

Managing Employment relations – on the job training task

Word count - 791

Provide approximately 800 words which details how your organisation has been affected by the recent global pandemic of COVID 19. Examples could include furlough of employees, updating your remote working policy, maintaining regular communication update across the workforce, increase in sickness levels from key workers, a huge ramp-up (such as delivery drivers) or decline of work activities etc.

Tai Tarian is a housing association with responsibility for over 9000 homes throughout the Neath Port Talbot and Swansea valleys, with approximately 520 staff who are a mix of office and community based. The employees consist of several trades, which include Electricians, Carpenters, Plumbers, Painters and Roofers to deliver work on the tenants' homes to ensure it delivers on its organisational goals of getting all the homes up to a set standard set out within government legislation and guidance. The coronavirus pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on the working practices of the organisation.

Over half the organisations employees have been furloughed throughout the pandemic when the guidance has been to work from home and lock downs imposed. Emergency works have been carried out in homes but only in extreme cases - such as to provide work to boilers or electrics to ensure the safety of the tenants. The organisation was able to provide a top up of the government funded furlough scheme to allow all employees furloughed to receive their normal full pay. Those who were not furloughed were encouraged to work their hours flexibly around family commitments due to home schooling of children and any caring responsibilities and were also given 2 days extra annual leave as a thank you.

At the start of the pandemic an "Incident management group" was created with a group of Senior Managers who met on a regular basis throughout each week to assess the latest government guidance and the organisations next steps - to devise a plan to keep staff safe and comply to the latest government guidance. This group would then provide regular updates to staff through email of what was going on in the organisation.

A staff Facebook account was set up to encourage staff communication, along with encouraging managers to have daily check-ins with their teams via zoom or skype video calling. Working groups were devised across the organisation to discuss how, when and what would happen when restrictions were changed, encouraging staff across the organisation to take part to gain varied views.

Overnight the office staff were turned into “home based”, IT equipment was provided wherever possible, although some staff were asked to use their own equipment until the organisation could source new laptops for all to work from home. The development of a “home working” policy was devised with considerations of DSE assessment for Health and Safety Regulations. The pandemic has seen an increase in the demand for the housing, with increased need for support with benefits income due to tenants losing their jobs and incomes due to the effects of the coronavirus across the country. Many people have been made redundant and lost their jobs due to business closures. This in turn has put a high demand and strain on those working from home as Tai Tarian provides support in these circumstances. The organisation has been lucky not to have had to make any redundancies and has continued to recruit as needed (although not as much as in normal circumstances).

Throughout the pandemic there has been an increase in absence rates across the organisation in comparison to the previous years, with a substantial increase in those absent due to stress, anxiety, and depression. To try and support employees through these difficult and strange times the organisation provided training provision and created a group of “mental health first aiders” of staff across the organisation, encouraging staff to reach out as and when needed. There was a focus on well-being strategy’s, encouraging staff to reach out to the organisations Employee Assistance Program(EAP), and training of managers and staff on coping mechanisms, reliance techniques and dealing with stress full situations.

The organisation has asked staff to complete regular questionnaires to establish how the employees are coping in these times, largely highlighted from these has been the feeling of isolation amongst staff. This is not a surprise and unfortunately hard to combat with so many restrictions and lockdowns in place, the organisation has sent little gifts to employees’ home address’, such as, chocolate at Easter and personalised drink bottles and thank you cards from the Chief executive for employee’s hard work and commitment.

The organisation has also tried to encourage positive staff moral by encouraging staff to speak out about any concerns they have, either via their line manager or through a confidential email process that is provided by the organisation. The pandemic has affected everyone in some way , but no experience the same, home circumstances often dependent on experiences. Some employees have lost family, friends and the organisation has lost tenants and sadly lost staff to the awful disease. The effects are something that not only the organisation, but the world will see for many years to come.