

**NOTE OF THE INFORMAL MEETING OF
MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL RESOURCES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION RECRUITMENT AND
RETENTION PANEL
HELD ON 8 MARCH 2005
(FROM 5.30 PM TO 6.20 PM)**

PRESENT: Councillor Theakston, Hawkins and Simms.

Late Arrivals: None.

Early Departures: None.

1/04 - **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Webber.

2/04 - **REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE PANEL:** The Chair invited the Scrutiny Officer to provide the Panel Members with some background in relation to the paperwork circulated with the agenda for the meeting. The Scrutiny Officer referred to the information provided which set out an analysis of questions contained within the Recruitment and Retention staff survey questionnaire in relation to Section 1 "Pay and Reward" and Section 9 "Managing Change". The Scrutiny Officer advised that there were a further seven sections for which analyses were now being prepared and which would be ready in the near future. The Scrutiny Officer then referred to the comparative data provided within the analyses comparing staff perceptions between departments, departmental statistics against similar statistics for the Council as a whole and those same statistics comparing the Council with similar Local Authority benchmark averages.

Councillor Theakston questioned the anticipated output from the Panel's work and queried how the statistical data provided would contribute to the Panel's final recommendations.

A general discussion ensued in relation to the way in which the statistical data could be interpreted and the potential need for other indicators to provide additional information in support of the data. Members noted that the data quantified qualitative issues with regard to the working environment in terms of the perception of these issues by employees thus attempting to provide appropriate information upon which to define problems and solutions. The Panel agreed that there was a need to identify key outstanding issues for staff and address those issues with possible solutions.

Panel Members were referred to the data in relation to Section 9 (Managing Change) and specifically table 10 which set out an overall summary for departments in relation to this particular section of the questionnaire. The point was made that if one particular department featured heavily in that table then that may indicate a problem with regard to this issue for that department. However it was also considered that this particular information could be cross referenced against whether that department has issues relating to the recruitment and retention of staff. If so

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then the summary data may indicate the reasons why, leading to the identification of a problem which could then be considered in terms of possible solutions. The Scrutiny Officer pointed out that the data identified major issues facing all departments and the Council as a whole regarding the working environment for employees.

The Chair stated that in the Panel's view the questionnaire supported the work of the group and what the questionnaire could show the Panel was why people came to the Council and remained or left. The comparative data would allow the Panel to formulate an action plan for departments to consider. The Scrutiny Officer was invited to come back to a future meeting of the Panel with appropriate issues and draft recommendations arising out of the comparative data and statistics provided by the survey questionnaire.

The Scrutiny Officer suggested a meeting in two to three weeks' time to consider recommendations from the data provided that could be discussed and/or actioned by departments and their Directors in due course.

It was also agreed that the Panel would wish to ascertain which departments had the highest turnover of staff and how many employees had left the authority since the Recruitment and Retention Panel had commenced work and it was noted that this would be provided by Departments when they had the opportunity to meet with the Panel.

It was suggested therefore that the next meeting could take place in April 2005 and the Scrutiny Officer and Director of Administration offered to consult Panel Members in relation to a date.

In addition thereto the Chair advised that it was important to consider recruitment as well as retention issues in the work of the Panel. It was considered important to identify the single most important issue that led employees to leave the authority. It was anticipated that this information could be obtained via exit interview data maintained within the Council's HR section.

The Panel also suggested that the Scrutiny Officer could get in touch with employment agencies and job centres to ascertain whether they would be willing to help the authority so that by some means their visitors/clients/customers could be asked if they had ever considered working for a local authority and if not, why not? It was hoped that such information, whilst not statistically valid, would provide an indication as to perceptions of local authority which may help to identify any other issues. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to provide a proposal for this additional work at the next meeting.

Councillor Theakston referred to the Panel's timetable for the presentation of its recommendations to Council Resources Overview and Scrutiny Commission. It was noted that the Panel were due to present their recommendations to the Commission in August 2005. The Panel were keen to emphasise that this deadline should not fall back.

(The meeting concluded at 6.20 pm).

**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.

**COUNCIL RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
(RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES PANEL)
HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2005
(FROM 5.30 PM TO 6.45 PM)**

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

Late Arrivals: None.

Early Departures: None.

1/05 - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES:
There were no apologies for absence. No substitute Members had been appointed.

