

**CITY AND COUNTY OF CARDIFF
DINAS A SIR CAERDYDD**

Employment Conditions Committee: 16 October 2006

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive

Update on Work Life Balance Strategy

Background

1. The Works Council of 14 June, 2006 received a presentation by Chwarae Teg on the Work Life Balance strategy and outlined a range of key partnership working opportunities for the Council.
2. This report outlines the background to the project, provides an understanding of Work-Life Balance principles, outlines the preliminary work already undertaken and proposes how this can be taken forward in the Council. This report will be supplemented today with a presentation by Hayley Dunne, Business Development Manager, Chwarae Teg.
3. In terms of background, the UK Government in 2000 began to review options to support parents and employers, with the aim of making it easier for parents in work to balance their home and work responsibilities. The Government wanted to enable more people to work flexibly and sought views on a number of topic areas in this regard. The result of these consultations was the Right to Request Flexible Working Regulations under the 2002 Employment Act.
4. In Wales, the Assembly Government wanted to promote flexible working in as broad a way as possible, both with large and small organisations throughout Wales. Their aim was to embrace all employees including parents. They facilitated this through Chwarae Teg and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA). The success of these activities led, in 2003, to the Work-Life Balance Pilot Project (to be managed by the WDA) and the development of the Work Life Balance (WLB) in Wales Website (partnership between Welsh Assembly Government; Chwarae Teg; WDA and ELWa).
5. The funding for all the activities was provided by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). The WLB Pilot Project, was set up to work with large public sector organisations and was managed by Chwarae Teg between April 2002 and March 2005. One of the key objectives in the Chwarae Teg WLB Strategy 2005-2008 is to work with Local Authorities, raising awareness and increasing take up of Work - Life Balance / Flexible Working initiatives.
6. Work-Life Balance is achieved when an organisation and its workforce work together to identify benefits for both, through establishing a more flexible approach to working practices. The approach is also reason neutral i.e. the individual employee's reasons for wishing to avail of WLB policies / flexible working arrangements, will not be taken into account when considering their request. This approach supports the ethos that Work-Life Balance is available to all employees and not just those who can demonstrate caring and / or parental responsibilities.

7. Organisations that are committed to Work-Life Balance:

- recognise that effective practices to promote Work-Life Balance will benefit the organisation and its employees
- acknowledge that individuals at all stages of their lives work best when they are able to achieve an appropriate balance between work and all other aspects of their lives.
- highlight the employer's and the employee's joint responsibility to discuss workable solutions and encourages a partnership between individuals and their line managers.
- develop appropriate policies and practical responses that meet the specific needs of the organisation and its employees, having regard to:
 - fairness and consistency
 - valuing employees for their contribution to the business, not their working pattern
 - monitoring and evaluation
- communicate its commitment to work-life strategies to its employees
- demonstrate leadership from the top of the organisation and encourages managers to lead by example.

8. The benefit for employers could include:

- increased staff loyalty, motivation, engagement and satisfaction, employees feel more valued.
- attracts a wider range of candidates – for example older part time workers and carers.
- can be the added incentive required to attract candidates in sectors where recruitment and retention are ongoing issues e.g. Social Workers.
- can increase productivity
- reduces absenteeism and subsequently costs associated with sickness absence
- cements a reputation as an employer of choice.
- retains valued employees

9. The benefits for employees could include:

- greater responsibility and a sense of ownership contributing to a less stressful work environment
- better relations between management and workforce
- improved self-esteem, health, concentration and confidence
- increased loyalty and commitment
- a reduction in bringing home problems to work and vice versa.
- time to strike a better balance with life outside work.
- greater control of working lives.

Issues

10. Chwarae Teg have worked recently with Bridgend CBC which involved :

- engaging with Members, Managers, Unions and employees
- developing a WLB Strategy and piloting homeworking
- assisting in implementing a nursery voucher scheme
- piloting WLB training for managers

- piloting a Corporate Flexible Working Hour Scheme.
 - promoting partnership working with the Trade Unions.
11. Similarly, with Neath Port Talbot, work involved:
- piloting full/partial and informal homeworking.
 - achieving cultural changes
 - achieving a change of attitude in new office complex project development.
12. In working with Wrexham, Chwarae Teg assisted in :
- piloting team approach on a business case basis
 - removal of core hours and introduction of homeworking, purchasing of annual leave
 - projects in Parks, Highways, Maintenance, Anti-Fraud
 - supporting improvements in turnover and reductions in Sickness Absence
13. Experience and learning to date has suggested that the following approach works well and could be beneficial to Cardiff:
- establishing a working group involving managers and Trade Unions
 - partnership approach with trade unions.
 - equal treatment of staff regardless of personal circumstances
 - benchmarking and employees ownership
 - identification of Work-Life Balance champions
14. Lessons learned include:-
- implementing a WLB Strategy takes time.
 - realistic timescales are necessary
 - early involvement of Trade Unions essential
 - support from top level of the organisation and willingness to take risks by Senior Managers is critical.
15. Some of the tangible benefits to accrue from WLB within these authorities include examples of a significant reduction in sickness absence, up to date inspection programmes, outstanding social services case loads reduced and reductions in staff turnover. The development of Work- Life Balance also fits with the Council's commitment to consider and extend employer sponsored childcare. A report will be considered at January's meeting of this Committee on costed proposals to take forward a childcare voucher scheme.

Proposals

16. In view of the importance of initial awareness raising of WLB, progress since Works Council in June has been made as follows:-
- 14 June, 2006 : Presentation to Works Council
 - 28 July, 2006 and 28 September, 2006: Awareness Sessions for Trade Union representatives.
 - 12 September, 2006 : Presentation to Corporate Directors' meeting
 - 29 September, 2006 : Presentation to Human Resources Development Group

- 18 September, 2006 : Presentation to Accommodation Working Group
 - 16 October, 2006: Presentation to Employment Conditions Committee.
 - October to December: Presentations to Service Area Management Teams. Planned.
17. A Steering Group to guide the project and take strategic decisions and a Working Group to undertake the practical work required will be established by the end of October to comprise Trade Unions and Service Area representatives to take this matter forward within the Council. Pilot projects will be established to review the current Flexible Working Hours Scheme in the light of other schemes and how they are operating. Further areas to be looked at will include homeworking and hot desking as well as revisiting some of the current Family Friendly Policies to ensure continued fitness for purpose.

Investment for Reform/Benefit to service user

18. The implementation of Work-Life Balance will enhance employee motivation and increase productivity which will in turn benefit Service Users.

Council Policies Supported

19. This policy supports the Serving the City – Performance Pillar of the Corporate Plan.

Advice

20. This report has been prepared in consultation with relevant Corporate Directors and reflects their advice. It contains all the information necessary to allow Members to arrive at a reasonable view, taking into account the following advice.

Legal Implications

21. There are none in relation to the overall Policy but individual strategies may require legal advice as they are developed.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. Any future implications arising from the Work-Life Balance Strategy will be considered as these become clear.

Human Resource Implications

23. Implementation of a Work-Life Balance Strategy will have a positive impact on a range of HR issues, including employee engagement, support the Council's Commitment to being an employer of choice, improve relations between managers and employees and will contribute to a number of Corporate Health Standard issues. Specifically, other benefits will include a contribution to a reduction in sickness absence, help retained valuable and skilled employees and can help attract a wider field of candidates

Trade Union Comments

24. The Trade Unions support this initiative and are reassured that WLB will be accessible to all and that requests will be dealt with on a reason neutral basis. The working examples from other local authorities have reinforced to the Trade Unions that WLB is not solely for office based staff with childcare or caring responsibilities. The scope of WLB is much wider and this has been welcomed by the Trade Unions.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

25. It is recommended that:-

- (i) the preliminary work already undertaken to start Work Life Balance discussions be noted
- (ii) appropriate forums be identified so that awareness raising involving Members can take place
- (iii) a progress report be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee

JO FARRAR
ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Background Papers

“Work-life Balance” – Pilot Project 2002-2205 – Evaluation. Executive Summary – Chwarae Teg”