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| Committee: | Administration and Regulation Committee | | |
| Date of Meeting: | 01 October 2020 | | |
| Subject: | Early Years Team OCA | | |
| Report Author: | Carol Wylde | | |
| Contact Officer: | Carol Wylde | Tel: 01582 548213 | |
| Implications: | Legal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Community Safety <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | Equalities <input type="checkbox"/> | Environment <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | Financial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Consultations <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | Staffing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Other <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Wards Affected: | N/A | | |

Purpose

- The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of the Administration and Regulation Committee for the proposed changes to the staffing structure including downsizing of the Early Years Team within the Education Service.

Recommendations

- Administration and Regulation Committee is recommended to approve the post deletions and changes and implementation of the new staffing structure as outlined within section 5 of this report.

Background

- As a result of significant savings to be made by the Council, the Education Service is seeking to make savings across the service. Many teams within the service will be affected, including the early years team.

In order to meet the wider savings target, the proposal includes a reduction in the budget for the early years team of £52k by 2021/22. The service is also partly funded by income from other services within the council and from schools and other education providers. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic means that much of this income will cease resulting in an additional shortfall of approximately £56k. Prior to the pandemic, there were concerns about the sustainability of this income which is why the proposals have been developed to ensure that the team is sustainable without over-reliance upon additional income.

In order to achieve the savings required the early years team will need to undergo an organisational change to reduce the number of posts.

Report

- The proposal is to reduce the size of the team in order to meet the budget savings required. The intention is to retain the basic structure of the team in order to be able to provide a core service to early years providers and schools, mainly meeting the statutory duty of the Local Authority in respect of early years.

There will be a challenge to maintain the service to early years providers and in order to achieve this the team will review the nature of the support offered. It is likely that there will be a reduction in the level of support offered to early years providers with most of the support being limited to providers who have an inspection with an outcome that is less than good. There is likely to be a reduction in the amount of preventative work undertaken by the team which may result in an increase in the number of providers who are judged to require improvement or be inadequate.

If the proposals are not implemented then the budget will be overspent.

The Early Years Organisational Change proposal was shared with staff on the 22 July 2020 following consultation with DMT on the 21 July and Trade Unions (Unison, GMB and Unite) on the 22 July. Feedback from the meeting with the Trade Unions was supportive. They felt that the team had been well supported and prepared throughout the process and that the service was doing all it could to mitigate the impact of budget cuts. Trade Unions were reassured that the appropriate processes would be applied if redundancies have to be made. Staff were kept up to date informally about the OCA prior to the beginning of the formal process. Once the formal consultation started, staff in affected posts were invited to a formal consultation meeting. Most staff took up this offer and engaged in discussion about the proposals.

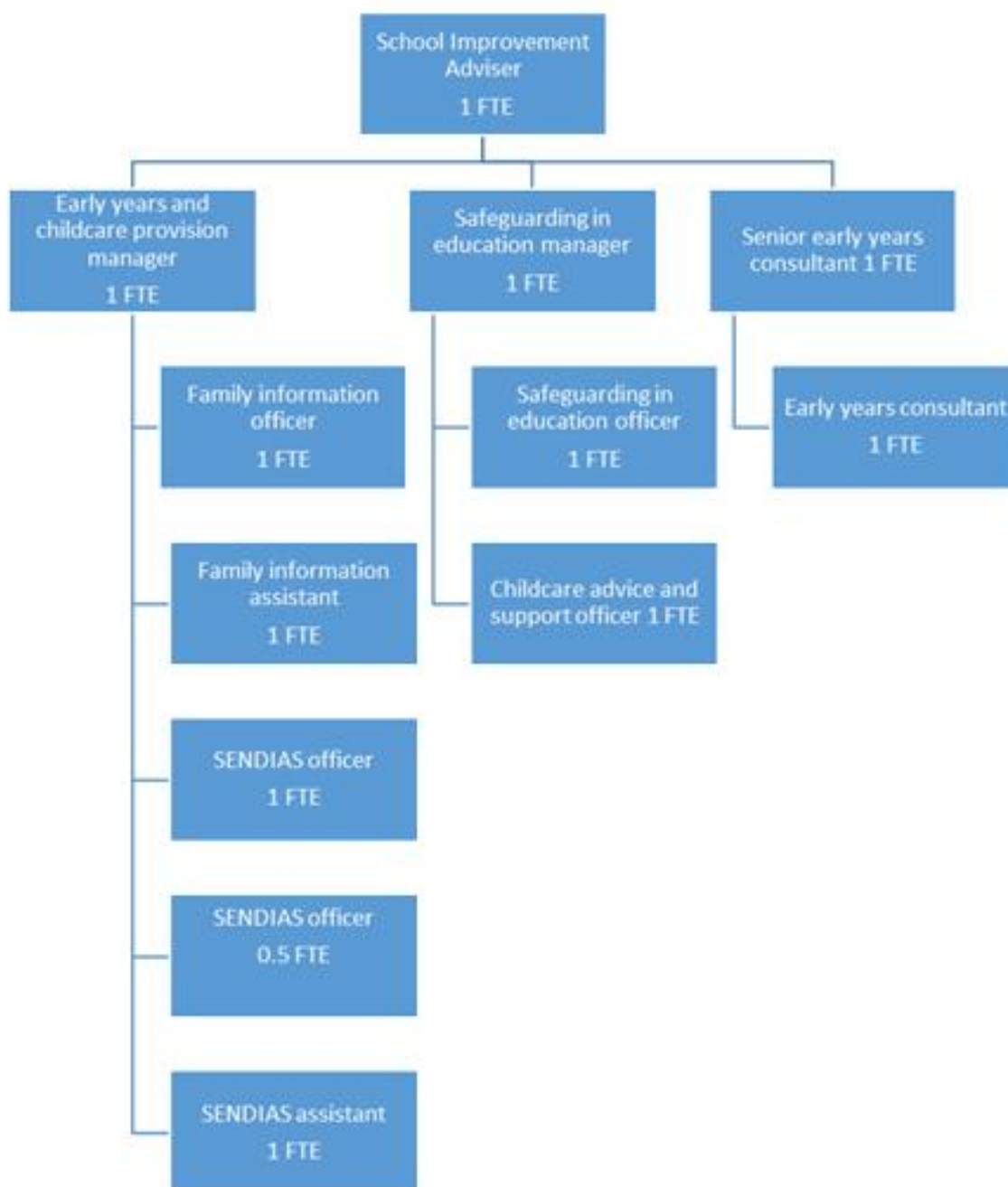
The process has been supported by the Council's HR team and the Council's Organisation Change Procedure continues to be followed throughout this organisational change/to implement the changes.