(5.30 pm)

2/05 - MINUTES:

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY):

That the Minutes of the Recruitment and Retention Issues Panel held on 5 April 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(5.35 pm)

3/05 - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were no declarations of interest.

(5.35 pm)

4/05 - EXEMPT INFORMATION: There were no exempt information items.

(5.35 pm)

MATTERS FOR REPORT

5/05 - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CORPORATE ISSUES: The Chair welcomed the Head of Human Resources, Executive Director (Corporate Policy and Improvement) and Scrutiny Officer who had attended the meeting to discuss corporate issues affecting recruitment and retention with Members of the Issues Panel.

The Scrutiny Officer referred to the additional information circulated as a briefing note in support of Agenda Item 5 regarding recruitment and retention corporate issues. The briefing note was a summary of the staff opinion survey, in particular, the overall corporate issues arising out of the survey. The information set out was detailed according to the sections of the survey and identified key results, and the possible actions required to address them. The Panel was encouraged to use the information when considering recruitment and retention issues facing the authority.

In each area the authority was compared to a benchmark average (of other local authorities), and had been broken down into departmental performance in those

areas. In this way, the authority and indeed, departments could be compared in relation to certain key areas set out within the questionnaire.

In response to a question tabled by Councillor Hawkins, it was acknowledged that it was not possible, due to the information available from the questionnaire, to compare for example Leisure Services provided by Harrogate Borough Council with Leisure Services provided by other authorities, and therefore, it was considered prudent to refer to the comparisons set out at paragraph 2.1 of the briefing note.

Councillor Simms queried apparent issues within the former Department of Leisure & Amenity Services in relation to pay and reward and queried whilst that might be the case. The Executive Director (Corporate Policy and Improvement) advised that the leisure profession was generally lower paid, and that was considered to be the position nationally. The Executive Director also advised that this might be an issue which is picked up under the current pay and grading review, and the Head of Human Resources advised that generally as a result of the review one third of staff received a pay increase, whilst a third will receive a decrease and the final third remain the same. It was anticipated that as an outcome of the pay and grading review, a number of lower paid staff would receive an increase in grade, and therefore salary. The pay and grading review would also, for the first time in a long history of job evaluation recognised certain skills which had not previously been taken into account.

The Head of Human Resources also referred to a number of changes, which had taken place in the way in which recruitment, and retention was now approached. For example, the exit interview survey had been amended to take into account specific issues raised in the original staff survey questionnaire. It was interesting to note that of the 48 people who had left since the exit interview survey had been revised, pay and grading had not been perceived as a problem, and nor had job satisfaction. The Head of Human Resources advised that at the next meeting of the Panel, information could be made available as to the reason why those 48 people had moved on, however, issues around working environment, management change, harassment and bullying and possibly stress and pressure at work were thought to be the case. It was noted that (in terms of working environment, there were only certain issues that could be addressed, and some that would require significant budget contribution) the Head of Human Resources advised that Officers were more concerned about those issues that should be regulated by Council policy and the possible gaps in such policies adopted by the authority. The Head of Human Resources then referred to partnership working with the Health and Safety Executive in relation to dealing with stress in the workplace, and the adoption of Management Standards employed through such partnership work. Those issues could feed into the Panel's work at a later date. The Chair reiterated that the work of the Panel was to improve or develop the recruitment and retention of staff. Councillor Hawkins queried which employees who had left the authority were choosing and it was considered that there was a need to understand what was taking place within the Council in terms of monitoring the outcome of exit interviews, which were now more sophisticated thanks to the updates. It was noted that the staff survey questionnaire exercise would be repeated in 2006, now that the corporate restructure had taken place, and which should also take into account the improvements made since the last questionnaire was circulated. The information from the existing survey would be

used as benchmarking information to assess progress since these improvements had been introduced.

The Head of Human Resources then referred to work being undertaken regionally to improve recruitment and advertise vacant posts. The Head of HR and referred to the current turnover of staff within Harrogate Borough Council set at around 15% and whilst in some cases that could be considered to be relatively high, there was also a train of thought which suggested that a turnover of staff was healthy, bringing new experience into the authority.

The Chair suggested that the work produced by the Panel should be subject to some kind of check to ensure that the Panel's output accorded with its original intentions and/or objectives and the Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this would be the case.

The Chair then referred to the work of the Panel over the last two years, and suggested that perhaps recruitment and retention may not be as significant an issue for the authority but this would be tested when individual departments were consulted.

In terms of the centralisation of the Human Resources function, it was noted that to date, the placing of adverts for the recruitment of staff had been centralised and the process streamlined. There had been an agreement with the Cabinet Member (Finance and Resources) that the centralisation of the Human Resources function would be reviewed, once the pay and grading review had taken place and been completed in 2007. The Chair referred to the need for more dynamic adverts to attract applications for posts within the authority, and to reinforce and develop the Council's image so that staff working for the authority could develop a sense of pride in working for the Council. Statistics on the responses to job adverts would be due at the end of the year.

The Panel then considered the external pressures affecting recruitment and retention, such as house prices, market supplements, home working and travelling to work, flexible working arrangements and the financial advantages for staff in not travelling to work every day. The Panel also considered issues regarding the sense of remoteness experienced by some smaller units working out of the centre of Harrogate and the Executive Director (Corporate Policy and Improvement) advised that with the Council's main offices being spread over five major office blocks, it was his view that a number of the issues raised in the recruitment and retention survey could be addressed by staff working from one central location.

6/05 - REVIEW METHODOLOGY: The Panel discussed dates for future meetings of the Recruitment and Retention Issues Panel and agreed that the next meetings would take place on 1, 9 and 14 February 2006.

**COUNCIL RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION
(RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES PANEL)
HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2006
(FROM 6.00 PM TO 7.10 PM)**

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

Late Arrivals: None.

Early Departures: None.

Also in attendance, Director of Community Services (Mr Les Williamson) and Business Support Officer Ruth Pridmore.

1/05 - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES:
There were no apologies for absence. No substitute Members had been appointed.

(6.00 pm)

2/05 - MINUTES:

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY):

That the Minutes of the Recruitment and Retention Issues Panel held on 14 December 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(6.01 pm)

3/05 - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were no declarations of interest.

(6.01 pm)

4/05 - EXEMPT INFORMATION: There were no exempt information items.

(6.01 pm)

MATTERS FOR REPORT

5/05 - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES: The Chair introduced the Director of Community Services (Mr Les Williamson) and Business Support Officer, Ruth Pridmore who had attended the meeting to respond to Members' questions in relation to recruitment and retention and the Department of Community Services. The Chair invited the Director of Community Services to highlight the salient points highlighted within the report and any conclusions that could be drawn as a result.

The Director advised that it was, to some extent, difficult to draw any conclusions from the work undertaken to date, since this information had not been previously available in this format and indeed, had not in the past been routinely available. Turnover remained stable within the Department at around 15%, however, a number of anomalies existed particularly within Leisure, Museums and Arts and certain

swimming pools as a result of the interest taken in these areas by students before leaving to attend University. The time spent by students in these posts was therefore limited, which had increased the turnover in staff. The Director also referred to problems experienced as a result of the high cost of living and housing in the Harrogate District. It was noted that the Department had experienced a trend where the recruitment of individuals who were not the principle wage earners in a household and therefore the Department was reliant on the career progression of the principal wage earner in the household and which it could not affect. The Director advised as to differing approaches taken in using campaigns to advertise vacancies, and it was noted that in some organisations, it was not uncommon to allocate approximately 25% of a post's salary to advertising costs. It was acknowledged that by virtue of employing those who were not the principle wage earners, Harrogate Borough Council were in competition with other organisations for certain staff. It was acknowledged that in terms of administrative and clerical levels the Council paid well in comparison to other organisations. The Chair queried whether it could be demonstrated that there was a higher turnover of staff in certain trades. The Director advised that it was not so much the trades that dictated the turnover of staff, more so the individual's predicament; for example, there was a good degree of stability within refuse collection where salaries tend to be lower when compared to administrative or clerical posts. The Director also referred to the level of staff turnover in the Knaresborough and Hydro Swimming Pools which relied upon the employment of pre-University students as lifeguards and who tended to be rather more transient in nature. The Director referred to the longer and shorter term jobs available within the Council. The Director was asked to identify and comment upon those areas of the department which indicated a higher than expected turnover of staff. The Panel members were concerned with the ways in which staff could be persuaded to stay, or whether the Council could provide a dis-incentive to staff to move on. In response, the Director advised as to ways in which staff could be encouraged to stay within the employment of the Council using career grades and training courses. One of the issues which had arisen as a result of recent exit interviews, was that staff by and large felt developed, having worked for Harrogate Borough Council. In any event, it was acknowledged that ambitious people did tend to move on and would consider whether it was in their interests to stay within the employment of an authority or organisation or leave to seek promotion. The Director referred to information collated, setting out the number of people, leaving the employment of the Council within the first five years. It was acknowledged that a larger number left the employment of the Council within one year and by and large those people tended to be under the age of 25.

It was acknowledged that there were certain areas where it was expected that staff would leave to pursue their careers due to the level of work and opportunities for advancement.

Councillor Hawkins referred to a post established by Harrogate Borough Council working within Knaresborough with the Community Association which had seen six or seven postholders over the last 6-7 years. It was acknowledged that this post offered good opportunities for progression and promotion that explained the turnover.

In response to Members questions, the Director referred to the use of market supplements which could be applied to those positions where the Council found difficulty attracting the right number or calibre of applicant. The Chair asked the Director whether he felt that there were any major issues in relation to recruitment and retention within the Department of Community Services. The Director advised that whilst there were concerns about potential difficulties in keeping hold of staff, there were no problems attracting new employees, more so keeping existing staff in post. By and large, it was possible to manage vacant posts without any detrimental impact on service provision. The Director advised that it was possible to treat staff fairly and equitably, provide them with rewards and opportunities for development whilst working for the Council, however, one of the most difficult aspects in recruiting and retaining staff was the Council's ability to match an individual's ambition. It was only possible to provide certain outlets for ambitious staff. In response to members questions the Director advised that in general, staff working in smaller teams tended to build a stronger team spirit and display a greater sense of job satisfaction.

Councillor Hawkins queried whether it was apparent that staff working in area offices felt a sense of isolation in working away from the centre. The Director advised that this was possible, however, there were ways and means of managing that predicament. Councillor Hawkins also queried the apparent number of layers of management within the Council and the Director referred to the current management system within the Council consisting of three and sometimes four tiers of management. The Panel referred to the outcomes of a staff opinion survey in relation to turnover of staff, job satisfaction and pay and reward as perceived by those taking part. In attempting to make sense of the information received in the survey in relation to those issues, the Chair referred to the transient nature of certain employees within the Community Services Department. The Chair queried how staffs were brought together for social events within the Department of Community Services. It was acknowledged that to bring together the number of staff working within that department in one place at one time was impossible. However, there were events, such as the Council Christmas parties and other events organised within smaller teams, which provided staff with a social outlet and means of getting together. The Director advised that he personally scheduled his own attendance at all staff meetings up to twice per year to ensure that he got the opportunity to see staff during the course of the year. Departmental Management Team minutes were available on the Intranet, and advised that in his experience staff felt reasonably well informed about issues taking place within the department. One way or another issues tended to emerge, however, the Chair referred to a need for a sense of belonging amongst staff working for an organisation, and that was considered important in retaining staff, and indeed provided the kind of dis-incentive referred to by the Chair earlier in the meeting.

In relation to social and sport events, and similar activities, the Director advised that the size of the organisation tended to dictate how people socialised and that they tended to socialise within smaller working teams. The Chair offered the Director an opportunity to raise two issues which he felt might assist the Department in improving its level of recruitment and retention. The Director referred to a number of issues which were not within the ability of the authority to change, such as Government initiatives, which tended to de-motivate staff and whilst considered to be essential by management, were seen as staff by "getting in the way of the job". In

conclusion, the Director referred to his past employment within Harrogate Borough Council as the Director of Health and Housing, during which he had managed to direct the department through a four year period of uncertainty as a result of the possible transfer of housing stock and other issues affecting the fundamental existence of the department, during which time these issues had prevented him from restructuring the department, which had in turn led to a higher than desired number of temporary contracts. The Director advised that in this predicament, it would normally be expected that efficiency would drop, however, the reverse was true and efficiency had increased during that period of time. Whilst the Director was not advocating the use of temporary contracts of employment, there were, perhaps issues in relation to the kinds of motivation that staff required to work efficiently.

