

Best HR team

Winner

Torus



Torus is a housing and regeneration group based in the North West of England, owning and managing 22,000 homes and housing 45,000 customers, and is one of the largest developers of social housing in the region.

When Torus formed, it had around 1,000 staff. Two-thirds of these perform frontline roles in neighbourhoods, directly supporting vulnerable customers or maintaining homes. The remaining workforce perform back-office corporate roles including IT and transformation, finance, legal, communications and business assurance.

But just three months after it formed, the company found itself facing financial problems.

“The government’s announcement of a 1% rent cut per year for four successive years may have been great news for customers, but could have been potentially catastrophic for Torus as its primary income for rent. The rent cut, coupled with ongoing benefit changes, meant that suddenly Torus was facing a significant financial threat,” said Penny Aspden, director of OD at Torus.

While an ambitious and innovative OD had been established ahead of Torus being formed, the threat facing the business meant that the team had to rebalance the group’s financial position, as well as protecting the business, customers and staff.

It was Torus’s 16-strong OD team who pioneered the change process.

The first building block was to create a single set of policies for Torus; the number of policies were streamlined and the length of individual policies reduced. Leaders attended briefing sessions hosted by the team and were given an ‘ask’ in terms of how to engage their teams with policies. The outcome was a leadership with succinct guidance,

autonomy, and a true recognition of the diversity of the business.

Another key step was developing a suite of systems. The team identified complementary software which integrated with the core system, creating a seamless recruitment, onboarding and absence management experience for job candidates, employees and leaders. An additional benefit was flexible access to on-the-job learning and an unautomated absence management system, allowing OD business partners and leaders to spend more face-time with people on added-value activities.

Having these systems not only gives the team more flexibility over the data they can supply, but helps to streamline the business approach.

One of the most challenging, and culturally sensitive, tasks for the team was its implementation of new terms and conditions. Two pay structures and a set of terms and conditions were replaced with a single Torus approach and new contracts issued. A move to spot salaries and market benchmarking was made, and a consistent approach developed across the business. Staff were also encouraged to use Yammer to

ask questions and air their concerns. It was a brave move, but a vital one in promoting transparency and trust. And it has been worth it. The outcome is a single, modern and flexible pay and benefits structure that rewards people equally for doing the same job, and an all-round fair, consistent approach to terms and conditions, removing the risk of equal pay claims.

The final challenge was focusing on building capability against the backdrop of large-scale cuts. Despite the need for efficiency, Torus continued to enable all employees to access professional study. It introduced Litmos Heroes in 2017, meaning that colleagues were given quick access to learning at any time. Succession planning has also been given greater emphasis. “The process has allowed us to identify a cohort of stars, who alongside their colleagues will benefit from a new approach to learning and development called Today and Tomorrow,” Aspden said.

Fast forward to the present, where the OD team have overseen a restructure and change programme affecting 850 staff, contributed to an overall cost reduction of £17 million over four years, fostered a unique ‘we are one’ culture, and achieved IIP Gold Recognition.

Our judges felt that Torus was a fantastic example of the power of simplifying and starting over, and praised it for acting in a clear, distinctive and business-orientated way. It might have been tough, but as one judge said, Torus “undoubtedly turned the dial on the organisation”, and in doing so showed us exactly what an exemplary HR team looks like.

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