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Respondent: I had grabbed a couple members of the staff or so and asked somebody to get some of the information for me, but then I just had to tweak it a little bit and add to it. So, I just finished it before, but it’s up to you. I could always send it to you after the meeting, if that’s okay?

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s great.

Respondent: Because I did want to ask a couple of things, that’s probably why I’ve not sent it back actually.

Interviewer: That’s no problem.

Respondent: Just reminding myself why I’ve not bothered.

Interviewer: (Laughs) No, I appreciate your time, don’t worry. Do you want to ask those things now or shall we pick them up as we go?

Respondent: Yeah, it was just, well, it’s in relation to obviously the data that you’re asking. I’ve sent an email clarifying about the managers, which is fine, but when we’ve gathered the information, so I can… I suppose it’s in relation to the first question. Which is total number of care staff employed, when we answer that question we tend to not include our casual workers. Just because we see they’ve not got formal employment contracts, blah, blah, blah.

But then I think later on where you’re asking how many staff with zero hours, I’m assuming you want them in there, because we would put our casual workers on that line. So, I’m assuming you’ve got your analysis of your total care staff and then the three subsets of them.

Interviewer: Yeah, please.

Respondent: The senior care workers and other staff, and then further down you’ve got different types of contracts. So, to add in our casual workers in that I’m assuming you want it in the top, as well, and then it’s all subsets of the same number?

Interviewer: Please, yeah.

Respondent: I’m assuming that.

Interviewer: That would be helpful.

Respondent: So, that’s fine, I’ve got them… when they were given to me they didn’t have it and I’m thinking, no, they need to add up to the same number. So, I’ve added them in, so that’s fine.

Interviewer: Brilliant, thank you, okay. So, I won’t ask you the detail then about how much you pay per hour, because you’re going to send me that back. I’ll just ask you the, sort of, how you go about pay setting and reviewing and that kind of stuff, is that okay?

Respondent: Yeah, that’s fine. Just on the pay, oh, in fact, if we’re not going into the detail…

Interviewer: You can do if you want to, it’s up to you.

Respondent: No, it’s fine, because it’s fairly straightforward. Where you’ve got number of staff on guaranteed hours, what do you mean by…

Interviewer: Right, so that’s guaranteed versus zero, it sounds like although your casual staff are zero. Some people use zero hours as, sort of, full staff, not just casual staff. But they might have staff who are guaranteed 15 hours or 30 hours a week and they might have staff on zero hours. So, they’re not necessarily casual, you know, they work a lot, but they’re not guaranteed any hours. As opposed to some who might… it might be 15, it might be 30. But they know they’re going to get that.

Respondent: So, in that category of the form where you’ve got your zero hours, your guaranteed hours, your minimum hours and your permanent contracts, they’re all exclusive from each other. So, if our staff are either zero hours or they’re on permanent contracts, they’re the only two boxes I’m filling. Or you could potentially have people on permanent contracts who might be on minimum hours or guaranteed hours. I’m not sure whether you expect any overlap in them.

Interviewer: So, it does depend a little, but if you only use zero hours for casual staff, I would just say everybody else is guaranteed hours then. But they might be full time or they might be part time, but they’re guaranteed. So, guaranteed minimum is the same thing for you then, essentially.

Respondent: Yeah, it is. On this draft I’ve got, we’ve got the same number in guaranteed and permanent because they’re all permanent and they’re all guaranteed because they’ve got permanent contracts. But I just wanted to clarify the definition, really.

Interviewer: But, you see, some places would class zero hours as permanent. You obviously don’t, you’ve got them as casual, but you can be permanent and zero hours. So, you’re permanent, but you’re never guaranteed a particular number of hours. So, it just depends on how you work things.

Respondent: Yeah, that’s fine, I’ll just put a couple of notes on when I send it back, so that we’ve got… it’s clear what our definition is. It’s fairly straightforward, just a couple of queries.

Interviewer: So, all yours are permanent apart from your casual and then you’ve got a range of full-time and part-time contracts within that permanent group?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then you only rely on your causal staff from time to time, they’re not a core part of your workforce?

Respondent: Well, our casual staff, we use casual, so, we have… yeah, you can have a permanent role with us for 30 hours a week and you can also be signed onto our bank, where you do more hours than that.

Interviewer: And would that be casual then? Bank is casual?

Respondent: Yeah, we tend to use the term bank if it’s… but it’s the same thing. Bank if you’ve already got a contract with us and you’re doing extra, versus casual, where you don’t have any permanent minimum or anything, contract with us, and you’re on zero hours. But our use of bank and casual staff will happen every week, week in, week out. Having said that though, we don’t have… you know, because we’ve got so many, quite often people move from casual to permanent.

But some people just want casual, it’s not, sort of, an imposed by us sort of thing, it’s people want that flexibility and freedom to decide when and where to work. Some people will work quite regularly, but don’t want a permanent contract with us. I mean ideally some of our regular casual staff would just have a permanent contract with us because it would be easier. We’ve got so many vacancies.

But they don’t want that, so we do offer people to switch over, but some people just want to work on that basis. So, I suppose from our point of view, knowing how we operate, we don’t see zero hours as negative really. It’s just they’ve got the option to choose when to work, how much, it’s not, sort of a, we’ve put people on zero hours because we don’t want to offer contracts.

Interviewer: So, for your staff the zero hours would be their choice, essentially, largely?

Respondent: Yeah, and it is definitely that, yeah.

Interviewer: Right, okay, so, we got a bit out of sync there, so can I take you back to just tell me a bit about your business? About the kind of care you provide.

Respondent: So, we provide a range of care. There’s supported living tenancies, we have day centres, we have respite. So, we focus on providing care for people with learning disabilities and dementia and older people, as well. So, that’s, kind of, our core client groups.

Interviewer: But you don’t have homecare, as such? You don’t go into people’s homes? It’s more day care?

Respondent: We do a little bit under, sort of, community support, under our supported living umbrella, really, and registration. But we don’t do, sort of, going into someone’s house, doing half-an-hour’s personal care, we don’t do that, we’re not in that market at all. So, we do a little bit of community support, as it complements some of our existing services, but we don’t have… not a lot, really.

Interviewer: And so, are you local authority funded?

Respondent: We are, yeah.

Interviewer: Wholly?

Respondent: We do have some self-funders, so we do have some people with direct payments, some self-funders, but predominantly we’ve got a block contract with the local authority covering all those services I’ve just mentioned. But in any of our services, I mean maybe or mainly in the day centres, that’s the main place where we have most of the places are commissioned under the block contract by the local authority. But we have a few spare places that we can sell outside that, as well.

Interviewer: So, forgive me, I’m more familiar with other forms of care than this one and certainly saying domiciliary care, block contracts are quite unusual, it’s much more spot contracts. So, is the day care services that you offer, is that block contracting a common thing?

Respondent: It is.

Interviewer: And why the difference then?

Respondent: Well, I’m saying it’s common, it’s common to us, we’ve always worked like that.

Interviewer: Is it [LA]?

Respondent: I’m not sure about other contracts. It’s [LA].

Interviewer: [LA]? Okay, that’s interesting, I haven’t come across that before, I’m wondering why the difference. But I’ll go away and try and find out why that’s block contracted, when other things are not.

Respondent: Well, we’re in a block contract for all our services, it’s one contract and we’ve had that since we spun out from the council in [year].

Interviewer: You’re a spin out? Right, okay.

Respondent: Yeah, we’re a spin out, so that’s the background to it.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting, I didn’t realise that, okay, that’s interesting. Okay, so, just give me… I know it’s all on the form, but just so I know while we’re talking, give me an idea of the size of your workforce.

Respondent: Well, this is obviously focused on care staff, isn’t it? We have about 250 people, sort of, our care workers and similar posts, really. Like I say, we’ve got about 300 budgeted posts, in total, but that includes managers and infrastructure-type posts, as well.

So, yeah, I suppose we’re reasonably large, really, like I say, we have supported living types, about 50%, I’d say, roughly of our business, as in the value of our business, our turnover. So, obviously that’s 24/7 support and, yeah, we’ve got six day centres, so, we’ve got staff across all of them, a respite service, which is in another building, and a dementia-type respite service, which is in a part of one of our existing buildings. Well, the building I’m in actually.

So, yeah, and this is all across [city], so we’ve got centres all across [city], really.

Interviewer: Okay, that’s really interesting, thank you. I’m just going to have a quick look at my questions. In terms of your workforce what is the breakdown, sort of, gender-wise, age-wise?

Respondent: I’ve not got that to hand, to be honest. Predominantly female, I’d say about… I’m trying to think of our gender pay gap information. Probably about 80% female, 20% male. Age, got quite an older workforce, a lot of the people… I think because we’re part of the council, a lot of the people transferred over from the council and they’ve worked in the positions for a good number of years, really.

So, if we were looking at our age profile, say over 50, we would have quite a high proportion. I’ve not got the exact figures to hand, but we’re definitely over 50% of people would be over 50. So, we do have quite a lot of people that are retiring, you know, each year, really. I think a lot of our recruitment now is we’re not focusing on young people, but it’s good to get some younger people in, really.

Just because of just continuity of services, really, like I said, we do have a lot of people retiring year in, year out, to be honest. But yeah, it’s predominantly female and predominantly, sort of, older females, really. A lot of people doing not full-time hours. So, you know, 30 hours is fairly common, 25-30 hours is quite common.

We do have some people on full-time hours, but a high proportion is less than full time.

Interviewer: And that’s their choice, again?

Respondent: Yeah, their choice.

Interviewer: What about ethnicity? How diverse is your workforce?

Respondent: I would say, again, unfortunately I’ve not got stats to hand on that, I didn’t realise you was having… maybe I’ve missed something.

Interviewer: I don’t need exact proportions, just, kind of, a sense of how varied it is.

Respondent: It’s quite a low level of diversity I’d say, really. We just actually… some of the information we have on that, we’re trying to gather again and refresh really. A lot of our information dates back to the council and it’s not… it could be better, I think, some of our analytical data on our workforce, really.

We’re just actually moving onto a new HR system, so we’re gathering all that. So, to be honest, I might be able to give you some information after the call, really.

Interviewer: Yeah, it would be good if you could.

Respondent: But yeah, again, predominantly, you know, if you looked at, sort of, the main… I suppose the main, sort of, element of our workforce would be white females over 50. That’s just… but certainly some of our newer recruits there is a lot more diversity. Sort of, current recruitment, applications, there’s a lot more people applying from different ethnic backgrounds. People with visas, people from overseas, so, we are seeing a lot of that, which I think is quite common, to be honest, at the moment.

Interviewer: So, I was going to ask you about international recruitment, are you doing much of that?

Respondent: We’ve done some. I wouldn’t say much, I think we get a lot of applications, but quite often they don’t tend to progress into anything either. You know, I don’t know whether some people are applying for a lot of jobs and because we’ve not had so many vacancies it’s been really difficult. You know, it makes it a much bigger exercise recruiting, and then you’ve got a lot of applications and you’re having to go through them all.

Interviewer: But you are able to sponsor people on visas if you want to recruit?

Respondent: Yeah, I don’t think we have sponsored anyone on visas, no.

Interviewer: Okay, so, just to go back to pay, can you give me a rough idea?

Respondent: To be honest, no, I think there’s one that we’re looking at, at the minute, who I’m not a big expert on that, our HR person would be, but unfortunately she’s taken leave, so she’s not in today. Otherwise she would have been on the call. But we’re just looking into one, who’s an existing employee, and we are looking at, sort of, that side of things really.

Interviewer: Right, but that’s new to you so far?

Respondent: Yeah, it is.

Interviewer: Okay, so, just thinking about pay then can you give me a sense of your pay rates? Do you have care worker, senior care worker, and what rates do you pay them?

Respondent: So, some of our rates, people are protected under TUPE, so, they’re protected at local authority rates. But our rates for any new members of staff for [organisation] and what we advertise at. Care workers it’s £11.29 per hour, obviously, and sort of, senior care workers would be £12.56.

Interviewer: Okay, and what is the difference in skills, qualifications, experience, between care worker and senior care worker?

Respondent: So, senior care workers tend to… see, we only have them in certain areas of the structure, I suppose. Well, I’m just trying to think. So, in day services, that’s an easier area to explain, really, there’ll be the senior care worker will have more… I wouldn’t say line management duties, because that would be the assistant manager. But they’d organise rotas a bit more and get more involved in organising the activities and the working arrangements for the day.

Certainly training, the obviously mandatory training would be the same for care workers and senior care workers. So, it is just slightly more senior responsibilities, really, for the senior care worker.

Interviewer: And it’s not linked, say, qualifications, a level of qualification gets you a senior-level job?

Respondent: Well, that’s what we’re moving to, but I wouldn’t say that would be the position at the minute. But we are moving to that. We’re just doing a bit restructure, to be honest, so we’re, sort of, in the… we’re setting out minimum qualifications for each level of support worker. Like I said, we’ve only got the two, but we then have assistant managers and managers. And we are linking that to, sort of, training and qualifications.

Interviewer: And what would you expect at each level?

Respondent: To be honest, I don’t have that information, I probably need somebody else on the call to answer.

Interviewer: No, that’s all right, don’t worry.

Respondent: To answer these sorts of questions, really.

Interviewer: No, that’s all right, don’t worry. So, in terms of your pay rate, what influences? I know TUPE staff are different, but that £11.26 or whatever it was, what influences how you set that rate? How do you make that decision?

Respondent: So, well, last year… things have got a bit complicated with our pay rates. So, we’ve always… well, we haven’t always, but generally we’ve mirrored the local authority pay increases. So, say, a couple of years ago that went up by 1.75% and ours went up by 1.75%, before that it was 2.75%. So, we’ve generally mirrored that. Now last year our intention was to, sort of, break away from that, which we can do. We can do for our TUPE’d staff, as well, we’re not bound by pay awards after the TUPE.

So, we can do that, but in the end the actual… the local authority actually funded us to actually apply the pay award to all our staff, which was a local authority pay award. So, it was quite a big increase last year, it was actually a flat rate of £1,925. Which is quite a big increase. I mean our lower level, I mean that was applied to every post, every position and grade within our business, so care and non-care infrastructure.

But sort of, at the lowest levels you’d be talking, sort of, you know, a 10% increase basically, 9%, 8%. And obviously that’s the local authority pay award is based on negotiations between unions and the local government association, taking into account economic factors and etc.

So, we do have quite a significant union presence, really, certainly more for the staff who TUPE’d across, rather than new members of staff, I think. And I think it just stems from a local authority environment, doesn’t it? There’s quite a high union membership in local authorities.

Interviewer: Is that [union]?

Respondent: It is, yeah. So, we have a recognition agreement with [union], so they played quite a big part in, you know, asking the council to fund it and their aim was to get obviously the local authority pay award for every employee of [organisation], basically.

So, this year, again, it’s not entirely sure, we’re going to see what happens, again, with the local authority pay award. But we are in this position where it’s quite… we found last year it’s quite difficult for us to go away, to go on our own. There’ll be a lot of input from [union] on that, I think if we tried to do that again, I suppose. So, we’ve just got to see what happens, really. I think they’ve not settled yet, so they’re still in negotiations.

Interviewer: And then it depends, also, what the local authority does about funding it.

Respondent: It does, yeah, because, you know, it’s very… our message to Unison last year and this year will be very, very clear that we wouldn’t be able to afford that level of pay award. Unless we received that uplift in the contract. So, it’s quite a complicated… it’s a very complicated arrangement with us and the local authority. Like I said, sort of, last year, we couldn’t have anticipated, I don’t think, what happened last year.

But because, I suppose, the difference from last year to previous years, in previous years, you know, due to the economical situation pay awards were relatively low, to be honest. So, it was 1%-2%, that sort of figure we’d be paying anyway, so it was quite easy to match. Last year was the first year where there was no way, as a company we would have been able to fund that pay award.

So, we were in the position where we had to break away from it and that’s when [union] and the council stepped in and there was a lot of toing and froing on that and discussion and negotiations. But they did contribute to the funding of it.

Interviewer: Okay, that’s really helpful. Then thinking a bit more widely beyond pay, what other benefits or rewards do you offer?

Respondent: Well, yeah, obviously we’re a foundation living wage, but that’s in relation to pay. We have… well, for new members of staff, they’re on 23 days leave, plus bank holidays, so that’s higher than the statutory minimum. We do try and accommodate, sort of, flexible working requirements in relation to shift patterns. Obviously a lot of our support worker roles are in… day centres, because they’re Monday to Friday, which is good. But certainly supported living and respite services are 24/7 services.

So, ideally people are working shifts and they’re working them on a rotating basis, but a couple of years ago to help out with recruitment, probably about 18 months ago, we did offer different shift patterns. Days only, evenings, nights only, weekends only, even. So, we do that, our standard working week is 36 hours, and we do pay shift allowance on four rotating shifts, I know a lot of care providers don’t unless it’s evenings and things like that.

Interviewer: And how much would that be?

Respondent: On new members of staff? If they’re doing rotating shifts, so this is a full rotation of evening/weekends, it’s 12%. If it’s nights only, it’s 5%, and if it’s days we don’t pay a percentage on top. So, yeah, what else?

Interviewer: Sick pay and pensions.

Respondent: Sick pay… well, pensions we offer access for new members of staff to People’s Pension. At the minute we do a 4% contribution, so it’s a matched contribution, 4% and 4%, rather than the minimum of 3% employer and 5% employee. So, we do the 8%, but a matched contribution.

Sick pay, yeah, I think it’s quite good with sick pay, in the first year we do do SSP only, but after that it will go to one month’s full pay, one month’s half pay, two months’ full pay, over the next three years. So, I can check it, but the maximum is three months’ full pay, three months’ half pay, after four years that would be.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Which, again, is quite good, really. We are actually looking at our, sort of, rewards and benefits package at the moment, we’re just about to do a survey, just to see. I mean I suppose our focus has been always in paying a good hourly rate. I mean that’s really where we want to be and we want to be, you know, sort of, I suppose, leading the local market in the pay, in our pay rate.

That has been our focus, we’re a not for profit, and I think because we do focus on that and paying an hourly rate, we have, I suppose, a small budget for anything above that. So, you know, some of the niceties or other benefits, we don’t have a range of benefits like access to staff discount schemes and things like that, or anything like that. We don’t have additional life insurance or anything like that.

But we are actually doing a bit of a survey on that just to have a look at whether there’s things that we can offer, which would help people out, really. And I’m thinking the types of things that are not going to cost us a lot of money, but will help them, like the paying for goods over 12 months, salary sacrifice type things, really.

So, we’re exploring that in a bit more detail, but that’s over the next two to three months. And we’re going to reach out to staff and just see what their views are on it and what would mean something to them. But we are going to put that in the context of our focus, really, and where we want our money to go is on paying a good hourly rate, you know? And that’s day in, day out, isn’t it? Every week, that’s what helps them.

But that does mean that we’ll be fairly limited in any other perks and things that we’ve got the money to pay for. But it’ll be interesting to see what people’s views are on that.

Interviewer: Yeah, it will.

Respondent: We do, sort of, obviously under tax rules you can give what’s classed as trivial gifts. So, we tend to do a £25 voucher at Christmas, we’ve done that the last couple of years. We used to have an annual awards event, which was… well, the drinks weren’t paid for, but the event was with a buffet and that and awards. But that stopped when Covid started and we’ve not gone back to it.

I’m not sure whether we would do or not, we’re going to revisit that as part of this survey, but we do a £25 voucher at Christmas and we’re an employee-owned organisation. So, if you want to be you can have a £1 share in [organisation], which gives you certain voting rights. But we’re going to be… we’re relaunching that, we used to have an employee-owner board and people would be classed as employee-owners if they owned a share. We’re relaunching it a bit into a staff partnership, so, again, that’s just about to happen, sort of, in the next month or so.

So, we’re looking at things for that, really, like if you’re having a monthly draw and things like that, if you’re an employee-owner, with small gifts. And if you’re one of the representatives you’ll get an extra day’s leave. So, we’re just looking at some benefits linked to that.

Interviewer: Is there big uptake of employee ownership?

Respondent: We’ve got about 70% of people. I think it could be higher than that, I think probably what’s happened is I don’t think we were getting the best out of that, our internal arrangements on the employee-owners, the reps. Which is why we’re relaunching it with new representatives, a new director. So, we’re expecting it to increase, to be honest.

Yeah, so, because we want that engagement, really, we want to benefit from that engagement and we want people to feel part of the business. But yeah, we’re about 70%, I think that will easily increase, we used to have a rule about you could only be an employee-owner when you’d finished your probationary period. Whether that’s six months or 12 months, but we’re actually removing that now.

So, it will be as soon as you join you can become an employee-owner, so I think that will, sort of, increase the numbers, as well, really. And we want to just get that engagement right from the start.

Interviewer: Okay, that’s really interesting. Just moving on slightly now, you’ve mentioned a few times you’ve got lots of vacancies, so, can you talk a little bit about your recruitment and retention position and challenges?

Respondent: So, yeah, we’ve got about how many… 48 vacancies in care, at the moment. I would say it’s hovered around that level for quite a while now, to be honest, a good 12 months plus. It’s been quite difficult. I think just the current issues in social care market and social care being probably not an attractive career to go into, so we’ve got that. And then we’ve got… as I said, we’ve got an older workforce, as well, and people are retiring and leaving. Generally people that leave us don’t… are retiring or they’re doing… we don’t have a big turnover of staff in relation to people, that you do get in care. Where you’ve got that constant people starting, then people leaving.

We don’t tend to have that, we’ve only had… I’ve got some information on leave. I think we’ve had 17 leavers over the past 12 months. Which is not really a lot, in care.

Interviewer: And that’s mainly retirements, or a lot of that is retirements?

Respondent: Retirements, yeah, I think so. Let me just have a quick look. It’s just been difficult, it’s really difficult to recruit, and we’re trying different things. Let me just see, end of contract, retirement, retirement, yeah, we’ve got a couple of not coming back to work after maternity, mostly retirement, we’ve had a couple of dismissals, attendance management dismissals due to ill health type things. Well, they wouldn’t have been dismissals, but we’ve had a couple of ill health retirements.

So, we’ve got a range, really, we don’t have, sort of, quite a big churn of just people leaving to go somewhere else, we don’t tend to have that, which is good. But we have struggled to recruit.

Interviewer: And I understand your point about attractiveness of care, but do you know how your salary compares to other employers in the local area?

Respondent: It’s good. I don’t think… it’s always been above, I think obviously we always knew, going back a couple of years with the planned increases in the national living wage, the real living wage. Not many other providers, if any, in [city] are foundation living wage employers, it was only ever us. There might be an odd one now, I’m not sure.

And because there was such a difference between national living wage, the government’s national living wage, and real living wage, we were always quite a lot above other providers. Obviously with national living wage coming up it’s now less so really.

Interviewer: What about other sectors? Is your pay rate still favourable to retail, hospitality, admin-type work?

Respondent: I think, again, they’ve come up, haven’t they? I think the national living wage coming up and then you’ve got your retail, like say the supermarkets pay really well. And I think that’s why it is difficult, I mean we do pay above obviously, sort of, the foundation living wage. Our pay rate is above that at the minute.

I can’t remember, what’s national living wage at the minute? I can’t even remember what that is at the moment.

Interviewer: It’s £10-something, isn’t it?

Respondent: £10-something. I think foundation living wage is £10.90.

Interviewer: It’s £10.50, isn’t it? National living wage?

Respondent: Yeah, £10.50, foundation is £10.90 and we’re £11.29. So, you know, it’s quite a reasonable amount above. I just think it’s really… I think probably compared to some other types of jobs and sectors it can be quite a difficult job for not a great hourly rate, to be honest. So, I suppose we pay what we can and we are above other similar care organisations. We are above them or the same, but I think compared to other sectors, I suppose easier jobs, maybe, for the same sort of money.

Interviewer: So, the people you’re losing are not elsewhere, they’re largely retirements, maternity, ill health, but you’re struggling to bring people in?

Respondent: Yeah, we are. I mean I think it’s improved, I think certainly with what we’ve found is… and, again, it’ll be to do with working hours and working patterns, as well. Because where we have been able to recruit it’s mainly within day services, so we’ve probably not got many vacancies now in day services. Most of our vacancies are in supported living, which is our 24/7 service.

And, like I say, whilst we’ve introduced more flexible working, we do try and accommodate that, at the end of the day we still need people working nights and we need people working weekends. And we need people working weekend nights. And we’re open 365 days a year and it just depends how… that’s not that attractive to some people, I suppose, depending on their circumstances, or it’s not possible for them to work like that.

So, whilst we have tried to… we do advertise on the basis of flexibility and we can look at hours and we can certainly consider working patterns, it’s still quite difficult to recruit to those shift patterns. Where you are working, sort of, days, you know…

Interviewer: Anti-social hours.

Respondent: … afternoons, evenings, lates, you know, sleep-ins, not all of our shifts are waking… what we call a waking night is sleep-ins, as well. Again, sometimes it’s just people don’t want that out of a job, basically, and they want to not be working overnight. But there’s others obviously that do so there’s flexibility in working and rotating shifts and that, it ticks a lot of boxes for some people.

So, we’re getting there, I think it is improving, certainly in day services recruitment has been a lot better recently. Most of the vacancies are filled, so most of these are within our supported living. We’ve got some in day services, but mostly in supported living, that’s where we’ve struggled mainly.

Interviewer: Right, okay. Thinking about other things that you might pay for; do you pay for DBS checks and uniforms?

Respondent: We don’t have… we only have uniforms in basically two of our working areas, one of our day centres, and our kitchens. And we do pay for them uniforms. In other areas we don’t have uniforms.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: But we do pay for uniforms where we have them. DBS checks we pay… well, I’m saying we don’t pay for DBS checks, new starters we arrange it and we deduct it out of the first pay, so we don’t pay for that. And we did do a big exercise last year refreshing everyone’s DBS and making sure obviously they’re all up to date and we did pay for that. But we have said that future ones, what we wanted to do was encourage people to sign up to the live version of it, the ongoing…

Interviewer: Yeah, the rolling one?

Respondent: Yes, the rolling one, and we did say that we… because administratively it’s easier for us as an organisation than having these big exercises where we’re arranging them. So, we did ask people to sign up to that on the basis that we would pay for that. But we didn’t really get much uptake, to be honest, for some reason, I’m not sure why. So, yeah, like I said, last year we did a big exercise where we did pay for it. So, whether we pay for it… I’d say that we probably would do the same again. But we don’t… we’re not confirmed that we would. So, we do want to encourage people to do the live updates.

But yeah, we’ve not had much success with that, to be honest, so we probably have to review our position on that, I think. But the last time we did pay, we paid for everyone.

Interviewer: What about induction training, and general training, are you able to pay for that? For staff time when they do that?

Respondent: So, induction, yeah, definitely, and ongoing training, yeah. I mean we do a lot of in-house training. So, we have trainers, so, things like moving and handling and first aid, we do all that in-house. Now I’m not an expert on training but we recruited a learning and development manager last year. Previously that role had been part of managers’ roles and a link with HR, but it’s just so important for us. So, that manager’s done a refresh of all the training and our training arrangements.

But yeah, we do pay for that. The only posts where we don’t pay for training is our casual workers. So, we will provide the training, but we don’t pay them…

Interviewer: Their time?

Respondent: … their hourly rate. Yeah, so, we don’t pay for their time. It’s an issue that comes up periodically and we have a review of it and we consider it. But at the moment we don’t do it. It’s something that [union] gets put on the agenda from time to time and we’ll get queries on it. But at the moment we don’t pay for that.

Interviewer: And is that affordability?

Respondent: We pay for the training, but not…

Interviewer: Is that affordability?

Respondent: It is, really, we’ve never paid for it. I think, like I said, we will make sure they’re trained and we will provide the training or access to training, but not pay them. And it is partly an affordability decision, but, you know, equally we, I suppose… some casual workers will be working at other providers, as well.

I mean I’m not saying that’s not a reason not to pay them, but it’s they might not end up doing a lot of work for us, we don’t know. And we just think we’ll pay for the training and we’ll invest in that side, but this training is going to help you anyway, you know? You could, sort of, go through all our training and be better equipped to move onto another job elsewhere if you decided to.

So, we, sort of, see it as a benefit providing the training. Obviously we want them all trained up to be able to work in our services anyway, they’d have to be. Like I said, it is probably something that we would review from time to time. But the last time we looked at it, which was only a couple of months ago, it was an affordability thing, yeah. And we’ve never… it’s not that we used to do it and we didn’t do it.

So, we’ve, sort of, continued with our decision not to pay for time and training.

Interviewer: And what about the cost of living crisis, have you seen a notable impact on that? And are there things that you’ve done to help address that or support your staff?

Respondent: You mean in relation to our staff?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Or us, as a business?

Interviewer: Your staff. Have you seen much of an impact on them and is there anything that you’ve done to support them?

Respondent: I’m not aware of a big impact. Like I say, obviously, you know, we pay reasonably well. I think one thing that does… unfortunately being part of the local authority, sort of, timelines for pay. You know, our pay rates would ideally increase in the April, and we’ve still not paid the payrise of this year because it’s not been agreed and we don’t feel that we can move until we have the discussion after the local authority pay award is agreed.

Now, last year that meant that they didn’t actually receive the pay award until the February, because it was only agreed in the January. And I’m not sure when it’s going to be agreed this year. Last year we did actually look into paying it early, as in, sort of, just start paying it or give them an advance on it. For legal reasons we were advised not to, because there’d been case law about sometimes it’s… I don’t know, it got a bit complicated.

We did look into it, but we were, sort of, concerned last year about that. We do offer, you know, people can do extra hours because we have this bank arrangement. So, quite a lot of our contracted staff do additional hours, but yeah, I’ve not heard… I suppose I’m a bit remote, I think, from frontline workers, really. But I’ve not heard any managers.

I think I would get to hear about it and I’ve not heard a great deal of… there’s not really been any comments made to me about people are starting to feel the impact of this.

Interviewer: Okay, of the different things that you offer, like pay, guaranteed hours, flexible working, what do you think are some of the most important to attracting and retaining your care workers?

Respondent: I mean I’d definitely say pay and I think it’s just going back to our focus really is on paying a good hourly rate and trying to make sure that that’s as reflective as it can be of the job that they’re being asked to do. So, certainly pay and hours, like I said, even our casual workers I would say any of them could. They’d obviously have to go through a process of applying for a permanent job, but from our point of view if they weren’t able to do the job they wouldn’t be a casual worker for us, and we wouldn’t use them in that way.

So, you know, we do, sort of, say really our casual workers are casual workers by choice, really, because there’s always opportunities for permanent positions. So, I think it’s that, your pay and a permanent position, so, you know, you’re guaranteed your pay, we pay in the middle of the month, you get paid half a month in arrears, half a month in advance and that helps people, as well.

So, I think it’s that combination, really, but I think certainly the hourly rate of pay, that’s our focus, really. And permanent contracts, as well, we don’t have any temporary contracts, we don’t tend to. And I suppose that’s linked to the level of vacancies we’ve got at the minute, but it would have to be something. For us to offer someone a temporary contract it would be specifically because it’s a requirement that we only need that role for a temporary period.

We wouldn’t offer temporary contracts with a view to maybe ending them and then recruiting again or something. It’s just not what we do, so we always advertise permanent contracts.

Interviewer: And I guess the fact that you’re block contracted helps, as well, doesn’t it? Block commissioned?

Respondent: Yeah, it does. I mean that’s probably going to change at some point, but yeah, that does help. It helps us, because we are able to do that, yeah.

Interviewer: And why do you think that… excuse me, why do you think that will change? The block commissioning?

Respondent: Just because, so, when we came out of the council we had a XX-year contract and that’s been extended by XX years, plus XX. So, that is due to end next year, so they’re looking at options at the minute, so we’re due to hear from them over the next few weeks, really.

Interviewer: So, other similar services are not block commissioned, is that right?

Respondent: No, they wouldn’t be block. I think we’re… sorry, my phone’s beeping, let me just… yeah, so, we’re blocked in the way that we’ve got a block for our whole… all our supported living, respite. So, it’s a very big block, including a range of services, we get one sum for all those services. So, other providers wouldn’t have that range and volume of services in one block anyway. But even the contracts they do, I mean some day services might have a bit of a block contract, but certainly supported living it would be based on hours of support and the weekly variations.

So, we’ve haven’t got any of that spot or variable purchasing, and also we’ve got quite a lot of different services as part of one whole block contract. So, it’s very, very unusual, but that’s because we’re a spin out really. I think our fXX years was due to end in 2020. So, because of Covid obviously the council couldn’t do anything.

So, whilst during 2019 we thought there’ll be a lead up to doing something differently from next year, that never happened, and they had to very quickly just give us a XX-year contract, plus one year, an option to extend for XX year. So, yeah, we know we’re in an unusual situation and, I suppose, quite a fortunate situation in relation to that. Because we’ve got guaranteed levels of funding, basically.

But, equally, we do a lot, there’s probably a lot that we do in addition to that, or we probably have a bit of a different relationship than other providers just because of the block arrangement that we have.

Interviewer: With the council?

Respondent: With the council and [NHS Trust] is the main people we deal with, because obviously it’s an integrated care service. So, all the social work teams are actually part of [NHS Trust],. But our contract is actually with the council, but they’ve got an integrated service.

You know, I suppose because I think there’s not those discussions that they would probably have with other providers about varying hours or doing a top up on hours. We’ve got a block and we quite often get emergencies on a Friday and, “Can you take this person?” And things like that. And we do what we can to accommodate them within our overall resource, really. Rather than being very specific about how many hours, support needs, this is what we’ll be charging you on top. A lot of that is removed, really.

Which is not a bad thing, but we know we’re in a fortunate position at the minute, so we do expect that to change to some degree.

Interviewer: Okay, that’s really interesting. So, I’ve asked you my questions now, I wondered just if there’s anything I’ve not asked you about that you think is important to say?

Respondent: No, I don’t think so, I think that covers it. I can’t think of anything that we’ve not covered, really. Like I said, I suppose a lot of things we’ve been talking about now are things that are in our heads and, sort of, I suppose you continually are thinking of ways to refine, I suppose, your arrangements and thinking about what’s important to people. That’s why we’re doing the survey. So, yeah, and just that employee engagement obviously we feel is really important, that’s why we’re relaunching our employee ownership arrangements.

We do think that’s really important, and probably what sets us apart, maybe, from other providers. But obviously there’s no point having those in if it’s not been that effective, there’s no point in having them, because you’re not setting yourself apart, really. So, that’s why we’re relaunching it.

So, yeah, we do quite a lot of work on that and, like I say, recruitment is improving. It is just, sort of, supportive… the 24/7, really, areas where it does become difficult. But, you know, we’re constantly looking at different ways to recruit, obviously we have ongoing ads on our website and through Indeed. But we’ve been to like job fairs and colleges, we try and do a lot of work with colleges.

Interviewer: So, what kinds of things do you do with colleges?

Respondent: Well, just, sort of, going to events, really, or if they have any careers things. So, we try and engage with local colleges, really, for… it’s been difficult. Apprenticeships, we have had a couple of apprenticeships, but that is… it’s been quite difficult, I think, the apprenticeships. Just because of the nature of some of our services and like we’ve never had any in supported living, we think it would be quite difficult, just because of the nature of the work, really, and just the working arrangement. So, we’ve tended to focus on day centres, but I think that has been quite difficult. It’s not, you know, we’ve had… like I said, we’ve had a couple, we haven’t got any at the moment, I don’t think, apprenticeships. So, they have been quite low in numbers.

But yeah, we’re just trying to, I suppose, get out there and engage with different areas, really.

Interviewer: So, on apprenticeships I’ve heard quite often it’s difficult to backfill, so, if you send somebody… the time they’re not there, you’re paying them for that time and you’re paying someone to replace them and that’s quite… have you struggled with that?

Respondent: Well, I suppose, yeah, we would have to backfill and that’s where we’d use casual. But obviously, yeah, 20% of the time is generally off. So, we’ve had more success, I suppose, with apprenticeships in other areas like admin, rather than in care. They’ve been quite good, really, the apprenticeships we’ve had in admin. But we do one thing we’ve not mentioned, which is we do health placements here.

So, they’re not employees, but we have arrangements with [education provider] mainly, I think it is, where people who are doing, say, mental health nursing, or physio, or I think some people say we’re doing dietician-type courses are placed here for a few weeks to work in our services. And we, sort of, I suppose give them access to our services and our, I suppose, insight to help them if they’re working with people with learning disabilities or dementia. So, that’s quite good. So, we did that, I mean last year we had quite a few of them, really, across a lot of our services.

So, that’s really good and been quite a valuable… you know, as well we get something from them, as well, really. So, yeah, I can’t think of anything else that we’ve not really covered, no, I think that’s it, really.

Interviewer: Well, that’s really useful for me, really helpful, so I do really appreciate your time, thank you very much. And it would be really great if you could send the form back, as well, that would be really helpful for me.

Respondent: Yeah, I’ll send it back now.

Interviewer: All right, okay, well, thank you very much, good to talk.

Respondent: Thanks very much.

Interviewer: Bye.

Respondent: See you, bye.

END OF AUDIO