

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Personnel Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 13 June 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 11.00 am and ended at 12.12 pm

1 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 16th April 2024 were confirmed as a true record.

2 Declarations of interest

None.

3 Public speaking

None.

4 Matters of urgency

None.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

6 Director recruitment update

The report set out detail on backfilling the Director of Housing role, along with the proposal to reassign some areas of responsibility and recruit to a new Director of Place position. Recruitment for these two roles; Director of Housing and Health and Director of Place has now commenced, and the committee were informed of the process and timescale for recruitment to these posts.

The Interviewing Sub Committee will be required to be part of the interviewing process, and make recommendation to full Council about the proposed appointments.

The existing interim arrangements agreed with Council to cover the two Director roles will continue until the appointment of the new postholder. Following expressions of interest and an interview process the following Assistant Directors have been confirmed as acting up in the Director role on an interim basis: Director of Place – Andrew Wood; and Director of Housing and Health – Catrin Stark.

The Committee noted the report.

7 People Data

The Committee received the regular update on key people data up to 30 April 2024. Some data highlighted included:

- The number of market supplements applied to posts has increased by 10 to a total of 21 since the last reporting period. Market supplements are applied to posts which are difficult to recruit to in a challenging labour market and the increase relates particularly to arborists, and surveyor roles in the Housing Service, where there is a general shortage of candidates, leading to increased pay rates in the market. Market supplements continue to be reviewed on an annual basis.
- Absence monitoring is currently projected to be 11.51 days lost per FTE by the end of March 2025, higher than the target of 8.5 FTE days and higher than the annual figure for 2023/24 at 10.05 days per FTE. The projected figure is expected to fluctuate through the fiscal year and will continue to be monitored.
- The average length of time to recruit has increased from 61.69 days to 85.15 days since the last reporting period in February, but remains below the national average of circa 100 days.
- The number of vacancies recruiting and not recruiting is currently 7.97% of the headcount (44 vacancies). 21 of these are currently being actively recruited to and 12 have been appointed and waiting to start employment.

The Committee also considered the Annual People Data Report, which provided a wider range of data, including equalities, training and employee relations activity. The report's main focus centred on actions relating to recruitment and retention, as this had been a specific challenge for the Council in recent years.

Highlights from the report included:

- Headcount increased by 3.75% compared to the same period the previous year but remained below the budgeted FTE of 557.3. The largest proportion of the workforce was paid at grade 4 (28.8%) (£33,945 -£40,221) and the largest service was Housing, Health and Environment which represents 55.25% of the organisation.
- Salary costs increased this year by 14.8% due to increased headcount and the nationally determined Pay Award.
- Staff travelling costs reduced for the second year running by 1.01%, possibly attributable to the Council's Worksmart Policy.
- Vacancy rates remained similar throughout the year, between 7% and 8% of headcount. This compares favourably to when vacancies were at their peak in August 2022, with 60 vacancies and a vacancy rate of 11.76%. Recruitment costs increased this year to £1,368 per head, but still significantly below the average benchmark cost of £3,000 - £5,000 per head.
- Combined voluntary and non-voluntary turnover reduced to 11.25% compared to the previous year of 13.75%. This compares favourably with other public sector organisations which are on average 14.6%.
- The number of apprenticeships grew by 54.54% over the last year, with 17 apprentices, and a significant reduction in the Levy funds therefore being lost to the government (£3,852 compared to £14,854 the previous year).
- The number of FTE days lost per employee to sickness absence reduced by 2.88% from 10.94 FTE days to 10.05 FTE days, although still above the target of 8.5 days.

Questions and comments from Members on the Annual people data included:

- How productivity was measured across the workforce; in response, Members were reminded of Key Performance Indicators and the monitoring of delivery of

action plans from the service plans and the Chief Executive explained that work was taking place to further develop the performance monitoring approach;

- An Equality and Diversity Advisor was now in place and reviewing how to improve the data held on personnel to have a better reflection of the diversity of the workforce;
- Long term sickness absence could be provided at service level as well as providing data with only the short and medium term sickness element, to see how this compared to the sickness absence rate target;
- Comment from the Leader that the voluntary turnover data did not make any reference to employees leaving due to involvement with Members;
- Workforce planning and succession planning were being developed to feed into the Workforce Strategy. Each service will continue to examine where mitigation was needed for those with a workforce likely to experience shortages in the future, for example due to retirement. Performance Excellence Reviews and 1-2-1 meetings continued to help retain staff and this approach is scheduled for audit review in the autumn;
- In response to comment on the pathway for employees unable to work, the Corporate Lead – Human Resources outlined the mechanisms in place for retirement through ill health, but did explain to Members that the pension criteria were very strict;
- Climate change training had been omitted from the list of training provided, but the Corporate Lead confirmed that a number of staff had previously volunteered to undertake “train the trainer” carbon literacy training and these employees were now being used to train staff and members. Climate change training also formed part of the Welcome Morning for new employees.

In relation to Recruitment and Retention specifically, the report highlighted:

- Vacancy and turnover rates have reduced. Although the general trend is positive, there remains challenges with recruitment to specific professions/roles, for example surveyors, solicitors and arborists. This is in line with the wider market and where necessary the Council has agreed market supplements to attempt to mitigate against this.
- A range of interventions have been put in place, including a review of the Recruitment Policy, improved pay and grading arrangements (known as the Reward Review), vacancy monitoring, and a new employer brand. There has been a review and improvements to the recruitment process, together with working more closely with managers so that they understand the process, improved training in our processes and updated information and guidance available via the intranet. Further enhancements to staff benefits and the Happy Healthy Here staff health and wellbeing programme have also been implemented, including a new staff benefits portal and Employee Assistance Programme, introduction of Wellbeing Champions and resources to support mental health and financial wellbeing.
- Further work planned for this year includes the exploration of an EV car salary sacrifice scheme and further improvements to the Cycle to Work Scheme, consideration of annual leave improvements (subject to UNISON consultation and Personnel Committee approval), a Grow Our Own/apprenticeship video to support recruitment and a review of the recruitment templates.
- Work has been undertaken to benchmark current salary levels against the market to assess whether the Council's pay rates remain attractive. During the Reward Review, the Council reconfirmed that it aspired to being a median pay employer and to also pay the Real Living Wage as its minimum pay point. The pay

benchmarking exercise therefore took this into account when determining suitable comparators.

- The following roles which are currently paid below the median pay rate:
 - Public Health Officer, by £1,091, which has been addressed by a market supplement;
 - Solicitor, by £3,594, which has been addressed by a market supplement;
 - Arborist Team Leader, by £4,690, which has recently been addressed by a market supplement.
- The results therefore suggest that the current pay and grading structure remains competitive in the market and therefore no changes are proposed.

Questions and comments from Members on the salary benchmarking data provided in the report included:

- A request on a review of solicitor numbers – in response, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that a review was underway. Locums were used occasionally depending on the work demands, but a balance had to be struck between Locum costs and that of taking on a full time post;
- Reassurance that the vast majority of posts that were benchmarked were favourable for the Council against other local authorities;
- Market supplements were reviewed annually.

The Committee noted the report.

8 **Forward Plan**

The Committee were presented with a forward plan of work.

Some issues raised by the Committee for possible inclusion were:

- Tackling the issue of delays in answering calls and emails. Advice was given to raise this issue through the Scrutiny Committee for further scope. The Leader also suggested that the issue could be referred to the Overview Committee for consideration;
- An update on the Worksmart Policy should come forward to the Committee in light of changing work practices over both public and private sectors. A review was currently underway through the Estates Team on how the Council offices were utilised.

The Committee noted the forward plan.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

E Rylance (Chair)
J Loudoun (Vice-Chair)
P Arnott
J Brown
N Hookway
M Martin
A Bailey
B Bailey

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
C Brown

Officers in attendance:

Joanna Fellows, Corporate Lead - Human Resources
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

K Blakey
M Chapman
T Dumper
D Haggerty
P Hayward
E Wragg

Chair

Date: