

# Recruitment in Hillingdon



## A review by the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee

### Councillors on the Committee

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**HILLINGDON**  
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## Chairman's Foreword



Successful recruitment is the lifeblood of any organisation, and the London Borough of Hillingdon is no different.

Over recent years, recruitment methods have changed significantly and it is vital that the Council keeps pace with these changes and embraces the new recruitment techniques that are now used across the public, private and third sector. By reviewing our current processes, but also taking into account these new methods of recruitment and staff retention, there was an opportunity for us to make long-term improvements that will benefit the Council in the future, as well as the present.

Social media and online jobsites have become commonplace for job hunters, and it is important that we make the most of these recruitment tools, in addition to more routine methods such as advertising. These new methods of recruitment have given the Council the opportunity to adapt and modernise its recruitment procedures, and this review was the perfect chance to consider what could be done to continue making improvements.

Branding and advertising, as well as considering recruitment using social media or the Council's webpage, were all important aspects of the review. However, the improvements could not just be limited to recruitment, and staff induction and retention had to also be considered to ensure we retain the staff we recruit.

The use of an external witness who specialise in recruitment allowed us to consider alternative, innovative recruitment, interview and assessment techniques, and, along with evidence from the Council's own Human Resources department, we were able to take into account best practice ideas from both the public and private sectors in the hope of broadening the review and shaping our recommendations.

My belief is that the recommendations in this review, along with the work officers have already undertaken to improve recruitment, will achieve the goal of modernising and improving recruitment at the Council, helping us to remain a successful public sector employer for many years to come.

***Councillor Scott Seaman-Digby***

***Chairman of the Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee***

# Recommendations

Following witness sessions with officers and external recruitment employees, Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee saw it fit to recommend:

## Recommendation 1

The Council develop an employment brand, agreed by the Leader of the Council as lead member for Communications, to ensure the organisation has a unique and attractive message that differentiates from other employers in the public, private and third sector.

## Recommendation 2

The Council develop and implement a social media recruitment strategy, not only focused on advertising vacancies, but also promoting and managing the Council's online reputation and employer brand.

## Recommendation 3

The Council develop a culture of internal advocacy for the organisation among its staff, and reinforce this support through introducing a recruitment referral scheme.

## Recommendation 4

The Council develop a "Total Reward" approach to recruitment marketing, which involves not only advertising remuneration, but also the total worth of the recruitment package.

## Recommendation 5

The Council introduce and develop a workforce succession plan for all key roles within the organisation.

## Recommendation 6

The Council create talent pools of existing employees, an alumni network enabled by social media, and an "Apprenticeship Talent Pool" to ensure talented apprentices have opportunities to maintain employment within the Council.

## Recommendation 7

A centralised Job Description Library is implemented and all managers involved in recruitment are re-trained on the new e-recruitment system, together with refresher training on selection methods and equalities.

## **Recommendation 8**

A review of the current Competency Framework is conducted by the Council.

## **Recommendation 9**

The Council introduce consistent interview questions associated with each job description, suitable selection techniques and values-based interview techniques to ensure employees' are culture-fit, and occupational testing for recruitment to key and relevant roles. Cabinet also requests officers investigate appropriate ICT assessment techniques as part of the selection process, to ensure office based workforce retains a high level of ICT competency.

## **Recommendation 10**

The Council introduce an evaluation of recruitment and selection processes and performance indicators as part of the probationary period sign-off process, reporting on a quarterly basis to CMT.

# Overview

## Background

The Council's Recruitment and Resourcing team sit within the Human Resources (HR) function and consists of a manager and five officers. However, in addition to recruitment, the team are also responsible for supporting agency recruitment across the Council's two main suppliers, Guidant and Pertemps, ensuring availability of over 500 temporary workers at any point.

The Committee had hoped to see comparable numbers of the Council's workforce alongside other local authorities, but these figures are difficult to produce and would remain unreliable, as local authorities offer different services, and many types of council also choose to outsource departments such as waste collection or social care. This unreliable data would not tell the whole story of council employment figures when it comes to recruitment or employee numbers, as some councils would look significantly smaller than others that provide services in-house.

However, HR were able to provide up-to-date figures relating to employees at the London Borough of Hillingdon, and the following table indicates the current workforce numbers at the Council, broken down by directorate:

Directorate	Employee Headcount	Employee Full Time Equivalent
Administration	123	112
Finance	227	211
Residents Services	1,530	1,201
Social Care	833	720
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,713</b>	<b>2,243</b>

During this financial year (April - December 2016), the Council recruited 317 new employees, and it recruited 366 employees in 2015/16. During the same year (2015-16), voluntary turnover due to employee resignation accounted for 320 of 480 total employees leaving the Council, which equates to a voluntary turnover figure of 11.2%.

