

**COUNCIL RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES PANEL
HELD ON 5 APRIL 2005
(FROM 5.40 PM TO 6.35 PM)**

PRESENT: Councillor Theakston in the Chair. Councillors Hawkins, Simms and Webber.

Late Arrivals: Councillor Webber at 5.45 pm.

Early Departures: None.

1/04 - **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES:**

There were no apologies for absence. No substitute Members had been appointed.

(5.40 pm)

2/04 - **MINUTES:**

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY):

That the Minutes of the Recruitment and Retention Issues Panel held on 26 October 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair and the Notes of the Informal Meeting of Members of the Panel held on 8 March 2005 be received.

(5.40 pm)

(D)

3/04 - **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were no declarations of interest.

(5.40 pm)

4/04 - **EXEMPT INFORMATION:**

There were no exempt information items.

(5.40 pm)

5/04 - **REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE PANEL:** Further to Minute 5/04 of the meeting held on 26 October 2004 the Chair welcomed the Scrutiny Officer who provided a presentation in relation to the work of the Recruitment and Retention Issues Panel, specifically the findings arising from the staff opinion survey in relation to two sections "7" and "3", "Being Part of the Council" and "Training and Development". The Scrutiny Officer referred to the response rate, 53.4%, the highest in Local Authority benchmark averages, the usual response rate ranged between 30 – 35 %. The Scrutiny Officer advised that in order to prioritise findings, responses had been compared against Council and benchmark averages. The eight areas upon which staff had been consulted were:

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1. Pay and reward.
2. Managing change.
3. Training and development.
4. Communication.
5. Health and Safety.
6. Job satisfaction.
7. Being part of the Council.
8. Equalities.

The Scrutiny Officer then referred to the findings arising from the questionnaire, specifically section 7 in relation to "Being Part of the Council" which had been broken down by departments (prior to 1 April 2005 restructure). In response to a question tabled by Councillor Webber in relation to difficulties experienced by Benefits staff and the nature of that particular job it was agreed that it would be useful for the newly appointed Director of Resources to identify specific issues which would explain how staff felt in relation to the Council and the quality of its service provision.

In relation to the conclusion that staff based at Harrogate International Centre did not feel part of the Council, it was concluded that this should actually be seen as an encouraging response since the International Centre had been established as an arms length operation. HIC was not part of the Council when compared with the likes of the Department of Leisure and Amenity Services and Department of Technical Services.

It was noted that in due course a list of such concerns would be passed to the new Departmental Heads to address and comment upon when meeting and giving evidence to the Panel in June 2005. The Panel Members then briefly discussed the timetable for completion of the Panel's work.

Having considered those issues arising from section 7, the Scrutiny Officer advised that similar principles applied to the responses arising from section 3 of the questionnaire in relation to "Training and Development". It was noted that the Department of Administration (as it used to be known) had particular issues in relation to staff training. The Scrutiny Officer also advised that information regarding the remaining sections of the survey would be available in this format.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that a number of issues had arisen as a result of the questionnaire indicating that certain Council departments had experienced problems with violence and aggression from members of the public toward their staff, both over the telephone and face to face. In addition there were also issues in relation to the under reporting of such incidents. The Head of Human Resources advised that this was an issue that had already been picked up by the Human Resources section who were keen to encourage staff to report such incidents and to alter the misconception that violence and aggression was considered to be part of their job. It was considered that staff should not have to deal with such behaviour as part of their job although it was accepted that some departments would by virtue of the service offered, be exposed to pressured and sometimes desperate people.

The Scrutiny Officer then referred to further information to be requested from departments in relation to staff numbers, types of job vacancies, turnover rate,

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sickness levels and exit interviews amongst others, and that information was expected to be provided to the Panel, at its next meeting, possibly in June 2005.

Councillor Hawkins queried whether it would be possible to provide evidence to back up the assertion that Harrogate Borough Council did not discriminate on the grounds of age. It was noted that it was possible to provide age profiles of the workforce and age profiles of those appointed by Harrogate Borough Council however there were certain pieces of information that the Council did not record and therefore a comparison of an applicant's age against the age of a successfully appointed employee would not be possible.

The Chair then asked the Head of Human Resources to comment upon the possible format and/or shape of the Panel's final report in terms of addressing the questionnaire's findings and setting out meaningful recommendations in relation to recruitment and retention. It was considered important to distinguish between recruitment and retention and deal with each separately in deciding where the authority should be and how the authority should attempt to get there.

The Panel discussed its role ensuring that the authority had the necessary mechanisms and procedures in place to address the findings arising from the questionnaire. It was suggested and subsequently agreed that recruitment was a service that should be provided corporately and therefore both recruitment and retention could be broken down into half a dozen key issues that could be addressed both corporately and departmentally. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to coordinate the draft findings for distribution to Departments in this format.

The Head of Human Resources advised that the Council was now moving toward a corporate approach to recruitment. The Panel considered it important that their findings should in some way augment the corporate approach being taken to recruitment mentioned by the Head of Human Resources. It was noted that specific suggestions in relation to recruitment had been made at earlier meetings of the Panel and it was agreed that these would be included in the information circulated to Departments for a response when they were invited to address the Panel.

The Head of Human Resources referred to Appendix B, the framework/check list of issues that could be used when receiving evidence concerning recruitment and retention issues and advised that there were certain corporate issues set out within that appendix that would require a corporate response. For example the Council already employed home working and flexible working policies. The Chair queried how such policies were expressed to the general public when applying for jobs. This led the Panel to a discussion about the corporate layout for job adverts and whilst the corporate image was considered to be important this was considered to be one of the last stages of the Panel's work that they would investigate before agreeing their findings. It was agreed that corporacy was central to the Panel's thinking in relation to recruitment and therefore this issue would be put to departments and their comments invited thereon.

The Panel then discussed how progress was to be made in the forthcoming months toward the June meetings and the Scrutiny Officer agreed to coordinate the draft findings for all the sections in the Staff Opinion Survey and present them in the

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format as agreed at the meeting. He would also summarise the views of the Panel agreed at previous meetings and produce a list of information to be requested from Departments by the Panel for a response when they are invited to attend a Panel meeting in June.

(5.40 pm – 6.35 pm)

6/04 - **DATE OF NEXT MEETING:** It was agreed that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed as information became available.