



Somerset County Council

Submission for Team of the Year

INTRODUCTION

The financial circumstances at Somerset County Council have been well publicised during 2018-19 and we have clear plans that are delivering financial balance. This submission describes the role of the HR & Organisational Development team in delivering and in many cases leading change programmes that are not only linked to our financial programme, but are also improving organisational performance and service outcomes. This is a team that has had to deliver its own share of financial cuts, totalling £2.5m since 2015 and equivalent to 40% of its 2015 spend.

The results are clear. HR programmes have led directly to cost being removed from the council through effective use of technology, policy and innovation, whilst also leading to year-on-year improvements in staff surveys. The HR-OD team continues to demonstrate exceptionally high levels of skill and engagement, compassion and innovation, championing the employee and focusing on improving lives. For its performance and influence over the past 12-months in the face of huge organisational pressures, this team is being nominated for the PPMA's Team of the Year award.

CONTEXT

Somerset County Council

Somerset County Council is an upper-tier authority, with a revenue budget of c. £320m and c. 3,500 staff. Reductions in funding over 10-years have seen £143m of savings and efficiencies, with £26m delivered in 2018-19.

HR & Organisational Development

The HR-OD team delivers a comprehensive service to Somerset County Council and external clients. There are five areas within the team: HR Advisory, HR Policy & Projects, Organisational Development, Resourcing and HR Administration & Payroll. This structure includes a business partner model.

The budget for the service is c. £2.8m, which includes the learning & development budget and income of £1.4m from external clients. The headcount for HR-OD is c. 80 people.

HR-OD has been set its own ambitious savings targets since 2015 and has not only reduced its budget by £2m, but overdelivered in each year. Its savings target for 2019-20 is a further £500k.

TEAM ACHIEVEMENTS

The new People Strategy for Somerset County Council was launched in June 2018 and can be viewed using this link: <http://online.pubhtml5.com/fuxz/fgcx/#p=1> . It was compiled

following workshops across the whole authority, using feedback from c. 700 colleagues, and directly supports the authority's vision of Improving Lives in Somerset.

Staff Surveys also demonstrate continued improvement. Not only do we see year-on-year improved feedback from staff, but the HR team appears at the top of the table in terms of positivity of response and completion of appraisals and learning & development.

Financial Programme

The more recent challenge has been on financial sustainability. Working in partnership with managers across the organisation and the Business Change team, HR focused on delivering in the following areas:

- **Establishment Control** – accurate workforce data is an elusive practice for many large organisations. The HR Admin & Payroll team, working with the Finance team, ensured that managers and the senior leadership team could challenge on budgeted costs and where savings could be made. A direct outcome from this is the work with our Children's Social Care team, and a reduction in establishment costs of £1.5m in 2019-20 through the identification of unfilled vacancies and workforce planning.
- **Restructurings** – Whilst this may be seen as 'normal business', the number and complexity deserve a special mention and includes front line services such as children's early help and libraries. The team also run a voluntary redundancy programme, with over 150 applications approved since April.
- **Financial Capability** – the OD team has managed a programme of compulsory financial management training for all managers, as a core competence run in conjunction with the Local Government Association.
- **Policy & Practice** – Application of policy has realised financial benefits. An example of this is removing £70k of car-user claims, where criteria had not been applied by managers. Not a popular task. We also led on the proposal and consultation of 2-days compulsory unpaid leave. This was rejected following a ballot, however the programme was instrumental in getting the message on finances to all staff. A voluntary scheme was introduced instead.
- **Engagement** – The Director of HR-OD, working with the Chief Executive, presented to over 800 staff during September and October. Effective use of our networking tool ('Yammer') was made, with questions and comments answered directly by the Director. Weekly strategic meetings were organised with staff representatives, in addition to service area consultation meetings.

Business Partnering

A business partnering approach in particular with our Adults & Children's Services continues to realise excellent results. The team, for example, has run programmes focused on team & manager development across both areas with good feedback. One of the products coming out of this work is the rollout of a 'Leadership Attributes' Framework, designed to support organisational design work in 2019-20.

Technology

Somerset County Council launched an ambitious Technology & People Programme, in 2017-18. The HR team has seized this, including the following improvements to its own use of technology:

- **Training** – the IT training team support to the technology programme has enabled teams to run with the new technology, supporting improvements to our front-line services.
- **Sharepoint** – a programme has started to place all personnel records on Sharepoint. This is a result of the ambition of the HR Admin & Payroll team, to create the paperless HR department.
- **'Chatbot'** – Our Policy & Projects team is developing a Chatbot, to support staff to access the numerous wellbeing programmes across SCC and ultimately work across all HR policies, guidance and advice.
- **Payroll** – introduction of e-processes for all payslips, claims and correspondence, directly supporting the reduction in the HR budget. E-Payslips alone will save c. £30k in postage each year...
- **E-Learning** – the team continues to expand the use of e-learning, with over 17,000 modules completed this year.

Resourcing

2018 has seen the Resourcing team continue to make improvements to how SCC attracts and engages with candidates. A strong social media presence sees advertising across a number of platforms. The team also led the design of a new 'brand' for SCC, using our in-house design expertise (who also designed the look of our People Strategy).

We constantly review our approach to recruiting in key areas, such as Children's & Adults' Social Care. Innovations include 'Try Before You Apply', where prospective candidates are invited to visit us before applying. This has resulted in a 100% application rate from those who attend.

Young People Strategy

Our OD team leads on apprenticeship recruitment & development, which again has made great progress in 2018. We now have over 200 people working under the apprenticeship framework, including new hires and those developing skills. SCC has also just launched an accredited management programme (ILM 3), enabling the levy to be spent in-house.

CONCLUSION

The HR & Organisational Development team has performed outstandingly in the face of significant organisational challenge (the most difficult I have encountered in my career). It has not only made a major contribution to the financial recovery of Somerset County Council but has also led on programmes to improve performance & culture across the organisation and county. These programmes are working, as demonstrated by feedback from staff and partner organisations and for these reasons, the team deserves recognition as the PPMA Team of the Year.

APPENDIX ONE – SELECTED FEEDBACK ON THE TEAM

1) Peer Review

“Within SCC we saw many examples where the council was building capacity through its people. The council is proactive in terms of its approaches to staff engagement, empowerment and development.”

“All of this is being drawn together through the draft people strategy which has three key outcomes in mind in terms of the council’s workforce: becoming great leaders; realise their roles in improving people’s lives; and making use of technology and different ways of working to be more collaborative and effective.”

2) Michelle

Amidst all of the urgent financial imperative work going on at the moment it is easy to lose sight of some of the really important BAU stuff that carries on beneath the surface, keeping the wheels of the organisation turning and service delivery on the road. I just wanted to take a brief moment to highlight, to you and to Pat by copy, the extraordinary work that Michelle has been doing to support a number of very challenging HR cases in Transporting Somerset over the past few months. We’ve had a really torrid time over the past year in this service with a large number of serious illnesses and difficult HR cases requiring Michelle’s specialist skills and it is no exaggeration to say that the service would not have been able to cope without her support.

I have always been very impressed with the HR casework function, and the support that Jo, Rebecca and others provide to me and my teams is consistently excellent. They work very hard covering a huge number of staff these days, with an ever increasing number of service changes to support. But Michele’s work on over the course of this year has gone above and beyond even this very high standard. The effort, skill, judgement and compassion she has shown is one of the most impressive things I’ve witnessed in over 10 years working in this organisation. Working in extremely difficult, emotional and stressful situations she manages to balance a compassionate, patient and sensitive approach with an underlying focus on business needs and performance. She is hugely respected and valued by both the employees she is working with, and the managers she is supporting. She has had a very positive and significant impact at a personal level for a number of employees who have been struggling with some very difficult illnesses and mental health problems over the past year.

As you will know from your culture work, the Transporting Somerset management team are a fairly gruff and unforgiving bunch, with a pragmatic operational focus that doesn’t always value the softer side of people management. They are not quick to praise but they would all echo the above sentiments and have been extremely grateful for Michele’s support over the past few months.

3) Adults Social Care

I have really valued your support and encouragement over the last few weeks. Your methodology and all round positiveness has added real value to us. You are right it is really good to have the evidence from the performance figures supporting all the hard work the team has put in place. I am very proud of the way South Somerset has engaged with all this work. We are looking forward to the next phase and how we can refine what we are doing well and also to the next Development day.

4) ICT

A really big thank you to everyone, that have made the training possible over the past couple of days. This was delivered in an engaging and enjoyable manor, that certainly captured the attention of the staff involved. It is crucial we manage our staff and look after them in the correct manner; especially around sickness management and performance. These are crucial factors with massive financial impacts not only on the service but also wider authority.

5) Early Help Services

I would like to record my formal thanks to Rachel Overd, HR Officer, whose support and guidance has been absolutely excellent throughout this process.