It was concluded that a high turnover of staff was not necessarily an issue within the Department of Community Services.

The Chair thanked the Director of Community Services for his attendance and contribution to the Panel meeting.

6/05 - **REVIEW METHODOLOGY:** The Panel discussed the date for the next meeting of the Recruitment and Retention Panel previously scheduled for 2 March 2006. This meeting was rescheduled to take place at 5.30 pm/6.00 pm on 9 March 2006.

**COUNCIL RESOURCES COMMISSION
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PANEL
HELD ON 14 FEBRUARY 2006
(FROM 6.00 PM TO 7.00 PM)**

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

Late Arrivals: Councillor Simms at 6.30 pm.

Early Departure: None.

Officers in attendance: Karen Robinson (Business Support Manager – Department of Development Services), Stuart Quin (Director – HIC), John Noland (Head of Management Services – HIC).

1/05 - **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** There were no apologies for absence.

2/05 - **MINUTES:** The Senior Member Services Officer advised that the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2006 were not yet available, and would be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel.

3/05 - **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were no declarations of interest.

4/05 - **EXEMPT INFORMATION:** The reports submitted by the Business Support Manager and Director of Harrogate International Centre under agenda item 5 were both considered to contain exempt information pursuant to paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended. The questions and discussion in relation to these reports was, however, held in open session.

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 strapline 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

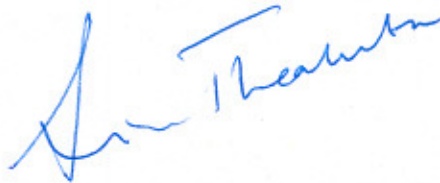
another, and in addition the content of the International Centre's business plan. The Director referred to the somewhat different approach of HIC in investing money to make money, rather than cutting services to make savings. In response to a question from Councillor Hawkins regarding the ability of 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.

(The meeting concluded at 7.00 pm.)

CHAIR - 9 MARCH 2006.



**COUNCIL RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES PANEL
HELD ON 9 MARCH 2006
(FROM 5.30 PM TO 7.00 PM)**

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

Officers in attendance: Executive Director (Corporate Policy & Improvement – Mr K Douglas), Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Mr P Jordan) and Business Support Manager (Marion Wrightson).

- 1 - **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** There were no apologies for absence. (5.45 pm)
- 2 - **MINUTES:**

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUSLY):

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Recruitment and Retention Issues Panel held on 14 February 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(5.45 pm)

- 3 - **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were no declarations of interest. (5.46 pm)
- 4 - **EXEMPT INFORMATION:** There were no exempt information items. (5.47 pm)

MATTERS FOR REPORT

- 5 - **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION – DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES AND CORPORATE POLICY AND IMPROVEMENT:** The Chair welcomed the Executive Director (Corporate Policy and Improvement) Mr Kevin Douglas and Mr Peter Jordan (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), together with the Business Support Manager, Marion Wrightson who had attended the meeting to respond to Members' questions with regard to recruitment and retention issues in their respective departments.

The Chair invited the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to refer to the briefing note circulated at the meeting in relation to the Department of Resources, which comprised the former Departments of Finance and Administration. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services referred to staff turnover rates averaging 13% per annum, representing 70 staff during the period April 2004 to January 2006. The reasons given for this turnover in staff were also given as follows: -

- 50 were for reasons that the Council was unable to influence.
- 18 were for reasons that the Council could potentially influence.
- 2 left as a result of HBC actions, i.e. performance/capability issues.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services then referred to specific recruitment and retention issues affecting the Revenues and Benefits section, Information Technology, Legal and Democratic Services and Financial Management areas of the department, and then referred to a number of recruitment procedures employed within the Department, which were now implemented by Business Support upon which the Business Support Manager responded to Members questions, together with the impact of changes to the methods of advertising posts within the Department of Resources and Corporate Policy and Improvement which Business Support was also assisted. The analysis demonstrated certain unpredictability in response levels for posts, the increasing use of the Internet as a means of job hunting and the time taken between interview and appointment. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services then referred to specific initiatives aimed at retaining existing staff and attracting new recruits. Examples of flexible working hours, career grades, good working conditions and facilities, training and health and safety care were all cited as means by which this could be achieved. The Chair invited Members questions in relation to the presentation. In response to Members' questions, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Business Support Manager then referred to a generally happy core of people working within the department, together with issues relating to pay levels, which when compared with the cost of living within the Harrogate District would lead to departures in staff. It was noted that one of the issues in the revenues and benefits section was the role of Benefits Assessors, and it was acknowledged that these particular posts were probably some of the most difficult jobs at that level. The upgrading of that post (of which there were 20 similar) had led to improved retention levels in this area.

