

Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Group : End of Task Report

The RRT&FG was set up in May 2019 in response to a need perceived by the Employment and Staffing Committee to consider in detail the challenges posed to the Council in the field of recruitment and retention.

A call was put out to all elected Members to join the T&FG and the following responded : Cllrs Cheung Johnson, Daunton, Handley and Wilson. Together with Susan Gardner Craig (SGC), as Lead Officer, these formed the group. Cllr Daunton agreed to chair the group and to write up notes of each meeting.

The group met three times : 20th May, 9th July and 16th October.

At the first meeting it was agreed to examine the following : time-frames for filling posts ; approach of managers to the general issue of recruitment and retention ; the branding and marketing of SCDC ; issues raised in the outcome of the staff survey that had a bearing on recruitment and retention.

At our second meeting we explored these issues leading to the following comments and questions.

1. Filling of posts: we explored differences of approach across South Cambs to timetable for filling of posts. SGC provided snapshot from three departments (Environmental Services, Housing and Planning) for posts filled early in 2019. Indications were that areas most in need of staff take longest to fill posts. In one instance it took almost a month for a candidate to be informed of the job offer, during which time they could easily have taken a job elsewhere. Important that vicious circle of 'being too busy to give time to recruitment because of being short staffed leading to being shorter staffed' did not take any further hold. Suggested that perhaps greater emphasis is needed across the Council on the need to push job offers through the system with speed. HR can and does do a lot, but managers in departments perhaps need encouragement to act. Changes have already been made to speed up the process.
2. Agreed that more emphasis could be put on the importance of good management in relation to recruitment. Filling posts can at times be the most important part of a manager's job and if it means putting other work on hold for a time, then that should be accepted as part of the commitment to manage. Managers need sufficient support to be able to find time to recruit and retain staff; sometimes this element of their work can seem really burdensome. Additional administrative support is one response. A workforce development post has been created in Planning; perhaps this is something to be replicated in other departments. A good use of time and money.
3. New Managers' Handbook is in train. This should help emphasise the need to prioritise recruitment and retention.
4. Specific points on recruitment: encourage departments to agree a date for interviews as soon as post is cleared for advertisement; put date for interviews into the advertisement; make sure successful candidate is informed as soon as possible after interview; make sure unsuccessful interviewees are also contacted; keep note

of any unsuccessful candidate whom one might want to consider for other South Cambs posts.

5. Specific points on retention for managers: make sure to welcome staff when they start, to have a mentor or 'buddy' in place for them from their first day; make sure the regular one-to-one meetings between managers and staff are held; notes should be kept and follow ups arranged; make sure development opportunities for staff are known and offered. Looking after staff and valuing them and their work is important.
6. IT issues: all staff are concerned about the ways in which poor IT infrastructure impedes their work and can make carrying out daily duties very stressful. Accepted by all that this situation has to be resolved. Work going on now to solve problems.
7. Branding and Marketing. Some work has already been done on this with Comms., Does not need a large sum of money to be spent to make some significant helpful changes. In the meantime, simple things can be done to improve present arrangements. Group recommended: setting aside money to review jobs page, looking to bring in someone to redesign it; giving job vacancies a more prominent position on home page; putting onto web pages video quotes from those currently working in South Cambs indicating the range and interest of their jobs and the benefits offered by South Cambs as an employer; advertise apprenticeship scheme more widely.

At our third meeting we looked in detail at the qualitative information that had come out of the staff survey which the Employment and Staffing Committee had commissioned. Many of the comments in the survey relating to recruitment and retention backed up our own findings and appeared to endorse the group's suggestion that greater management emphasis needed to be placed on the importance of good practice in this area. We also commented that the following of basic and established procedures in relation to recruitment produced good results and when these were not followed the outcome was not good. Planning had suffered particularly both because of its major restructuring into a shared service but also because of national shortages in that profession. Special attention would be paid to planning in relation to recruitment and retention.

Apart from management and procedural issues we noted that the physical infrastructure of the building needed some serious attention, particularly kitchen and washroom facilities. We also noted the many positive comments in the survey concerning supportive colleagues, flexible working, work in the service of others, and the friendly atmosphere.

Further, we noted that over the past three years (2016-2019) there had been little continuity in senior management and leadership and that there had been significant 'acting up' with consequent huge administrative and management responsibilities laid on few people. Given the workloads across departments, there had, in some areas, been an inability to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to requests from members and from the general public, leading to a perception that the culture of service was in need of re-freshing.

The appointment of a new CEO, Liz Watts, was a good opportunity for such refreshment and for a new approach to management. Liz Watts would be considering the implementation of recommendations of Castlerigg, the consultants employed to take

forward the need, acknowledged in 2016, for some new thinking on management structures and service deliverability across the Council

At its third meeting group believed that it had highlighted issues of concern in relation to recruitment and retention ; it had suggested ways forward ; and it could already see some of those suggestions being put into practice .

At this stage it was felt appropriate for the group to stand down. Liz Watts had already indicated her intentions in relation to the implementation of the Castlerigg report, the need for leadership through good management and the encouragement of staff, the importance of a culture of service and the a supportive work environment. These would feed into significant steps forward in recruitment and retention