While the Council continues to require a smaller workforce, this turnover suggests that recruitment requirements will continue to exceed 300 new starters per year.

## Current Recruitment Procedure

The Council uses an online recruitment system, or Application Tracking System (ATS), which is called i-Grasp (internet global recruitment application), supplied by Lumesse Ltd. The contract for this system has recently been renewed for a four-year period and an upgrade is planned for early 2017/18, which will enhance the user experience for HR, recruiting managers and applicants alike.

As well as a number of annual subscriptions secured with online job and social media sites, such as *Jobs Go Public* and *LinkedIn*, the Council has a contract with Penna Ltd to co-ordinate recruitment advertising and provide any additional 'strategic recruitment services'. This contract is due to expire and a tender will be developed to establish a new contract for April 2017.

In order to advertise a position, the recruiting manager meets with the Recruitment and Resourcing Team, who subsequently set up the vacancy in the ATS. The system automates the

approval process with all posts constitutionally requiring Chief Executive approval and final sign-off by the Leader of the Council. The vacancy is then 'posted' to the Council's own job page, as well as to any relevant job and social media sites required.

Applicants are able to make an online job application through the ATS (applicants with a disability may use an alternative application process, such as emailing a CV) and once the job advert is closed, the recruiting manager can 'shortlist' applicants for interview. The applicants are notified electronically of available interview slots and they are able to book an interview time through the ATS.

Interviews are conducted by a panel of at least two officers, and once a verbal offer of employment is made, a contract is distributed via the 'on-boarding' portal in the ATS, which the applicant can automatically accept.

All offers are conditional upon pre-employment checks, such as Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for relevant positions, and satisfactory references. References are sourced through a dedicated online reference checking system. Once pre-employment checks are successfully completed, a start date is confirmed and the employee commences working for the Council. All employees are 'on-boarded' with an induction process and are subject to a six-month probationary period.

## Aim of the Review

Recruitment is a vital aspect of any successful organisation, and the HR department arrange the recruitment of new staff and supply numerous policies and extensive guidance to assist with different stages of recruitment.

This review set out to understand more about the system that the London Borough of Hillingdon use to undertake recruitment. The effectiveness of current practices was considered in an attempt to identify improvements to them that may benefit advertising and branding, interview methods and management training, new staff and equalities, and staff retention, with appropriate witnesses who could speak on behalf of the private, public and third sector.

The review considered whether there are any simple improvements to the process of recruitment that will help the Council to continue to attract high-calibre staff and improve the Council's attractiveness as an employer. The benefits of the review, however, are much more widely dispersed than this, with the potential to better utilise the existing branding of the Council, the selection process, and ensure that the right staff are identified to fill a role for a long-term period.

It was proposed that the review was broken down into four key themes, each with a significant impact on the end goal of improving recruitment at the Council. These themes were:

- Recruitment: Advertising roles and reaching appropriate candidates;
- Selection: Interview methods and helping officers assess candidates;
- Staff Induction and Staff Retention: Ensuring new staff are suitably trained;
- Equalities: Guaranteeing all staff and candidates equal opportunities.

Considering these four themes would allow the Committee to evaluate and develop significant aspects of recruitment within the Council. The Committee also believed that a review of the recruitment policy would help the Council advance its overall branding and recruitment process, and these changes had the potential to make a long-term improvement to the attractiveness of the Council as an employer. To achieve these goals, it was first important to understand how recruitment was currently undertaken at Hillingdon Council, as well as the models of best practice in other areas of the public sector, as well as in private sector and third sector employers, which could help the Council's approach.



# Recruitment

As the most visited page on the Council's website is the jobs page, this review offered an opportunity to assess a key aspect of Council branding and interaction with our residents.

The review considered whether posts were advertised in a suitable way to reach the necessary audience, and whether applicants are given the right information to prepare for an application or interview. This encompasses where roles are advertised, but also the presentation and content of Council advertising, including Council use of social media and other business networking websites which can be used to attract candidates.

## Employer Brand

Members identified a clear opportunity for the Council is to produce a strong employer brand that differentiates Hillingdon from any other Council or, indeed, organisation. In order to attract the best talent, which may involve encouraging people to travel across neighbouring Boroughs, it is important to stand out and indicate our position in the recruitment marketplace and why a potential candidate should consider us before other employers. To truly engage with a potential candidate, our employer brand should articulate the values, culture and unique selling points of the Council and be able to authentically describe the experience and benefits of working for the London Borough of Hillingdon.

