

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Personnel Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 10 September 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.05 am and ended at 12.17 pm

1 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 15th April 2025 were confirmed as a true record.

2 Declarations of interest

None.

3 Public speaking

Two statements were read out on behalf of previously registered public speakers, who were now unable to attend in person.

Statement from Mr P Quantrill

"I request East Devon council to desist from any existing or further investments in LGPS Funds.

Israel is guilty of genocide in Gaza and has been for decades in Palestine.
Israel is guilty of Apartheid in Palestine and as with the South African government in the 90s, they should be made to realise the world will not stand by and let their actions continue.

Companies in our High Streets , such as Barclays Bank, McDonalds, Next, Starbucks, L'Oreal and many, many more are complicit in supporting and funding this Israeli government and their military campaigns in Gaza and large parts of Palestine.
Anything this council can do to stop the funding will hopefully bring peace to the people of Palestine."

Statement from Ms T Sanders:

"Palestinians are facing the most horrific violence imaginable right now.
It could not be more urgent that LGPS funds be divested- ensuring Public Services monies are not funnelled into companies which are enabling the Israeli Government's apartheid and genocide against Palestinians.
In this context there are clear legal duties not to be complicit in assisting these atrocities.
Many councils are listening and taking positive action to stop aiding Israel.
This council is NOT powerless, and it must end all financial ties linked to Israel."

The Chair responded as follows:

Thank you very much for your statements.

The Council's pension fund is managed by Devon Pension Fund and concerns should be raised with them directly.

We do, however, note the points that you have made this morning.

Cllr Wragg spoke of her experience as a County Councillor and that the County authority do take ethical concerns seriously.

4 **Matters of urgency**

None.

5 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

None.

6 **Annual Health and Safety Report 2024/25 and Corporate Safety Workplan 2025/26**

The presented report set out the work undertaken by the Corporate Safety Team through the year, and the work plan for 2025/26.

The report covered:

- Accidents and incidents, broken down into type;
- Training undertaken by staff;
- Workplace inspections and audits;
- Tests, drills and evacuations
- Policies and reports;
- Ongoing work
- Work Programme for the coming year.

Discussion by the committee included:

- Welcoming the recording of near-miss events, which provided valuable information;
- Data available currently was difficult to break down into specific trends; the replacement of recording software would help provide better informed data, but it was stressed that any significant incidents were always followed up and learnt from;
- The culture of reporting was changing, following promotion of the reporting mechanisms;
- Whilst Councillors were not regarded as employees, advice was offered to them on a regular basis for their role;
- Tribute given to officers dealing with difficult role and the increase in verbal abuse from the public;
- Assessments were made of the council offices, and refined following review such as the recent evacuation practice of a full Council meeting. Councillors requiring assistance had already been identified and measures put in place to assist them in case of emergency;
- Councillors were encouraged to report any near-miss, accident or incident and the contact means for doing so would be circulated;
- The office temperature met with the statutory requirement; however personal comfort levels vary.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The Chair thanked Matt and his officers for their work.

7 **People Data: Annual Report 2024/25**

The report set out statistics of the workforce for the 2024/25 period.

Headline Findings

- **Headcount:** 557 staff (↑1.08% / 6 FTE), still below budgeted 565.4 FTE.
- **Pay:** Most staff are in Grade 4 (£35–41k). Significant growth in Grade 6 roles (↑23%). Average pay £33,151 (slightly below national council average £34k).
- **Directorates:** Place is now the largest (44.34%) following service restructuring.
- **Salary Costs:** ↑10.56% this year (slower growth than last year's 14.8%).

Workforce Trends

- **Market Supplements:** Increased from 11 → 21, mainly to address Housing Surveyor shortages.
- **Travel Costs:** Down for the 4th year (↓8.16%).
- **Recruitment Costs:** ↑ to £2,232 per head due to executive recruitment. Excluding these, costs would have fallen. Benchmark = £3–5k per head.
- **Vacancy Rate:** 6.82% (better than 12% benchmark).
- **Turnover:**
 - Combined = 13.08% (↑ from 11.25%, but still below LGA benchmark 13.5%).
 - Voluntary = 10.93% (close to national 12%).
 - Highest voluntary turnover: Housing (16.9%) and Governance (16%).
 - Non-voluntary turnover steady at ~2%.

Learning & Development

- **Training:** 508 attendees (↑ from 483), feedback positive.
- **Apprenticeships:** ↑90.9% since 2022/23 (17 → 21). No levy funds lost for the first time (prev. losses £3.8k–£14.9k). EDDC exceeds typical council uptake.

Attendance & Absence

- **Average Days Lost:** 10.24 per FTE (slightly ↑ from 10.05).
 - Benchmark: 10.59 days (regional), 8.8 days (national LG average).
- **Absence Causes:** Stress, anxiety & fatigue = 27.9% of cases (highest in Health & Housing).
- **Absence Patterns:** Long-term ↓7.3%, but short-term ↑5.4% and medium-term ↑19.8%.

Workforce Profile

- **Age:** Average 49 (national council average 47).
- **Diversity:**
 - Ethnic minority staff = 3.24% (↑ from 1.6%, still well below national 16%).
 - Staff with disability = 5.94% (↑, slightly above council average 5%).
- **Gender:** 52.6% female / 47.4% male.

In summary the data is showing as a Council we are performing well against benchmarks. Notable positives include decrease in travel, for both cost and supporting our Climate Change Strategy, Learning and Development engagement and apprenticeships. Absence continues to be an area which requires further consideration and we need to continue to closely monitor the use of market supplements.

Discussion by the committee included:

- Seeking clarification on the number of posts not included in the report, due to being funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – in response, this information would be supplied to the councillor after the meeting;

- Salary overall cost had increased due to promotion and recruitment of an Assistant Director, not due to headcount;
- Committee were reminded of the work undertaken to help manage staff absence, including the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), policy and processes in place, and close working between the HR business managers and Manager to support a return to work;
- Grow Our Own work included links with Devon County Council, in relation to those with care experience, this helps engage both a diverse and younger workforce;
- Higher vacancies were seen in the Streetscene service, and workforce planning was taking place to help address the needs of the service;
- Impact of absence of staff on remaining team members was discussed and acknowledged.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The Chair congratulated Gemma Roberts on her recent promotion to the role of Assistant Director for People and Performance.

8 **People Data: April - July 2025 quarterly report**

The report presented to committee for the period of April to July 2025 was considered.

Headcount has stabilised but dipped slightly from late 2024. Vacancy recording changes explain a sharp increase in reported vacancies, following alignment between HR and Finance records. Agency use has risen slightly due to seasonal demands. Absence rates were climbing, driven by stress-related factors which had become the leading cause of long-term absence. Wellbeing initiatives and the recent staff survey will be central to addressing these challenges, with HR business partners again working closely with Directors.

Discussion by the committee included:

- In response to benchmarking questions, whilst some benchmarking was done with a diverse range of organisations, the most comparable data was with other local authorities, especially neighbouring ones;
- In respect of marketing supplements, careful management of impact and an annual review is made when those are withdrawn. The review includes assessment of impact on service delivery;
- Streetscene have a seasonal demand for agency workers; other agency staff are often put in place to cover vacancies while awaiting recruitment for key service posts. Numbers relating to the planning service would be checked as requested, and supplied to the committee.

RESOLVED to note the report.

9 **Out of Hours Policy**

The Committee were asked to approve a new corporate policy on standby and call-out ("out of hours") arrangements, following recommendations from the 2022 Reward Review and 2023 audit recommendations.

Issues identified with the existing policy were inconsistencies, and varying rates of pay for out of hours work. Cabinet received and considered the proposals on 4 June 2025.

In response to a question on mileage rates, claiming for travel was limited to the distance between the normal place of work (council offices) and the site, in line with existing policy and employment contracts. In more recent years, many out of hours issues could be managed remotely, therefore not requiring the office to travel.

RESOLVED that

1. The new Out of Hours Policy be approved;
2. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Governance and Portfolio Holder for Council and Corporate Co-ordination to agree any minor changes to the policy, following final comments from Unison.

10 **People Strategy**

The committee were previously informed of the development of a People Strategy at their meeting in April.

This document set out the components of the strategy for 2025 to 2028, setting out the ambitions that surrounded the One Team East Devon ethos:

- Connect: areas of focus on connecting to the One Team East Devon through shared values and behaviours; total reward package; recognition; and fostering a diverse and inclusive environment;
- Grow: focus on development of “Focusing on Great Managers” programme; Grow Our Own initiative; review current “We Grow” offer;
- Thrive: focus on Change and Resilience; developing a continuous feedback cycle; safe and supported team; “Happy, Healthy, Here” initiatives

The refreshed Behavioural Principles and new Management Commitments were also set out. The Strategy is planned to be launched in October.

Comments from the committee included:

- What was the cost of developing the strategy? In response, the committee were informed that this was part of the HR budget in terms of staff time, not an additional cost to the authority;
- Key refresh to help get the best from employees;
- Suggestion to include simplicity and accuracy in all communications; and to include accountability;
- Welcomed the approach, which was good practice elsewhere.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

11 **LGR and impact on staff**

The committee were reminded of the current timeline for devolution, with new arrangements set to go live on 1 April 2028. Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2026 (TUPE) would protect existing staff, automatically transferring employment to the new employer whilst maintaining the existing terms and conditions of employment. Pension rights were protected under separate legislative provisions.

Support is available to staff via the Council’s “Happy, Healthy, Here” scheme; and the pending People Strategy, soon to be in place, were hoped to help staff navigate their way through the transition period to the new employer.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

E Rylance (Chair)
J Loudoun (Vice-Chair)
T Dumper
P Hayward
Y Levine
E Wragg

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
R Collins

Officers in attendance:

Matthew Blythe, Assistant Director Environmental Health
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Gemma Roberts, Assistant Director for People and Performance

Councillor apologies:

P Arnott
A Bailey
B Bailey
K Blakey
J Brown
N Hookway

Chair

Date: