

Essential Reference Paper "B"

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE BRONZE ASSESSMENT

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

Key Information

Assessment Type	Bronze Assessment
Investors in People Practitioner	Jeannette Stanley
Visit Dates	12/05/2015 – 03/06/2015 (six days onsite)
Assessment Enquiry Number	ENQ – 96024 – 1TN5GN

Conclusion

Having conducted the assessment 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 continues to meet all evidence requirements of the core Investors in People (IIP) Standard with sufficient additional evidence requirements to have achieved the Bronze Award.

Many congratulations on achieving a positive assessment outcome set against a backdrop of organisational development, including a number of changes at the corporate leadership level.

My thanks go to all those people who took part in the IIP discussions for their open and honest feedback; special thanks must go to Helen Farrell for ensuring that the assessment flowed smoothly and trouble-free.

Milestone Dates

Review of Continuous Improvement Plan	December 2016
Date of Next Full Assessment	April 2018

Jeannette Stanley, June 2015

Investors in People Practitioner

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1 Introduction and organisation background

East Herts has continued to face a number of challenges in line with all local authorities since the Government introduced austerity measures to reduce the nation's deficit. To meet these challenges East Herts has revised its delivery model (and continues to do so) to delivery services more efficiently while achieving the same outcomes, as well as improving services at a reduced cost.

Approaches adopted by the Council are many and varied and include a number of strategies for sharing services and resources with neighbouring authorities, as well as undergoing an internal restructure and introducing new ways of working to ensure East Herts successfully delivers its commitments to residents, communities, business partners, stakeholder and staff alike.

Another key instrument of change relates to the number of elections held in May 2015, both parliamentary and local elections, that resulted in East Herts welcoming a new Council Leader together with 22 new elected members. In addition to the elections, the previous Chief Executive retired at the end of May 2015, an interim Chief Executive has been appointed from within to lead the organisation until a new Chief Executive has been successfully recruited and permanently takes up the position. Other staff changes at corporate leadership level include the appointment of a Director of Finance & Support Services, the creation of a number of new roles and the appointment of a number of new Heads of Service.

The squeeze on public funding continues and impacts on East Herts' strategic partners including the police, fire-service, job-centre plus, health, local housing associations, regional colleges, the CAB and CVS who form the local strategic partnership and shape the corporate plan. Working collaboratively, sharing resources and premises with stakeholders will continue moving forward in order to face the next round of funding cuts.2015-2016.

East Herts will continue to focus innovatively on developing budget and service models to maintain performance through organisation development by building both workforce capacity and staff resilience; challenges that are not taken lightly. A key driver central to the Council's priorities was the introduction of the *Here to Help* transformational programme following a peer challenge. *Here to Help* provides a platform based on corporate values, beliefs and behaviours considered desirable on which to develop strategies for creativity, innovation and business development.

2 Summary of findings against the requirements of the Standard

Strategies to improve

East Herts vision is to *improve the quality of peoples' lives and preserve all that's best in East Herts*. The Council's vision is firmly underpinned by a set of values fully enshrined in the organisation's transformational programme *Here to Help* introduced just over 18 months ago providing a platform for change from which to deliver the corporate plan and its key priorities.

The corporate strategic plan 2015/16 – 2018/19 broadly sets out the direction of travel for the next four years continuing to build on efficiency savings and improve service delivery through three main priorities identified for:

People -- Fair and accessible services for those who use them and opportunities for everyone to contribute.

Place – Safe and Clean.

Prosperity – Improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities.

The three corporate priorities were established directly as a result of feedback received from a number of wide-ranging consultations held with the residents, local business partners, communities, stakeholders and strategic partners taking into account the district plan and other strategic drivers such as performance data and funding constraints.

Central to East Herts' overall vision and direction of travel lays the *Here to Help* transformation programme with an overriding purpose to provide the best possible access to services and advice by "*putting customers first*". Following feedback and recommendations made after a peer review, East Herts initially worked with an external consultant to develop the *Here to Help* concept. A number of workshops were held for managers and staff looking at values and desirable behaviours relating to customer care, enhancing the customers' experience, as well as identifying barriers that got in the way of providing the best possible customer service requiring improvement. A number of major projects were also identified from staff feedback and the *Here to Help* workshops; some were corporate for example the Performance Development Review (PDR) and Induction; some were service specific looking at ways of working to avoid duplication, as well as a number of other local projects

After the initial *Here to Help* workshops, the Head of HR and Organisational Development took over the strategic lead and redesigned the workshops. A corporate project co-ordinator was appointed to take on the operational lead and control of *Here to Help* and other corporate projects, for example how to improve customer contact through telephony. A new Head of Business Development has also been recently appointed to develop commercial innovation, dove-tailing with East Herts' organisational development strategies.

A stated the focus for the *Here to Help* workshops was to identify ways of removing barriers to success, to communicate and celebrate successes internally, as well as ensure that people became fully engaged with the programme. It was also important to make sure that people agreed and believed in the values and behaviours and this was achieved by staff being involved in their identification, ultimately voting on the final five.

A *Here to Help* steering group was set and a staff forum was also established to include representatives from across all areas of the Council. The forum meets regularly to provide people with an update and feedback on progress against local service level action-plans, as well as discuss barriers, concerns, lessons learnt and to share achievements and success. There are opportunities for people to contribute ideas for service improvements that may also relate to other major projects. HR consistently provides a regular update during the forum on learning and development strategies, activities and new innovations such as e-learning and bite-size training sessions together with opportunities for questions/answers.

Evidence gathered during interview confirmed that staff consultations and employee engagement have considerably improved since the last assessment. People and stakeholders are fully involved in developing strategies for improving performance, including improvements to the way people are managed and developed shaped by information gained through staff feedback, surveys, pulse-checks and *Here to Help* providing a framework for staff development underpinning corporate priorities.

A culture of communication and involvement ensures that team meetings and individual one-to-ones “*shimmer with Here to Help all the way through our service and through people’s personal and professional motivation*”. Communication channels are many and varied and continue to include team meetings, one-to-ones, PDRs, “Update” a monthly staff magazine and staff briefings. There is also good use of the steering group and staff forum made as mentioned. CMT and SMG continue to meet strategically focusing on policies, strategies and performance from which headline messages cascade through all service areas via DMT and local area meetings. Effective use of notice-boards display key messages, providing information for signposting and referral together with other electronic methods via the web-site, emails and social-media adding to the effective flow and exchange of information, knowledge and advice. Joint-meetings continue to be held at the strategic level with representatives from UNISON.

The PDRs and one-to-ones continue to be the main vehicle for people to discuss their individual learning needs which also inform service planning and ultimately feed into the organisational development strategy. The commitment to and application of PDRs was impressive with extremely high return rates. Opportunities provided for learning are innovative, designed to be cost effective and flexible to develop the Members, service, leadership and management capabilities taking into account external good practice – for example HAY. There is a wide mix of external and internal activities on offer including networking forums and sharing resources with strategic partners. Mandatory and professional development opportunities continue to be well planned and well supported. There is also a raft of learning activities made available to support corporate projects and the culture change programme at which values lay at the heart of all planned activities including induction.

There is a developing and emerging culture of social responsibility within East Herts. Discussions revealed community engagement strategies now include the *Time Bank* which is a community facing initiative for people to share their skills and where people can volunteer their help and support by registering a certain number of hours to do gardening for example and then claim the hours back through *Time Bank*. East Herts is also proactively working with partners to develop Dementia Awareness and befriending schemes in the community, delivering training with allied professionals, as well as working on a scheme to provide staff with a set number of days throughout the year to devote to charity work, working in voluntary organisations or on community projects.

Opportunities for improvement

- It was suggested that the Council would improve communication and increase access to corporate leadership by introducing quarterly meetings attended by the Chief Executive and UNISON representatives.
- East Herts may wish to revisit its Health and Wellbeing strategies to ensure that Work Life Balance solutions are effectively deployed both for the Council and its employees.
- KPIs are used to improve performance. Question: Has East Herts clearly defined the most useful KPIs to provide performance data, metrics and intelligence needed to effectively implement its next phase of transformation?
- Consider including *How Officers Are Expected To Work* sessions as part of Members' development programme.

Taking actions to improve

East Herts is committed to providing clarity of leadership, setting a clear direction while providing a sense of re-assurance in light of the recent changes made at both Council Leader and Chief Executive's positions. Moving forward the interim Chief Executive to be (at the time of the assessment) explained "*how everyone has a contribution to make and future priorities will be discussed and agreed by being consultative at all levels - Here to Help will continue to play its part.*"

With a determined ambition to move from being "good" to "great" East Herts is aiming towards becoming a more agile and responsive organisation, with a supportive culture in which people are able to make decisions quickly and effectively in line with self-sufficiency and are commercially focused. The Council's ambition is expected to be realised by developing a "*high performance mentality*" in a culture in which people are personally growing and developing, working on service area improvement-plans that impact on the corporate plan. "*We are asking people 'what can you do that will make a difference?'*" Good news and success stories are now consistently being shared at CMT, SMG and DMT cascading throughout the Council via the communications' network.

In line with celebrating success and recognising individual and others' contributions through *Here to Help*, East Herts is now recognising staff with 40 years' service. The Council is also currently revising its reward and recognition strategy and had originally involved UNISON representatives to look at reward and recognition as part of *Here to Help*. The Council has benchmarked strategies for reward and recognition at both a regional and national level against local authorities and is about to embark on a major piece of work with an external Benefits' Consultant.

Here to Help is based on a pragmatic approach to achieving the Council's purpose and vision and involves people across all levels as stated, to be role-modelled and led by Members, CMT and SMG in all service areas. Initially perceived to be internally facing to gain people's initial "*buy-in*", the Council is now into its next stage of transformation and focusing more externally. A staff survey had been recently conducted to gain feedback to make sure that the programme continues "*on the right track*". Key findings show that people clearly understand the Council's values and what they mean in terms of the way they work including how managers are expected to manage and develop their teams. However, feedback obtained during the assessment indicated that there are people in some areas of the Council who continue to be or have become less engaged with *Here to Help* and are starting to feel frustrated by the programme. Typical comments included:

- "We've always worked this way - we don't need to be told!"
- "It's a waste of time and resources and we have little of either to spare"
- "We always do the best we possibly can for our customers."
- "We've always done this, all of us, all of the time!"

In terms of involving and empowering people *Here to Help* without question has played a critical role in improving consultations, communications, as well as employee engagement. For example, team meetings are now happening in certain areas of the Council where they hadn't been before for whatever reasons – high volumes of work, lack of staff, lack of time or other resources were some examples. As a result of *Here to Help* people now have a voice and are heard with their input and ideas for service/process/systems improvement regularly feeding into action-plans. Moreover, the staff forum is not chaired by a manager and is "*great for empowerment and provides a good balance to UNISON*". Further communication improvements have also been made to the staff briefings which are now on video and put online for those on holiday or for those home-working, remote working or otherwise.

Contained within East Herts strategic plans is the next stage of *Here to Help* that involves bite-sized training to follow up on last year's work, as well as to refresh and encourage collaboration across the different service areas. The programme is expected to inform the Council's future direction through a mix of corporate projects connecting strategies for organisational development and business development through people strategies designed to build future capacity, capabilities and resilience. The learning and development programme is designed to encourage more cross-working through internal networking, supported by a wide range of learning and development activities to drive performance improvements and improve East Herts' service provision.

