

Northwards Housing – HR and Equality Sub-Committee Meeting

Hexagon Tower
Tuesday 25th November 2008
Chair: Martin McKeivitt

Present:

Martin McKeivitt (MM) Board Member & Chair
Rachel Christie (RC) Board Member
Joan Fitzgerald (JF) Board Member
Fatima Adamjee (FA) Board Member

In Attendance:

Robin Lawler (RL) Chief Executive
Steve Wood (SW) Director of Business Services
Lisa McBurnie (LMcB) Head of HR
Tara Kelly (TK) Equality & Diversity Officer
Alan Lawrenson (AL) Head of Health and Safety

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1	Welcome and Introductions The meeting was confirmed as quorate.	
2	Apologies for Absence No apologies had been received.	
3	Declaration of Interests / Confidential Matters / Equality & Diversity Matters Arising There were no Declarations of Interest. There was one confidential item: Job Evaluation (item 11) Equality & Diversity implications were noted on particular reports.	
4	Minutes of the Last Meeting – 28th October 2008 The minutes of the last meeting held of 28th October were approved & signed by the Chair.	
5	Matters Arising	

	<p>a) Health & Safety</p> <p>The Health & Safety Team Improvement Plan is item 8a) on the agenda.</p> <p>b) Consultation on Greater Manchester Future Transport</p> <p>The Chief Executive asked for this item to be further deferred until the result of the public consultation & vote was known.</p> <p>c) Staff Appraisals</p> <p>LMcB reported that 86% of staff appraisals have been completed to date. HR Team are prompting outstanding appraisals to be concluded.</p> <p>LMcB undertook to bring a report to the next meeting on the results of the Staff Survey.</p>	<p>RL</p> <p>LMcB</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Sub-Committee Review</p> <p>SW reminded Members of the discussion at Board when Sub-Committees were asked to consider the revised structure & terms of reference for Sub-Committees. The intention is to take a report with recommendations to Board in January incorporating any comments from Sub-Committees.</p> <p>In the context of this Sub-Committee, the intention is to combine the Resource & Audit Sub-Committee with this Sub-Committee to create a new Resources Sub-Committee which will take responsibility for HR matters. Equality & Diversity issues will be within the remit of the three new standing Sub-Committees in order to embed E&D across the organisation.</p> <p>In a correction to proposed terms of reference, SW advised Members that Resources Sub-Committee will have oversight of health & safety issues with the exception of construction related health & safety matters to be considered by the new Asset Management Sub-Committee.</p> <p>FA asked whether combining responsibilities into the new Resources Sub-Committee would lengthen the agenda & time required for the new Sub-Committee. RL responded that agenda will be managed to ensure that the new Sub-Committee aims concludes its business in a couple of hours.</p> <p>SW advised that, in anticipation of Board approving the new Sub-Committee structure, Members will be invited next month to express preferences for which Sub-Committee(s) they wish to serve upon. The new Sub-Committees would then be able to commence operation in January.</p> <p>Members approved to following Recommendations:</p>	

	<p>1. It is recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Resource & Audit Sub-Committee and HR & Equality Sub-Committee be combined, renamed Resources Sub-Committee and give up the remit for Audit ii. A new Audit Sub-Committee be created iii. The Sub-Committee approves revised terms of reference for the Sub-Committees as set out in revisions to paragraphs 14.1 to 14.4 inclusive <p>It is recommended that all changes are effective from January 2009.</p>	
<p>7</p>	<p>HR Policies</p> <p>LMcB introduced the three HR Policies which have been reviewed, updated & brought to Sub-Committee for approval:</p> <p>a) No Quit Policy which is intended to retain staff & failing which, to give an understanding of why people leave the organisation.</p> <p>b) Retirement Policy which is intended to meet our legal obligations & to support people to work beyond their normal retirement age when it is their best interests & those of the organisation for them to work on.</p> <p>c) Family Friendly Policy which is designed to ensure Northwards complies with current legislation, but more importantly to support our people in balancing their home & working lives. This will be underpinned by monitoring & reporting the number of days of authorised absence taken by staff under the Policy, rather than resorting to sick leave.</p> <p>LMcB explained that the policies are backed by HR Team support to managers in interpreting & implementing the policies particularly by using generic letters. All the policies will be available in their current edition to staff, managers & Board Members via the intranet. Managers will be provided with an electronic toolkit.</p> <p>RC welcomed the policies which she thought very accessible. MM stressed the need to evaluate the outcome of these policies. LMcB responded she accepted the need for regular review & that quarterly monitoring against targets will assist evaluation.</p> <p>Members approved the revisions to the following HR Policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Quit - Retirement - Family Friendly 	

8	<p>Health & Safety Team Improvement Plan</p> <p>SW introduced AL who is the Head of Health and Safety. AL spoke to the report & began by explaining the drivers behind the creation of the H&S Team which is a competent source of advice & support for managers & teams across the organisation. AL went on to advise Members of the main areas for attention by the H&S Team, including examining the scope for selling additional H&S services to other companies as the Decent Homes programme scales down. The H&S Team are working closely with the H&S Working Group which is chaired by SW.</p> <p>RC welcomed the report & the setting up of H&S Team, but asked for regular reporting of key H&S performance to Sub-Committee &, if appropriate, Board. She would expect to receive information on accident rates & trends & incidents reportable (RIDDOR) to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). SW undertook to address this issue & to ensure Performance Indicators incorporate appropriate H&S indicators.</p> <p>SW advised Members of the need to provide further training to Board, particular in the area of corporate manslaughter. RL advised that the HSE recommend that companies identify a director with particular interest in H&S matters.</p> <p>FA asked whether Northwards should use courses provided through local colleges in addition to in-house training. AL advised that some of his team had attended college courses.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the content of the Health & Safety Team Improvement Plan & gave approval for its implementation.</p>	
9	<p>Equality & Diversity</p> <p>a) E &D Action Plan: Quarter 2 Update</p> <p>TK gave an update on progress with actions in the E&D Action Plan to 30th September 2008. The overall position is very positive in that half way through the year 89.4% of actions have been achieved.</p> <p>TK then went on to speak to a supplementary paper, previously circulated, which fed back on the external assessment of Northwards against the Equality Standard Level 3. The report summarises the issues contained in the assessor's written report. TK is to meet the assessor to discuss his report & recommendations.</p>	

