

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 12 MARCH 2024  
REPORT OF THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION TASK AND FINISH PANEL

SCRUTINY REVIEW – RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND LEAVER PROCESSES

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a Task and Finish panel to understand more about the Council's staff turnover, recruitment challenges and its approach to the retention of staff.
- 1.2 The objectives of the Committee are to determine if recommendations could be made to:
- Reduce turnover (if deemed high);
  - Improve recruitment techniques/success rate;
  - Improve retention (if deemed low); and
  - Improve the handover process when staff leave the council
- 1.3 The Task and Finish Panel met on three occasions (see minutes in appendix A) and examined a range of data and information. This report outlines the findings arising from the Panel.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of this report.
- 2.2 That the Committee agree with the recommendations as set out in paragraph 3.6.

**3. Explanation**

**3.1 Staff Turnover**

- 3.1.1 There are currently around 450 employees working for the council. The Task and Finish Panel received the staffing profile breakdown by age, ethnicity and length of service.
- 3.1.2 It was noted that during 2022/23, there were 104 new starters and 115 leavers. The majority of the leavers were as a result of voluntary resignations. It was noted by the Panel that the turnover during that period was relatively high compared to other Hertfordshire authorities. It was recognised that it was an exceptional year, given there was a major senior

management restructure, and also two contracts (community buses and lifeline alarm control centre) were outsourced.

- 3.1.3 For the period between April – December 2023, there were 71 new starters and 59 leavers. The majority of the leavers were again as a result of voluntary resignations and the ending of fixed term contracts. It was also noted by the Panel that the turnover was relatively low compared to other Hertfordshire authorities.
- 3.1.4 The Panel was pleased to note that there were 34 internal promotions/moves during 2022/23 and 17 between April – December 2023. And that there had been 10 returners over the last two years.
- 3.1.5 The Panel acknowledges that staff turnover is sometimes inevitable. Also it could create new opportunities to remaining staff members and new starters to the team could bring new ideas to improve the service.
- 3.1.6 The Panel recognises that there is currently an informal buddy system put in place to help new starters settling into their jobs. Members could see the benefit of putting a formal system in place and would recommend officers to implement this at the earliest opportunity, which would provide more support to new starters and this would also ensure consistency across all the teams.

## 3.2 Recruitment

- 3.2.1 The Panel examined the reasons for difficulties in recruitment in the current market. It was acknowledged that this was down to a combination of factors, including fewer people looking for work, skills shortages, “baby boomer” generation retiring, increased competitiveness in the marketplace, impact of Brexit, along with lifestyle changes after the COVID era.
- 3.2.2 The Panel also received recruitment data from officers. In particular, 160 posts were advertised between April – December 2023 with 122 people appointed, which equates to around 77% of vacancies being filled the first time round.
- 3.2.3 The Council’s recruitment approaches have also changed to adapt to the needs of the market after the COVID era. For example, the Council has implemented a new job application system where candidates could select their interview slot and that most of the assessments are now taking place remotely.
- 3.2.4 The Panel also noted that the Council has recently launched a new recruitment website, which promotes a wide range of benefits working at the Council. The website also enables the candidates to get a better feel of what it is like working at the council by promoting individual staff stories as well as showing the new CORE values and behaviours of the Council. The Panel was impressed with the wide range of benefits provided by the Council and

suggested that officers should look at adding to the new recruitment site top fifty reasons to work for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

- 3.2.5 It was also noted that the Council has employed two Graduate Trainees for the first time this year under the LGA National Graduate Development Programme and that a number of hard-to-recruit teams also have trainee posts put in place in order to grow our own talent.
- 3.2.6 The Panel also received information about the Council's flexible working and remote working arrangements.
- 3.2.7 The Council should continue to build a better brand and promote all the good work it's doing at every opportunity in order to attract a wider pool of candidates to work for the council. At the same time, officers should keep abreast of good practice in recruitment.

### 3.3 Home Working

- 3.3.1 The Panel discussed the benefits and drawbacks from home working. It recognises that almost all employers now offer home working and it would be even more difficult for the Council to recruit staff if home working was not an option.
- 3.3.2 It was explained to the Panel that the Council has put in the following arrangement regarding home working.
  - No one will be permanently based at home.
  - All staff are expected to attend the workplace at least once a week and as required for service provision, also to attend training and other corporate events. The relevant Director/Assistant Directors determine office cover arrangements in each of their teams.
  - If the role is suitable for more agile working arrangements, these must be discussed, agreed and recorded with their manager.
  - The Council does not pay for travel to and from the workplace and does not contribute to any expenses incurred as a result of working from home.
- 3.3.3 Indeed, there are teams that work from the office five days a week as their jobs would not enable them to work remotely, this includes Campus West staff, the Hive and Museum services.

### 3.4 Staff retention

3.4.1 The Panel received detailed information about what the council has been doing to retain staff. Whilst acknowledging that due to budget constraints, and that the council is in the National Pay Awards, there is very little that the council could do with salary. However, it was noted that the council has put in place the following initiatives to retain and grow staff.

- **Awards**

- The Council provides long service awards to staff that work for the council for more than ten years.
- The Council also runs an Employee Recognition Scheme, where the judging panel is made up of all members of Employee Forum, not senior management.
- The Council also encourages staff to nominate projects to be put forward for national awards to create a sense of pride in the workplace. Indeed, the Council has been successful in winning a number of awards in recent years.

- **Learning and Development**

- The Council provides a wide range of training courses to staff and managers are actively encouraging their team to attend.
- The Council also sponsors staff to study towards professional qualifications
- The Council will soon be launching a new Management Development Programme

- **Health and Wellbeing**

- The Council provides all the staff with access to an Employee Assistance Programme, which provides free 24/7 staff counselling, information and advice on a range of services
- The Council provides training for all staff on mental health awareness and training for managers in supporting staff wellbeing
- The Council provides staff with free access to an app called GoodShape, which provides medical advice 24/7 as well as personalised health advice.
- The Council is a Mindful employer and a Disability Confident employer

- The HR team works closely with managers to provide support for staff with long term disabilities and health conditions.
- **Staff empowerment**
  - All teams at the Council nominate their own representatives to attend the Employee Forum, which is chaired by the Chief Executive. The meeting takes place every 6-8 weeks and representatives could raise any concerns directly to Senior Management. This is in addition to other avenues (e.g. one-to-one with their managers, team meetings, etc) that is available to staff should they need to raise any concerns.
  - The Council operates a buying and selling annual leave scheme, as well as flexible working arrangements supporting a better work-life balance to our workforce.
  - The Panel acknowledged that the Council has done a number of staff surveys in the past and that the Council has since moved to conducting short surveys (e.g. CORE values staff survey, review of employee recognition scheme, climate change survey).
  - The Panel recommends that staff surveys should continue to be done regularly.

### **3.5 Handover process when staff leave the Council**

- 3.5.1 The Panel was provided with exit interview information. The exit interviews are held by HR team directly with the employee to explore the reason for leaving, including the role, management and perception of the Council. The only time exit interviews do not take place is if the employee is being made redundant or dismissed. Figures were shared with the Panel showing job satisfaction: 90% of staff felt their skills were effectively utilised, 62% felt their salary was fair and 83% felt they had the necessary skills to undertake their duties.
- 3.5.2 Most staff's experience of the Council is positive (61% rated it good and 25% rated it excellent) and they would recommend the Council as an employer to the others.
- 3.5.3 It was acknowledged by the Panel that staff would serve their notice period and during that time the leaver's manager would start the handover process. It was shared with the Panel that all the staff should save their work on a shared drive and that processes and procedures should already be put in place to ensure that services could still run in the period of any staff absence.
- 3.5.4 It was also understood by the Panel that the Council uses the Jadu system to handle customer case work and that all previous communications with the

customer should be saved on the system rather than the individual employee's mailbox.

### **3.6 Summary of Recommendations from Task and Finish Panel**

- 3.6.1 A formal buddy system should be implemented to ensure all new starters are supported in the best possible way to settle into their new job.
- 3.6.2 Officers should look at adding to the new recruitment site top fifty reasons to work for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
- 3.6.3 Staff surveys should continue to be done on a regular basis.
- 3.6.4 All of the above recommendations should be implemented by HR, overseen by the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation).

### **4. Legal Implication(s)**

- 4.1 None arising directly from the report.

### **5. Financial Implication(s)**

- 5.1 None arising directly from the report.

### **6. Risk Management Implication**

- 6.1 None arising directly from the report.

### **7. Security and Terrorism Implication(s)**

- 7.1 None arising directly from the report.

### **8. Procurement Implication(s)**

- 8.1 None arising directly from the report.

### **9. Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 9.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority: "Run an effective council."

### **10. Climate Change Implication(s)**

- 10.1 None arising directly from the report.

### **11. Communication and Engagement Implication(s)**

- 11.1 None arising directly from the report.

## **12. Equality and Diversity**

- 12.1 An EqlA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

Appendix A – Minutes of the Task and Finish Panel meetings