

# INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REVIEW REPORT

## EAST HERTS COUNCIL

## Key Information

Assessment Type	Review
Assessor Name	Jeannette Stanley
Visit Dates	23/04/2012 – 27/04/2012 (four on-site days)
Assessment Reference Number	ENQ-85203-20Y86B

## Conclusion

Having conducted the review in accordance with the UK Commission for Employment & Skills (UKCES) and EMB Excellence Ltd guidelines, I am very pleased to confirm that East Herts Council (East Herts) continues to meet all 39 evidence requirements of the core Investors in People (IIP) Standard.

Many congratulations on achieving a positive assessment outcome set against the backdrop of a major change management programme that included the bringing together of all support services onto one site, the implementation of shared services, as well as remote and home-working.

My thanks go to all those people who took part in the IIP discussions for their frank and honest feedback; thanks also go to those who kindly provided cover enabling interviewees to take part in the IIP discussions. Special thanks must go to Helen Farrell for ensuring that the review process flowed smoothly and trouble free.

*Jeannette Stanley, May 2012*

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

East Herts was last reviewed against the IIP Standard in April 2009. Since the last review the council has been through a number of significant changes including the imposition of austerity measures in line with bringing down the national debt following the comprehensive spending review of October 2010. Furthermore in May 2011, 50 new members were elected to the council who, embracing the programme already underway in terms of new ways of working, introduced a major transformation programme to achieve their new corporate priorities. In January 2012, the previous chief Executive left the council; a new Chief Executive was appointed April 2012.

The change management programme involved a significant amount of staff consultations. All senior posts were affected as the senior management was entirely restructured. Heads of Service affected had to reapply for the new posts with a reduction in number. Some managerial and operational posts were also affected and everyone has been rehired under new terms and conditions. Shared services for Revenue and Benefits has been introduced with one neighbouring authority and all internal audit services are shared county wide. The council is currently exploring shared services for support services with two neighbouring authorities. A members decision to be made in July 2012.

Moreover, the transformation involved the relocation of support staff from across two sites to one site, as well an introduction of home and remote working. The challenging times have required the *resilience*, *resourcefulness* and *creativity* of all involved, supported by an ongoing investment in workforce development.

## 2 Findings against the requirements of the Standard by Management Theme

Strengths are written under each management theme and opportunities for improvement are identified under the relative sub-heading.

### A: Strategic Planning

East Herts has a clear purpose and vision: *To improve the quality of people's lives and preserve all that's best in East Herts.* The vision is supported by a set of strategies for improving performance outlined within the overall corporate strategic plan 2012-2016.

Following the May 2011 elections a new framework of priorities was adopted shaping East Herts' focus and direction:

- *People – Opportunities for everyone to contribute to and access the council's services*
- *Place – Safe and Clean*
- *Prosperity – Improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities*

The priorities were established as a result of various data analyses based on national policy, community and staff consultations, surveys, focus groups, as well as local demographics under the umbrella of the *Sustainable Community Strategy*.

The corporate strategic plan sets out the direction of travel for the council over a four-year period and incorporates a robust performance management framework to enable the close monitoring and review of outcomes aligned to the three priorities.

The corporate strategic plan, in turn, is underpinned by a number of key service plans to ensure that the strategic plan is delivered alongside the council's medium-term financial plan which also runs over four years reflecting growth and efficiencies.

It was explained that services plans are developed each year for going forward by Heads of Service in which key performance indicators are established to enable progress to be measured along with the medium-term financial plan, forming the council's performance management framework. Also forming a part of the performance management framework is the performance development review (PDR) process which is universally applied to all employees and in which objectives are discussed and agreed that link directly into the service plan(s) and ultimately to the council's priorities.

Senior managers went on to explain how performance indicators are tracked, measured and reviewed at least monthly as part of the corporate health-check, some quarterly and others annually. The corporate health-check is reviewed by the corporate management team together with accountancy as service budgets are monitored before being reviewed by the Executive and the council's Corporate Business Scrutiny, Environment Scrutiny and Community Scrutiny committees.

In terms of people strategies, senior managers described how workforce planning is strategically driven *from the top* ensuring that the council *has the right people, with the right skills and knowledge in the right jobs, at the right time* in order to deliver high quality services in a time of great change and restricted resources. Effective implementation of workforce strategies has been fundamental to change the way that the council works including the introduction of shared services, remote working and the relocation of support service staff onto one site. Furthermore, workforce planning required the entire senior management team to be restructured throughout with the number of Heads of Service has being reduced. Consequently affected Heads of Service had to re-apply for the new posts, which had bigger and remits. New terms and conditions of employment have also been introduced throughout the council to ensure fairness and equality and a revised PDR scheme has been launched.

In terms of staff engagement, communication and consultation arrangements and in particular regarding the council's transformation, approaches included a C3W focus group with representatives of staff from each section. Heads of Service also gave regular presentations to staff, liaison with UNISON during the programme was described as *regular and productive*; consultation booklets were distributed to staff.

People described a variety of ways in which they contribute to developing the council's objectives and corporate priorities. A lot of project work has been linked to the council's transformation where people had responsibilities for certain aspects to lead on specific pieces of work.

Interviewees also confirmed that the PDRs are directly linked the service plan(s) when they are involved in agreeing team and individual objectives. People generally described the PDR as a positive and meaningful experience as the discussion provides an opportunity to *look at where we're going as well as personal development*.

### Opportunities for improvement

At the time of writing the council had very recently appointed a new Chief Executive. Furthermore, as the transformation is nearing its completion there are still many more challenging times and changes to face ahead. Now is an appropriate time to re-assess consultation arrangements with representative structures to make sure that constructive relationships exist and they are consulted when developing the council's strategic plans.

More than one individual referred to the PDR as a being *tick-box* exercise, however it was difficult to determine the exact reasons why. Consider raising the profile of individual ownership and responsibility higher to ensure the quality of the PDR enables people to *get the best from the valuable time set aside by managers*.

## B: Effective Management

The change management programme required the relocation of staff previously based across two sites to one, as well as the introduction of home and remote working and shared services. The significant amount of change has also required *innovation, resilience and resourcefulness from all*. As such the Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service invariably explained the necessary capabilities required to lead, manage and develop people effectively in line with the council's priorities and transformation. Capabilities are defined within managers' job-descriptions, as well as within the PDR process to ensure there is a *focus on doing the best they can with the resources available*.

Managers described how they mutually agree objectives within their teams including the support individuals need, as well as any relevant training and development, how they link back to service plans to deliver against the service actions and be measured through the PDRs objectives.

Plans put in place to develop the necessary management capabilities include:

- Managing and Supervising Change
- Personal Resilience
- PDR for Managers
- Project Management
- Home-working
- Recruitment and Selection
- Data Protection
- Employee Engagement
- Performance Management
- Mentoring sessions

A key priority for the council is also to ensure regulatory compliance / corporate governance; as such managers' development plans may include the following:

- Benefits Regulations
- Universal Credits
- Health and Safety
- Risk Assessment
- DDA

Moving forward, plans include talent management and succession planning.

There was also a verbal set of expectations described that centred on having open and honest communications, being supportive, leading by example, helping people to grow, coaching and mentoring.

In addition there are the monthly corporate meetings, *Core Brief*, SMG meetings, bi-monthly DMT meetings, local meetings, plus the PDRs / six monthly reviews, as well as individual one-to-ones and daily interactions. It was often mentioned that management meetings themselves provide excellent opportunities for sharing best practice, working across teams in an integrated, holistic manner with a focus on maintaining, improving services, as well as on growth and efficiencies.

Discussions with people in non-management positions were very clear on what they expected of a good manager through induction discussions. They also provided a set of verbal expectations in line with those of managers including being accessible, actively listening and taking effective actions and being understanding.

There were many examples of very good and excellent, tailored support which have resulted in as smooth a transition through the changes as possible whilst maintaining and delivering high quality services. The application of the PDR and objective setting process has greatly improved since the last IIP review, together with the number of interim one-to-ones taking place. These are well-structured sessions where any issues may be discussed and include a focus on moving forward. There are also local team meetings to collectively discuss progress and performance, as well as support provided for development. There are many daily interactions in which colleagues are encouraged to share experience, information and knowledge within the team. Overall, the majority of people were positive in their responses to questions on management effectiveness and in terms of their expectations.

Comments include:

- *We're all in the same boat*
- *It's a very open-style with clear direction from CMT*
- *We have to take difficult decisions but the support's always there for you*
- *I feel very lucky, there's a lot more variety now and it's more interesting even though it's demanding and very pressured*
- *I have a high level of autonomy in my role, it's based on trust, it's good to know you're valued*



### Opportunities for improvement

As a result of the significant organisational changes that have taken place including a period of time when the council was without a Chief Executive, the key priority is for East Herts to stabilise the top-team.

A very small number of people from across more than one area (who were also mainly office-based) indicated that the *Core Brief* was a one-way flow as it's communicated to them by email without any additional verbal / local input.

A number of people commented that the PDR was seen to be less than worthwhile as some managers are perceived to be better than others in setting smart objectives. Pressures of work and lack of time also appeared to impact on the quality as others described the process as a *tick box* exercise. Line-managers need to fully own their responsibilities as well as manage expectations by making sure that staff also jointly-own the PDRs and by making sure that the process is *fit for purpose*.

Others commented on the rigidity of the PDR process.

## C: Culture and Communications

The CMT was described as being very open and receptive to upward feedback. Quarterly staff briefings raise awareness and encourage questions. Directors continue to hold open-sessions for people to drop-in and put forward ideas and suggestions, as well as raise any matters of concern. The Chief Executive and Directors all operate *an open management style*.

Interviewees confirmed that they *have a voice* in the decisions made that concern their day-to-day responsibilities. In terms of general communication and other opportunities for involving people, examples include:

- *Core Brief* following CMT meetings
- Whole staff, CMT, SMG, DMT and local meetings
- Community projects / partnership working arrangements
- Local Joint Panel meetings held between council members and UNISON
- Intranet and web-site
- Biennial staff survey
- PDRs and one-to-ones
- Daily interactions

Moreover, there are many ways within the council to capture people's ideas and feedback for continuous improvement that include focus and project teams and the transformation arrangements. Home and remote-working has brought its challenges, together with many benefits. Many managers are making creative arrangements to suit different people's differing needs including a demand and reliance on IT which is ever growing.

Consultation and communication arrangements are viewed positively and on the whole are seen to work very well despite the council undergoing significant changes. By far the majority of people are involved in regular team meetings. There were some reports from some areas to indicate that meetings have not been taking place, or reasons why they hadn't been occurring as expected. *If we're not going to meet for a period of time we should be given clear reasons.*

The majority of people felt very encouraged by line-managers to share information, ideas and learning outcomes within local meetings and in informally across teams as the council's open-plan working environment actively promotes and supports this form of engagement.

### Opportunity for improvement

A small number of people commented that the *Core Brief* lacked interesting and useful information as it appeared to communicate *what we know already*. It was also suggested that the quality of the content could be improved and be less be *instructional*.

A few people commented on a lack of team meetings.

## D: Developing People

Running in tandem with strategic and service planning is workforce planning and workforce development when key matters are factored into the process to ensure capability to deliver the strategies.

Each year a corporate training plan is developed and communicated, based on strategic needs and needs that arise through the PDRs. Themes are identified by HR for example covalence training, as well as through the service and budget setting process. Workforce development priorities recently included change management, personal resilience training and home-working in order to equip people to manage change effectively, manage expectations as well as manage having difficult conversations. An ongoing key training priority is the up-skilling of people on the ICT help-desk to resolve issues as a first part of contact and ultimately encourage residents to *self-serve* electronically.

Learning and development activities are driven by council's need and evaluated for impact on service delivery and ultimately the three priorities. *The corporate plan is our vision, the service plan is how we're going to get there and the PDR links our learning, as well as performance objectives to overall priorities.* It was explained that the PDR process is based on a cascade that starts at the strategic level and filters through the council via objective setting to the individual level. *It's a very good mechanism for moving forward.*

Resources supporting the delivery of corporate training plan include a central budget that is managed by HR, as well as training budgets agreed for each of the services that are closely monitored as part of the overall monthly health-check when performance indicators and financial matters are reviewed by the CMT. Good use is also made of the vast amount of internal expertise and skills during team meetings, via presentations when relevant learning outcomes are shared, as well as through project work as development activities are tailored to specific work-based needs.

Other resources supporting development actions continue to be both creative and flexible and include a regional e-learning platform, as well as the many opportunities made available through collaborative approaches adopted between local authorities and other allied agencies such as the police, the NHS and Shelter, for example. CPD is actively supported in line with requirements for those employed in legal and technical positions; senior managers actively support development through mentoring sessions as well as through talent management forming part of the council's succession planning.

In order to ensure that learning and development is effective and applied in practice, there is an onus on line-managers to hold pre and post training discussions, as well as review development activities within the PDRs. Training feedback forms continue to be completed and sent to HR where learning is categorised into events to determine whether any common issues or themes have emerged. *We also look at "near misses" that is those who haven't achieved their objectives to see if we need to either change our provider, as well as to continuously improve our provision.*

People's comments regarding learning and development include:

- *Learning is ongoing as we're regularly updated on any key policy and legislation changes, and we have our technical training so long as it's relevant and justifiable*
- *We're very good at sharing in our team and training is very good, I've been on some fabulous courses.*
- *The resilience course was the best course ever!*
- *We've had pathfinder and mystery shopper courses – they were very good networking opportunities but also extremely useful for improving customer service*
- *Data protection is a hot topic at the moment now we've home-working*

East Herts induction process is seen to be effective, tailored and supportive and phased to include corporate, departmental and job-specific elements, particularly surrounding the redeployment process is two, four, six and eight weekly reviews have been introduced. Further support is provided through one-to-ones, mentoring, on-the-job training and job-shadowing opportunities, as well as interim PDRs. Risk assessments and health & safety matters are seriously considered, as well those relating equality and diversity.

#### Opportunity for improvement

It was suggested that service learning and development plans should be re-introduced in the form of *team training plans* to make sure that Heads of Service retain ownership of service learning actions to prioritise learning. The team training plans could then be forwarded to HR for inclusion into the overall corporate training plan.

## E: Managing Performance

Throughout the discussions everyone was very clear on their role and how they are able to make a difference to the council. There were many examples of people describing a sense of achievement on delivering excellent customer service and receiving constructive feedback from their respective manager, as well as receiving acknowledgements from other areas including feedback from residents. Other people's examples include ideas and suggestions being taken on board that have helped with the transformation; high levels of autonomy were often reported across the entire council.

There was also a strong sense of loyalty conveyed; many of those interviewed are long-serving and extremely committed to public service. Many described how they are encouraged by managers to provide the best service they can with the resources available.

Employee awards continue and people's contributions are also recognised in feedback received during management, local / team meetings, as well as via emails and in general daily interactions.

Individual performance is measured through the PDRs when objectives are set at the start of the cycle in line with service plans; objectives and progress are monitored in the six-monthly review and achievements and performance are formally measured at the end of the year / cycle. In many areas of the council individuals described best practice examples in the form of having supportive one-to-ones with their manager throughout the year, with mentoring and coaching, where appropriate.

PDR objectives are expected to be smart and measurable whether they are tangible or *soft* objectives for example those set for enhancing community engagement.

There is an extremely robust performance management framework in place and all service plans have performance indicators that arise from residents' surveys, staff consultations, plus process driven measures linked to the strategic priorities. Service plans have clear actions defined and link into the individual objective setting process. The suite of performance indicators and information arising from the financial data analyses form the monthly health-check pack which is reviewed by CMT and then the Executive which meets at least 10 times a year. The health-check pack is also assessed by the Corporate Business Scrutiny, Environment Scrutiny and Community Scrutiny committees. The corporate training budget flags up any over or under spend.

Performance improvements described include:

- Quarterly HR reports inform action plans
- Flexible working arrangements are making the most of resources available in line with priorities identified for growth and efficiencies, including the introduction/exploration of shared services
- Remote and home-working has enabled the relocation of staff from two to one site by freeing up vital space, overheads and facilities
- The council was a trail-blazer for home-working arrangements which have demonstrated an increase of productivity of 20% and a fall-off in absence levels
- The council is now handling 30% more business in the benefits section without having invested too many additional people; volumes have increased disproportionately to the level of resources put in as people are working smarter
- Sickness and absence rates have dropped from 6.8% to 5.5% which is good for local government
- Coming out of the transformation programme, morale and motivation levels are improving, including work-life balance
- The quality of service delivery has remained high throughout the change management process
- A new PDR format has been launched and is now monitored closely in terms of application, as well as evaluated in terms of quality of outcomes
- Staff surveys continue to inform improvements in terms of culture, communication and working practice

Moreover, discussions with the Chief Executive, members of the CMT and SMG revealed ongoing plans for continuous improvement that include workforce development, recognition, talent management in line and underpinning East Herts vision *To improve the quality of people's lives and preserve all that best in East Herts.*

#### Future support opportunities

Interactive [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/interactive](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/interactive)

Diagnostic surveys [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/mediaresearch/tools](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/mediaresearch/tools)

Health and Wellbeing [www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/healthandwellbeing](http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/healthandwellbeing)

Please also refer to the EMB Excellence Ltd's website [www.iipcentralengland.co.uk](http://www.iipcentralengland.co.uk) for workshops, events and celebrations

## Appendix 1 – Suggested Continuous Improvement Plan

Business Issue - What	Suggested Actions – How	Potential Benefit - Why	Priority - When	Solutions/Support Available - Who
Strategic Planning	<p>Consider re-assessing consultation arrangements with representative structures. to make sure that constructive relationships exist and they are consulted when developing the council's strategic plans.</p> <p>Consider raising the profile of individual ownership and responsibility higher to ensure the quality of the PDR enables people to <i>get the best from</i> the valuable time set aside by managers.</p>	<p>Could help foster more constructive relationships than currently exist, as well as improve consultations arrangements.</p> <p>Improved quality of PDR, objective setting and performance management; greater ownership at individual level.</p>		
Effective Management	<p>A key priority is for East Herts to stabilise the top-team.</p> <p>Ensure that the <i>Core Brief</i> is accompanied by a verbal brief and allows for two-way discussions.</p> <p>Continue evaluating the quality of PDRs' application for improvements.</p>	<p>Much needed stability after a time of great change could help improve staff engagement and raise confidence levels, as well as morale.</p> <p>Improved connections and relationships between managers and teams.</p> <p>Ensures that the council as a whole is managing performance effectively, at all levels.</p>		

Culture and communication	<p>Consider refreshing / revitalising the <i>Core Brief</i></p> <p>Managers to commit to regular team meetings.</p>	<p>To improve the quality of content, making it more informative, meaningful and interesting to read</p> <p>Provides opportunities to collective discuss, review and improve performance; also to collectively forward plan, share ideas and information, as well as learning outcomes.</p>		
Developing People	Re-introduce <i>team training plans</i> .	Ensures that Heads of Service retain ownership and are able prioritise learning actions.		



**Appendix 2 – Assessment results summary**

The Investors in People Framework

The Evidence Requirements

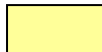
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	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																								
	10	✓	✓	✓																										

The number of evidence requirements met is 39

Key:



The Core Investors in People Standard



Your Choice from the IIP Framework



Not part of the Investors in People Framework