	<p>In particular, TK stated that there is a need to gather & record the evidence of compliance with Level 3. She feels that the evidence understates the progress the organisation has made towards Level 3.</p> <p>TK explained the actions designed to achieve Level 3 on the schedule attached to the paper. This draws out the specific actions from the range of service specific plans & team improvement plans using Covalent. The intention is to embed E&D actions across Northwards rather than have a specific Level 3 Action Plan.</p> <p>RC asked how employees' understanding of the Equality Standard could be evidenced. TK advised that this is by making it a specific topic in individual appraisals using core competencies.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted progress with E&D Action Plan at end of Quarter 2, approved the actions to achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard & agreed to monitor progress with the actions within E&D Action Plan 2008/09.</p> <p>b) E&D Working Group & Forum Updates</p> <p>TK updated the Sub-Committee on the work of the E&D Working Group, which comprises officers across the organisation, & upon the E&D Forums comprising tenants & residents. She highlighted the tenant friendly hate crime flyer being developed by BME Forum, with support from the Disability Forum, & the Disability Awareness Event being organised for Summer 2009.</p> <p>TK advised Members that the first meeting of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Residents Forum took place on 13th November & there is interest in developing the group, particularly looking at lower satisfaction rates of LGBT people compared to Northwards residents as a whole.</p> <p>JF asked whether Care & Repair had clarified whether they are able to support disabled tenants living in Northwards' properties. TK undertook to get clarification & report to the next Disability Forum.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted progress of these groups & requested a further update in January 2009.</p>	
10	<p>People Matters</p> <p>a) Absence Performance</p> <p>SW updated the Sub-Committee on absence rates in October. He advised that the trend for short-term absence did not fall in the</p>	

	<p>month & there was an increase in long-term absentees to 10 cases in the month. This has resulted in a predicted outturn for 2008/09 of 10.6 days on average compared to a target of 9.5 days.</p> <p>LMcB explained the actions being taken by managers with the support of the Employee Relations Manager to tackle short-term absence. Clear communication is being put in place for staff with unacceptable levels of absence.</p> <p>For long-term absence, LMcB advised that 3 categories of absentee had been identified, with the most serious category being subject to the capability procedure. Whilst Northwards will comply fully with DDA & is sympathetic to the needs of unwell staff, she advised that staff with long absence may be unable to fulfil the terms of their contract of employment. In such cases, capability was the last resort.</p> <p>MM commented upon the coverage in the media that day on doctors issuing Well Notes instead of Sick Notes; the presumption being to identify what work people are capable of doing rather than simply excluding them from the workforce.</p> <p>Members noted the current absence performance in October & cumulative position for the year to date.</p> <p>b) Job Evaluation Update: Confidential Report</p> <p>(Heading should remain on public minutes, but actual minute recorded separately in Confidential Minutes)</p> <p>SW gave a update on the final set of job evaluation (JE) reviews. The original interviews resulted in 6 appeals, of which 2 were withdrawn & 1 post being evaluated in recent interviews. Of the remaining 3 appeals, 1 has been dismissed after an appeal hearing with the Chief Executive, 1 has had further work on the role undertaken & 1 is still pending. The Neighbourhood Services Officer appeal hearing is scheduled for 9th December.</p> <p>A revised structure chart, subject to the outcome of appeals, was appended to the report</p> <p>SW advised that , to obtain assurance & to protect Northwards from any future challenge, he is considering arranging for an Equal Pay Audit. Four Equal Pay Claims, which go back to the period of employment with the Council, are being handled with advice from Northwards' solicitors. These cases are currently stayed & unlikely to be heard by Tribunal until Summer 2009.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted progress with Job Evaluation & Equal Pay Claims.</p>	

11	<p>Business & Delivery Plan 2009-2014</p> <p>SW reminded Members of the request from the Board to consider the current Plan & to comment upon relevant sections as part of the review & refresh for 2009-14 Plan. Accordingly, he had included in the report the "Our Organisation" section which is within this Sub-Committee's remit.</p> <p>RL noted that Health & Safety needs to be added to teams under leadership of the Director of Business Support. SW invited further comments & advised that Area Panels were consulted in November & that a specific Area Panel/ Tenants Associations event is organised in January.</p> <p>Sub-Committee noted the process to develop the Plan for approval by the Board in March 2009 & Members undertook to provide comment.</p>	
12	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>a) Article on Forced Marriages</p> <p>RL advised Members of recent media coverage concerning Northwards' extension of the domestic abuse policy to include honour violence & forced marriages. This was noted.</p>	
	<p>Date & Time of Next Meeting: 27th January 2009.</p> <p>To be confirmed, subject to Board decision in January on new Sub-Committee structure.</p>	