

EMPLOYEE SKILLS, LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Committee name	Finance and Corporate Services Select Committee
Officer reporting	Suzie Horn – Central Services Directorate
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

This report provides an overview of the Council's Learning & Development (L&D) Function and the work they are doing to ensure employees have the necessary skills and development opportunities enabling them to be successful in their roles and support residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee note the contents of the report and provide any comments to officers as appropriate.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Talent is a vital enabling factor in the HR strategy. As a fundamental part of the HR strategy, talent is key for us to deliver services to residents. Through a review of the needs of the Council at present, taking into account the expected needs in the future, current macro economic and wider labour market challenges, talent attraction, development and retention is critical.

A clear plan of talent needs, talents that need to be bought in and talent that needs to be grown will help ensure the right skills are available in the Council at the right time. This will also provide career paths for employees and aid retention of skills. There are a variety of different methods used to ensure that employees have a comprehensive talent offering.

With a skills shortage being experienced throughout the labour market, but acutely in the public sector, there is a need for a comprehensive learning and development offer to attract and retain employees. With a broad, encompassing plan and foresight the aim is to reduce the impact of the skills shortage in years to come.

Induction

The L&D team continually monitor and adapt the induction offer for new employees joining the Council. Whilst during the pandemic it was essential to move training and induction online with sessions held remotely, now officers have the opportunity to review the effectiveness of this and adapt the approach to different learning needs.

Following a review of current process, a new face to face induction session for all new employees on permanent contracts has been launched. These sessions are introduced by Tony Zaman and includes presentations from CMT members and the Head of HR as well as other Council services to provide new starters with information relating to:

- Working in a political environment
- Hillingdon's Strategy, aims and commitments
- Our people strategy, performance management and expectations of employees
- Employees benefits
- Local Government Pension Scheme
- Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the Employee Wellbeing offer

Research shows that an effective induction supports new employees to better understand the organisation, their role and organisational values allowing them to become productive more quickly. Further existing research suggests that induction is clearly linked to employee retention. Therefore, induction is a crucial foundation to the engagement and retention strategy.

In addition to an in-person induction session, Learning Zone (the Learning Management System) also has a number of mandatory modules that employees must complete. Through a recent upgrade managers can now monitor compliance with the induction programme and meet probation expectations.

Plans are also underway to develop a specific induction programme pathway for all new managers, whether new to the organisation or newly promoted. This will consist of essential masterclass programmes including Performance Management, Managing Difficult Conversations and Employee Relations. This ensures that all new managers have the necessary skills to succeed within their role.

Performance Management

A recent relaunch of the performance management process encourages all employees and managers to meet regularly to review personal objectives, consider barriers to their achievement, discuss workloads, wellbeing as well as development needs. These objectives are linked to the overall Council Strategy. Managers are aware that these development needs are met in a range of ways, and that a formal training course is not the only option available to them. Shadowing and coaching opportunities enable employees to learn from their peers to develop service specific skills.

Identified training needs will be used to formulate a Corporate Training Calendar. These requests are currently being collated; once the training calendar is finalised, it will be shared with Managers and employees to enable them to book on to or access specific learning.

L&D are also reviewing all courses available through the Learning Zone to refresh and expand the offer of generic or specialist courses available to employees, to include programmes on offer and funded through the Apprenticeship Levy.

Early Careers

The Early Careers strategy considers the various options available to attract and develop new joiners to the Council which is fundamental to growing the own talent in hard to recruit areas. It is a key lever in tackling the skills shortage being experienced at present. Through the use of Early Careers initiatives now future skills shortages can be softened.

Apprentices have been used across the organisation since the introduction of the Levy in 2017. Since this date, over 586 of Hillingdon Council and maintained school's employees have successfully accessed this type of learning. Developing a 'grow your own' culture is important to

the success of this initiative and many apprentices have already successfully been appointed into permanent positions in the Council. This is an area that will continue to be developed to identify new areas of the Council which could be supported by Apprentices and ensuring the Council stay up to date with new apprenticeship standards.

Apprenticeship Levy funding can also be used to upskill existing employees and 79 employees have accessed an apprenticeship programme since 2018.

Last year, T-Level students were introduced to the Council, working with the local college provider. This is an approach that is being enhanced for 2023/24, aiming to provide opportunities for up to 10 T-Level students. Working with SMTs officers are currently identifying teams/ services where these roles will be situated with the possibility of designing a rotation scheme enabling these students to experience different services within the Council. The intention is to develop these young people and encourage them to apply for Apprenticeship vacancies at the end of their programme of learning.

Interns and Graduate programmes are areas of development for the L&D team, with the first intern due to join Hillingdon's Waste Service in October 2023. Again, work with SMTs is being undertaken to approve these routes into learning and identify placement opportunities.

To fully maximise the apprenticeship levy investment, thus ensuring money is not being sent back to Central Government unnecessarily, officers are also regularly engaging with Hillingdon maintained schools to increase the number of new apprenticeships and completions.

Talent Development and Succession Planning

A focus moving towards the end of 2023 is to complete a full succession plan of the top four levels of the organisation allowing a greater understanding of skills and experience already within the Council. This will also allow clarity for succession plans for critical roles and inform development programmes for specific individuals.

Furthermore, the process will also identify potential top talent who have potential to be the next leaders of the future. Once identified development plans need to be put into place to develop and retain the individuals.

Research shows that there is a clear link between having a diverse workforce and improved performance, decision making and effectiveness.

Combining effective talent and succession planning with an understanding of the diversity of the current management structures will allow Hillingdon to engage positive action in recruitment and development activities to address inequalities and increase representation, where it is appropriate and relevant to do so.

Understanding the diversity of the workforce will allow for programmes to be developed to meet the needs of those with different skills and experience.

Management Development

There is an established link between management capability and productivity of the workforce. It is therefore essential that managers have the necessary skills to lead teams and services. Reviewing the data from the Talent and Succession Plans, a range of qualification programmes

are being compiled to support their development. Utilising funds from the Apprenticeship Levy wherever possible is key and offering a range of Management programmes from Level 3 (First Line Managers) to Level 7 MBA programmes removes any costs to the Council. Programmes such as these also allow employees to learn with employees of other organisations which allows them to see other perspectives.

The quality of the training provision will be monitored and an application process will be formalised for all management apprenticeship programmes, ensuring that employees are committed to completing the programme of learning. These successful employees will then be used to mentor future students.

Supplementing these qualification programmes with Hillingdon specific learning will create a well-rounded management development experience; ensuring that managers are fully versed on the Hillingdon ways of working and processes, as well as being clear on expectations of being a manager.

Training on topics such as understanding bias in decision making, cultural competency and creating an inclusive workplace will be important elements of this. Embedding cultural change and attitudes in creating a diverse and inclusive workplace will need to be supported by senior leaders.

Masterclasses around Finance, Complaints Handling, Understanding Data and HR policies will ensure that managers are given all the skills needed to succeed in their role. Developing skills in providing feedback to employees will encourage good management practices.

A separate Management & Leadership programme is in development to ensure that managers have access to just in time learning around HR policy and processes.

Learning Zone

The Learning zone system enables employees to access learning at a time suitable to them. The externally hosted system provides employees with a suite of online learning which can assist with their development needs. The site is also used to promote face to face learning programmes and webinars collating employee training records.

Upgrades to the Learning Zone system will provide an integration between Learning Pool (the Learning Management System) and ResourceLink (the HR and Payroll System). This will allow the systems to interface removing the need to maintain 2 systems and allow employees to log in through single sign on.

The refreshed system will also allow greater ability to create programme learning paths specific to job families, enabling enhanced monitoring and reporting of compliance and programme completion. This enhanced function will enable Managers to monitor their team's training activity and promote learning programmes to support their employee's development.

Accessibility for all

The learning and development offering needs to be fully inclusive and supportive of the HR strategy. All employees need to have equal opportunity to grow within their role and the learning available needs to be accessible to all. This means using a variety of different learning methods and technology as tools to develop employees.

Officers will continue to combine this with the early careers work to support vulnerable people to access supported employment opportunities, for example Project Search and supporting Care Leavers.

RESIDENT BENEFIT

Residents will benefit from a corporate training programme that supports the development needs of the organisation enabling employees to offer excellent customer service. Upskilling managers will ensure that Hillingdon's greatest resource feels valued and supported which will, in turn, ensure a more engaged workforce 'putting our residents first'.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.