Report to:	MSMTM
Report by:	HOCS Helen Gardner-Swift
Meeting Date:	7 October 2021
Subject/ Title: (and VC no)	Review of annual actions (2020-21) under the Human Resources Strategy VC 157865
Attached Papers (title and VC no)	None

Purpose of report

1.   The purpose of this Committee Report (CR), following the update on the application of the Human Resources Strategy (HRS) (VC121405) in 2020-21 provided to the SMT on 28 October 202, is to review the annual actions under the HRS for the period 2020-21.

Recommendations and actions

2.   I recommend that the Senior Management Team (SMT)
  (i)   notes the annual actions under the HRS for 2020-21 as set out in the Executive Summary
  (ii)   amends the review date of the HRS to August 2022
  (iii)   agrees the publication arrangements as set out in paragraph 19.

Executive summary

3.   The HRS sets out what the Commissioner aims to achieve with, and for, staff at all levels and, in doing so provides a framework for the focus and setting of how the organisation manages human resources (HR) and sets operational objectives and activity to develop people and talent.

2020-21 – annual actions

4.   For 2020-21 in Q3 and Q4, generally, there was continued progress against the HRS and the actions taken in respect of each part of the HRS are set out below. However, it should be noted that:
  • progress against the HRS was affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way we worked in Q1 and Q2
  • HR was managed, as far as possible, in line with the HRS.

Leadership

  (a)   recognising the need for strategy and vision, the Strategic Plan 2020-24 (SP) was taken account of in decision making
  (b)   governance requirements, including human resources governance, have been followed
  (c)   the SMT approved the Operational Plan 2020-21, which included operational objectives related to the management of human resources and the Performance and Quality Framework 2020-21
  (d)   reviewed, monitored and reported on achievements positively, critically and fairly, learning from practice and recognised and acknowledged success

(e)　management training took place but there was no formal leadership training undertaken.

Developing and managing talent

(f)　a Learning & Development (L&D) Plan was approved and in place for the second half of 2020-21, which incorporated updated individual learning and development goals

(g)　updated performance and quality standards and targets were agreed (see below **Performance Management and accountability**)

(h)　there were no new members of staff so no induction training was provided

(i)　in addition to the mandatory training that took place, the Commissioner focused on remote working training
- training for all staff was provided on working from home effectively
- guidance notes on managing various aspects of our IT systems and Microsoft Teams were provided to all members of staff
- all managers undertook training on managing employees working remotely and on mental health in the workplace

Promoting workplace diversity and equality

(j)　in the work of the organisation, there is due regard to the three aims of the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 which are:

- to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- to advance the equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

(k)　mandatory equalities and diversity training was provided to managers, with the staff training taking place in April 2021 (as it was not possible to schedule this in March 2021)

(l)　all CRs included a consideration of equalities impact as a mandatory section

(m)　the Equality Policy and guidance was reviewed as part of the work on the revised Employee Handbook, with the finalisation of the review in 2021-22

Workforce and resource planning

(k)　a risk-based approach is taken to mitigate the risk arising from funding arrangements and this includes taking account of relationships with external stakeholders, having a work-force that concentrates a range of functions in fewer individuals and our ability to fund statutory, mandatory and strategically important functions. Our approach also considers the impact of decisions, policies and business development on resources, including, human resources and workloads.

(l)　the Commissioner was allocated a funding budget of £1,903,00, of which £1,497,816 amounted to staff costs.

(m)　salary costs, the biggest single element of our budget, are derived from the SPCB's terms and conditions. The 2020-21 salary budget was set using guidance

from the SPCB, which assumed a cost of living allowance of 2.4 %. An interim pay settlement for 2020-21 was agreed which amounted to slightly more than 3%.

(n) no recruitment was carried out in 2020-21

(o) the SMT monitored and reviewed key workforce statistics, such as staff in post, staff turnover and absence and sickness levels

Communication

(p) we aim to have an organisation where regular, open and constructive communication is used, encouraged and embedded in our policies and practices, where possible, and recognise the importance of good staff relations and effective communication with staff

(q) the quarterly all staff meetings resumed in November 2020 and, following the expansion of remote working, regular team meetings took place.

(r) all members of staff can access the agendas, papers and minutes of meetings of the SMT (information is only withheld from staff where the relevant exemption(s) in the FOI Act or the EIRs would apply if a request were to be made for the information or where a duty of confidence is owed to a third party)

(s) following the temporary closure of the office premises from 23 March 2020 staff were regularly updated by the SMT and the HOCS on a range of matters, including the temporary closure, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our regulatory work and the work that we were able to undertake, additional HR policies, the expansion of remote working and guidance on/sources of wellbeing support.

