

MATTERS FOR REPORT

5/05 - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT

SERVICES: The Chair invited the Business Support Manager (Karen Robinson) to introduce the report submitted to Panel Members and highlight any salient issues in relation to recruitment and retention matters within the Department of Development Services.

The Business Support Manager referred to the total level of staff turnover between April 2005 and January 2006, explaining the reasons why at the current time, Planning Officers had proven particularly difficult to recruit. More recently, the Department had found greater success in recruiting Planning Officers, however, the challenge now seemed to be retaining these officers. It was noted that a certain amount of streamlining had taken place in relation to the way in which vacant posts were advertised within the Department. A total cost of £20,000 had been allocated to advertising vacant posts within the department previously, however, this cost had risen due to the increased number of vacancies within the Department and indeed Officers were now working towards reducing that cost using strapline adverts that directed applicants to the Council's websites or to telephone officers within the Department as opposed to the larger adverts that normally appeared in the press and other employment journals. This was part of a Council-wide review of advertising costs within the authority.

The Business Support Manager referred to the main reasons quoted by employees during exit interviews for leaving the Council, namely higher salaries, personal reasons such as relocation out of the district, and commuting, the need to reduce the amount of travelling in their working day.

The Business Support Manager then referred to the initiatives used to retain staff within the Council and referred to the devolved guidelines for recruitment observed by the Department of Development Services. The Business Support Manager then referred to the terms of reference of the Departmental Resource Management Group attached as an Appendix to the report, which met every four weeks to monitor recruitment and retention issues within the Department. The Business Support Manager referred to the types of issues monitored by the Group and by staff generally and the kind of monitoring information available on a regular basis. The Business Support Manager then referred to a number of retention initiatives, set out at paragraph 4.3 of the report, and referred to market supplements applied to career graded posts which had been increased the number of applicants for specific vacancies. It had been found that the promotion of local Government terms and conditions had been useful in attracting applicants for vacancies. Applicants had made it clear during interview that the terms of conditions had been attractive to them and had influenced their decision to apply for posts. It was noted that there were difficulties in attracting applicants for parking attendants vacancies, and this was thought to be to the likelihood of working in inclement weather conditions, the rates of pay and the level of abuse experienced by "on duty" parking attendants.

It was acknowledged that there were issues in relation to the employment of cleaners within the Council and the level of competition between the Council employing individuals (at minimum wage) and agencies employing staff at a far

higher rate of pay. It was also acknowledged that there were occasions when the Council was unable to appoint cleaners at minimum wage, and relied upon agency staff which was far more expensive. The Business Support Manager then referred to the national shortage of Planning Officers and consequent difficulties in employing Planning Officers at Harrogate Borough Council, however, the Department was able to employ Planning Technicians in the first instance which could, due to training and career gradings, be able to move into Planning Officer posts in due course. This was seen as good practice in terms of staff retention within the Department. The Business Support Manager then concluded by referring to the ever changing situation within the Department and the need for staff and teams to adapt to changes both nationally and locally. It was acknowledged that to date, these changes had been managed and staff would continue to work to that aim.

The Chair then invited Members questions in relation to the Business Support Manager's presentation and report.

Councillor Hawkins referred to the recent reorganisation of the Council's structure, and queried whether it had been evident during recent exit interviews of people leaving because they were not able to get the job they wanted, or were unhappy with the new management arrangements? The Business Support Manager advised that the Department had actually gained new services, such as the Economic Development Unit from the restructuring, as opposed to having lost services. It was apparent that there were one or two unhappy individuals, however, these were in addition to the number of opportunities within the Department as a result. Councillor Hawkins queried whether the application of career grades had resulted in longer term retention of staff, however, it was acknowledged that at this stage, it was too early to formulate any conclusion. Councillor Hawkins also queried the use of national advertising campaigns with some posts, however, it was acknowledged that the clerical/administrative posts were advertised on a local basis. Each post was reviewed and advertised in the most appropriate way according to the type of job including the use of professional journals. There was increasing use of the Council's website in recruiting staff and that was noted. In response to a question from Councillor Hawkins, it was acknowledged that there was a need to undertake some comparison of the cost of employing cleaners and agency staff in favour of a higher base salary for cleaners employed by the Department. It was also queried whether there had been any collaborative work undertaken with other local authorities in relation to recruitment and retention, and the Business Support Manager confirmed that there had been work undertaken recently with Leeds City Council which had helped the Department recruit staff in the Estates Division. It was confirmed that this exercise had seen the sharing of expertise in recruiting such staff rather than combined recruitment of retention initiatives.

It was also noted that within the report were a number of staff listed as having left the authority which Members had been able to build up a working relationship with. Some Members had not been made aware of these departures. Although a separate issue to the one being discussed, this was noted as a matter of some importance for Members on the basis that they did need to know who to contact in certain situations.

The Chair queried whether the Department now employed its full complement of Planning Officers, and this was confirmed. It was noted that the guidance from the ODPM suggested 150 cases per Planning Officer, the level in Harrogate was in excess of 200. It was not possible to increase costs and pass those increases onto customers, since the charges for planning applications were set by the Government and indeed Councils were required to keep the level of increases in Council Tax to a minimum and were threatened with capping if they could not.

The Chair then queried those elements of recruitment adverts that had now been removed in favour of the strap line advertising campaigns. The Chair queried whether a cost benefit analysis had yet been undertaken in relation to the savings achieved from placing smaller articles in the local press in comparison to the increase in cost of sending a higher number of application packs to applicants. It was noted that this had as yet not been undertaken.

The Chair referred to the need for a sense of belonging or pride in the organisation or company within which staff worked, and queried with the Business Support Manager whether it was felt that people working within the Department felt part of a team and felt pride in the service they provided. The Business Support Manager confirmed that it was her impression that this was the case, and in response to the Chair's question regarding whether or not that sense could be improved, it was concluded that it would be interesting to see the results of the next staff opinion survey.

The Chair and Panel then thanked the Business Support Manager for her time and attendance.

Recruitment and Retention – Harrogate International Centre:

The Director of Harrogate International Centre submitted a written report in respect of the Harrogate International Centre in response to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Commission's consideration of recruitment and retention issues. The Director advised that currently, the Centre had approximately 120 people on their payroll and then referred to the longer term generic issues facing the Harrogate International Centre.

It was noted that the Centre's headcount largely depended upon business needs at the time. The Director referred to the problematic nature of recruiting stage, lighting and sound technicians. Four further posts had been created within the Centre and it was anticipated that these would be filled in the next few months. A junior position had also been established as an apprentice post, which it was anticipated when developed together with the application of career grades, could assist in longer term stability in terms of the retention of the technicians referred to above. This post could be used to improve links with schools labour market and would be of value to the Harrogate International Centre in terms of strengthening links with the town. It was acknowledged that leave and pension rights were strong selling points to attract applicants to the International Centre, however, since the International Centre was in effect another department of the Council, HIC could not always compete with other conference venues when it came to salaries. The Director referred to the benefits of

promoting the HIC Sick Pay scheme, which was a major difference between HIC and other similar employers in that Market. The Head of Management Services referred to work undertaken with local schools in the past to encourage school leavers to take up employment within the International Centre, and whilst there was initially a poor response to this work, it was suggested that perhaps it was possible to increase awareness within schools of opportunities within the International Centre using presentations to students every 2-3 years and it was noted that this could be extended to promote the Council as whole. Councillor Hawkins queried the image surrounding the International Centre and whether HIC's image assisted the recruitment process. That was confirmed. It was thought that there was perhaps a feeling of bureaucracy more so with the Council than with the International Centre and that HIC probably generated a more glamorous image than Harrogate Borough Council.

The Head of Management Services also referred to recent discussions within the management team to involve HIC in local job fairs, such as those held at the Cedar Court Hotel in order to promote the benefits of working within HIC and the caring environment that could be offered. It was noted that this could be extended to promote the Council as a whole.

In terms of improving efficiency, HIC regularly reviewed the way it worked using event by event debriefings to improve the performance of staff from one event to another, and in addition the content of the International Centre's business plan. The Director referred to the somewhat different approach of HIC in investing money to make money, rather than cutting services to make savings. In response to a question from Councillor Hawkins regarding the ability of HIC to pass on costs, it was confirmed that HIC did not have this ability in the same way as its competitors. The Director referred to the equality of pay issues for the International Centre which acted as the Council's trading arm in comparison to private conference venues which could pay staff whatever rate was considered to be appropriate. The HIC did want to compete in terms of salaries with those private firms, however, had to be aware of the fact that throughout the Council, there were posts which carried out work not dissimilar to that of HIC and would have to be graded at a similar level.

In conclusion, it was noted that the International Centre had recently invited Council staff for guided tours of the complex during the Annual Bridal Fair and there were ongoing discussions regarding the feature of HIC within the Corporate Induction Event.

The Chair and Panel thanked the Director of Harrogate International Centre and Head of Management Services for their time and attendance.