



Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	People Service - Update
Date:	5 th March 2024
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Carole Weston, Portfolio Holder for People and Transformation
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	n/a
Appendices:	Nil
Background papers:	Nil
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	EDI – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion HR – Human Resources RAG – RED, Amber, Green FTE – Full Time Equivalent CLT – Corporate Leadership Team SLT – Strategic Leadership Team

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Corporate Priorities	Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery
Wards affected	N/A
Purpose of the report:	1. To provide the committee with a corporate staffing update and to highlight the associated the work programme.
Recommendation:	1. For the committee to review and provide feedback.
Period for post policy/project review:	The work programme forms part of the Transformation

People Service Update

Introduction

The Chair of the Finance and Resource Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a separate paper updating the committee on 3 specific areas:

- Recruitment;
- Staff turnover;
- Sickness;

Recruitment

The Council's existing vacancy rate is circa. 15%. A rate of 5-10% is generally seen as optimal. Our current rate is impacted by a number of vacant posts which are on hold pending restructures, principally relating to Housing and Legal services. If we exclude these 'on hold' vacancies the rate is approximately 11%.

The Council is keen that managers proactively progress our job vacancies so that no time is lost in replacing staff members. Performance is managed on this rigorously including a new monthly vacancy tracker at SLT where Chief Officers can gain assurance over recruitment progress.

We are also working to improve our recruitment advertising approach. This work will focus on our branding and streamlining the process so that people can easily find and apply for our roles. LinkedIn is proving our principle advertising media focusing on the 'Dacorum offer' highlighting advantages such as work/life balance and supportive benefits. Further work will also explore the brand of Dacorum and how this is presented, so potential applicants understand our purpose and values as an organisation.

The recruitment market is clearly competitive in many areas, especially for 'professional' roles. In these pockets across Dacorum, we need to think creatively around pay and structures. Our market forces policy is already having an impact in those areas (e.g. planners) and we are considering whether different structures and pay bands maybe required for specialist roles.

With the market challenges and an aging workforce (approximately 70% of staff are over 40 years old), we need to think differently and innovatively about how we can generate interest about working for Dacorum. In recent months we have done the following to help this:

- We have attended a job career fair event with various schools at Shendish Manor;
- We also attended a session with Wilkinsons (for staff at risk of redundancy due to its closure in Hemel Hempstead).
- We are also exploring opportunities to work with the Mount Prison on work placements.
- We have a meeting in Q4 with the local college to see we can work together for job placements or paid employment.
- We have set up a project group to improve our school summer work experience programme. The corporate management team is currently establishing how their services can support this programme. It is likely that we could offer up to 10 placements this year.

- We have recently increased graduate intake through the national graduate development programme (3 graduates per year now rather than 1 per year). All three new graduates have been inducted and have started in their roles.
- We have trained 16 members of staff via the apprenticeship levy over the past 2 years. The Council is reviewing a further increased offering of apprentices and graduates as part of the service planning process for 2024/2025. This would enable us to 'grow our own' in these challenging service areas.

Staff Turnover

The annual staff turnover percentage is currently 13% which is considered a healthy staff turnover rate in the UK. The Council's annual staff turnover rate has been between 10%-15% for many years.

There is a clear correlation between areas of higher than average staff turnover (Property, Planning, Homelessness, and Legal) and specific recruitment challenges. This is likely linked to market-related issues such as skills shortages and market pay inflation. Initiatives to combat this are set out in the recruitment section within this paper.

While the Council's staff turnover is healthy, we continue to strive to be the 'employer of choice'. Our people strategy 2022 to 2025 recognises the importance of strong leadership, management and career development to make the Council a workplace where staff wish to stay.

The people strategy programme plan is currently in delivery. Please see below some of the key developments in this area:

- **Leadership development programme launched for middle managers.** Over 50 managers are soon to complete this programme. It included training on coaching skills, change management and empowering teams to take initiative and ownership. The learnings from this programme will help shape our mandatory manager programme.
- **Mandatory Management Programme.** This will focus on what skills/competencies does a great manager need to possess to drive our Council forward. We aim to implement this in the summer/autumn.
- **Embedding our new values and behaviours** A new set of values and behaviours were developed by staff. These set out our desired workplace culture. These were launched to the workforce last year and are now being embedded e.g. in performance management, recruitment. This work is being led by a cross-council staff group.
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.** We have an EDI action plan overseen by an EDI working group from across the Council. The next key projects are establishing a celebration/recognition events calendar for 2024, reviewing the community impact assessment process to ensure it is robust and meaningful and exploring how we can improve EDI data on our staff and community.
- **Revised PDR (appraisal) and talent management plan.** We will be reviewing our performance development review process to ensure that all staff are given the opportunity to thrive and develop.
- **Future Talent Programme.** We will also be developing a future talent programme which will focus on providing those with an interest to progress their career with the opportunity to develop their skills and broaden their experience.
- **Enhancing our new starter and manager Induction programmes.** This will ensure that each new starter and manager has a positive start to their Dacorum experience and feels supported and included from day 1.
- **Coaching and Mentoring Scheme** In Q3 the Council launched a workplace coaching scheme for staff to become a trained workplace coach. We currently have three qualified training coaches

with 5 further employees interested in the next round of training. A mentor scheme is currently being explored to further support staff who wish to progress their careers.

Sickness Absence

The sickness outturn for this quarter (Q3) is more than the last quarter (Q2) with an average of between 11 and 12 sick days per FTE. The main reasons for this increase are increased absences in the following areas: Flu/colds, Stress and Musculoskeletal.

These make up a large proportion of sickness absence. The area of the highest sickness absence falls within the Neighbourhood Operations service area, which consists of mainly front line services (Waste and Clean, Safe and Green) and where the nature of the work (outdoors and physical) is more likely to result in an absence.

Higher levels of sickness is consistent across all sectors including the public sector so our figures are not unusual. However the data does show that the Council's long term sickness absence is causing a significant impact on our overall sickness outturn: long term sickness absence has increased by a third over the past four years.

Indeed, over the past year there have been some very serious medical cases that have resulted in staff being absent from work for a significant period of time. These cases are very sensitive and will often result in a staff member being away from work for up to 12 months. For context, 10 cases of serious long term sickness has resulted in over 1,500 working days lost, this equates to adding over 2 days sickness per FTE on the Council total.

The sickness scrutiny group continues to assess all long-term sickness cases each month to ensure the Council is doing all it can to support staff back to work, by ensuring we have the latest medical information from our Occupational Health team, looking at what adjustments we can make to roles and where cases need to be escalated to a formal process in line with the policy. We work closely with managers to ensure regular contact is made with staff who are absent from work as this is a critical aspect to help staff back to the workplace. For example, weekly sickness management and HR meetings recently set at Cupid green to proactively manage sickness absence across the depot.

The Council continue to arrange staff wellness offers which includes courses, webinars, exercise classes and other support. We run wellness clinics across the Council so that staff can have wellness checks through a qualified nurse. We also have a mental health first aider programme, with a cohort of trained staff who can be the first port of call for our workforce should they need some assistance. We also offer a free confidential helpline to staff where they can seek professional advice and counselling. Our leadership development course for all middle managers contains a module on how we effectively manage staff through change and how we best manage anxious staff.

We continue to trial an onsite physio treatment and a clinic at Cupid Green depot. This encourages safer working practices to try and prevent injuries and bad working habits with frontline staff. We will be assessing the effectiveness of this and will be discussing future options with the cupid green management team.

We have also recently completed a flu vaccination programme across the Council, are about to launch our menopause policy and will be reviewing the approach to 'special leave'. All of these should impact positively on our sickness rate.