Proposal/Options

5. The current structure of the team is shown below. Posts in red boxes are at risk due to downsizing. The post in pale orange is affected by an increase in hours. Posts in green are unaffected:



The proposed structure of the team is:



Whilst the capacity of the childcare advice and support officers and early years consultants is reduced to 1 full time equivalent of each, there is no assumption that the posts will be filled by an individual on a full time contract. Part time working / job shares would be considered for both posts. Appointment will be pending successful interview and the person with the highest score will be able to choose the hours they would like to do. The remaining hours will be either allocated to the second highest scorer or split between them. This will be outlined in more detail in the implementation plan.

The senior early years consultant postholder has requested a reduction in hours to 0.9 FTE which has been approved and implemented outside of the consultation.

The proposed increase in the safeguarding in education post reflects the increased level of demand for support across the whole education sector, extending beyond early years. Childcare advice and support officers will be ringfenced to apply for this additional 0.5FTE post. The job description for this post has been updated to reflect the changes to the scope of the role and this was reviewed by the Job Evaluation panel and regraded from L7 to M1.

The Family Information Service is not within the scope of this proposal as the service will become responsible for the administration of childcare funding from September which requires additional capacity to fulfil the statutory function.

It is proposed to:

- Reduce the total capacity of early years consultants from 1.8 FTE to 1 FTE
- Reduce the total capacity of childcare advice and support officers from 2.5 FTE to 1 FTE
- Delete the vacant Early Years and Childcare Workforce Development Officer post (0.88 FTE)
- Increase the capacity of the safeguarding in education post from 0.5 FTE to 1 FTE

Feedback from the consultation was that staff understood the reason for entering into a consultation and recognised that there was little option to avoid the downsizing. Naturally staff were concerned about the process that would be used to achieve the necessary reductions and HR guidance has been shared. There was also a concern about the Council's ability to provide the required support to schools and the early years sector in improving outcomes for children, in particular with regard to early literacy. This is a particular concern given the proposed reductions to the Flying Start service. The early years team work closely with this service and there is a risk that significant reductions to both teams will have a detrimental effect on outcomes for young children, in particular those who are disadvantaged.

There was a query regarding whether the Childcare Advice and Support post should sit alongside the Early Years Consultant post rather than within Safeguarding. This was considered but it was decided that it would be better to remain in its current position.

To achieve the reduction in the overall capacity of the team voluntary separation was offered to affected colleagues. One colleague applied for this which is now being considered under the Voluntary Redundancy process. One member of the team has applied for a job elsewhere and, subject to satisfactory checks, will be leaving the team before the end of the year.

It is proposed that the organisational change proceeds as planned, subject to approval. If the required reductions are not fully achieved through voluntary redundancy and staff moving on there will be a process of ring-fenced interviews. Employees at risk of redundancy will be offered the opportunity to be redeployed to suitable alternative roles within the Council. Implementation will then be supported by the HR service.

Appendix

6. An Integrated Impact Assessment has been carried out but due to the small number of employees affected it has not been included in this report as the employees could be identified. No issues were identified.

List of Background Papers - Local Government Act 1972, Section 100D

7. Not required.

Implications

| Item | Details | Clearance Agreed By | Dated |
|-------------------------|---|--|-------------------|
| Legal | The proposals have the potential for 2 compulsory redundancy/redundancies. In the event that compulsory redundancy is necessary, there is the possibility for an internal appeal to officers and the Council could also need to deal with any potential Employment Tribunal proceedings. | This report has been cleared by Jasbir Josen, Solicitor in Legal Services. | 15 September 2020 |
| Finance | The proposals are delivering savings of £20k in 2020/21 as part of the approved emergency budget. The savings increases by an additional £32k in 2021-22 and in total £52k savings will be achieved by 2021-22, contributing to the overall savings target for the Children, Families and Education Department. | This report has been cleared by Atif Iqbal (Finance Business Partner), on behalf of the Service Director for Finance | 16 September 2020 |
| Equalities | IIA has been carried out. Due to the small number of employees affected and to protect individual confidentiality an Integrated Impact Assessment has not been attached to this report. Overall, there is no noticeable impact on individuals or a groups with one or more protected characteristic. | Maureen Drummond, Interim Equalities Manager | 16 September 2020 |
| Environment | | | |
| Community Safety | | | |
| Staffing | Should there be no suitable alternative employment through the redeployment process, the proposals to reduce the number of posts may lead to up to 2 post holders becoming at risk of compulsory redundancy. | This report has been cleared by Angela Claridge, Service Director of HR & Monitoring Officer | 9 September 2020 |
| Consultations | | | |