be provided to members at the committee meeting.

## **7. PAYROLL**

- 7.1 Following Cabinet approval in February 2014, a delegated agreement was signed with Ashford Borough Council to provide our payroll service. The new payroll service went live in November 2014 following several months of implementation meetings designed to build the structure of our organisation and input payroll information and 2 months of parallel runs with KCC in order for both Folkestone & Hythe and Ashford to be confident that every element had been transferred correctly (for example, mileage calculations, overtime calculations etc).
- 7.2 East Kent Audit have carried out annual audit reviews of the payroll service and placed substantial assurance on the systems of internal controls in operation with no recommendations or actions, with one report stating that 'the success...is reflected by there not being any payroll errors since the payroll went live in November 2014'.
- 7.3 During 2019/20 the majority of managers and officers have continued to use the self serve options within the payroll system. It is recognised that not all staff are able to access self service, for example the grounds maintenance teams and staff at Hythe pool who continue to work using paper forms, however we have rolled out an option to receive e-payslips to personal email accounts for those staff who preferred that option to having paper payslips and in the last month of the financial year the vast majority of those who were still receiving paper payslips opted in to e-payslips due to the current pandemic which made producing the paper payslips more complicated.
- 7.4 The self service element of the iTrent payroll system enables staff to update their own address details, bank details, request annual leave, review their absence history, submit mileage claims and expenses claims for authorisation and to view historical payslips & P60 information. Managers are able to run their own reports on team structure, leave and absence information as well as approving requests submitted by the staff within their teams. At the start of the 2020/2021 financial year a new version of iTrent was launched which has made the system more 'user friendly'.
- 7.5 In addition to the original delegated agreement, Ashford also provide our election payroll.
- 7.6 The delegation arrangement and service level agreement are reviewed annually by the Head of HR and the Head of Personnel at Ashford. During 2019/20 discussions took place to consider the extension of the delegation compared against implementing a stand-alone payroll system for Folkestone & Hythe. Whilst the transformation programme is ongoing at the council, the most sensible option was considered to be an extension of the delegation, however this will be on a year-on-year basis which will be reviewed as new corporate systems are implemented at the council.

## 8. STAFF BENEFITS

- 8.1 For several years now staff have been able to benefit from some locally sourced discounts with businesses within the district, a privilege discount card with MacArthur Glen Designer Outlet in Ashford and wider discounts via the CSSC scheme (Civil Service Sports Council) where for a small fee each month staff could access English Heritage sites at a reduced rate along with discounts locally and nationally for cinema tickets, theatre trips and sporting activities.
- 8.2 In August 2018 we launched a new online staff benefit scheme called F&H Rewards in conjunction with Reward Gateway enabling staff to access a wide range of online and high street shopping instant discounts or cash back opportunities including supermarkets, general retailers, holidays, insurances, cinemas and restaurants. This remains an extremely popular reward platform with our staff.



- 8.3 Since the launch, we now have 327 active users – approximately 87% of staff – with the majority of discounts continuing to be obtained in the supermarkets, Halfords, B&Q, Currys PC World and cinemas. The scheme has also been opened to councilors during the year.
- 8.4 Part of the F&H Rewards Scheme offers a salary sacrifice option to staff using the 'Cycle to Work' scheme where they can order a bicycle (and equipment) worth up to £1,000 which is paid by the council upfront to the relevant store with the staff member repaying the amount over 12 months through the payroll system which enables tax savings of between 32-42%.

We currently have 2 members of staff who are within their 12 month agreement plus a further 8 who have completed their repayment period. It is anticipated that there may be an increase in applications over the next 12 months depending upon requirements to attend the civic centre for work and restrictions for social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 8.5 The F&H Rewards platform also has a 'wellbeing centre' enabling staff to access our Employee Assistance Programme (provided via BHSF), healthcare cashplans, healthy recipes and meal plans, discounted gym memberships, advice on mental health issues and also impartial financial advice. These pages of the platform are regularly accessed by a number of staff and regular health promotions are publicised to all staff as part of our internal communications strategy.
- 8.6 Professional Subscriptions & Professional Training

It is worth highlighting that there has always been an element of the agreed Pay Policy to reimburse staff for one professional subscription each year via the payroll

system. This is always seen as a positive benefit by the staff that are required to have professional memberships and annually approximately 20% of staff benefit from this option.

In addition, every service area has a training budget as well as there being a central budget for training which is managed by the OD Manager within HR. This provides many opportunities for staff to access development sessions internally as well as attending one day short courses and seminars or longer professional courses leading to formal qualifications. This enables the council to encourage internal promotions and secondments to staff as they develop within their chosen career paths and also encourages staff to remain employed at the council due to the levels of investment in staff.