The requirement to tender for a new 'strategic recruitment services' contract from April 2017 conveniently gives the Council an opportunity to include developing a corporate recruitment identity as part of the specification, while a focus on social media-based recruitment should be contained in the specification for the tender to ensure the Council is in place to embrace the next major development in recruitment. Such an identity should be consistent with the Council's current branding guidelines, in conjunction with Corporate Communications, and agreed by the Leader of the Council.

Key messages are vital to recruitment, and to attract the most suitable candidates, those recruited would fit with the employer brand. The Council's policy of "Putting our Residents First" should resonate with employees, and the values that run through the service should be demonstrated throughout recruitment.

The investment in the development and design of an employer brand would be offset by reduced recruitment advertising in the future. The Council has successfully produced an 'employer brand' for social worker recruitment, and it is important that this work is replicated to produce a corporate employer brand which attracts candidates who would embrace the Council's vision, culture and values. Therefore, it is recommended that:

1

**The Council develop an employment brand, agreed by the Leader of the Council as lead member for Communications, to ensure the organisation has a unique and attractive message that differentiates from other employers in the public, private and third sector.**



## Advertising Roles

Increasingly, job applicants are becoming more sophisticated in how they approach their job search. In similar ways to how websites and applications like *Trip Advisor* have changed the way people select holidays, websites such as *LinkedIn*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Glassdoor* are transforming how people approach the job market. Candidates can research companies and gather an understanding of the organisational culture and what differentiates a company from their competitors.

The Council achieved considerable cost reduction by moving from traditional print advertising to predominantly online advertising over the last six to seven years. However, technological and social advances are driving further change, and social media is the next 'battleground' for the attraction of top talent.

Several years ago, the Council's advertising budget was £850,000 per annum, but this has been reduced and is now around £150,000 per annum. The Council have an advertising contract with Penna, who advertise jobs in the national media, professional publications and websites, but jobs are also advertised on the Council's website.

Members noted that the new Social Worker Recruitment Portal had been a major improvement to the public-facing part of the website and employer branding, but this also had a narrow benefit that could be employed more widely in other recruitment sectors too.

Much HR attention has been devoted to social worker recruitment and offering of an improved portal of information for potential candidates. In a departure from the usual job specifications, the role description was enhanced by portraits of existing social workers and discussions of their job, hosted by a bespoke website. The website provided pages describing the Council, social care roles and careers, and also the benefits of working for the Borough, and the first recruitment campaign for managers was a success. A second campaign is currently being planned, and the Council is working on establishing which aspects of this rebranding and campaign could easily be transferred to general recruitment.

The Council has achieved success in terms of social worker recruitment, with 80% of the posts now full, and less reliance on more expensive agency staff.

By rolling out the successful aspects of social worker recruitment into wider Council recruitment, it may be possible to make further savings on advertising with an improved website and more details of each role available for potential candidates.

The Council website is therefore an important facet of recruitment, and improving the jobs' site should be a priority. Many visitors to the London Borough of Hillingdon's website will just visit the jobs webpage, and as a result, it is important to ensure the site is 'magnetic' and keeps visitors' attention.

HR confirmed that the website is set to undergo a full review to ensure it has a high impact and engages those who visit the site; increased video content is likely to be included. Consultation with relevant stakeholders and then a review will take place to decide the best course of action.

In addition to the website, the Council must aim to improve its presence on social media. *LinkedIn* allows the Council to link jobs to professionals that may be suitable recruits, and the Council are now starting to see hits on their pages of the *Glassdoor* online jobsite. *Glassdoor*, in addition to advertising jobs, allows former employees to rate their employers. This is considered helpful as it promotes an honest and open assessment of the organisation that can be used to attract new recruits.

Members agreed the Council must take advantage of new ways to recruit, as HR is changing and modernising the way the Council analyses recruitment is vital to keep up with competitors.

Increasingly, video media is helping differentiate between potential employers, and embedded video is very compelling to certain applicants. When the recruitment web pages are updated, it is vital that video content is reviewed and enhanced. Giving potential candidates a better look at the day-to-day role is vital to recruitment, and so-called "vox pops" of current employees, recruiting managers, residents and other stakeholders may help give an honest impression of what it is like to work at the Council. This video media would also help to improve the content on the Council's recruitment website, as well as on external job recruitment sites.

Video media can also be linked intrinsically with an improved social media presence, as social media is becoming increasingly important in recruitment. Videos can be shared and watched easily through social media, giving the Council to opportunity to reach a wider audience. Furthermore, through sites such as *Glassdoor*, applicants are able to research companies and hear from existing employees about the realities of working for a particular employer. On that basis, it is recommended that:

2

**The Council develop and implement a social media recruitment strategy, not only focused on advertising vacancies, but also promoting and managing the Council's online reputation and employer brand.**

Since the review began, the Council had already made changes to the social media aspects of recruitment, and it was confirmed that a staff member within HR will now manage the handling of the Council's *Glassdoor* account, allowing for an increased focus on the site, and ensuring comments from outgoing staff members are taken into account, while also using the site to appeal to potential new candidates. This will help analyse areas where the organisation can improve recruitment or staff retention, helping to reduce the selection failure rate and save the Council both time and money when recruiting.

Overall, the intention of enhancing the Council's workforce brand, developing our online presence, especially around social media, and focusing on the development of an interesting jobs page, is to reduce the reliance upon paid-for recruitment advertising. The majority of job searches begin online, and the Council should maximise its presence and the quality of the online content to be an extremely "eye-catching" prospective employer.

## Reaching Appropriate Candidates

Research continues to demonstrate that whilst remuneration is important, there are other factors that contribute to the decision to join (or remain with) a company. Development opportunities, the workplace environment, culture, engagement and wellbeing all significantly impact on which company a candidate will eventually choose.

Developing 'internal advocacy', where employees act as 'ambassadors' for the Council and promote their own organisation, is an extremely powerful recruitment marketing tool. Councillors discussed the use of internal advocacy and staff referrals in private companies, and whilst it was accepted that paying staff members to help recruitment can be controversial, there are benefits from employing this strategy.

One of these benefits is the rise of advocacy among current staff who help to support their employer, but it also results in the recruitment of staff members who fit the business culturally; something the Council hopes to achieve through recruitment in the future. This is widely considered to be a result of referral schemes as those recruited in this manner have a more authentic idea of the role they are applying for through the current staff members. This not only impacts positively on new employees fitting the organisation culture, but also on staff retention.

Recruitment, however, must also remain visible. Referrals can create problems with diversity as many refer friends or former colleagues who may be similar to themselves. Furthermore, while cash rewards for referrals remain popular in the private sector, some find them unpalatable.

However, it remains important to consider that referrals paint accurate pictures of what it is like to work for an employer and aid staff retention rates, which are much higher in the private sector than public sector; Microsoft recruits around 60% of its employees through referrals, and recruitment companies consider it an important recruiting method. Therefore, the Committee recommends that:

**3**

**The Council develop a culture of internal advocacy for the organisation among its staff, and reinforce this support through introducing a recruitment referral scheme.**

Appropriate candidates are not limited to the United Kingdom either, and the Committee was also informed of the importance of recruiting overseas social workers in successful recruitment. Although the costs involved when recruiting workers from overseas are higher than domestic costs, there was a financial return in the investment, as the Council was not only receiving very experienced social workers, in many cases they could also use these new employees to replace more expensive agency staff.

## **Sustaining Competitiveness in the Recruitment Market**

The London Borough of Hillingdon is not only competing in the workforce market against other councils, but also against other public sector bodies, not-for-profit organisations, and increasingly, private sector companies.

To ensure the Council is able to recruit high-calibre candidates, it is essential that the organisation positions itself competitively and attractively as an employer. While salary and remuneration remain important considerations, research continues to demonstrate that other factors significantly determine which organisation an applicant chooses to apply and work for.

Due to the progress of national negotiation of terms and conditions of employment, the public sector often incurs workforce costs, such as pension contribution overheads, which the private sector would not be subject to. However, these nationally negotiated terms and conditions are often a source of differentiation; for example, few private sectors would offer the generous level of holiday leave or pension contributions available to employees of the organisation. In effect, the Council may be offering a similar salary to a competitor, but offering much more in additional holiday entitlement, pension contributions and other benefits, and this "Total Reward" should be made clear to applicants. For these reasons, it was recommended:

**4**

**That the Council develop a "Total Reward" approach to recruitment marketing, which involves not only advertising remuneration, but also the total worth of the recruitment package.**

## **Creating Talent Pools**

Currently, the Council's approach to recruitment is relatively reactive, with job roles advertised as they become vacant. It is possible to take a more proactive approach and 'nurture' prospective applicants, so as soon as a vacancy arises, there is a pre-existing 'talent pool' of potentially interested candidates.

Council talent pools would firstly need to be established, and an alumni network would help this aim, as would an increased profile on social media. Furthermore, the new apprentice scheme, which referred to later in this report, would also be considered a talent pool.

Once again, social media is considered vital in enabling easy development of groups and communities, and provides various ways to help maintain communication with prospective talent pools. *LinkedIn* and *Glassdoor* were both examples of online talent pools that can be easily managed and sustained by HR.

However, the most obvious pool of talent available to the Council is that of its existing employees.

The Council's current employees not only understand the current business culture and organisation, but they also provide a talent pool that does not require costly advertising to recruit from. Naturally, employees who continue to perform at high levels should be considered for internal promotions, and by interviewing internal candidates before going external, the Council may be able to prevent high financial and time costs.

Long-term succession planning should also play a more prominent role in recruitment, as it not only provides the most cost-effective recruitment solution to filling a position, it also ensures the retention of good employees, and establishing a talent pool of existing employees helps to encourage this. Consequently, the Committee recommended that:

## 5

### **The Council introduce and develop a workforce succession plan for all key roles within the organisation.**

The Committee also commented on the benefits of setting up an "Alumni Network Talent Pool", as other Councils use former staff, residents in the area, community leaders or professionals, such as teachers or doctors, to reach out on their behalf and create a network for them to recruit from.

Former employees also play a key role in future recruitment in the new age of social media recruitment, as their comments on social media, particularly *Glassdoor*, can impact upon prospective employees considering a role at the Council.

The Council must, therefore, maintain social media communication with former employees, both to help future recruitment, and in case those former employees remain interested in returning to work for the organisation.

Members discussed the possibility of encouraging local residents to apply for local positions, and heard that the Council already advertised locally in libraries, schools and with Job Centre Plus. Furthermore, careers' management teams within schools helped to target apprentices. However, it was made clear that selection of local residents could not be exclusive for vacancies, as this would not be legal.

The Council will also begin an extensive recruitment campaign for apprenticeships for 2017/18, which Members explored later this report. These apprentices should also be considered a talent pool and a workforce planning process will be put in place to ensure successful and high-performance apprentices have opportunities for employment with the Council once their apprenticeships come to an end.

## Apprenticeships

While the Council employs apprentices in areas such as Legal Services, Green Spaces and Housing Repairs, the introduction of apprenticeship targets under the Enterprise Act, together with the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, means the Council has the opportunity to introduce a far more wide-reaching and diverse approach to apprenticeships.

The HR team have recently met with each Head of Service to discuss the opportunities for apprenticeships and other workforce initiatives across the Council, such as Project Search, a supported internship for school leavers with learning difficulties. An apprenticeship workforce plan has been developed, outlining the potential to convert approximately forty vacancies into apprenticeship opportunities and from next year, it is anticipated that the Council will have appointed these apprentices internally.

The new Apprenticeship Standards encompass an extremely broad range of vocations and the training which can be funded by the Apprenticeship Levy ranges up to degree-level qualifications. This means that apprenticeships can be an attractive alternative to attending university because the 'earn and learn' approach can be preferable to the risk of accumulating student debt.

A recruitment campaign targeting local residents (although not exclusively), including local school and college leavers and parents, could also be beneficial to the Council, while contributing to the career development of young people across the Borough.

The Committee also believed that it would be helpful to encourage apprentices to be involved within the Council's increased social media platform, and help foster the culture of advocacy for the organisation.

It was agreed that the Committee recommended that:

6

**The Council create talent pools of existing employees, an alumni network enabled by social media, and an “Apprenticeship Talent Pool” to ensure talented apprentices have opportunities to maintain employment within the Council.**

# Selection

## Interview Methods and Helping Officers Assess Candidates

A "one-size-fits-all" approach to recruitment is unsuitable, given the wide variety of functions undertaken by the Council, and the requisite skills necessary. However, the review gave consideration to the methods in place to help managers in deciding a framework for appointing staff.

The Committee sought a greater understanding by recruiting officers of how different tests, questions and best practices could help to ensure that, on the one hand, candidates are given the opportunity to demonstrate the necessary capabilities, and on the other, an appropriate level of differentiation between candidates emerges.

The HR Policy suggests a framework for scoring candidates, and additional options for weighting the most important characteristics. The guidance does not, however, extend to the method by which these results are obtained.

## The Selection Process

The Council predominantly relies on an interview process as a means of selection, with some areas introducing limited selection 'testing'. In order to make lawful selection decisions and protect the Council from costly discrimination claims, recruiting managers need to demonstrate that they have made objective decisions based upon the job description and person specification of the role.

Recent experiences have indicated that improvements to the selection process are required. Some 'tests' that have been used by recruiting managers could not be objectively demonstrated to be valid and reliable, as they may have failed to measure what they purported to and did not offer consistency of measurement. These are underpinning principles in ensuring fair and non-discriminatory selection processes, so need to be addressed.

HR has identified three commercially available selection tests which meet both validity and reliability requirements, and these could be made available to recruiting managers:

- Verbal comprehension;
- Numerical comprehension; and,
- Accuracy and error checking.

Another selection challenge is the inconsistency of job descriptions (JD) and person specifications, upon which all selection decisions are made. There is no central JD library, and although every role in the Council is evaluated to determine a consistent grade, writing a job description is a job devolved across all services, which creates discrepancies and inconsistencies of approach.

While not advocating that writing job descriptions is centralised, as Line Managers are the best placed people to articulate the requirements of a role, there is an opportunity to provide an online job description library tool which would improve the standard and consistency of job descriptions, as well as offering version control and governance around the selection process.

Aligned with a job description library, it may also be beneficial to introduce standardised questions to measure candidate suitability against specific criteria which are outlined in the person specification.



While the introduction of commercially validated selection tests and a job description library would have cost implications, this could be offset by a reduction in 'failed' selection where unsuitable candidates are recruited, inevitably leading to a need to re-recruit the position.

Any tools that can be used to support the selection of the most suitable and talented candidates will then lead to enhanced performance and productivity on taking up the role, and this would lead to a decrease in so-called 'failed' selection.

## Enhancing Internal Processes

Candidates rarely apply to a single employer, and the applicant's experience of the recruitment process is often a contributing factor to which employer they eventually choose. Frustrations and delays during recruitment often make candidates reconsider working for a particular employer, and as all selection processes are mutual, it is important that the Council continues to develop internal process to ensure the recruitment experience is positive and candidates are more likely to choose to work at the London Borough of Hillingdon.

The Council's e-recruitment platform will receive a system upgrade during 2017/18 aimed at improving the user-interfaces for both applicants and recruiting managers, and it is important that all managers are trained on this system.

In addition to updating the e-recruitment platform, it is important to ensure best practice when selecting candidates as well. All selection decisions should be related to the criteria outline within the 'person specification' section of the job description. These selection decisions are ultimately subject to the scrutiny of an Employment Tribunal and therefore should be made as fairly, objectively and equitably as possible.

The quality of job descriptions is therefore essential to being able to justify a sound selection decision, but currently the standards are not consistent and no central management of job descriptions is conducted. These discrepancies and inconsistencies in the approach to writing job descriptions should be eliminated, and consequently, to support consistent and objective selection processes against the person specification criteria. On this basis, the Committee recommends that:

**7**

**A centralised Job Description Library is implemented and all managers involved in recruitment are re-trained on the new e-recruitment system, together with refresher training on selection methods and equalities.**

## Ensuring Selection of High-Calibre Applicants

Candidate selection is potentially one of the more strategic decision-making processes a manager will engage in.

Poor selection can have an extremely negative impact on performance, productivity, team morale and overall service delivery, and correcting poor selection can lead to painful, time-consuming and extremely costly capability processes.

In contrast, good candidate selection can be the opposite, and a 'great hire' can go on to be a top performer and an asset to the Council for many years. Thus, it is essential that we equip managers with the tools to ensure that they select the right candidate.

Recruitment is not solely based on skills and experience, and it is important that we also recruit people who exhibit the desired behaviours to help us deliver our organisational objectives. The Council's competency framework defines the behaviour expectations of its managers and staff,



and this framework forms part of the person specification criteria, allowing selection decisions to be made against the competency framework. This framework, however, has not been reviewed for over ten years, and the Council has been through unprecedented change during this time.

A review of this framework would, therefore, be desirable to ensure the behaviours described within the framework remain relevant to the Council in the current climate. Therefore, the Committee recommend that:

## 8

### **A review of the current Competency Framework is conducted by the Council.**

Similarly, to ensuring current staff still fit the behaviour expectations and culture of the organisation, it is important to recruit people who share similar values to the Council. Cultural fit and shared values between candidates and the Council are essential to good recruitment, and the interview process should seek to try and corroborate whether the partnership between a potential employee and the organisation would be a 'culture-fit'.

Every one of the Council's employees should be serviced-focused and be passionate about putting our residents first. Recruitment based on shared values is an example of culture-fit and research demonstrates that high performing organisations ensure that candidates are suitable adapted to the organisation, as well as having the requisite skills and knowledge.

With candidates applying from the private sector, honesty was of paramount importance to ensure culture-fit, but it was also helpful for the organisation to retain a commercial mind-set which may be more recognisable with private sector candidates' thinking. Furthermore, the Council arguably has different values from other local authorities too, and these may help recruitment when up against competitors in the public sector.

Members suggested that the interview process needed to be modernised to ensure selection of top candidates and prevent the hiring of unsuitable candidates. To do this, it would be important to modernise the interview process and make it more interesting, and the Committee agreed that looking at different ways to make more senior hires was significant.

One possible idea was to ask senior role candidates to do a "day on the job" as part of their interview, something that Social Services' directors had previously been asked to do. It was also noted that the final stage for interview for most Chief Officer hires, required constitutionally, would be by the Council's Appointments Committee or Sub-Committee.

Relevant and consistent interview questions should also be associated with each job description to help improve the chances of selecting the right candidate, and in some roles, occupational 'testing' can augment the interview process to improve decision-making when selecting a candidate. If a role requires high levels of accuracy, then this cannot be determined by asking a question at interview, but an online accuracy test can allow a candidate to demonstrate accuracy skills and provide an objective selection score.

Furthermore, in today's world of work, having good levels of ICT competency within an organisation is critical to its effective operation. Having staff that can easily use and adapt to our changing technology toolkit will aid service improvement and transformation going forward.

Currently there are no set techniques (except within the ICT Service) in assessing ICT skills of staff, and whilst an individual's use of technology will vary from role to role, there should be a basic level of competency that applies to most office based staff. It is therefore proposed that officers investigate this further as part of the candidate selection process.

With these considerations in mind, the Committee recommend that:

**9**

**The Council introduce consistent interview questions associated with each job description, suitable selection techniques and values-based interview techniques to ensure employees' are culture-fit, and occupational testing for recruitment to key and relevant roles. Cabinet also requests officers investigate appropriate ICT assessment techniques as part of the selection process, to ensure office based workforce retains a high level of ICT competency.**

# Staff Induction & Retention

## Staff Induction

The recruitment process should also ensure that candidates understand the role and responsibilities it entails. The Committee's review considered ways in which a candidate can be helped to understand the role they are applying for, beyond a candidate specification. Staff induction should therefore help a candidate understand what to expect day-to-day in the role, and ensure that the staff induction period introduces new staff to the key policies, benefits and opportunities of the Council. In social care, for example, the Director was involved at an early stage in terms of meeting new staff to help them transition into their new role. Opportunities also exist for staff to meet the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council.

With over 800 services delivered across the Council, there is a need to be able to induct employees across a broad range of roles. To ensure this happens, an induction check-list is used to ensure that each employee receives consistent information and training during their 'on-boarding' period. This check-list must be completed before the Council can confirm that the employee's probationary period has been completed successfully.

The Council has recently successfully trialled a two-day face-to-face induction process for all staff within the Children and Young People Services, and this will now be extended to cover all employees across the Social Care directorate, including adult social work and care.

## Staff Retention

At the time of the review, the projected staff turnover for 2016/17 was expected to be 19.6%, however, this figure also included redundancies and retirements, which meant that the voluntary projection would be 11%. This suggests that around one in ten employees will resign from the Council in a specific year.

HR has not noticed any specific trends with resignations, but the Council will be introducing a new 'exit interview' process which may offer more insight into this. This new 'exit opinion poll' system is being introduced in 2017 and aims to provide clear and confidential feedback on the reasons why employees choose to leave employment with the Council. Furthermore, comments on *Glassdoor* will be monitored and taken into account, as this allows former staff members to comment on their experience in an organisation, as well as potentially divulging their reasons for moving on.

Although overall staff turnover figures are not concerning, HR has been monitoring the turnover of staff across Children and Young People's Services because of the market scarcity of experienced children's social workers. This financial year's staff turnover in the area is projected at 14.3%, of which 13.3% was voluntary, which compares favourably against the latest national statistics (September 2014) which showed the turnover of staff in children's social care averages 17% across England, rising to 21% across London.

This positive retention rate is attributed to the establishment of a stable management team, the new induction programme, positioning the Council as a top quartile recruiter, London's leading payer of social work salaries, the introduction of a new career progression scheme and the rolling out of a bespoke management development programme to all sixty managers across the Social Care directorate.

The importance of succession planning in staff retention cannot be underestimated either. As discussed earlier in the report, this is an important part of strategic workforce planning and should be captured to prevent good employees from leaving the Council.

A difference in culture can also lead to reduced staff retention, and this must be taken into account. The Committee questioned whether there was a difference in culture with candidates who had not worked in the public sector before, and were informed that it was vital that recruiting managers were open and honest with candidates at interviews in order to attract them to the role; this honesty helps to find out whether a candidate is the right fit for the organisation culturally.

Members also suggested that a staff referral system helps aid staff retention. Very few employees would refer a friend or former colleague for a job if they intended on leaving their position themselves, and having a close friend or colleague to work alongside them can also be a contributing factor in remaining in their post.

The Committee suggested staff retention and the view of current staff members should be analysed in an attempt to improve staff retention rates and understand the reasons that employees leave their positions. Currently, staff surveys within the Council were used to help understand the views of staff members, but more could be done in this area. It was agreed that an item on staff retention and the benefits package that staff receive be added to the work programme in the future, and that the item be monitored by the Committee.

## Evaluating Recruitment Success

It is important that the Council is able to continuously monitor the effectiveness of its recruitment process and evaluate the success of investment in new initiatives. In doing so, the Council can improve under-performing aspects of recruitment, while focusing on expanding the more successful aspects of the process.

Potential ideas to monitor recruitment success included a 'scorecard' of key recruitment and selection performance indicators that could be agreed and reported on quarterly as part of the Council's business performance monitoring process, ensuring that the recruitment process remains both effective and efficient. Such a report would include data on the time it took to recruit employees, exit interview analysis, and the cost per hire.

A suitable time for this analysis of the selection process would be at the end of the probationary process, and it would evaluate the correlation between recruitment processes and the eventual performance of the recruited employee. These evaluations, as well as key recruitment and selection performance indicators, would be reported every quarter to meetings of the Corporate Management Team. On this basis, the Committee recommended that:

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**The Council introduce an evaluation of recruitment and selection processes and performance indicators as part of the probationary period sign-off process, reporting on a quarterly basis to CMT.**

# Equalities

HR policy is clear that candidates declaring a disability, who meet the person specification in full, are guaranteed an interview in line with Council policy and the 'Disability Confidence Scheme', and that additional appropriate arrangements will be made to accommodate applicants who consider themselves disabled. Furthermore, the advice is given is that disabled candidates are welcome to discuss their impairment, though should be reminded that it has no bearing on their appointment.

There are clear structures in place to help ensure that recruitment is conducted in a fair manner, concentrating on factors relevant to undertaking a job. However, the review considered whether these structures have proved sufficient, and whether the Council has a positive record in assisting disabled applicants. This would ensure that the recruitment process directly represented the Council's wider commitment to equalities.

## Equalities and Diversity

The Council was recently awarded the Disability Confident Employer certification which has replaced the 'Two Ticks' scheme, and the policy of offering a guaranteed interview to anyone with a disability who meets the minimum criteria outlined in the person specification for any role, has been maintained. A training module covering disability and requirements to make reasonable adjustments has also been introduced and is mandatory for all managers involved in recruitment.

While the Council had previously considered 'anonymous' applications, where candidates' names are removed from the application documentation to avoid any 'unconscious bias' during short-listing, it is not felt that this would be beneficial. It would have cost implications regarding system development and administration of the process, which would also lead to slow recruitment.

It is also essential for the short-listing manager to be aware of any candidates with a disability, so they can apply the alternate criteria to offer a guaranteed interview where applicable. Council policy states that candidates who had declared a disability and met the person specification in full when applying for a job were guaranteed an interview, and additional appropriate arrangements should be made to accommodate applicants who consider themselves disabled.

The Council are certified as a Disability Confident Employer, due to the organisation's approach to supporting disabled candidates. An annual workforce equality report is produced and published on the Council's website, and the certification award demonstrates the Council has a good record of recruiting disabled employees.

HR confirmed that they remain confident the London Borough of Hillingdon goes 'over and above' their legal requirements in supporting disabled candidates, and will continue this approach to equalities and recruitment in the future.

## Terms of Reference of the review

**The following Terms of Reference were agreed by the Committee:**

1. To understand how recruitment is currently undertaken, and learn more about current areas of success which could be more widely replicated;
2. To look at suggested models of best practice internally, in local and regional government, and in private and third sector employers, as appropriate to the aims of the review;
3. To consider, and recommend to Cabinet, any improvements to the Council's present approach.

## Witnesses

### **Session One - 28 November 2016**

Mr Robert Peasnell, Managing Director, TMP Worldwide

Mr Mike Talbot, Workforce and Organisational Development Manager, London Borough of Hillingdon

### **Session Two - 5 January 2017**

Mr Mike Talbot, Workforce and Organisational Development Manager, London Borough of Hillingdon

## Background material

- HR policies and procedures
- Recruitment - Defining the Role
- Recruitment - The Selection Process
- London Borough of Hillingdon Social Care Structures
- Scoping Report for Review into Human Resources and Recruitment (Item 5), Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee Agenda, 26 September 2016
- Minutes of Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee meeting, held on 26 September 2016
- Recruitment and Selection Report (Item 5), Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee Agenda, 29 November 2016
- Minutes of Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee meeting, held on 29 November 2016
- Recruitment and Selection Recommendations (Item 5), Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee Agenda, 5 January 2017
- Minutes of Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee meeting, held on 5 January 2017
- Review of HR Recruitment Process: Potential First Review Topic
- Review Topics for First Major Review of 2016/2017 (Item 5), Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee Agenda, 16 June 2016