



North Devon Council

Report Date: Monday, 23 September 2024

Topic: Review of Authority's Future Proofing our Workforce

Report by: Nikki Gordon, Head of Organisational Development

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Governance Committee requested that a report on the on the staffing challenges faced by Local Authorities and the associated risks this brings be brought to a future meeting.

1.2 Local Authorities across the country are all experiencing challenges in employing and retaining staff in a very competitive market. This report sets out what the Local Authority is doing to mitigate this challenge and providing reassurance that the Council are offering an attractive overall experience for existing and future staff it employs.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Members note the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The report sets out some of the recruitment challenges Councils are facing with recruitment into some posts and the measures this authority is putting in place to try to mitigate this.

3.2. The report outlines what we were currently doing to ensure that we have the right number of people, with the right skills, attitudes and behaviours to attract, develop and retain appropriate staff now and for the future.

4. REPORT

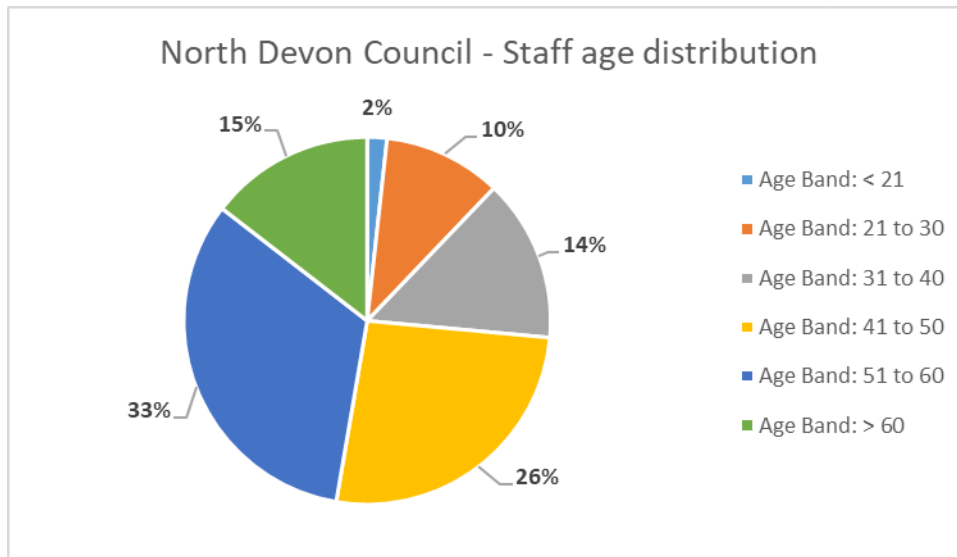
4.1 Local Authorities across the country are all experiencing issues in employing and retaining staff in a very competitive market. Methods of mitigating this are being used such as increasing graduate schemes and apprenticeships which is explored further in this report.

4.2. The challenges we face, just like other local authorities, is that there is a national shortage of particular professions such as Planning Officers, Environmental Health

Officers and Building Control Officers and previously HGV drivers although this is not quite such a challenge for us at this time.

4.3. This is coupled with an aging workforce. To give some context, the age demographic of our current workforce across the Council shows that 48% of our employees are over the age of 51.

The below table shows the Council's current workforce age breakdown



4.4 Another challenge that we have experienced is that recruitment into North Devon historically was an 'easy sell' with being able to live and work in such an amazing and beautiful part of the country. This has become a significant challenge now in that firstly the cost of housing has increased significantly and potential staff are struggling to find or afford to live in the area and secondly with the introduction of hybrid-working, working from home has become more attractive and even if people are choosing to live in North Devon, with this increased flexibility they are able to obtain a higher paid job in another area (such as London) but be able to live and work from home in the South West.

4.5 The latter point above undoubtedly has had an impact on the Council's ability to recruit into some posts; however with some organisations now asking their staff to be back into the office more we may start to see a shift in this pattern. It does highlight however that offering flexible working arrangements is very important in attracting new staff and it also highlights the task that we all have, officers and councillors, of maintaining and enhancing the reputation of North Devon Council as being an excellent employer (an employer of choice) and an enjoyable and rewarding place to work and develop a meaningful career to serve and support our communities.