(t) all members of staff were able to work remotely from the third week in August 2020 and following this regular team meetings and managers' meetings with individual team members took place by phone and then by MS Teams (once this was in place)

(u) general staff communications were issued via all staff emails.

Performance management and accountability

(v) there are robust staff governance and management policies and systems in place that should ensure the performance and development framework is applied consistently to all levels in the organisation. A proportionate performance management system is also in place.

(w) the Performance and Development Framework was reviewed as part of the work on the Employee Handbook and this work was completed in Q2 2021-22.

(x) due to the temporary closure of the office premises as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and, also, the fact that not all staff were able to work remotely until August 2020, in Q1 and Q2 it was not possible:
- to set personal objectives for each member of staff
- to agree personal development plans with each member of staff
- for all line managers to carry out regular one to one performance management discussions with members of their teams

(y) in Q3 and Q4 ongoing performance management discussions were able to re-start continue (as far as was reasonably possible) using updated objectives and personal development plans based on those that had been in place for 2019-20.

(z) managers were also required to undertake performance management discussions on a monthly basis and, in these discussions, were also required to:

- reflect the challenges that members of staff may be experiencing when working remotely and indicate the support available to help manage these challenges
- take account of and support the wellbeing of members of staff who are working remotely

COVID-19 pandemic

3. Our priority as an organisation has been to continue to provide key services and guidance within available resource while safeguarding the health, safety and wellbeing of all members of staff.

4. Since closing our office premises on 23 March 2020 and putting in place our business continuity arrangements, we have worked to maintain operational output within the constraints imposed by limitations on access to office systems.

5. We have also worked to keep all teams, supported and connected and have emphasised physical and mental wellbeing and emotional support in the regular updates provided to all members of staff.

6. We have strong governance in place, can demonstrate sound and transparent decision-making and have expanded our remote working capabilities while safeguarding the connectivity and security of our digital network. All members of our staff can work remotely. We have also ensured that our finance processes and procedures are maintained and secure. We will continue to adapt to the new ways of working and carrying out our responsibilities.

7. HR been managed, as far as possible, in line with the HRS and, where any changes needed to be made, the SMT were advised of these by the HOCS.

Audit 2020-21

8. The HRS provides for proportionate and risk-based workforce planning although we do not have a stand-alone document entitled "Workforce Plan". There is also an effective management reporting system to enable the SMT to monitor and review key workforce statistics.

9. Following the audit in 2020-21, the auditor has recommended that the Commissioner should develop a formal stand-alone work force plan, in addition to the work force planning that is undertaken under the HRS. The auditor is of the view that this may assist in the Commissioner in delivering their functions over the medium to long term.

10. Subject to sufficient resource being available, a "Workforce Plan" will be considered and developed in 2022-23, in conjunction with a review of the HRS with the aim of this being put in place in 2023-23. The planned review of the HRS was due to take place in April 2021 but this has been delayed due to the impact of other work priorities. In order to take account of the work relating to the intended Workforce Plan, the review date of the HRS should be amended to August 2022.

Risk impact

11. The HRS supports achievement of our HR governance objectives and, also, mitigates the risk of not managing HR in support of strategic aims and objectives.

12. By recognising that HR will continue to be managed, as far as possible, in line with the HRS but that changes may need to be made to take account of the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way we are working, mitigates the risk of not following the HRS or following an ineffective HRS.

Equalities impact

13. There is no direct equalities impact arising from this report. However, in undertaking HR management, managers should have regard to any relevant equalities issues that arise, and their impact on a member of staff, and seek guidance (as necessary) from their Head of Department or from the HOCS.

Privacy impact

14. There are no direct privacy impact issues arising from this report.

Resources impact

15. HR will continue to be managed, as far as possible, in line with the HRS but changes may need to be made to take account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way we are working and there may be a related resource impact. At this time, it is not possible to quantify any such impact.

Operational/ strategic plan impact

16. By recognising that HR will continue to be managed, as far as possible, in line with the HRS but that changes may need to be made to take account of the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way we are working, will try to ensure, that as far as possible, we are following an HRS which supports strategic aims.

Records management impact (including any key documents actions)

17. None.

Consultation and Communication

18. Publication of MSMTM minute

Publication

19. This CR should be published in full.