

Category: Employee Engagement

Organisation: Hertfordshire County Council

Date: October 2007

EFA overview

Building on a solid equal opportunities platform which had been existence for a number of years, Hertfordshire County Council saw the Age Regulations as an opportunity to review its approach to age issues and to revitalise its diversity initiatives, including a multi-faceted age awareness campaign.

Initiative

An age awareness campaign – “Making our Mark takes (all) Ages”

Aims and purpose

- To build on existing workforce diversity strategy and diversity branding
- To embrace opportunities arising from the Age Regulations by raising awareness of age issues and embedding diversity.

Business drivers

- Awareness of social and demographic change, skills shortages, low employment and rising pension costs
- Understanding the benefits a diverse and engaged workforce can bring

Approach taken

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) launched its equal opportunities policy “Putting People First” in 1999; by 2004 they realised that both legislation and people’s expectations had moved on. HCC wanted to build on the progress this document had made and increase the pace of change. Significantly they wanted this policy to be made real rather than just exist on paper – this led to the workforce diversity strategy developed in 2005. Both of these documents included age as a key diversity strand.

The strategy is employee centric. Staff designed it and are responsible for delivering it, so the concept had to be one that everyone could buy in to. A diversity brand was created that represented uniqueness and individual contribution. With the symbol of a thumbprint, a perfect symbol of individuality, and the strap line “Making our mark on equality”, HCC created a call to action for all employees.

To achieve the strategy the project team and external consultants (TMP) held focus groups and workshop style events to ensure the work was employee driven.

HCC realised that the experience of staff and customers was vital to the success of the campaign so they used these experiences as visible

testimonials; their photos were used in the advertising campaigns (internal and external), on posters and on the council's website.

A focused and detailed age campaign led on from this, and the diversity brand was refined to 'Making our Mark takes Ages'. The work on this campaign really began in September 2005.

An Age Focus/Steering Group was set up in September 2005 consisting of HR representatives across departments and the legal team. Regular meetings were held from the beginning involving Trade Unions.

In February 2006, a conference was held for HR and managers and the programme included an introductory session to the age regulations; conference workshops explored what managers felt the Council's priorities should be in terms of age. Priority areas highlighted included:

- A review of HCC's retirement age policy
- Benefits e.g. annual leave entitlement & long service awards
- Graduate & leadership programmes and
- Recruitment & selection.

These all fed into the Age Action Plan.

Building on the conference in February, HCC carried out a survey of staff in July 2006 to understand employees' experiences of working for the organisation in relation to their age and what changes would make the biggest difference. Many employees stated that flexible retirement was important to them, along with the fair provision of training opportunities and equal access to promotion. The results from this survey were used to check any gaps in the action plan and to assess the focus for ongoing communications.

In addition to internal communications, external partners (Manpower and Tribal) were consulted to review their age action plans and share best practice in recruitment and advertising.

Barriers

Key barriers identified included:

- Communicating the new policies and practices to over 32,000 staff
- Dispelling managers' concerns over performance management given the decision to operate without a retirement age.

Impact

As a result of HCC's approach to age:

- Recruitment costs have been reduced as a result of reduced staff turnover, now down to 13.1%.
- More effective recruitment as the pool of talent has widened.
- Valuable skills have been retained, and job flexibility increased, heightening the perception of Hertfordshire as an 'employer of choice'
- There have been indications that employees feel more valued and therefore more motivated/committed, which in turn is enhancing productivity.

HCC now employs 520 people over the age of 65 (an increase of nearly 100 from March 2006 to March 2007) and in last 12 months has had 332 new starters over 65.

The council has shared best practice with the local police authority, district councils and other private and public sector organisations and received external recognition as a forward thinking employer

Monitoring

- HCC monitors all recruitment activities by age, allowing it to identify emerging trends and any remedial action required.
- The organisation's age profile is monitored with reports produced twice a year.
- Age is considered when carrying out any Equality Impact Assessments

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