The Chair then invited the Executive Director (Corporate Policy and Improvement) to refer to any similar issues for the Department of Corporate Policy and Improvement. It was acknowledged that this Department had only been in existence since 1 April 2005, and since that time, two staff had transferred, one internally, but both moves had suited their own specific needs in respect of job satisfaction and promotion. The Executive Director advised that a picture was beginning to emerge of how staff worked in that particular department, using flexible working hours and task and finish type arrangements to retain staff of high skill levels occupied with family care issues. It was also acknowledged that one particular quality which was not often recognised was that of staff loyalty and indeed, the Executive Director referred to the wider issues to be addressed by the Improvement Agenda, which would include staff initiatives such as long service awards, improvements in office accommodation and generally improved working environments. Councillor Theakston questioned whether the Executive Director believed there were particular problems with recruitment and retention within the Council, and whilst it was not considered that there were particular and/or acute problems, there were a number of posts at middle management and junior levels corporately which proved to be consistently difficult in terms of the retention of staff. Once again it was perceived that the issue of house prices and the career prospects of the principle wage earner in a household did tend to affect staff turnover levels within the Council. Neither of these issues were such that be affected by the Council to its advantage.

It was believed that the authority was generally a good employer with regards to training and development and staff development and the importance of

acknowledging these strengths when recruiting staff was considered paramount. In terms of those problematic and specialist posts which tended to see a slightly higher than normal turnover rate, an example was discussed where perhaps an accountant would train for a CIPFA qualification for 3-4 years and move on to another employer, once that qualification had been obtained, simply because the opportunity for promotion (once the qualification had been gained) was not readily available in that post. This referred to points made at earlier meetings about the council's ability to meet / match staff / employee aspirations.

The Chair queried the length of time taken to train Benefit Assessors on the basis of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services assertion that it took up to six months to part train these employees, and up to a year for them to become fully operational. The Executive Director advised that there was a vast quantity of rules and regulations that assessors were required to observe which were changed by the Government on an annual basis.

The Chair queried the structure of Business Support, which was now consistent throughout the Council and the centralised function for the advertising of vacancies throughout the Council. In response to Members' questions, the Business Support Manager confirmed that the savings achieved as a result of this structure could be evidenced not only in terms of cash but also the more professional appearance of that element of their work.

In relation to the longer service awards, the Chair referred to the need for the Council to develop its reputation for being a good trainer of people, and to market that as a strength in recruiting staff, not that there was a particular problem in this regard for departments, but that if over the course of seventy posts, two or three could be influenced by such action, then perhaps this would be an improvement. The Chair referred to the analogy of staff working for Disneyworld, which carried out similar works as Local Authorities in terms of Parks and Gardens, Highways and other such services and the need for the Council to market itself as an exciting place to work. The Executive Director referred to work to be undertaken regarding the Council's image and corporate identity as a result of the fact that there were throughout the Council various formats of letter and other documentation, which it was considered, could be much improved under a single corporate identity. This initiative could also be used to promote the work of the Council perhaps not fully appreciated by all, and indeed to sell the Council's achievements or success stories.

The Executive Director referred to the impending review of the Council's corporate identity and the need to ensure consistency across the Council in producing adverts and other publications, which promoted the work of the Council. It was anticipated that work would commence on this review during the next municipal year.

(5.47 pm – 6.42 pm)

6 - **REVIEW METHODOLOGY:** It was agreed that the next meeting would be held at 8.30 am on Tuesday 28 March 2006 where the Panel would receive a draft final report from the Scrutiny Officer, drawing out the key facts and issues and potential areas for recommendations for the panel to the Resources Commission. That particular meeting would also deal with the issue of staff discounts at facilities

such as the Brimhams Fitness Suite, which it was thought had been introduced in the past, but it was unclear whether this scheme was still in operation.

(6.42 pm – 6.50 pm)