The Council's Organisational Development Strategy 2015/2018 sets out East Herts approach for the next four years to workforce development and how it is firmly underpinned by *Here to Help* which in turn is further underpinned by the Learning and Development Programme 2015/16. To ensure workforce capabilities, capacity and resilience the programme is essentially split into three categories: Core, Corporate and Personal to support the development of core skills, mandatory training and appropriate professional development. As mentioned, the range of activities on offer is wide and extremely flexible taking into account service and team needs, as well as learning styles including e-learning. Coaching and mentoring are well-embedded in the culture supported by a number of ILM qualified coaches. The commitment to and support for workforce development in East Herts is impressive;- all people are encouraged to continuously learn, many referred to working in local government effectively ensures that learning is an ongoing activity as change is constant owing to political, financial, environmental and technological legislation and obligations.

Opportunities for improvement

- The PDRs were still considered in some areas to be a tick-box exercise; in others they were considered to be de-motivational as managers are not “allowed” to recognise good performance, as good performance is downgraded.
- As part of the PDRs revisions mention was made that a higher profile of *Here to Help* objectives would be included. The Council will need to ensure that *Here to Help* objectives are both work relevant and meaningful to avoid further disengagement and / or “*a tick-box approach*” becoming even more embedded.
- Mention was made that CMT and SMG were not visible enough and should “*walk the talk*” more by consistently role-modelling the Council’s values.
- Mention was frequently made that Members, CMT and SMG should recognise the extra work people are coping with by revisiting work / staff ratios. “*If you’re under resourced it’s difficult to go the extra mile, let alone above and beyond expectations.*”

Continually improving

East Herts continually improves on the quality of service delivery, as well as approaches to employee engagement and workforce development as a result of its ongoing investment in developing people whose inputs, outputs and outcomes are measured through range of internal and external methods. For example, training and development activities are evaluated to determine whether the original learning objectives were achieved, as well as to determine if learning has been applied in the workplace and / or shared with others. In terms of the Council gaining an understanding of its return on investment and impact on performance, qualitative methods used include feedback from stakeholders and customers.

There is a large suite of KPIs against which performance outcomes are recorded on Convalence and regularly reported on. Every quarter the statistics are reviewed via performance reports going to CMG; performance levels are also RAG rated enabling a quick strategic focus for any necessary adjustments.

In each service area monthly DMTs are held where there is a management review of statistics relating to the budget, invoicing against targets, sickness and absence, as well as a management review of reports generated by the finance and performance team that then feed into the quarterly Covalence reports reviewed by CMG and Corporate Business Scrutiny.

Furthermore, quarterly reports are developed and go to Members’ HR Committee providing an accurate overview of learning and development activities, turn-over rates, induction figures, information relating to Equality and Diversity, as well as sickness and absence figures. Annual reports are also produced by HR contrasting and comparing this year’s figures with last year’s overall performance. In addition to all these activities the Council benchmarks its performance regionally, as well as with the CIPD and ELGA.

Underpinning as stated the Council's organisational development is the *Here to Help* programme. Staff surveys and pulse-checks capture people's views on how they are managed and developed and shape continuous improvement plans. East Herts' employees believe in the Council's vision and values. "*We've got a good name – we're an organisation that cares and strives to do its best for customers!*"

3 Next steps

East Herts is required to undertake an interaction with the IIP Practitioner within 18 months of this assessment. The scale of the activity may range from a discussion with senior managers on progress against current people strategies and any challenges the Council may be facing, through to a full assessment.

Appendix 1 – Template for Continuous Improvement (left blank to develop actions towards achieving higher level accreditation)

Business Issue – What	Suggested Actions - How	Potential Benefit – Why	Priority – When	Solutions/Support Available - Who



Appendix 2 – Assessment results summary

The Investors in People Framework Evidence Requirements

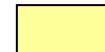
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The number of evidence requirements met is 91

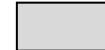
Key: ✓ = ERs included and fully met
 X = ERs included and not met
 ? = ERs included with some evidence available but insufficient to fully meet



The Core Investors in People Standard



Your Choice from the Investors in People Framework



Not part of the Investors in People Framework