

Staffing review

Background

1. A staffing review has been a feature of recent budget discussions, and was proposed by the Hoey Ainscough report.
2. There is a budget allocation for salary costs arising from a staffing review.
3. There is a dearth of useful data for any review to be based upon. No effort appears to have been made in the past to apportion staffing costs to lines of work. Nor has any effort been made to identify which work adds value, which work is the cost of being in business, and which work is waste.
4. Councillors can not, from published accounts alone, distinguish between the costs of being in business, and activities that deliver value. They will always, therefore, struggle.
5. An effective staffing review will require data as to what work is being done, and whether that work adds value, is part of the cost of being in business, or is waste.
6. No data being produced means that there is no evidence of outputs or costs that is capable of being benchmarked, either over time or against peers.
7. All this having been said, any staffing review should be appropriate and proportionate.

Recommendation

1. That council consider the suite of papers under this heading and make appropriate recommendations to council.

Pay Profile

1. The Pay Profile of an organization is, broadly speaking the gap between the highest and lowest paid members of staff in an organization, the distribution of employees within that profile, and the relationship of employees to the mean salary.
2. These are significant issues for larger organizations, where there is often pressure to publish Chief Officers pay and emoluments, and to enable them to be compared to mean pay for the organization.
3. It is important to remember that Berwick Town Council is a small organization, where all employees are employed on established pay bands, related to spinal column points, with incremental progression within bands, subject to performance appraisal.
4. It is also important to remember that comparators based on gross income figures, as opposed to hourly rates, can be confusing if the total pay of part time employees is used as part of a comparison with the total pay of a full time employee.
5. Nevertheless, the use of an easily quoted benchmark can contribute to public understanding of the pay profile of the organization, and can contribute to transparency without disclosing actual figures.

Recommendations

1. That council adopt two pay profile benchmarks:
 - a. The ratio of the highest pay point attainable by the lowest paid employee, expressed as an hourly rate, to the highest pay point attainable by the highest paid employee, expressed as an hourly rate, and
 - b. The ratio of the actual hourly rate paid to the highest paid employee compared to the mean hourly rate for all employees.
2. That these rates, and the projections of them for the coming year, be published as part of the annual budget process.

Gender mix

1. Any work touching upon the self identified gender of employees is fraught with difficulty in an organization as small as BTC. Bluntly, the risk of publishing data is that individuals may be identified from any published data which would be a breach of confidentiality.
2. Nevertheless the council has a clear equalities duty to demonstrate that it is aware of its responsibilities to provide equality of opportunity, not merely by stating its policy but by monitoring its outcomes.
3. Again, a sense of proportion is required. BTC can and should check its employment policies and procedures on a regular basis, preferably by having them reviewed by an organization with sufficient expertise. However, it should also be aware, when recruiting, of whether there are sufficient grounds to consider applying a gender related exception to equality rules. This can take more forms than positive discrimination; it may be that options such as offering family friendly policies such as job share or flexible working might address any perceived imbalance with regard to gender and the workforce.

Recommendation

1. That any committee or officer approving a recruitment advert or process be required to certify that they have considered the existing gender balance, any barriers to recruitment, and have taken any necessary steps to ensure that recruitment is fair and provides equality of opportunity.

Cost of being in business as a proportion of precept

1. Some long serving members may remember that during last year's budget debate some members referred to a figure they described as the proportion of precept being spent on staff costs.
2. Without commenting on that debate it highlighted the lack of data as to cost allocations. It also highlighted a lack of clarity between activities that add value, and activities that are part of the cost of being in business.
3. Collecting this data is part of the staff review proposed above. By extension, it provides an opportunity to aggregate the data on staffing costs, with the other costs of being in business, to provide a figure, expressed as a percentage of the precept collected.

Recommendation

1. That the figure of cost of being in business as a proportion of the precept collected be calculated as part of the budget process, and published as part of the budget papers.

Proposed definitions of roles and duties

1. Civics
2. Admin
3. Allotments
4. Parks and play areas
5. Advice and supervision
6. Projects and regeneration
7. Finance
8. Audit
9. Accounts