

**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.