## 9. PEOPLE STRATEGY

9.1 As part of the transformation programme, work was undertaken to devise a new People Strategy for the council. Over the last 12 months the strategy has now become embedded within the council framework and underpins not just the transformation programme but all of our people related activities.

The People Strategy can be seen at **Appendix B**.

9.2 The 6 main themes of the people strategy are:



## 10. TRANSFORMATION

10.1 During the 2019/20 year the Chief HR Officer and HR Project Officer have continued to support the transformation programme.

10.2 Stages 1 (Corporate Services) and 2 (External Services) of the transformation programme have now been completed successfully. Stage 3 (Development Management, Housing Options, IT and Communications) is due to start in quarter 2 of the current financial year followed by Stage 4 (HR) in quarter 4. Regular meetings led by the Chief HR Officer have also taken place with the branch Unison chair and regional Unison officer with the option for the regional GMB officer to also attend to ensure that the unions are kept up to date with progress towards transformation.

### 10.3 **Behavioural Competency Framework**

In early 2018, the Chief HR Officer commissioned Indigo Training to provide a behavioural psychologist to assist in the creation of a new behavioural competency framework for the council. This would form the basis of any recruitment and selection under the transformation programme and also provide a foundation for the creation of a new performance management framework and links to career development and progression.

10.4 Following final approval at CMT in May 2018, the framework was launched to staff by the same behavioural psychologist in order to provide some consistency of approach. The launch comprised a series of weekly emails introducing behaviours under each of the 4 core values followed by familiarisation sessions, also run by Indigo, to enable staff to identify how they are already displaying many of the behaviours within the new framework.

10.5 In order to enable staff to feel comfortable with a competency based behavioural interview or assessment which focuses primarily on behaviours, we arranged for Indigo's chartered psychologist to return in the 2019/20 financial year to upskill staff on how to prepare for the interview and also to train managers on how to lead a competency based interview. In addition, the HR team have also been trained on how to design and write other assessment activities that can be used as part of a selection process, for example work based activities, inbox tasks, group discussions and individual report writing. Whilst this will take longer to implement than a behavioural interview it will ultimately enable a more robust selection process to take place focussing on evidenced skills rather than just a face to face interview.

A bank of interview questions for each behaviour at each level has also been designed in conjunction with Indigo which now forms the basis of all behavioural based interviews and assessments.

10.6 Throughout the transformation programme so far we have assimilated the vast majority of staff into new positions with no competitive process. However, we made it very clear throughout the process that we would still expect all staff to undertake a behavioural assessment focusing on relevant behaviours for the role with the outcomes being used to design a personal development plan for each member of staff providing them with the opportunity to improve on certain behaviours should the need arise. This is enabling us to embed a high performance culture across the council.

By the end of the 2019/20 financial year all staff within stage 1 of the transformation programme have undertaken a behavioural assessment led by their manager and supported by a member of the HR team. From May 2020, staff who were part of stage 2 will be booked in for their assessments and those in stage 3 will have their

assessments before the end of the 2020/2021 year. Therefore by the end of the current financial year, every member of staff will have a personal development plan based on their assessment.

The staff who have already had an assessment have provided some very positive feedback on the process and have been encouraging others to embrace the process as it has been viewed as being very supportive.

10.7 The behavioural competency framework is attached as **Appendix C**.

## **11. HR SERVICES IN 2020/21**

- 11.1 Some of the work already identified for the team during the 2020/21 year includes:
- Further development of the behavioural framework to embed competency based recruitment and selection activity and embedding the new personal development plans into our performance management framework;
  - Continued support to the transformation programme;
  - Continuation of talent management and succession planning;
  - Development of additional employee benefits to enhance reward & recognition;
  - Development of a new on-line recruitment module linked to JobsGoPublic; and
  - Continuation of the ILM internal and external delivery.

In addition, following the period of national lockdown as recovery plans are developed locally following the Covid-19 pandemic the HR team will be working to support the senior management team in enabling staff to continue working successfully from home whilst feeling supported and part of a wider team across the council.

## **12. LEGAL / FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS / POLICY MATTERS**

### **12.1 Legal Officers Comments (AK)**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### **12.2 Finance Officers Comments (LH)**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **12.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (ASm)**

There are no specific Diversities and Equalities Implications arising from this report.

## **13. CONTACT OFFICER AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

Andrina Smith – Chief HR Officer  
Tel: 01303 853405  
Email: [andrina.smith@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk](mailto:andrina.smith@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)



The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None

**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – HR Services Structure Chart

Appendix B – People Strategy

Appendix C – Behavioural Competency Framework