

East Herts Council Report

Human Resources Committee

Date of Meeting: 5 August 2020

Report by: Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development

Report title: HR and Payroll Team Update Report

Ward(s) affected: N/A

Summary

RECOMMENDATION FOR Human Resources Committee:

(a) To note the HR and Payroll Team Update Report

1.0 Proposal

1.1 This report provides an update on what the HR and Payroll team have been working on during both Quarter 4 in 2019/2020 (January 2020 to March 2020) and Quarter 1 2020/21 (April 2020 to June 2020). (The report is longer than it normally would be due to covering two quarters on this occasion and also because of the work being done in relation to COVID-19 which has seen HR and Payroll workload increase.)

2.0 Payroll Service

2.1 Payroll continues to deliver its primary mission of ensuring all Staff, Councillors and Contractors on Payroll are paid accurately and on a timely basis.

2.2 Payroll finalised the separate general election payroll in

relation to the snap election as expected, successfully processing individual payments to 286 people on 7 February 2020.

- 2.3 Payroll complied with the Pension Regulator's legal duty instruction to re-enrol and re-declare automatically enrolling staff not in the pension scheme. This was completed in the with the 3 year re-enrolment requirements in the February 2020 payroll including submission to Regulator. As previously report the re-enrolment affected 20 staff who had the option to opt out once re-enrolled.
- 2.4 Payroll processed all year end statutory requirements for the 2019/20 financial year to HMRC and LGPS Pension provider which included balancing to the general ledger and closing down the ResourceLink system. Payroll then worked with IT to install the 2020/21 new year service pack on the test system which they fully tested before agreeing to install on the live system to begin the 2020/21 monthly processing. The pension year end return that payroll processed is a complex time consuming return that includes all Staff pension contributions and employers that has to be balanced to the general ledger and monthly submissions to the pension provider (LPP). All circumstances like maternity/sick/unpaid leave have different calculations to ensure records are accurate.
- 2.5 Payroll and HR like all services has had to manage the different ways of working to comply with restrictions from the outbreak of Covid-19. This has meant all the team working from home and only accessing the office for essential matters e.g. to print payslips (for casual staff and contractors). Refined processes have been put in place to ensure this is effective and Payroll are keen to retain elements of home working moving forward to retain some of the productivity gains achieved. Payroll adapted very quickly to this immediate change in processing mainly the receipt of information from HR and Staff as well as increased claims for processing received due to extra hours being worked to process business loans etc.

- 2.6 Payroll and HR have also had to set up and calculate furlough payments for theatre staff (all Casuals and 8 permanent employees) with first payment being made in May and ongoing. This information is collated then submitted on the HMRC portal by HR staff (in particular the Trainee HR Officer – Emily Cordwell) who has also been calculating the ongoing payments for payroll to process.
- 2.7 Payroll processed P60's for all Staff & Councillors for the 2019/20 tax year onto 'My View' also processed the P60's for the Election payroll which were posted to the 286 individuals on that payroll.
- 2.8 Payroll collated and calculated the payments for the 2019/20 tax year paid to Councillors and sent to Democratic Services for publishing on the East Herts website. Other published information has also been provided to Finance to be included in the 2019/20 statement of accounts relating to senior officer pay.
- 2.9 To keep visual communication with the rest of the HR Team weekly zoom meetings chaired by Head of HR & OD take place where all Team members reflect on their previous weeks achievements then priorities for the coming week which allows work loads to be divided appropriately and ensure effective practice is shared. The Head of HR and OD also briefs the whole team (HR, OD, Payroll and H&S) on updates from Leadership Team meetings.

3.0 Learning and Development

- 3.1 The HR Quarterly Management Statistics Report provides the data regarding the learning and development events from January to June 2020. Events were delivered face to face until it was unsafe to do so and some events had to be cancelled/postponed in response to the COVID-19 advice received. There were 127 employees participating in 14 learning and development opportunities during the period

January - June 2020 (in addition e-learning has also been undertaken in this period with staff completing the 4 core courses required on an annual basis – see 3.3).