4.6. There is continued competition from, private companies, as well as from within the local government family and for some people the attractiveness of the flexibility



offered through agency working suits their personal circumstances. We are all seeking similar skills within a limited supply.

4.7 What are we doing to mitigate this risk - Attracting employees to NDC

There is a huge amount of work happening to improve our position in the market, we have completely redesigned our recruitment pages, making them far more attractive and exciting for those seeking opportunities, with professional videos, giving potential candidates a real sense of our culture and what it is like to work for NDC, the wide range of career opportunities available and the various entry points into those posts.

We have significantly widened where we advertise vacant posts to ensure we are reaching the largest pool possible and we have made our adverts more appealing and attractive using photos that reflect the context of the position. As well as our usual advertising routes we now use much wider channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Indeed, Public Sector Today, South West Times as well as specific publications such as The Planner for specialist roles. We are seeing an increase in the number of applications received on the back of widening the audience we are trying to reach out too.

Local Government Association (LGA) – a national recruitment campaign is being launched as part of the Sector Support 2024/25 co-produced with Solace (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) to further assist beyond what we have done ourselves to further promote opportunities, attract new talent and further highlight the benefits that a career can offer within Local Government.

To remain competitive, we enhanced our Apprenticeship pay offer in April 2023 and we are exploring at what point an apprentice should receive the same salary as a graduate as they come through different entry points within the Apprentice routes, for example some taking up to 5 years in planning.

We will soon have Onboarding up and running which is a process of effectively introducing newly recruited individuals to NDC through our iTrent system. This will enable our new starters to see their progress and start to prepare for joining us. Onboarding will include welcome video, SMT photo with names. Once offer has been accepted, they will then have access to our general info on the organisation such as headcount, overview of the teams, policies, FAQ's and new starter checklist. New starters will see a countdown to start date and be able to complete all their new starter paperwork online and submit prior to their first day. Giving an understanding of the organisational culture and values all helping to ensure that individuals feel welcomed and supported as they begin their new career with us and it will provide them with the knowledge and resources they need to be successful in their new role.



Evidence indicates that a positive Onboarding experience can aid retention and that new hires who are satisfied with their Onboarding at 90 days are two times more likely to stay with the company 1.5 years down the road.

For many years we have been supporting local secondary schools with career fairs, careers sessions with apprentices, mock interviews, interviewing skills training, visits to our main offices at BEC, the Museum and the Crematorium and by offering work placements. We also engage with school careers officers and bring them into the Council to showcase our opportunities and projects the Council are working on currently to provide a flavour of the exciting work we are involved in.

When requested we also support lessons by sending in our staff to schools to talk to the children – W&R staff, Museum staff, Dog Wardens. We have just started working with supported interns from Petroc and always try to offer learning opportunities to local T Level students.

We also work with the local job centre supporting their open days and offering training for both their clients and staff in interviewing skills and how to apply for a job at NDC. We have also previously offered interview skills training to help local Ukrainian and Afghan refugees and assist them to secure employment. We have an Enterprise Advisor working with Pathfield School, a local SEN school, and they meet on a regular basis to improve the career links and job prospects for their students. An example of which is to provide a stall at the Pannier Market where they can sell the goods they make and learn about commerce.

For the first time, in 2024 we took part in the Local Government Association (LGA) National Graduate Development programme (now rebranded as Impact) Leadership & Management. This is one step to building managers of the future as the programme matches bright, talented, passionate graduates to Councils to deliver key projects during a 2 year placement and we are delighted that we were able to interview four excellent candidates and we appointed one who started their placement with us on 2nd September 2024.

Again for the first time we took part in the recently launched LGA Pathways to Planning graduate scheme to equip graduates to become our next generation of Planners and again we are very pleased to have appointed into this scheme.

We are also very proactive in communicating the good work that the council carried out, through social media and through the press. Being seen as proactive in areas such as the environment and organisational development is attractive to younger generations and shows that we are an employer that can offer a broad range of experiences and that we are also an employer whose values fit with the employees.



Councillors have an important role to play in ensuring that the public messages from the council, whether that be messages that we have proactively put out, or messages picked up by the press from committee meetings, is positive.

