
ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Workforce Development Progress and Future Work

We were one of the small District pilot Authorities in the Eastern Region on Workforce Development and are now one of the pilots in Phase Two of that project, facilitated through Eastern Regional Employers. The work that we've now done around Workforce Development and plan to do has undoubtedly been aided by our involvement in the "pilots" initiative. Set out below is a progress report on where we are in relation to each of the main headings from our Workforce Development Plan.

Leadership Development

After considering our succession planning requirements and the need to develop future leadership talent RDC has sponsored the attendance of two council managers at the Essex Leadership Centre of Excellence set up by the Essex Strategic HR Partnership (and partly funded by the ODPM).

The programme addresses key competencies – Leadership, Self Awareness, Interpersonal Skills and Working in Partnership and Managing Contracts. A range of development methods are used including:

- ❑ 1 to 1 feedback sessions with a designated role coach/mentor
- ❑ Development of a personal development plan ('PDP')
- ❑ Access to learning and development identified through the PDP
- ❑ Regular events for all participants to assist in tracking progress and sharing learning
- ❑ Competency tracking via an excel tracking tool
- ❑ Action learning opportunities where groups address local, regional or national issues identified as capacity building themes.

Participants attend evaluation meetings with the Chief Executive to track progress and evaluate the programme every month. The programme runs until the end of January 2006. If successful further places will be funded next year. To date participants have found the main outcomes to be improved networks and increased self-awareness but as the participants begin to record their learning and use the competency tracker outcomes will become very clear.

An in-house Leadership programme for senior managers will commence in September 2005. The programme will focus on the importance of Leadership in creating a vision to motivate and inspire staff and in strategic planning. Equalities and diversity will be a core theme of the programme and one used to link the sessions together and for project work in-between.

In the Member arena, we have expanded our training and development programme for elected members by developing a competency based package, especially around Overview and Scrutiny, Decision Making, Chairmanship and

Leadership. We are seeking funding via the OPDM Capacity Building Fund to help us deliver this in full but as yet await the outcome of our bid. We have worked with the IDeA on the exact details of this package using the “modern members modules” and are now delivering a tailored programme for Rochford members.

Skills Development

Over the past year the Council has developed and imbedded some of its procedures and processes in relation to skills development. This has resulted in the organisation gaining Investors in People accreditation on 1 March 2005. This award recognises that we embrace a commitment to development and training in order to achieve our aims and objectives.

We recognise that this is the beginning rather than the end and although we have proved that we have the right foundations in place we now need to build on this and continue to review and improve what we are doing in line with changing priorities and organisational needs.

The development programme over the past year was based on a training needs analysis at the individual, team and organisational level.

As part of this programme the induction process has been improved to ensure staff can fit into the organisation and become effective as soon as possible. This incorporates a new corporate induction, which provides staff with an opportunity to meet and question the Chief Executive and aims to provide them with a clearer understanding of the organisation's values and how they fit into its wider objectives. We have also introduced a buddy scheme for new starters.

The programme has focussed on developing management skills, especially those in relation to people management. All managers who have at least one direct report have undertaken mandatory people management training. This emphasises the role of managers in developing staff and was key to the Council gaining Investors in People accreditation.

When the programme started we also published a Manager's Guide which is a tool to help managers ensure our people work towards the fulfilment of corporate objectives. The guide contains information on all areas of people management and points managers in the right direction if they require further information.

Other courses aimed at managers have included Recruitment and Selection, Managing Discipline and Capability and Performance Review training. Feedback from the courses has been excellent.

Another priority has been building up basic IT skills. We have put 57 staff through the European Computer Driving Licence (a basic IT qualification) in conjunction with the local adult college. Further staff will commence the programme in September 2005.

A number of staff briefing sessions have been held on important initiatives such as Investors in People, Job Evaluation and Freedom of Information. This has aided communication and enabled the smooth running of these initiatives.

In addition to Corporate provision, professional development training is sponsored within departments, e.g. ensuring staff are up to date with current legislation so that the organisation is aware of and meets its responsibilities in respect of our changing statutory duties.

15 staff are being sponsored to undertake post-entry training, which enables us to develop highly skilled staff and also acts as a retention tool.

Our evaluation processes suggest that the key outcomes from our investment to date have included:

- ❑ Improved communications and learning across the organisation
- ❑ Improved IT skills across the Council
- ❑ Greater staff empowerment. Staff have given examples of where they have made changes to their work as a result of the training undertaken
- ❑ Improved recruitment and retention in key areas e.g. Revenue and Benefits
- ❑ Increased knowledge and skills leading to greater capability and capacity
- ❑ Refreshed and updated skills

A key internal staffing priority for the coming 12 months is to further develop our Leadership capacity as described above and to develop an increased awareness of equality and diversity issues throughout the organisation and of how this can improve service delivery.

Over the next year we will be focusing on developing different types of learning through other methods. We have drawn up shadowing protocols and mentoring guidelines.

We will also be increasing the opportunities for staff to learn from one another and learn about existing best practice.

To ensure staff understand what behaviours are required of them in their jobs and how they contribute to the organisation we feel it is important to introduce a competency framework. In particular we felt it would support succession planning and leadership development. We are working with Essex County Council to review and amend the Essex Competency Framework to fit RDC terminology and culture. We are one of four Authorities in Essex working with the County on this. We will roll out the competencies to all jobs during 2005 and integrate them into the recruitment and selection and Performance Review processes for 2006.

Developing the Organisation and Building Capacity

We have made good progress in respect of improving communication across the organisation. A fortnightly staff newsletter has been introduced and a staff sounding board has been set up, consisting of a range of representatives from all areas of the Council, to raise staff matters as necessary. Two staff sounding board representatives now attend OMT meetings to put forward concerns or views on a regular basis. Regular staff briefings have also been held. A revised staff handbook has been written.

We are now looking at a range of policies to improve work life balance. A home working policy has been written and a work group set up to pilot its implementation before it is rolled out in the autumn.

A new HR and Payroll system has been introduced. From April 2006 we should have easily accessible and useful workforce data available, as there will be historical data in the system. The system will streamline processes between HR and payroll.

We will undertake a skills audit later this year to ensure that we use our staff resource effectively and we are currently reviewing how other organisations have undertaken such an audit.

The Council introduced a new sickness procedure in July 2004 and have briefed all managers on the policy and procedure. Sickness has reduced from 9.75 days per employee in 2003/2004 to 9.44 days in 2004/2005. We have worked closely with local disability charities to enable staff on long-term sick leave to return to work and hope that the new policy will result in a further reduction in days lost due to sickness.

The Chief Executive is currently finalising a revised organisational structure to take into account imminent retirements at senior management level and to ensure the Council's organisation remains Fit for Purpose. It will be important to ensure as smooth a change process as possible.

Resourcing Local Government

We have taken a long-term approach to recruitment issues by investing in the Recruitment Portal – 'Careers in Essex' which has been set up by the Essex HR Strategic Partnership. We have had a fairly high number of hits on our website through the portal and have had interest in posts through this vehicle, although we have yet to appoint as a result. The site should increase general awareness of the range of opportunities in local government and our aim is to look at specific campaigns targeting minority groups and young people in the forthcoming year.

We have outsourced our recruitment pages to Jobs Go Public and this has enabled us to have access to an on-line recruitment process and potentially

deliver savings on press advertisements. We have also received more interest in posts and have filled them on first advert as a result. We are now working with the Essex Strategic HR Partnership to achieve one joining cost for all local authorities, as rates currently vary widely across Essex.

We have worked with a local disability charity to offer work placements to local residents with impairments to demonstrate that they can make a full contribution to the workplace. We have also offered a one-year placement to a school leaver.

We have made a bid for ODPM funding to offer placements which would enable students to fully qualify as Environmental Health Officers.

Turnover is steady at 15.73 % in 2004/2005 (15.67% in 2003/2004).

To address skills shortages in Revenue and Benefits a careers fair was held near to Rochford station to enable prospective applicants to come and talk to staff from the Council. The event attracted a lot of interest including candidates who were commuting to London. A comprehensive training programme was set up so staff could be recruited from different backgrounds and trained up. This has been effective in recruiting and retaining in that area as the paper on Housing Benefits/Council Tax demonstrates.

Pay and Rewards

We have been working on a local pay review and have evaluated all posts (apart from senior manager positions) against the Whitley Council Job Evaluation Scheme. Members and the Trade Union have endorsed its implementation. We have undertaken an equality impact assessment of the results and staff have been informed of the results and appeals process.

We will be working with County Council to review our senior posts over the next 6-9 months.