

Full Council Meeting – 27 July 2021

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Corporate Resources

I'm really pleased to announce that Somerset West and Taunton Council has been nominated as a finalist for a Municipal Journal award in the Innovation in Diversity and Inclusion category for our Neurodiversity policy. It's the first time that this Council or predecessor Council has ever been nominated as a finalist for any Municipal Journal award.

This policy which I initiated is the proudest thing I have ever been involved with in my years as a Councillor. I am Autistic and was diagnosed in 2014 and I wanted to introduce a policy which supports staff and job applicants with neurodiversity in the workplace. Only 15 per cent of people with these issues work and that's a national scandal. We can and must do so much better as a society to remove stigma, to raise awareness and acceptance of people with neurodiversity issues.

I would like to thank Julie Jordan who has worked with me on this project and frankly without her drive and organisational skills this project would not have been implemented. It's been a joy to work with Julie who picked up my ideas and helped make them happen. Thanks also to Alison North who always believed in this policy and always made sure we had the staff resources to enable things to happen. Finally, thanks so much to all the staff who are working on the various working groups shaping our employment and training policies and practices for this initiative. Again, without them this would not be happening.

People Team Update

Recruitment

During the last quarter, SWT budget was for 657 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. The actual average for the period was 583 FTE with 75 FTE vacancies.

	Starters	Leavers	Turnover
January	5	3	0.52%
February	1	4	0.69%
March	12	4	0.68%

Casework

The number of Employee Relation cases appears to rise as increased structure and processes were brought in.

	Total Cases	Cases Closed During Period	Ongoing Cases	New Cases
January	13	7	8	5
February	21	4	13	8
March	30	3	16	14

Sickness Absence

The level of reported sickness absence during the quarter:

January – 3.49% // February – 2.44 // March – 2.18%

Personal and work related stress continues to account for the largest amount of absence, making up 25.43% of all sickness. Following the sessions with MIND, Wellness action plans are being rolled out and mental health will be the focus of the Council wellbeing strategy.

Service Development

Team

A three-phase people plan has been agreed with JNCB focusing on compliance and getting the basics in place, whilst developing a longer-term people plan and strategy in readiness for LGR. The team have been brought into an interim structure to support the delivery of this plan. Plan achievements include agreeing an approach to Job Evaluation and market factor review; resolution of complex and legacy employee relations issues such as grievances and introduction of probation processes.

Directorate People projects

Directorate People priorities include amending the flexitime scheme in Open Spaces to support the seasonal nature of the work and development plans in Housing. Consistent People Plans are being rolled out starting in Internal Operations and will include key strategic actions on directorate specific issues.

People Projects

The upgraded Learning Management System has gone live and an online recruitment process in progress.

ICT Services

Infrastructure Team

The team have been focusing heavily on completion of the Infrastructure Refresh Project, new equipment is now in place at both Deane House and West Somerset House and our vast server estate is being steadily migrated. This is an essential piece of work that will vastly improve our disaster recovery and resilience stature. As of 06.07.21 160 of 171 servers have been migrated.

Cyber security is a key priority for ICT and we have now introduced a monthly 'Patch Wednesday' whereby all systems are checked for vulnerabilities and security updates applied.

Service Desk Team

Working hard providing support to the remote workforce whilst also supporting various ongoing projects.

Applications Team

The team have been working away on various upgrades of core business systems, such as the M3 Environmental Health system and Open Contractor system.

Also supporting their colleagues in Infrastructure to ensure core systems are secure and free of vulnerabilities.

There are many ongoing projects that the application team are supporting which require detailed ICT expertise.

COVID-19 Grant work continues to take place.

Governance

Community Governance Member Working Group is working on the Terms of Reference and Communication and Consultation Plan is on the Council agenda and the 12 month clock starts from the date of approval.

The Council Governance Arrangements Working Group will be commenced again shortly to continue the work following the Council resolutions in March 2021. However, this may change if the Secretary of State decides on Unitary Somerset in the near future.

Change Projects

There are now 62 interactive processes live in Firmstep that have taken over 210,000 service requests in total since Firmstep was launched, over 10,000 each month and more than 31,000 customers now have accounts set up to report and manage their requests on-line.

The main success to report is the Information Management project completion, on time and on budget, which considering the challenges of the pandemic is a fantastic achievement. All migrations of information have now been completed and we have gone from 10 terabytes at the start of the process down to 1.3 terabytes migrated to the new corporate file plan in SharePoint platform as part of our Microsoft 365 investment.

This was done by all staff removing duplicated, redundant and obsolete information, which has been accumulated over many years and was a considerable corporate risk since the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations in 2018. SWT is now an exemplar for information Management and Councils from all of over the country are using us as a best practice example. Information is now easy to find, can be worked on by multiple people at the same time and has built in retention policies so that we only keep what we are legally allowed to keep. This culminated in an award for excellence during this years iESE public sector awards, with the judges commenting that the project was of national significance.

Health & Safety

COVID Response – the H & S Team has continued to support the organisation and has been actively involved in the Roadmap Strategic Group; pathing the way forward for when restrictions start to lift. This has included full assessment of corporate buildings to ensure that safety practices align with the latest government guidance

and roadmap plan. Moving forward during June, the team will also participate in the COVID tactical response debrief that is being co-ordinated by SWT's Emergency Response Officer in line with ASLRF requirements.

H & S Team Structure – a temporary resource plan has been implemented to support essential H & S System development, including the scoping and implementation of H & S software. The new team structure will focus on developing risk management strategy (in line with the SWT Risks and Opportunities Management Strategy, approved by Audit Committee in March 2021), developing an improved approach to audit function and developing a centralised catalogue of compliancy, legislation and corresponding policies.

Risk Management – the team has continued to support SWT's operation to identify and address risk management gaps; this has included a documented approach to gap analysis and associated team level improvement plans. Subsequently, improved risk profiling processes will be aimed at galvanising the links to the Corporate Risk Register.

H & S Committee – all meetings have continued throughout the pandemic (via TEAMS) and the H & S Team is currently reviewing all TORS and setting committee objectives for the forthcoming period.

Audit – Housing & Communities has recently instructed a construction sector specific external auditing company to assess the Depot operation. The H & S Team support this audit and will assist the teams to deliver any subsequent audit recommendations. In addition, at the beginning of June SWAP commenced the full H & S Audit and the expected completion date is 10th August 2021.

Occupational Health Programme – during COVID restrictions the annual programme of OH monitoring was postponed. The resurrected plan has now restarted at the beginning of June (starting with Asbestos Lung Function Tests). Further phases of testing will roll out over the next few months. The H & S Team has also developed a case management process in conjunction with the HR team, so that ongoing cases can be monitored and escalated accordingly and to compliance.

Corporate Performance & Organisational Development

Returning to the offices – planning a phased and cautious approach to returning to working in our office buildings, grounded in our employee data and with an awareness of the approach taken by neighbouring councils across the south west area. Plans for July focus on reconnecting our employees with their team members, with plans for August focussing on beginning to allow people to access the buildings for more general working tasks and collaborative work.

Performance Management – taking the next steps in embedding our new approach to performance management. With Directorate Plans launching and our new LMS ready, we are gearing up the request to our employees and asking them to begin shaping objectives at both a team and individual level. We have refreshed all the tools and templates as well as added some further supporting guidance to help

them. Coaching and support is also provided from the People Team, particularly the PBPs and myself to enable people to adopt this new approach.

Leadership Development Programme – we are in the early stages of developing our own development programme for our leaders, researching best practice and using people data to better understand the needs and focus points.

Internal Ops EBI Staff Awards – a monthly round of awards to celebrate employees who are going over and above and demonstrating Easier, Better or Innovative solutions.

Continuing to gather and use our people data to inform and influence our decisions with the next People survey due out week beginning 19th July.