4.8 Positive action we are taking to develop, upskill and retain our valuable employees

Within the Planning service, an officer is undertaking an apprentice MSc Urban Planning RTPI degree and the authority is funding this training corporately. One officer is undertaking the Chartered Town Planning (Degree) which is funded through the apprenticeship levy. Two graduate officers have been given the opportunity to undertake specialist Masters Degrees in Planning. They are doing MSc 'top ups' with the cost of this training met through our corporate training budget. Two officers are undertaking Chartered Town Planner Apprenticeships (Level 6), again funded through the levy and have both just passed their first year.

Within Environmental Health and Housing Service, two officers undertook a level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner apprenticeship, again fully funded through the apprenticeship levy. Both officers are Neighbourhood Wardens and have recently become graduates, with one officer now based in the Food team and one officer based in Environmental Protection

Within the Building Control service, one officer is undertaking a level 6 degree in Building Control Surveying, this is being funded through the apprenticeship levy.

Senior Management Team are keen to support Apprentice opportunities and when they are determining how to fill vacant positions, they will consider every business case to determine if a vacant post could be delivered through an apprentice post supported with training through the apprenticeship levy.

The Council have recently approved a number of training opportunities for existing staff to upskill and gain high level qualifications through Exeter College and Exeter University. Through the University we have 5 employees who will undertake the Chartered Manager Level 6 and 1 employee who will undertake Level 7 Senior Leader and MBA plus 1 employee undertaking a level 5 qualification through Exeter College.

4.9 Recent recruitment success in Building Control, Planning, Environmental Health & Housing.



Some examples of recent positive recruitment are within Planning we have successfully appointed a Senior Planning Officer (Enforcement), a Graduate through the national pathways to planning scheme and a Senior Planning Support Officer.

There is a similar picture for Building Control where a number of substantive vacant posts have been advertised previously without success, however I am pleased to report that we have now appointed into the posts of Senior Building Control Surveyor, Building Control Surveyor and a Trainee Building Control Surveyor.

Within Environmental Health & Housing we have appointed a Lead & Senior EHO (Environmental Protection), Senior EHO (Food), Senior EHO (Private Sector Housing), Graduate EHO, Temporary Accommodation Officer, Housing Officer, Apprentice EHO's (Neighbourhood Officers) and Housing officers (young persons, housing advice).

4.10 Organisational Development

We acknowledge that individuals are seeking more in terms of the employment relationship, greater flexibility, a better work life balance, career progression and job enrichment. Many individuals seeking to work for an organisation with a supportive culture and with values that are important to them at whatever stage of their career. It is also acknowledged that employee engagement is vital, employees who have good quality jobs and are managed well, will not only be happier, healthier and more fulfilled, but are also more likely to drive productivity, innovation and service delivery

Employees need to understand the vital role that they play and how their contribution fits with our overall Corporate Plan, they need to feel valued, listened to and encouraged to offer ideas suggestion for improvements and not be afraid to challenge how things are done. This requires open and regular two way communication, this is achieved through regular check ins, organisational development group, use of our staff suggestion scheme, staff surveys, regular team meetings and forums, plus the Chief Executive does a regular blog to keep everyone up to date.

Managers need to be equipped with the skills and behaviours both to engage, and to protect the health and wellbeing of, their teams. To achieve this, we need to provide the most effective management development possible. To enable then to nurture, give opportunities to all.

We have a cross council Organisational Development group, made up from staff who come forwards to sit on the group from variety of service areas and mixture of roles. The group meet bi monthly to work collaboratively to explore issues, encourage ideas for change, improvements, culture captured in an improvement plan.

One of the outcomes from this group was the development of our Behaviour Framework which sets out our desired behaviours and how we expect from each other. This one team framework was developed by our employees for our employees (their words)



Integrity - respect
Collaborative – working together
Achieve results - progressive/ adaptable / flexible /dynamic
Nurturing – developing/giving opportunity
Curious – innovative / inquisitive

This is a living framework and we continuously seek to ensure that it is fully embedded throughout NDC, our framework is used during our recruitment process, (recruit for attitude train for skill) and we say what we will do and we challenge poor behaviour.

Again through the OD group, we listened to our employees with regard to our previous Appraisal process and asked was it still delivering what we needed a Review took place and a redesigned process was introduced by way of check in conversations, more real time, more flexible more forward looking.

