

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE SILVER ASSESSMENT REPORT

for

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

Key Information

Assessment Type	Silver Top-up Assessment
Investors in People Practitioner	Jeannette Stanley
Assessment Dates	13, 14, 19 and 20 April 2016
Assessment Enquiry Number	ENQ-98435-538R8V

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 along with the 91 evidence requirements of the Investors in People Framework met in 2015, East Herts Council (EHC) now meets 129 evidence requirements and has been successfully accredited at Silver level.

Congratulations on achieving a positive assessment outcome set against a background of cultural change and transformation. My thanks go to everyone for their open and honest feedback; special thanks must go to Helen Farrell and Emma Freeman for ensuring that the assessment flowed smoothly.

Milestone Dates

Review of Continuous Improvement Plan	April 2017
Date of Next Full Assessment	April 2018

Jeannette Stanley, April 2016

Investors in People Practitioner

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1 Introduction and organisation background

Since the Bronze assessment in 2015 EHC has continued to embrace challenge and change. As a result of the May 2015 elections a new Leader of the Council has been elected along with 22 new Council Members. Furthermore, a new Chief Executive was appointed (October 2015) who brought with her a clear ambition for East Herts that has since been underpinned by three newly defined corporate priorities that in turn are reinforced by the organisation's H2H values and behaviours which are now firmly embedded into working practice. Other key changes include an organisational restructure and the development of a new Leadership Team. The restructure involved a small number of redundancies as three Heads of Service posts no longer exist and some services have been shared internally; a total of six Heads of Service will ultimately be leaving. The Leadership Team now comprises the Chief Executive, two Directors to lead on major projects (one new external appointment) and seven Heads of Service, as well as two Heads of Shared Services (external). Throughout the period of transition EHC has continued to implement its strategies for Organisational Development, Workforce Development as well as the liP Action Plan developed as result of the 2015 assessment.

It is understood that some people in some parts of the organisation may not agree with the outcome of the 2016 assessment owing to number of changes that have taken place over recent years and the transition process still underway. Throughout the 2016 assessment consistent feedback was provided to conclude that EHC's cultural and structural changes have been led with great clarity, have included many forms of consultations where people have a voice and input to the decision making that is further supported by the Chief Executive's personal, open-door leadership style. Excellent support has continued to be provided throughout the change process for personal and professional development. Furthermore, the recruitment process although now streamlined ensures that people are now being recruited not just for their professional and technical expertise and, more importantly, in line with the Council's values and required behaviours.

2 Assessment feedback

The findings below may be read as a continuation and in addition to the Bronze assessment report reflecting progress and developments and, where appropriate, suggestions for ongoing improvements.

Feedback indicated that EHC has invested much time and energy under the leadership of the new Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to foster a culture of inclusion to deliver an ambitious programme of transformation to ensure greater transparency and accountability; this has been helped by the restructure and the establishment of the new Leadership Team.

The Leadership Team now reports directly into the Chief Executive and replaces the previous department, senior management and corporate management teams to provide a corporate leadership that delivers on priorities and steers clear of duplication and wasted energy. The Chief Executive and Directors will now provide a mentoring role to all members of the Leadership Team on a rotational basis and will no longer have line-management or operational responsibilities. Driven by an ambitious Council Membership the restructure has also been designed to ensure that Heads of Service work collaboratively on major projects, led and mentored by the Directors, dispersing the potential legacy of an earlier “*silo mentality*”.

Discussions revealed the impetus behind the restructure is the Chief Executive’s approach to major projects and the need to have the right people in the right roles with the right behaviours to embrace responsibility and accountability, to lead on and create a culture of sustainable high performance aligned to the organisation’s ambition.

Three key priorities moving forward are channel-shift, partnership working and commercialisation to include the development of more automated online services providing greater access to customers, as well as commercial projects through partnership working.

In terms of communication much mention was made to confirm that people have been fully informed and involved throughout the change process as a result of staff briefings. Moreover people have been able to influence the way services have been structured by being directly invited to comment and challenge. The Chief Executive’s leadership style is both open and inclusive. The staff forum continues to meet on a regular basis as do teams in their local areas. A vast amount of information continues to be shared electronically and includes Team Update as well as a number of relevant communiqués. It is understood that a key project is being currently underway to revise the intranet to improve its currency, ensure that it’s easier to navigate and overall more user-friendly.

Relationships with UNISON have also improved since the 2015 assessment and are believed to be much more constructive. The Local Joint Panel meets at least once a quarter and more often if exceptional matters arise that need to be jointly discussed. UNISON representatives confirmed that consultations were effective throughout the H2H transformation and restructuring process and an example is that representatives were provided with a preview of the new structure before staff were invited to comment. Savings generated as a result of the restructure will be re-invested into front-line services. *“It’s a much better system, more focused on getting the work done rather than just on policy and most people agree it’s been positive – a more logical way.”*

Weekly Leadership Team meetings have now replaced the previous monthly CMT meetings. The LT agenda has also been revised to move away from the earlier report and policy-based approach to a wider and more open format of communication that includes business and discussion topics.

Detailed and extensive workforce development plans continue to support the delivery of the new corporate plan and OD strategy, as well as develop the desired behaviours to achieve the Council’s over-arching ambition. The Council’s values are now firmly embedded in the recruitment process which has been streamlined; everyone has access to the 2015-2019 OD strategy online and all new staff are provided with a copy during induction. Plans and resources for workforce development remain flexible and varied to reflect the diversity of disciplines in EHC, as well as support CPD and personal development. Key themes include issues relating to succession planning, career development and resilience. The strategy also includes support for the graduate trainee programmes, apprenticeship schemes and issues relating to lone-working and workload stress.

Work has been underway to revise the staff appraisal system through consultation to further embed core values and behaviours by incorporating an element of self-review. The evolved system will move to one PDR a year and include support via monthly 121s. It will also include development pathways to nurture talent and support career aspirations as well as succession planning by including the necessary learning and development. The workforce development plan now incorporates bite-sized e-learning sessions for developing required behaviours. People were able to confirm that their individual and in some instances team training plans and activities have been developed as a result of their input.

In terms of developing current and future leadership capability, corporate learning events have recently included service and financial planning workshops for Heads of Service. Feedback revealed that EHC’s transformation programme included a need to align service and financial planning into a single process. This was a major project and required a significant amount of time involving people in the design of a process to ensure that it was both *“light and non-bureaucratic.”* Service and workforce planning for 2016-2020 are both now fully aligned and include Members’ development.

Impact and benefits gained so far is that service planning is more collaborative, more open and people are more directly involved as a result of the changes. Members were able to feed into the process via voting buttons. A service by service approach has been adopted that included stakeholder participation gained through a number of professional networks and groups. Different ways of working have been successfully introduced. Furthermore, as a result of stakeholder engagement and participation EHC has been able to compare its learning offer externally including the quality of its learning for aspiring leaders, as well as compare itself to what was practiced a year ago.

It is fair to say that EHC as an organisation has come a long way in a very short period of time by building on its cultural transformation, values and behaviours and through benchmarking. Next year's plans will include a full evaluation to enable EHC to determine if the single service and financial planning process that now fully includes workforce skills is fit for purpose, that it has adopted the right approach and to consider what can be learned. *"It's an iterative process that will continue to evolve and develop."*

Discussions revealed that strategies for corporate social responsibilities have continued to evolve around the Council's Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2018 that has both an internal and external focus. Approaches adopted are led from the front and extremely well supported by the Council's Leadership. There is a new Health & Wellbeing Members' Committee and also a new Council-wide Volunteering Programme is being developed. Feedback indicated that Health & Wellbeing is even more defined in the new corporate plan which backs up EHC's internal Health & Wellbeing initiatives which have included a variety of events and competitions, for example, the national Step Jockey challenge 2016 involved different teams from different departments. EHC came fifth against all the UK Council's that took part and was best overall for the number of calories consumed by the number of participants. Already break-out zones have been introduced for people to enjoy lunch away from their desks and a number of walking clubs have been initiated. Future plans may include outdoor equipment for table-tennis. EHC has also signed up to the Mental Health Pledge *Time to Talk* and continues to look for new wellbeing ideas; the stress-management policy has evolved into the absence management so that there is no longer a policy. *"It's how you behave and how you do things!"*

Valuing, recognising and rewarding employees involves exploring how to get more from the current reward and benefits package to give more choice and support work-life balance.

In addition to progress and developments described above, the corporate and performance management framework is also undergoing a transition to reflect the new corporate priorities, the new service planning and budget setting process. There remains clear and robust methods in place for monitoring progress and outcomes conducted by the Leadership Team at least once a month verbally for tracking issues and looking at trends that is further supported by a major mid-year progress report formally reviewed by the Leadership Team and the Corporate Business Scrutiny

Committee. Previously it was carried out through the service plans' key activities that linked to the former PDR process.

The new PDR template will contain priorities and will be outcomes-based so that together with the new structure will firmly place the onus on Heads of Service who now have a higher level of decision-making and, with that, responsibility. Overall performance management is believed to be less bureaucratic, more streamlined as less reports are generated, it's much more focused and there is *"an altogether smarter articulation of priorities in the corporate plan with much more involvement in the story-telling and any resolution, with more time to analyse and reflect as we go forward."*

3 Opportunities for improvement

The suggestions below are not listed in any order of priority.

- Consider re-awaking H2H. Feedback indicated *"it's gone completely off the boil after so much time and effort was invested!"*
- The H2H forum has been renamed the staff forum. Feedback suggested that people didn't understand why? Consider reviewing / establishing clear terms of reference to ensure that it has a defined purpose with clear objectives and representatives fully understand how they are expected to contribute. An induction into the forum for all new members would improve their understanding. Actions with lead responsibilities, as well as a requirement for reporting back would ensure that there is some form of return on the time invested by the organisation, teams and individuals.
- Continue defining capabilities for all managers in people-management positions; make sure capabilities are explicit and well communicated and ensure that all managers are reviewed against them. Management tiers below the Leadership Team are areas requiring further development.
- Consider including commercial acuity and safeguarding adults as modules in future management development programmes; consider Mental Health Lite as a compulsory module for all people who manage others.
- As stated earlier, the transformation has been led with great clarity and with much support since the 2015 assessment. Most people interviewed trusted the new Leadership of the Council and the new Leadership Team. EHC would benefit in maintaining its high levels of communication and consultation as the change process continues to roll-out. Over communication is better than little or fragmented communication which only goes to serve a culture of scepticism.

4 Next steps

EHC is required to undertake an interaction with the liP Practitioner within 12 months of this assessment. The scale of the activity may range from a discussion with senior managers based on progress against current people strategies and any challenges the organisation may be facing, through to planning a programme of support with advice towards liP6 accreditation.

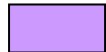
Appendix 1 – Assessment results summary

The Investors in People Framework Evidence Requirements

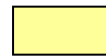
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	10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓						✓																

The number of evidence requirements met is **129**

Key:



The Core Investors in People Standard



Your Choice from the Investors in People Framework



Not part of the Investors in People Framework