

To: Audit and Governance Committee
Date: 26 July 2023
Report of: Head of Business Improvement
Title of Report: Recruitment and Retention Update

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To update the committee on recruitment and retention challenges and action
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman
Corporate Priority:	High
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Committee resolves to:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To note the report2. To confirm the committee is satisfied with the approach

Introduction and Background

1. The Council's People Plan objectives around recruitment include:
 - Develop the approach to improve the quality and volume of suitable applicants and candidates to improve fill rates and reduce time to recruit to enable the Council to maintain effective, high-quality service delivery.
 - Develop inclusive recruitment processes and practices to improve the diversity of candidates and recruits, making sure that managers understand their role and have the capability needed.
 - Develop training for managers on recruitment to improve manager capability and section decisions.

2. The work on recruitment is closely linked to work on diversity and inclusion and the outcomes of the pay and grading review will also impact our ability to attract and retain talented people.
3. The structure of the People Team includes a Recruitment Consultant and Diversity and Inclusion Specialist to support delivery of the People Plan.
4. The People Plan is part of the fit for the future programme and progress is monitored monthly by the Change Board and CMT.

National Context

5. All local authorities are struggling with recruitment and retention. By comparison, the Council has a relatively low employee turnover rate but, like other authorities, struggles to fill vacancies, especially in areas where there is a recognised shortage of people such as in environmental health, information technology, law, planning and surveying disciplines.

Current Recruitment Activity

6. Vacancy levels remain consistent at 25 per month. There are 13 live vacancies advertised on the careers site with 4 difficult to fill vacancies, 3 in Legal and 1 in Property Services. Advertised roles include 3 lawyers, a Major Project Surveyor and 5 support roles in the Home Improvement Agency Team in the Regulatory Services and Community Safety Team.
7. In addition to recruitment to fill vacancies, there is a corporate-wide apprenticeship campaign open with 11 opportunities. The Council is working with local schools to encourage a diverse and local pool of candidates.
8. The Council's in-house Recruitment Consultant is working to proactively approach candidates for the lawyer and property roles. Approaches so far are not providing applicants and difficulties are largely due to the skill shortage (as approaches have been made without sharing pay information) although it is known that the Council's pay is less competitive.

Current Recruitment Challenges

9. The market has changed slightly over the past 6 months. It remains firmly as candidate driven and challenging but we have noticed the IT market has become slightly less competitive. This has had little impact on the Council.
10. Grade 4/5 roles, such as in customer services and administration, are now proving to be more difficult with fewer applications. The lasting impact of Brexit has been to reduce the number of people in the market for these entry-level roles.

11. Interest in the Apprenticeship campaign has been varied but there is a good level of interest in the higher-level roles for project management and surveyor apprenticeships.
12. The Council has struggled to attract applicants for Legal roles, partly due to its pay being less competitive but also because of a shortage of lawyers. The Council successfully used market supplements to pay to support recruitment of six roles in Law and Governance earlier this year.

Changes Implemented and Results

13. The front end of the recruitment process is now automated, resulting in posts being advertised more efficiently, and work has been done with managers to make sure that essential criteria are, in fact, essential skills and experience to perform a particular role. Desirable criteria has been heavily reduced to open up opportunities to a wider pool of applicants.
14. Applications are up 31% compared with same period last year (Jan – May 2022) as a result of better advertising and better information for applicants. Also, applicants can now apply using CV and a covering statement and where this has been in place we have seen an increase in applications. The use of gender-neutral language may have also impacted application numbers.
15. As a result of more proactive approaches, a permanent Major Construction Project Manager is in place after a 12 Month search. Here, LinkedIn was used to headhunt. Identification of passive candidates is in place so that the Recruitment Consultant is ready to approach individuals as soon as the vacancy is posted for hard to fill vacancies.
16. Linked with diversity and inclusion objectives, the Council is engaging with local communities and schools and colleges to publicise opportunities and is providing interview and CV advice to raise the profile of the Council with a younger and more diverse demographic. This work includes working with the Council's Communications Team to get all vacancies posted on to a community newsletter from the Council.

Service Improvement Plans: Overview of Activity

17. Steady progress is being made to build the Council brand and sell the benefits of working for the Council. There are plans to develop video or imagery of staff working for the Council to improve content on webpages and social media. Work is underway to modernise the back end of the recruitment process so that managers will be able to shortlist and invite candidates for interview, without the involvement of the HR Admin Team. This will improve time to hire and provide a better candidate experience. Another priority is to

produce a simplified application form to make the application process easier for applicants.

18. Work is underway to review pay against the external market and the Council is considering how best to design pay structures to meet current challenges, particularly for occupations that prove difficult to fill with no prospect of the market improving for employers in the near future. Pay benchmarking data is being collected for the local government sector, the housing sector and the general market.
19. The People Team intends to engage with managers on how to improve the service that it provides and is going to design and deliver manager training in September/ October 2023 to improve manager capability.
20. Finally, work is ongoing on a Preferred Supplier List for permanent agency suppliers to help manage and reduce the cost to hire. The Council has negotiated with Reed, its agency for temporary staff, to provide a payroll-only service for candidates who have been sourced for temporary roles to provide a time and cost saving. Reed is not always able to find candidates and so the Council supplements this with its own searches for candidates but then hands over to Reed to deal with all of the administration.

Legal Implications

21. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Risk Implications

23. Current plans have been developed to manage the risk of not being able to resource services adequately across the Council. Work needs to continue to maintain staffing levels and fill vacant roles to maintain service delivery. Where the Council finds it difficult to fill vacant roles, this puts additional pressure on existing members of staff and may involve extra costs if contractors are used to cover work. Law and Governance, Regulation and Community Safety and Property Services have been struggling for some time to attract suitable candidates and fill vacancies. ICT has recently seen an increase in numbers of staff leaving and is now struggling to recruit replacements. It is these service areas that have the biggest challenges at present.

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List of background papers: None.

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