

HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT REVIEW

AGENDA ITEM No. 17

MEETING: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

DATE: 23 OCTOBER 2019

REPORT BY: MANAGEMENT TEAM

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update regarding the HR Services currently provided by Durham County Council and decide on a preferred option for the future provision of HR support.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Town Council entered into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Durham County Council to provide HR support on 18 August 2016.

2.2 The current agreement is renewed on an annual basis on 1 April and a notice period of 3 months would be required in writing from either party to terminate the agreement.

2.3 There have been a number of staff changes and reviews at Durham County Council with the HR service provided to the Town Council moving to the schools section. The members of staff on this section whose responsibility is the Town Council account work on a part-time basis which has caused a number of problems and delays over the last year.

3.0 Current Situation

3.1 As DCC provide a HR service for several Town and Parish Councils in the area they are trying to get everyone onto standard policies to make it easier for them (DCC) to assist when a problem occurs. This in itself is causing problems as DCC are very risk averse and have many more processes than the Town Council have had in the past. DCC policies are also not bespoke to Town Councils and do not reflect the very different staffing and management structures in place. As a consequence, although adopting 'standard' policies makes it easier for DCC it is certainly not making it easier for the Town Council, indeed it has complicated and prolonged every issue that they have been contacted about.

3.2 To be clear the Town Council were not breaking any laws nor falling foul of any employment legislation in the past, it appears that DCC start the process assuming any matter will already go to employment tribunal and insist on many additional stages that may be required by a large authority but are largely impractical and superficial at a Town Council level. The additional burden requires many more officers at a senior level who are able to take on these duties than the Town Council has available.

- 3.3 The policies DCC propose as 'standard' are always tailored to fit, as much as is practicable, to the Town Council requirements. At times it is very difficult to come to an agreement, as they are the HR provider and support services the Town Council have had to defer to DCC.
- 3.4 Delays in responses has at times put undue pressure on staff to then respond and complete investigations within the specified timeframes. Delays in responses regarding policy queries mean delays in putting policies to the Review Sub-Committee with amendments, certainly in the latest instance, received only an hour and fifteen minutes prior to the actual meeting even with many follow up emails and phone calls and a deadline being specified.
- 3.5 Management Team consider it is no longer appropriate to continue with the HR SLA with DCC as the service which was initially agreed is no longer being delivered. Members are requested to consider terminating the current arrangement, giving notice on 1 January 2020 and sourcing HR support from another provider.

4.0 Impact on Great Aycliffe Town Council.

- 4.1 It is essential that the Town Council have an effective and timely HR response to staffing queries to ensure there is no cause for concern, nor any matter progressing to industrial tribunal by default.
- 4.2 The delays and complicated policies and procedures are making it difficult for staff to keep matters on track and are inevitably drawing issues out much longer than would have happened in the past.

5.0 Policy Implications

- 5.1 Conforms to assisting the delivery of the following council aims.

Aim 1 "To provide good quality governance and management of the Council".

Aim 2 "To manage the Council's finances and assets in a responsible manner".

6.0 Staffing Implications

- 6.1 More time is being taken up with HR matters, this is being exacerbated by lengthy and complicated policies.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 Any agreement that may be entered into in the future will have a financial implication. At this time the cost for the last financial year was £1,155.00 at £60.00 per hour as and when required.
- 7.2 It should be noted that DCC have not yet submitted all bills for the last financial year and are not very efficient at billing promptly, so it is difficult to monitor the hours used and billed.

7.3 Although the previous SLA was retainer based and substantially more expenditure at £7,200.00 the Town Council received a much better service with more work being undertaken in a timely manner, tailored to the Town Council's needs and responses were received generally on the same day and no longer than 4 days. Work would be undertaken on an evening or weekend to ensure a prompt response was received. This also included at least a quarterly visit, often more, for a half to a full day where any member of staff could discuss any issues and attendance at committee meetings.

7.4 Although the cost of the retainer based SLA was higher this was a much better service and better value for money that actually assisted the Town Council staff.

8.0 Crime and Disorder Implications

8.1 None.

9.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

9.1 None.

10.0 Environmental Implications

10.1 None.

11.0 Risk Assessment

11.1 It is not considered that the matters contained in this report pose a risk to health and safety of staff or to the financial or public standing of the Council to a degree that a risk assessment should be appended to this report.

12.0 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

12.1 Is any personal or sensitive data required for this proposal which may have any implications for GDPR? **NO**

13.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Members:-

- 13.1 receive the report and consider the content;
- 13.2 consider whether to continue the SLA with DCC or investigate other providers.