

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Personnel Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 28 January 2026

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.02 am

12 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th September 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

13 Declarations of interest

None.

14 Public speaking

None.

15 Matters of urgency

None.

16 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

17 People data

The Assistant Director – People and Performance presented her report, highlighting the following from the People Data set out to end of November 2025.

- Workforce size: Headcount increased from 556 to 565 and FTE from 519.35 to 529.34, bringing staffing close to the budgeted FTE of 565.4 and strengthening operational capacity for the final quarter. Of these, market supplements had been applied to 10 posts, totalling 22 employees in receipt of a supplement (up by 1 compared to the previous report).
- Vacancy administration changes were ongoing to improve alignment between HR and Finance systems; figures will change once reconciliation work is complete.
- Vacancies had increased slightly from 66 to 67, with 29 posts currently being actively recruited and 14 offers made. The average time to fill vacancies was 57.28 days, improving from 59.12 and well below the LGA benchmark of around 100 days.
- Combined turnover: 8.55% year to date, projected at 12.82% (below LGA average of 13.5%). 48 leavers to end of November, of which 81.2% voluntary and 27.1% career moves.
- Phased returns from sickness absence had been removed from reporting to improve benchmarking accuracy.
- Projected year-end absence: 10.60 days lost per FTE (improved from July forecast of 11.42, but above target of 8.5 and 2024/25 outturn of 10.28).

- Work-related stress remains the leading cause of long-term absence.
- Ongoing actions include wellbeing support, management training, complex case management, and enhanced mandatory stress-related training

Questions and comments from the committee included:

- Whilst recognising why removing phased return data helped give a clearer picture to the data, care must be taken to monitor any impact should there be a large number of employees in this phase at any one time;
- Members were reminded that phased return to work usually happened up to a maximum of a six week period and was carefully managed between the manager and HR professionals, handled consistently across the authority;
- Members were assured that succession planning was taken into consideration as part of the process of service planning, and the impact on smaller teams was taken into account;
- Long term sickness data had been separated out into the report as requested by the committee; however it was not possible to benchmark this with other authorities or the CIPD as that data was for all absences;
- Welcoming the 5.71 days lost per FTE per annum as a positive indicator, as that was well below the LGA expectation of approximately 8 – 9 days per employee;
- Reported stress absences were recorded where possible into a work/personal split, and both managers and HR business partners worked with the employee to help understand the reasons behind the absence to work on solutions to help that individual return to work.

The Committee noted the report.

18 **People Strategy update**

The Assistant Director – People and Performance presented her report on the newly launched People Strategy, with an update on progress made.

As a reminder to Members, the report set out the basis of the strategy following extensive staff engagement. The strategy was launched on 25 November 2025, and sets out ambitions under three themes:

Connect (belonging, engagement, leadership and accountability),
Grow (development, capability building and future readiness), and
Thrive (wellbeing, inclusion, resilience and readiness for change).

The launch was supported by a virtual all-staff briefing led by the Chief Executive and Assistant Director - People and Performance, alongside management floor walks, depot visits, and informal “Coffee, Cake & Connect” sessions to encourage dialogue and feedback.

The People Focused strategy provides stability and reassurance during LGR, reinforcing organisational commitment to staff and supporting wellbeing, engagement and change management during a period of uncertainty.

Progress since the launch includes:

- Weekly staff newsletter rebranded as *One Team East Devon*, aligned to the strategy themes.
- Continued development of the staff hub, with strong engagement (390 views on the People Focused page).
- Volunteers sought for staff-led groups under Connect and Thrive.

- Publication of the supporting action plan, *Focusing on Action*.
- Ongoing communication and follow-up on staff survey actions.
- Change and Resilience workshops piloted, with wider rollout planned for 2026.

Next steps covered:

- Establishing staff-led engagement groups and develop a Communication and Engagement Plan
- Launch a mentoring programme, review recruitment and induction processes, and create a Managers Hub.
- Develop an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training programme, refresh one-to-one and performance reviews, and roll out Change and Resilience workshops.

Questions and comments from Committee members included:

- Senior staff undertaking floor walks were a positive approach;
- Refreshed people strategy was timely to help staff cope with the approaching changes brought by local government reform;
- One Team East Devon ethos helped break down silo working.

RESOLVED that the Personnel Committee

1. noted the successful launch of the People Strategy – People Focused.
2. endorsed the ongoing implementation of the strategy and key actions.
3. supported continued engagement and communication to embed the strategy across the organisation.

19 **Staff survey update**

The Assistant Director – People and Performance advised the Committee of the 60% response rate to the staff survey. To address anonymity concerns, respondents were only asked to identify their directorate. Independent analysis was supported by People Insights.

The headline results were:

- Overall engagement score: 63%.
- Strengths identified:
 - Strong teamwork (84% agree teams work well together).
 - High levels of manager support (79%).
 - Positive work–life balance and flexibility (72%).
 - Majority find work meaningful and fulfilling (75%).
- Areas for improvement:
 - Leadership visibility and communication (34% agree leaders are visible and approachable; 39% feel feedback is acted upon).
 - Workload and capacity (54% feel workload is manageable).
 - Bullying and harassment: 27% reported witnessing incidents in the past 12 months, although 65% feel confident raising concerns.

Actions taken and underway included:

- Ongoing communication with staff, including publication of full results, infographics and “you said, we did/will” updates, with clear links to the People Strategy and action plan.
- Survey results reviewed in depth at SLT away days, informing leadership priorities and commitments.

- The People Strategy (*People Focused*) launched, with a live action plan demonstrating how staff feedback has shaped priorities and actions, including the introduction of staff-led feedback groups.
- Leadership commitments introduced for each People Strategy theme, supported by individual SLT people pledges published on the staff hub. Progress is now a standing SLT agenda item.
- Directorate-specific actions identified, with each directorate agreeing three priority areas based on their survey feedback.
- Mandatory training review underway, including increased frequency of bullying and harassment training (from three to two years) and the introduction of preventing sexual harassment training in November 2025.
- Workload and capacity addressed through Cabinet-led prioritisation, Directorate Plans identifying work to stop or pause, and ongoing review of resourcing pressures.

The committee were advised that the next steps would be:

- Delivery of actions will be monitored through the People Strategy (*People Focused*) and the *Focusing on Action* plan, with defined measures for each theme.
- Regular progress reporting to SLT and updates to Personnel Committee.
- Further targeted surveys planned, alongside a commitment to annual staff surveys, to track progress over time, particularly in the context of Local Government Reorganisation.
- Acknowledgement that culture change will take time, requiring sustained focus, consistency and clear long-term outcomes.

Questions and comments from the Committee included:

- Praise for the work achieved by a largely new senior management team in a short space of time;
- Wellbeing resources were being pulled together to be in one place for ease of access for all staff;
- Care not to generate survey fatigue;
- Councillors should be viewed as a resource for ideas whilst mindful of not impacting on operational decisions; such suggestions should go via the relevant Portfolio Holder or through the Councillor Enquiry form.

The Committee noted the report.

20 **Corporate Health and Safety Policy update**

The Assistant Director – Environmental Health provided a report to the committee, which set out that the Council has had a Corporate Health and Safety Policy in place for many years. While the Chief Executive signs an updated policy statement annually, the core policy format dates from 2004 and was last fully reviewed in 2017. As a result, it no longer fully reflected organisational changes or developments in health and safety practice.

These updates were:

- Reflecting the current organisational structure.
- Wording revised and clarified.
- Responsibilities of Members explicitly clarified.

There were no questions from the Committee, therefore it was

RESOLVED that revised Corporate Health and Safety Policy be approved.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

E Rylance (Chair)
J Loudoun (Vice-Chair)
P Arnott
K Blakey
T Dumper
J Heath
Y Levine
E Wragg

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

Officers in attendance:

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

Councillor apologies:

A Bailey
B Bailey
V Bonetta
J Brown
N Hookway
S Jackson

Chair

Date: