

---

## Report to Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee

25 January 2023

### Recruitment and Retention

### Report by Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development

---

#### Summary

Through scrutiny of the quarter 1 and 2 Performance and Resources Reports (PRR) the Committee has recognised the issues identified through Corporate Risk 11; skills shortages and recruitment and retention issues as a key risk for the Council. The Committee requested a report be presented setting out the mitigating actions being identified and taken to manage this risk.

This report therefore provides details of the actions which the Council is currently taking to support its recruitment and retention agenda and to respond to corporate risk CR11 which states: *As a result of skill shortages across various sectors, and less attractive employment offers in comparison to other organisations and locations (amplified by the current cost of living situation), there is a risk that we will not be able to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of qualified/experienced staff to manage and deliver quality services.* The report builds on previous scrutiny of the People Framework (September 2022) and the quarterly (PRR during 2021/22).

#### Focus for Scrutiny

The committee is asked to consider and comment on this report. Key lines of enquiry for scrutiny include:

- whether Members of the committee are satisfied with the mitigating actions being taken to manage Corporate Risk11 in relation to staff recruitment and retention across the Authority and that these actions are being effectively monitored through the governance process linked to the corporate risk register
- that the cost and/or financial benefits of the actions have been considered, how they represent good value and whether there are sufficient HR resources available to support the actions
- agree how the progress on implementing the identified actions will be reported to the committee i.e. in a further report to committee or through more information being included in the Qtr3 Performance and Resources Report (PRR)

#### 1 Recruitment and Retention – Context

1.1 Organisations both nationally and locally are experiencing significant problems with recruitment and retention. Whilst the unemployment rate for August to October 2022 increased by 0.1 percentage points on the quarter to 3.7%, the number of job vacancies remains at historically high levels. The impact of

this is particularly affecting those areas where there have been traditional skills shortages, for example qualified social workers, or where there is high competition from other industries such as Gatwick Airport and/or the retail/hospitality sector (for example for Care Workers). At the same time, public sector earnings have fallen in real terms by 4.3% since the financial crisis (compared with 2.2% in the private sector). In addition to this, in a post Covid world where hybrid working is now the norm, where there is a mandatory requirement for place-based services and therefore proximity to the workplace, it is far harder to attract new workers to relocate to the "expensive southeast".

- 1.2 From a Council perspective, recruitment and retention is acknowledged as one of our most significant corporate risks currently. The latest rolling turnover rate, for the organisation has risen to 14%. From a scrutiny and inspection perspective, recruitment and retention remain a key area of concern for Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). In a recent monitoring visit, Ofsted cited that where social workers know their children well and have positive relationships with them they are more insightful about specific needs and can therefore ensure the best possible care. However, there are still children who have had too many social workers, and this impacts on the help and support we can provide.
- 1.3 In Adult Services, 22% (55 social workers) are agency staff, whilst in Children, Young People and Learning (CYPL) 17.4% (86.5 FTE) of our qualified social worker workforce are agency. In the current marketplace it is becoming increasingly difficult to source agency social workers, with a shift to having to purchase project teams, rather than individual workers. These too are becoming increasingly scarce.
- 1.4 Agency spend across the organisation has continued to increase, with costs in quarter 2 of 2022/23 being 13% higher than quarter 2 of 2021/22, (£5,064,937 compared to £4,487,931) and a rolling 12 month spend of £20.79m. This agency spend for the most part isn't budgeted although offset in part by vacancies.

## **2. Recruitment and Retention - Actions**

- 2.1 The recruitment and retention actions that are currently being undertaken to reduce both vacancy levels and turnover are detailed below:
  - **International Recruitment.** A number of successful international recruitment assignments have taken place in both Children's and Adult Services with a specific focus on recruiting qualified social workers from South Africa and Zimbabwe. Adult Services have undertaken 2 recruitment initiatives and appointed 10 social workers and 8 occupational therapists. Children's Services have undertaken 1 recruitment programme and appointed 36 social workers. Further international recruitment is planned for both Children's and Adult Services in February 2023. To date, the total cost of recruiting internationally has been circa £719,186. The majority of this cost has been funded by one off Covid monies. In addition, when one considers that an agency social worker costs approximately £33k more per annum than employed staff and given the number being used in both Children's and Adults Services, international recruitment is a sensible invest to save initiative.

- **Increasing capacity and skills in the Recruitment Team.** The national shortage of available candidates has been exacerbated by a considerable increase in recruitment activity driven by both turnover and service expansion. The Resourcing Advisors have been managing an average of 865 vacancies, each handling approximately 90-150 active vacancies at any given point. In the first 6 months of 2021/22, 756 vacancies were created, in the first 6 months of 2022/23, there were 1,154, a 66% increase. In either agency environments or in-house recruitment teams, the average number of vacancies a recruiter would work on at any one point would be in the region of 30-35. Given the current market conditions, a different approach, requiring new skills is also required in the marketing of our vacancies, the use of different sourcing strategies, including direct approaches and adopting a much more proactive management of candidates. Based on the number of vacancies that each advisor has been managing, this simply has not been possible, and the team has not been able to provide the level of service necessary, resulting in vacancies not being filled first time and candidates being lost. To mitigate this issue and following a competitive tendering exercise, additional short-term capacity has been engaged in the form of an external specialist project team who will work alongside the current resourcing team, supporting the recruitment to the most challenging vacancies in Children's, Adults and Place Services. This is for an initial 6-month period to get ahead of the demand issues and backlog. The other role of the team is to transfer learning and improvements to the Council's current recruitment processes and skills as part of the exit strategy at the end of the contract. This will ensure that the Resourcing Team is left in a stronger position when the project team steps away. Those Recruitment Advisors who currently serve the areas that would be supported by the project team have been redeployed to support other parts of the organisation, thereby increasing capacity, and improving service quality across the board. The cost of the external support is £422k and has been funded from one off Covid monies.
- **Engaging with candidates in a different way.** The current recruitment challenges are necessitating a more proactive approach to engaging with potential applicants and this includes attending careers fayres, presenting at schools and colleges, direct sourcing of candidates and running our own *meet the team* events. This latter approach has been particularly successful in recruiting candidates into Early Help, Family Time, and Social Worker teams
- **Review of pay and other terms and conditions.** To ensure the Council remains competitive in the recruitment market, a salary benchmarking exercise is currently being undertaken with other local authorities on our hardest to recruit to roles. The outcome of this work will be used to determine whether we do need to increase remuneration for some roles or whether we can offer alternative incentives to attract and retain staff. In addition, we are reviewing recruitment and retention allowances as well as other benefits, such as the *refer a friend scheme* to ensure these continue to be both attractive and competitive. Furthermore, and where possible, the Council continues to use hybrid working as a way of attracting applicants from further afield.

- **Optimising the use of apprenticeships and career pathways to support staff to develop their skills.** Given the national skills shortages in specific areas, growing talent internally is an important aspect of the Council's recruitment and retention plans. Apprenticeships in particular are a key enabler to support this. The Council currently has 357 apprentices in place and a further 81 waiting to be enrolled. The majority of apprenticeships are currently being undertaken by existing staff as part of their development and work is now underway with services to identify which existing vacancies might also be suited to an apprenticeship approach and potentially make them more attractive to external candidates. In addition, work is being undertaken to develop defined career pathways whereby new and existing staff can clearly understand how they can develop their careers at West Sussex County Council without the need to move to another organisation. An example of this is the creation of learning and development pathways for roles in Children's Services which align to professional standards where relevant and supports continuous professional development.
- **Ensuring staff health and wellbeing.** To support staff retention in particular, it is important as an employer that the Council is doing what it can to facilitate positive health and wellbeing in its staff. The Council has recently launched a Wellbeing Hub which is an online resource that provides information, tools and learning to support the staff wellbeing. In addition to providing information on areas such as emotional, physical, and mental health, the hub provides a means by which staff can connect with others to find support, including equality staff network groups, mental health first aiders, local classes, and other wellbeing professionals. Furthermore, and to ensure the Council's health and wellbeing support is up to date and relevant, an organisational workplace health and wellbeing needs assessment was undertaken in late 2022. This gathered anonymous information about the health and wellbeing of the workforce to identify where to reprioritise investment in employee health and wellbeing beyond basic health and safety legal requirements moving forward. The survey was open to all staff employed by the Council. The findings of the assessment are currently being reviewed and both individual service and a corporate action plan will be developed on the back of the results.
- **Development of leadership capability and embedding consistent people management and development.** Research shows that one of the reasons staff either leave or stay with an organisation is down to the quality, approach, and style of their direct line manager. To support this, a review of the Council's management development pathway has been undertaken and amended to ensure the training offer provides leaders with the appropriate skills to undertake their roles at different levels in the Council. Programmes under the pathway now include, developing high performing teams, personal resilience for managers, coaching for performance and unconscious bias. A number of programmes have also been introduced to support effective people management. These include performance management for managers (mandatory), developing high performing teams, recruitment, and interview training (mandatory) and crucial conversations.
- **Introduction of Stay Conversations.** In the update to the Committee (September 2022) on progress against the People Framework, details were provided on a new online exit survey process which has been developed to help the Council understand the reasons why staff have decided to leave and

take action to mitigate these in the future. Based on helpful feedback from Members, we have now introduced a "Stay Conversation" as part of the overall approach. This is aimed at avoiding the resignation by ensuring early engagement takes place with staff who might be thinking of leaving to discuss possible alternative options.

### **3. Areas for further development**

3.1 Whilst significant work is currently being undertaken to support recruitment and retention, there are a number of areas which require further development and attention. In summary these are:

- **Implementation of workforce planning in each directorate.** Whilst improved discussions are taking place in services about workforce planning issues, the Council still needs to develop a consistent approach to strategic workforce planning and further work needs to be undertaken in this area, possibly based on some of the excellent work the Fire and Rescue Service has undertaken in this area. This is a key enabler for the organisation to be able to look longer term and plan for its recruitment challenges rather than responding to vacancies once they emerge.
- **Developing stronger relationships with education providers.** Linked to strategic workforce planning, the Council needs to ensure that it has a robust supply route for appropriately qualified and skilled candidates as well as growing and developing talent internally. To support this, closer relationships need to be developed with education providers to ensure academic programmes match employment needs. This might be achieved by engaging fully with fora such as the Chichester College Skills Advisory Panels and Sussex Sector Skills Groups, to promote the County Council's employability and skills priorities
- **Collaborative working with other local authorities.** Joint working is currently being undertaken with District and Borough colleagues in West Sussex on some aspects of recruitment and retention. However, given our greatest competitors for those skilled staff who are in short supply are predominantly other county and unitary councils, greater collaborative working is required in this area. It is anticipated this work can be taken forward in collaboration with South-East Employers.

### **4. Policy Alignment and Compliance**

4.1 The mitigating actions outlined above link to the Council Plan through the 'Making Best Use of Resources' priority. As this is an up-date report dealing with internal matters the Equality, Human Rights, Social Value, Sustainability and Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessments are not required.

Gavin Wright

**Director of HR and Organisational Development**

**Contact Officer:** [gavin.wright@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:gavin.wright@westsussex.gov.uk) 07563 380168

**Background papers** - None