3.2 The Human Resources Officer has been looking at different ways to deliver the face to face sessions. The Officer has worked with the Customer Services Team to design and deliver two bitesize virtual programmes:

- Complaints, Compliments and Comments
- The new Member Case Management System

The sessions were delivered through Zoom (a virtual/video platform) and the events received positive feedback. Work continues with training providers to move the face to face sessions to virtual sessions and for courses to be converted to e-learning courses where possible.

3.3 The 2020 Mandatory E-Learning Programme was launched at the end of January. The refresher courses are mandatory for all staff and also provided to members in line with policies agreed. The Human Resources Officer is currently working on a variety of new e-learning courses for staff using SkillsBuild the Council's e-learning platform to develop and deliver.

3.4 Work on the corporate induction training has commenced after a review from the Chief Executive. Additional feedback is also being provided from the East Herts Together group which will assist in the development of the programme and ensure that new initiatives implemented are maintained and embedded for new starters as well as existing staff.

3.5 Three apprentices have completed their apprenticeships. Two have accepted fixed term contracts at East Herts and the third apprentice will be supported through their level 6 qualification as they continue their career progression. The current apprenticeship programme is in development as we look at ways to implement the programme in the current climate.

4.0 Human Resources Update

4.1 East Herts Together Development Update

The East Herts Together Group has continued to meet during lockdown on Zoom and has made progress on actions.

4.1.1 East Herts Together (EHT) has established where we are currently and where we want to get to which has been confirmed by the feedback provided from staff and management:

Where we are now:

- Values are not fully embedded and there are no clear behavioural competencies behind them
- Policies & procedures could be better incorporated and are not always consistently applied by management or as well joined up
- There are barriers to having a 'one team' approach. Not enough cross team working
- There is a lack of consistency in the use of corporate housekeeping tools
- There is a lack of staff ownership and engagement leading to an inconsistent organisational culture.
- Corporate customer standards have largely been forgotten about.

Where we want to be;

- One team with a clear and recognisable organisational culture that everybody understands and adheres to
- A consistent set of employment tools and practices which are truly embedded
- A 4 year HR and OD Strategy and Work Programme that supports the corporate priorities and strengthens the one team approach.
- Values and behaviours are supported by consistent

management practice, strong management training and underpinned by clear and appropriate policies

- Focused on providing excellent customer service to our residents and all whom we work with

4.1.2 EHT Quick wins achieved include:

- Developing and rolling out a corporate email signature
- The majority of staff have now added their photos to Outlook and the intranet and those still outstanding are being picked up by Heads of Service to ensure full coverage
- Outlook calendar protocols have been established and circulated to all staff in preparation for all outlook calendars becoming readable by all staff. Staff calendars are going to be made public on 3 August 2020 by IT, in line with the calendar protocols staff should connect MiCollab to their calendar and can mark appointments private where appropriate.

4.1.3 As part of the EastHerts Together work HR developed a survey that was sent to all staff in May 2020. The survey sought feedback on an initial analysis of the council strengths and areas for improvement as well as core behaviours expected of staff that was undertaken by LT and senior managers. Staff were asked for their input on the key positives to build upon, identified areas for improvement and desired staff core behaviours that all staff will all sign up to. The results of the survey have now been analysed and shared with staff at the recent Staff Briefings. A framework of cultural and behavioural expectations will be built around this in the form of a set of staff and manager core competencies.

EHT agreed to further strengthen a number of the positives identified as needing wider recognition across staff:

- The Leader to cover regeneration and place making in staff briefings
- More internal comms on district plan and G&HGT

- Feature Planning service in future staff briefings
 - Services to work with comms to enter more awards such as LJC and MJ to increase the council's profile
 - Include a protocol on how to work with Members in corporate induction
- 4.1.4 A draft Customer Charter has been developed with input from all service areas and has now been taken to Leadership Team for approval and will be implemented shortly.
- 4.1.5 A One page plan for the Eats Herts Together project has been developed which covers all of the actions for the 1st year. All actions have been assigned to members of the East Herts Together (cross service) Group and target dates agreed (see below). Included in the plan is to review and redevelop employment policies. A sub-working group of HR Officers and Managers has been formed which will develop drafts to the full EHT group. Policy development will follow terms of reference established by the EHT group:

Agreed TOR for HR/Employment policies

- To take the employee through their career journey
- Should be joined up, not in isolation to each other
- Include good examples and flow charts
- Legally compliant and best practice
- Include who to contact for more information

As set out below draft policy developments from EHT will then progress through the existing channels of Leadership Team, Unison, Leadership Team and then LJP and HRC.

Actions /Key projects

	When
Introduce a new Customer charter	Aug-20
Develop calendar management protocols	Apr-20
IT to switch all accounts to reviewer and Comms to promote	Jul/Aug 20
Introduce a corporate email signature	Apr-20
Roll out/promote photos for Outlook, Micollab, and the Intranet	Apr-20

Roll out/promote more effective use of Micollab	Jul-20
Survey all staff on strengths and weaknesses of our 'one team' to help inform Strategy and Competencies	Apr-20
Roll out/promote consistent voicemail messages	Aug-20
Develop Zoom Etiquette to support staff use and ensure balance	Sep-20
Re-implement Email Etiquette, train staff to use email effectively	Sep-20
Produce best practice guide for Managers and Staff for effectively working remotely	Aug-20
Develop a staff charter which sets out expectations from EHC and also expectations from staff/ this may be linked with revised Values	Oct-20
Corporate Induction improved	Jan-21
Develop HR &OD Strategy up to end of the new corporate plan, this needs to be considered by EHT, then LT and then HRC	Sep-Nov20
Review and develop all employment policies to take the employee through their career journey, a prioritised order has been devised by HR who will draft improvements with EHT members as listed, once drafted all EHT members will be engaged for feedback via email, then LT, Unison, LT and finally to LJP/HRC for adoption and implementation In line with LJP meetings:	Oct-20 Jan-21 Apr-21
Review polices which provide support for staff to manage work life balance/wellbeing	As above
Develop staff and Management competencies	Oct-20
Develop a new PDR process to support competencies	Oct-20
Develop recruitment tools to support competencies	Nov-20
Develop a management training to support new policies	From Feb-21
Review the staff recognition process	Dec-20

4.1.6 A draft HR & OD Strategy will be produced by the Head of HR and OD for consideration at the next HR Committee on 5 November which will be considered first at Leadership Team in October.

The recent Wellbeing Survey completed by staff (see Wellbeing section below) and feedback gathered at the Service Manager quarterly meeting has also identified in relation to current Home Working and the expectation of moving into an Office and Home Working Hybrid model some additional

developments for EHT to implement shortly to further support staff and share best practice (which are outlined above in the one page plan actions):

- Develop Zoom Etiquette to support staff use and ensure balance
- Re-implement Email Etiquette and train staff to use email effectively
- Produce best practice guide for Managers and Staff for effectively working remotely

4.2 Recruitment

4.2.1 Indeed online Job Board

The council went live in June 2020 working with Indeed (Generalist Job Board) on a 1 year's trial basis to advertise all jobs on Indeed (branded adverts) rather than using the multi online job board package across a range of generalist sites that we had been using. The cost of advertising has reduced significantly with this arrangement (by more than 7 times) and all of Leadership Team will ensure their service advertise posts on Indeed. Indeed are the market leader in terms of generalist job boards with more hits than others and their jobs tend to be listed first on search engines. We are currently developing a branded page where we are able to sell the benefits of working for the council, including case studies and videos (demonstrating our commitment to equality and diversity), and employees/applicants are able to leave reviews regarding their experience of the council as a recruiter/employer which will be built into the new starter process as action for new starters to complete ensuring a wide variety of reviews are posted which should also help attract more candidates .

4.2.2 Improved Job Application Form

A new job application form has been implemented which is

more user friendly. It has two parts whereby if a CV is submitted with the application only Part 2 of the application form needs to be completed by the applicant. The Part 2 section ensures that the candidate provides all the information required that is not normally covered by a CV e.g. reasons for leaving, any employment gaps, referee details etc. as well as demonstrating how they meet the person specification criteria. HR worked with the Web Admin team to ensure that the form is fully accessible for those who are blind or partially sighted.

4.2.3 Corporate Web Site

The content of the 'Working for Us' page on the council's website has been updated with the help of the Communications team and will be updated on the website soon.

4.3 HR Services provided to external organisations

As members will already be aware East Herts HR service has been providing HR support on a pay as go basis to Hertford Town Council. During this period the Head of HR and OD was approached for support by Cllr Stowe on a similar pay as go basis from Datchworth Parish Council to support them with a complex employee relations matter. Support was provided which was extremely well received:

Dear Mr Cassidy,

I am writing to say how pleased Datchworth Parish Council have been with the superb HR support provided by Simon O'Hear and his team including Helen and Vicki.

From the outset, they have been overwhelmingly supportive, professional and efficient in dealing with the HR issues faced by our Council.

I cannot praise Simon and the team highly enough and, subject to council approval, hope to use them for HR services in the future".

Kind regards,

*Cllr Jane Dodson
Vice-Chair*

Datchworth have since approached EHC HR for further support which will be progressed.

Bishop's Stortford Town Council have also approached EHC for some HR advice and the Head of HR and OD has had initial discussion for further paid support to be provided in the future on a pay as you go basis.

The Head of HR and OD has also recently been approached by Ware Town Council to bid for HR services from November 2020 and initial scoping meeting has been held.

During the summer the Head of HR and OD and HR Officers will develop the offer with revised rates to ensure EHC costs are fully met going forward as the rates have not been updated for a number of years. The offer will also be expanded to include more L&D support and additional H&S support to maximise use of the HR team and generate further income for EHC.

4.4 HR like all services have had to modify some working practices as we adjusted to new ways of working. HR have completed a variety of additional work in light of circumstances caused by impact of COVID-19, some key highlights are set out below that have not been covered above, please also refer to section 6 on Wellbeing Support below as well sections above (Payroll and L&D):

- Supporting staff home working and wellbeing

- Supporting Risk Assessments for COVID-19 (working with H&S, Management and Staff)
- Supporting and managing redeployment of staff across the council
- Supporting and managing the furloughing of staff at our theatre
- Creating COVID-19 Office protocols for Wallfields and managing the control of staff using the building to ensure safety (working closely with FM)
- Creating new COVID-19 protocols for example reporting COVID-19 symptoms and getting tested.

5.0 Casework

5.1 Support has been provided by HR on a number of cases in terms of absence and capability.

6.0 Wellbeing Support

6.1 Prior to lockdown restrictions in the period and during them the council has continued to support staff with existing wellbeing measures. These are set out below and were reported at full council on 22 July 2020 in response to a member question (services have been promoted through staff communications from HR):

- Line management: which includes regular 1 to 1s with staff has continued but is carried out through Zoom or on the phone (with emails) as the majority of staff have been working from home (WFH).
- Access to mental health first aiders has continued, again access has moved to email, with Zoom and phone support as required.
- Access to the My-rewards Wellbeing Centre: which provides exercises, training, advice and guidance to maintain wellbeing/mental health

- Access to the Employee Assistance Programme which provides both telephone counselling and face to face counselling as appropriate, this access is also provided to members.
- The majority of East Herts line managers have recently received training to help identify and support staff with mental health, this training took place in January and February 2020.
- Regular team meetings and Staff Briefings to ensure staff remain informed, engaged and feel less isolated, again this has moved to Zoom.
- MiCollab phone and online chat system has continued to be used with further support and guidance to improve use. MiCollab also includes a chat room feature which is also being used to keep up less formal team working practices whilst WFH.

6.2 Additional wellbeing support has been provided during this period of remote working, key highlights include:

- Advice/guidance has been provided to staff and managers from HR to help staff to improve their resilience whilst working at home.
- An article was written by HR and published in Connect (the staff weekly newsletter) reminding staff of the wellbeing support available to them including further mental health support from Able Futures (this is a new partnership arrangement with the DWP which provides staff with up to 9 months support around their mental health), advice from the council's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), support from Mental Health First Aiders, access to the MyRewards Wellbeing Centre, and for further sources of support the Wellbeing Hub on the Intranet. The article also provided support in terms of advice and guidance for those juggling childcare/home schooling with working from home.
- Mental Health Awareness Week (18-24 May) was promoted with a series of daily articles on e.g. how employees can be kind to themselves and others during lockdown, how physical activity can help with wellbeing and promoting what's on offer

at the council (e.g. online yoga sessions, exercise videos available on MyRewards website), and promoting other sources of support mentioned above.

- Managers have agreed support for employees e.g. for those with caring responsibilities, having flexible start and finishing times and allowing staff to come into the office to work (on a limited and appropriate basis).
- Staff have been allowed to return to the office to collect further equipment from the office to support them working more effectively from home e.g. laptops, mouse, keyboard and chairs.
- Guidance and support around coping with and managing bereavement for those staff who had lost loved ones due to Covid-19 or during the pandemic were shared with staff.
- A Wellbeing Survey was developed by HR and approved by Leadership Team. In particular the Head of HR and OD would like to thank HR Officer Vicki David for the work put into both developing the survey and for analysis and report provided. The survey was sent to all staff to identify how they could be supported further whilst working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. The response rate was excellent (89% of all staff completed the survey) and the results were very positive overall (see below). Where staff experiences have not been so positive, managers with HR support have been contacting staff to follow up discussions and put further support in place. The survey results were reviewed by HR and then reported to the Leadership Team with a number of actions identified to further support staff. The survey results and actions the council is taking have been shared with all staff with the report and appendices being published on intranet.
- The Wellbeing survey allowed staff to raise any issues or concerns they had about working from home or eventually returning to the office so that the council can support them and address any concerns, each employee has been followed up by their line manager with HR support over their individual response to confirm support where appropriate (this includes

staff who did not respond, a number of non-responders. were existing home workers or working in the office).

- The Survey asked staff to report if they are currently shielding in line with government guidance so that further support can be provided to support this including more equipment being delivered to their home where appropriate.
- In order to further support mental wellbeing as well as complying with Government Guidance and H&S requirements: DSE assessments have been sent to all staff and collected from the majority of staff with actions followed up alongside the wellbeing survey results for Individual staff. Risk Assessments have been completed for all council services in relation to COVID-19 restrictions and safe practice (Unison have been consulted on all as well as the staff who will then follow them). We have a main Wallfileds Workplace Risk Assessment in place which allows limited numbers of staff to return to the office on a limited basis with clear Office Protocols for staff (and also for Members) to follow in order to adhere to social distancing requirements. Where a service requires work to be done away from the office or home, risk assessments have been undertaken and implemented to ensure this is done safely and relevant measures but in place including PPE being provided where identified.

6.3 Summary of Key results from the Employee Wellbeing Survey (The full report and appendices are attached as Appendix 1 to this report).

- 93% of employees gave a rating of 6 or higher out of 10 for their overall experience of working from home so far (10 indicating that the experience has been extremely positive and 0 indicating their experience has been extremely negative).
- The top three positive aspects of working from home reported were: not having to commute to work, good work/life balance and having a suitable home work environment.

- The top three most significant challenges reported were: demanding workload, being unable to keep up with colleagues/friends from work and limited IT. The council has identified support for employees facing these challenges e.g. by helping them to re-prioritise or reallocating work where appropriate, having regular team meetings and supporting more flexible hours to allow a balance to be achieved.
- The majority of employees reported positively regarding the suitability of their workstation whilst working from home, how technology was working for them, the suitability of their work environment (e.g distractions/noise from other people in their household), team communication and how well they were being kept informed on the Covid situation and measures that the council was putting in place.
- Many employees gave reasons for wanting to continue working from home e.g. being more productive and better able to balance their caring responsibilities. The council is not expecting employees to return to offices until it is safe and appropriate to do so. It will explore whether more remote/home working can be accommodated. Managers will continue to discuss with employees their individual circumstances and any barriers to returning to work, identifying solutions with them where they can be accommodated. Risk assessments have been undertaken in each service to allow a limited and appropriate return.

6.4 Further Measures which are being developed and then implemented based on the Staff Survey Results which will also support mental wellbeing:

- East Herts Together have been tasked with developing guidance and briefings for employees to reduce email traffic/make more effective use of email.
- East Herts Together have also been tasked with sharing best practice from Revenues and Benefits in terms of effective home working including more use of MiCollab chat to avoid

emails and sharing advice regarding building in breaks from the screen and having informal interactions with the team etc.

- East Herts Together have also been tasked with creating Zoom guides which focus on building in breaks and etiquette to make use more effective and less demanding.
- The Leadership Team will explore whether team, service or council-wide level events could be arranged with social distancing measures in place which allows there to be a physical employee presence at an event to help support staff engagement and reduce feelings of isolation.

6.5 In partnership with the Community Wellbeing and Partnerships Team, HR are continuing to develop and promote the council's wellbeing programme. The Council had submitted a bid for the REBA (Reward & Employee Benefits Association) Employee Wellbeing Award 2020 for 'Best Wellbeing Engagement' covering our Live Well, Work Well staff wellbeing programme. As previously reported REBA recognised the quality of the work led by the Community and Wellbeing Partnership team with HR by shortlisting East Herts Council as a finalist, unfortunately we did not win on this occasion.

There have been two Wellbeing meetings during the restrictions and both have been attended by the Deputy Chief Exec as the Wellbeing Sponsor and the Head of HR and OD as well HR and Community Wellbeing staff. A number of improvements have been identified especially to promote the offer further and increase further staff take up. A report is being written for Leadership Team to consider and support further development. A key new initiative to help build upon the extensive work already undertaken is that each service will be asked for a wellbeing champion who will be developed to help improve engagement across the council.

6.6 Flu jabs

The council's offer of free flu jabs to staff was a success last year with 70 staff taking up the offer and the reduction of sickness absence in 2019-20 supports the provision being made this year so this will be rolled out in September 2020 via the Boots Scheme.

6.7 Mental Health First Aiders

Mental Health First Aiders continue to meet every 2 months to support each other. Experiences of giving support to staff (and on occasions to members of the public) are shared (anonymously).

8.0 HR and Payroll System Development

8.1 The HR Trainee Officer has begun further developing the HR and Payroll system in line with their new role which provides approximately 2 days per week to maintain and develop the system. Unfortunately as previously reported the provider, who are now called Zellis, have been poor in terms of support/customer service and despite only having the system for a number of years we now have our 5th account manager who like predecessors has been slow to respond and support effective use and delivering the outcomes expected. An onsite meeting had been planned to drive more effective use of the system and to review unimplemented modules but this has not been possible due to restrictions. A special online demo is therefore to be arranged in the coming weeks on how to more effectively use the system which will include use of the H&S module and the L&D module which are not currently implemented (a refund of 50% will be given if the modules are unsuitable).

8.2 As outlined in the Payroll update the self-service portal of the system called MyView has now been developed for Member

use so that they can now all access their records and update them, receive e-payslips and claim expenses electronically. A pilot of 10 members across the different wards and parties was rolled out successfully in February with training on how to use the system and claim expenses/mileage. All member expenses and mileage claims will be sent to the DSOs for checking and then a further authorisation by the Democratic Services Manager. The remaining members will receive training on how to claim expenses/mileage in the coming months this has been delayed as expenses are not currently being claimed in the main meaning the learning will not be put into practice, a staged further rollout will take place when appropriate. The restrictions have also delayed moving all casual staff onto myview for self serve access to details and payslips as the IT accounts have not been set up by users as they have been on furlough leave and not accessing the Theatre or council network.

9.0 Recruitment Agency Review

9.1 The Head of HR and OD with the support of the HR Trainee Officer have now fully implemented Matrix SCM to support the procurement and management of Agency workers, following the ESPO MStar 3 framework. This is a Neutral Vendor Managed Service which is web based and centralises the end-to-end procurement process to enable all parties to achieve the best possible value both in terms of quality and price (this will generate savings on the cost of agency workers as it reduces the margins charged by the agency in terms of temp fees, conversion from temp to perm fees and ensuring actual NI costs are charged rather than inflated ones). The implementation for this project was completed on time and went live on Monday 13 April 2020.

Work has now begun on implementing a similar system from Matrix for procurement of specialist work at more competitive rates from specialist/consultancy firms in relation to project

work where it is appropriate to commission a specialist firm for a statement of work/ distinct piece of work rather than hire a temporary worker.

10.0 Options

N/A

11.0 Risks

N/A

12.0 Implications/Consultations

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

No

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

Yes – as described in the report

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

No

13.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

Appendix 1: Employee Wellbeing Survey Results with appendices A, B and C.

Contact Officer

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