4.11 Employee Wellbeing

We understand the importance of wellbeing and have a number of mechanisms to fully support our employees such as:

- Wellbeing & flexible working strategies / policies
- Trained mental health Advisors
- Compulsory Mental Health awareness for managers
- Occupational Health support / self-referral Counselling Service
- Financial wellbeing / pre-retirement sessions / Additional Voluntary Contributions
- Wide range of Staff well-being sessions, webinars – such as Healthy eating, stop smoking



- We carry out an annual Wellbeing surveys as well as a regular light touch pulse survey to gauge how our employees are feeling
- We have a Wellbeing Hub which provides lots of useful information, hints and tips
- We provide free Flu jabs for those who are not eligible to receive one from their GP
- Provide the opportunity for PSA testing at BEC supported by Unison 14th November 2024
- We recognise that many individual will become carers and offer Care for careers support
- We are a Disability confident employer
- Encourage social activities and events such as BBQ for staff and their families / paid for by SMT and contributed to by Unison
- Creation of an alternative outside space for employees to have their lunch meet with colleagues and have meetings.

We also offer a range of other attractive benefits to our employees to support a healthy work life balance such as:

- Flexible hybrid working options
- Ability to purchase additional leave
- Family friendly policies
- Flexi time
- Pensions scheme
- Access to wealth of wellbeing support/service
- Salary sacrifice as part of the cycle scheme
- Kaarp staff benefits / exploring another as well Black Hawk.

4.12 Future Succession Planning / Talent Management

We continue to identify strategies for employees development aligned to our business needs to improve employee satisfaction and retention. Although we accept that new ideas and fresh eyes to NDC is equally important.

We are reviewing the full profile of our current workforce to give us a clear picture in relation to age, single points of failure and critical roles. This is currently being done at service level but will be looked at holistically by SMT to shape our overarching workforce planning.

We are seeking solutions not just to address our current workforce needs but also what may or is likely to change in the future not only in relation to numbers of staff and skills but how will technology change the way we work and also be responsive to our changing customer needs



We are also using this as an opportunity to explore if we plan to replace on a like for like basis or may there in be a better way to deliver for our communities.

4.13 Examples of our workforce planning:

A planned known retirement of our Bereavement Services Manager who had already reduced their working hours, we have put in place a Trainee Bereavement Manager in post undertaking training to be able step in the full role at the appropriate time when the substantive officer fully retires.

We have widened the pool of officers to able to undertake internal Health & Safety as previously this was the responsibility of a part time post and a single point of failure within the organisation.

We support 'growing our own' staff and we have a number of Graduates and individuals undertaking apprentices in various areas across the council as previously mentioned. EH / Legal / Planning / Finance / ICT / Governance / W&R / PMO / Housing / Revenues & Benefits / Estates/ Customer Service / Building Control.

We offer management development to individuals who aspire to become our managers of the future. This provides them with the confidence, skills and the appropriate building blocks to become those future leaders.

Mandatory training for managers against a framework to ensure they have the skills and behaviours themselves to effectively, lead, manage change, motivate and support their teams. Such as Mental Health awareness, recruitment, performance management, health & safety & risk assessments

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Much of our development is paid for through the Government apprentice Levy all businesses with a payroll of over £3 million pay the levy, the levy rate is 0.5 % of the total payroll we can then draw this money to cover the costs of our apprentice training programmes for new and existing employees. This together with other training and development opportunities such as Further Educations enables us to attract externally and nurture internal talent, not just for the current skills needs but we are starting to look ahead what changes could happen and forecast how might this effect future needs in terms of numbers required skills and capabilities.



5.2 Not all development can be paid for through the Levy and in addition the Council have a corporate training budget for those development opportunities that cannot be supported through the levy. It is worth noting that not all development is delivered through direct training there is mentoring opportunities, shadowing on the job plus secondment opportunities.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required for this report.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1. There are no environmental impacts

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

8.1.1. The commercialisation agenda: None

8.1.2. Improving customer focus and/or None

8.1.3. Regeneration or economic development: None

9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1. Part 3, Annex 1, Paragraph 5(f)

10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
Vacancy/ recruitment information provided by HR/ Demographics.



12.STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: