HILLINGDON
LONDON

Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy Overview Committee Major Review Scoping Report 2016/17

Recruitment & Selection

1. Context and Current Recruitment Procedure

1.1 The following table indicates the current workforce breakdown by directorate:

Directorate	Employee Headcount	Employee Full Time Equivalent
Administration	129	116
Finance	225	210
Residents Services	1,546	1,217
Social Care	845	730
Total	**2,745**	**2,273**

1.2 The Council has recruited 278 new employees this financial year (April to October) and recruited 366 employees in 2015/16.

1.3 In 2015/16, voluntary turnover (due to employee resignation) accounted for 320 out of 480 total employees leaving the Council which equates to a voluntary turnover figure of 11.2%.

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

1.5 The Council's Recruitment & Resourcing team sit within the 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.

1.6   The Council uses an online recruitment system or Applicant 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 March 2017, which will enhance the user experience for HR, recruiting managers and applicants alike.

1.7   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.

1.8   A number of annual subscriptions are secured with online job and social media sites, such as Jobs Go Public and LinkedIn.

1.9   In order to advertise a position, the recruiting manager meets with the Recruitment & Resourcing team who subsequently set up the vacancy in the ATS (i-GRasp). The system automates the approval process with all posts constitutionally requiring Chief Executive approval in consultation with 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.

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

1.11   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.

1.12   All offers are conditional upon pre-employment checks (such as DBS checks for relevant positions) and satisfactory reference. References are sourced through a dedicated online reference checking system. Once pre-employment checks are successfully completed then 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.

2. Recruitment Advertising & Employer Brand

2.1   Increasingly, job applicants are becoming more sophisticated in how they approach their job search. In similar ways to how websites and apps 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.

2.2   Research continues to demonstrate that while 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.

2.3 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 candidate should consider us before other employers. To truly engage with a potential candidate, our employer brand should articulate the values and culture of the Council and be able to authentically describe the experience of working for the London Borough of Hillingdon.

2.4 The requirement to tender for a new 'strategic recruitment services' contract for April conveniently gives the Council an opportunity to include developing a corporate recruitment identity as part of the specification. The investment in the development and design of an employer brand would be offset by reduced recruitment advertising in future.

2.5 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. Again, a focus on social media-based recruitment should be contained in the specification for the 'strategic recruitment services' tender to ensure the Council is in place to embrace the next major development in recruitment.

3. Apprenticeships

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

3.2 The HR team have recently met with each Head of Service to discuss the opportunities for apprenticeships and other workforce initiatives (such as Project Search, a supported internship for school leavers with learning difficulties) across the Council. An apprenticeship workforce plan has been developed, outlining the potential to convert circa 40 vacancies into apprenticeship opportunities.

3.3 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.

3.4 A recruitment campaign targeting local residents (although not exclusively, which would be unlawful) could be beneficial to the Council while contributing to the career development of young people across the Borough.

4. The Selection Process

4.1   The council predominantly relies on an interview process as a means of selection, with some areas introducing limited selection 'testing'.

4.2   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.

4.3   Recent experiences have indicated that improvements to the selection process are required. A number of 'tests' have been used by recruiting managers which cannot be objectively demonstrated to be valid (that they measure what they purport to) and reliable (that they offer consistency of measurement). These are underpinning principles in ensuring fair and non-discriminatory selection processes so are a concern. HR have identified three commercially available selection tests which meet both validity and reliability requirements; verbal comprehension, numerical comprehension and accuracy / error checking. These could be made available to recruiting managers.

4.4   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 JD is a job devolved across all services, creating discrepancies and inconsistencies of approach.

4.5   While not advocating that writing JDs, is centralised (line-managers are the best placed people to articulate the requirements of a role) there is the opportunity to provide an online job description library tool which would improve the standard and consistency of JDs, as well as offering version control and governance around the selection process. Aligned to a JD library could be the introduction of standardised questions to measure candidate suitability against specific criteria outlined in the person specification.

4.6   While the introduction of commercially validated selection tests and a JD library would of course 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. Tools that support the selection of the most suitable and talented candidates obviously lead to enhanced performance and productivity on taking up the role.

5. Onboarding & Retention

5.1   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 successfully completed.

5.2   We have recently successfully trialled a two-day face-to-face induction process for all Children & Young People Services which will now be extended to cover all employees across the Social Care directorate, including adult social work and care.

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

5.4   This positive retention is attributed to the establishment of a stable management team, the new induction programme, positioning ourselves as a top quartile (in fact, currently 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 60 managers across the Social Care directorate.

5.5   A new 'exit opinion poll' system is being introduced for January 2017 to provide clear and confidential feedback on the reasons why employees choose to leave employment with the council.

6. Equality & Diversity

6.1   A training module covering disability and requirements to make reasonable adjustments has been introduced and is mandatory for all managers involved in recruitment.

6.2   The Council has recently been awarded the Disability Confident Employer certification which has replaced the 'Two Ticks' scheme. We maintain 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.

6.3   While we have recently 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 in terms of the system development and administration of the process which would also lead to slower 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.

6.4   As part of the recent apprenticeship discussions with Heads of Service we have also identified areas which would host supported internships. From September 2017, we intend to support between nine and twelve school and college leavers with learning difficulties on the year-long Project Search employability programme.

7. Summary of Opportunities

7.1 Develop a clear employer brand for the Council which articulates our culture and values, highlights our 'unique selling points' and describes the experience and benefits of choosing to work for the London Borough of Hillingdon.

7.2 Enhance our social media recruitment presence.

7.3 Use tender of new 'strategic recruitment services' to deliver points 7.1 and 7.2.

7.4 Design a recruitment campaign for circa 40 apprenticeships across the council, targeting local school and college leavers, parents and residents.

7.5 Introduce commercially valid selection testing for critical roles.

7.6 Implement a central job description library to enable consistent and objective selection against person specification criteria.

7.7 Support the Project Search initiative with an initial cohort rolled out in September 2017.