

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Recruitment and Staff Retention

September – December 2023



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Introduction

From the Chair of the Task Group Councillor Michelle Le Marinel and Vice Chair Councillor Ryan Towers.



Following the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 August 2023 (at which the annual workplan was agreed), this Task Group was set up in September 2023.

The aim was to identify any underlying issues relating to recruitment and staff retention, and if so, to address them ensuring the Council has an excellent workforce, providing quality services to residents and a reputation as a good employer.

The Task Group met on several occasions over the course of 4 months from September to December, gathering evidence from a range of witnesses and sources including Hollie Walmsley, Head of Human Resources (the lead officer for the study), UNISON branch secretary Lesley Miller, survey responses from the Council's Senior Management Team and an interview with the Executive Member for Resources.

We would like to thank all the Members involved with this Task Group and to the officers, including Hollie Walmsley, Head of Human Resources and Clare Gornall, Democratic and Member Services officer for their time, knowledge and support.

We hope the recommendations made within the report are acknowledged and accepted by the Executive Cabinet.

Councillor Michelle le Marinel
Chair

Councillor Ryan Towers
Vice Chair

Summary Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are informed by the views and documentary evidence provided by the range of witnesses and sources engaged throughout the review.

1. That the Council's Senior Management Team be requested to investigate the feasibility of the Council working towards the Living Wage Accreditation, and if promising, present their proposals to Executive Cabinet
2. That the Council actively promotes health and wellbeing (including mental health) support available as part of its overall employee benefits package
3. That the Executive Member for Resources monitor recruitment and retention figures over the next 6 – 12 months especially in identified key risk areas
4. That a member learning session be arranged on an annual basis to update on workforce planning
5. To include performance reporting data on recruitment and staff retention on the new members portal from the new recruitment system

Membership of the Task Group

Councillor Michelle le Marinel (Chair)
Councillor Ryan Towers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Karen Derbyshire
Councillor Gordon France
Councillor Christine Heydon
Councillor Alex Hilton
Councillor Samantha Martin
Councillor June Molyneaux
Councillor Dedrah Moss
Councillor Kim Snape

(please note Cllr Karen Derbyshire was part of the Task Group until 14 November 2023)

Officer Support

Hollie Walmsley, Head of Human Resources
Clare Gornall, Democratic and Member Services Officer

Scoping the review

The objectives the Task Group were:

- To ensure service delivery is maintained
- To identify service areas at risk of failure and to look at how we can make recommendations to address this
- To identify aspirations and capacity for improving services

The Desired Outcomes Were (not in preferential order):

- To achieve accreditation and awards for staffing
- To improve organisational reputation
- To maintain service delivery
- To retain staff
- Work to achieve the real living wage accreditation
- Attract and retain the best workforce

Terms of Reference

Members of the Task Group will be clearly focussed on the high level, policy and strategic aspects of the retention and recruitment of staff, which is within the scope of councillors' role in decision making as per Governance arrangements within the Constitution.

The Task Group will only scrutinise operational processes (which is within the remit of officers) insofar as they may be impacting service delivery and/or impacting our role as councillors.

Witnesses

The following witnesses met with the task group and/or provided information.

Hollie Walmsley, Head of HR
Emily Monk, Transformation Officer (Organisational Development)

Lesley Miller, Branch Secretary, UNISON

Executive Member for Resources

Consultees

Senior Management Team / Directors (via questionnaire / survey)

Meetings

The agendas and minutes of each meeting can be found here
[Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group](#)

Background and Context

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was agreed on 1 August 2023. Recruitment and Staff Retention was agreed as one of the Task Group topics.

It had been noted that recent meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel, some Heads of Service had cited lack of staffing as an issue affecting performance. As part of this review members wanted to investigate in more depth whether issues with recruitment and retention of staff were impacting service delivery and / or if there were any wider issues to consider in this regard.

The Task Group held its first meeting on 6 September 2023. Councillor Michelle le Marinel was appointed Chair, and Councillor Ryan Towers was appointed Vice Chair.

6 September 2023

Scoping the Review

When considering the scope of the review, members identified the importance of ensuring that the review focussed on strategic issues, which were in the remit of councillors, rather than operational issues, which were in the remit of officers. It was also acknowledged that currently employer-trade union relations were very good. The Task Group sought to be clear about its objectives for this piece of work.

The Task Group therefore requested clarification on the role of councillors (i.e. making strategic policy decisions) and role of the Chief Executive (as Head of Paid Service) as defined by the Constitution. It was acknowledged that statistical information was useful in informing decision making.

The Task Group made the distinction between recruitment and staff retention and whether either of these presented an issue. Hollie Walmsley indicated that at Chorley there was no issue as regards staff turnover (retention). She said that when high quality staff leave, often it is not personal, and if there are any concerns there are procedures in place to address this.

As regards recruitment, she indicated that there were challenges nationally and globally in the modern labour market. She informed members that the Council do have a strategic approach to workforce planning, which includes a reduction in spend on agency staff over the next 2 - 5 years. To meet this objective, a Recruitment and Talent Advisor had recently been appointed with Human Resources.

The Task Group discussed the scoping document and agreed upon the aims and objectives of the review, which included maintaining service delivery, identifying areas of risk and what can be improved. It was noted that the scoping document was a “living document” which could be amended during the course of the review.

To assist the review, members requested a number of policies and documents relating to recruitment and retention to be provided for consideration at the next meeting.

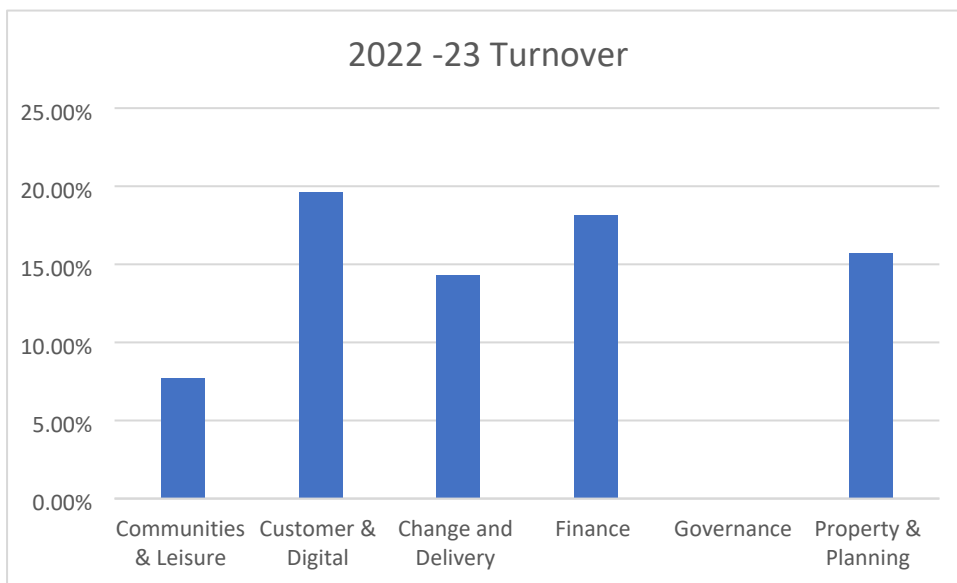
A copy of the scoping document can be found at appendix A to this report.

Background information

Hollie Walmsley, Head of Human Resources presented background information to provide context to the review which included details of organisational turnover 2022-23 and year to date 2023-24. The data included statistical information presented by Directorate and by reason for leaving (voluntary resignation, end of fixed term contract, retirement/ERVS, or dismissal / agreed exit):

Turnover

1. Organisational turnover for 2022-23 was 16.11%. 48 people left the organisation.

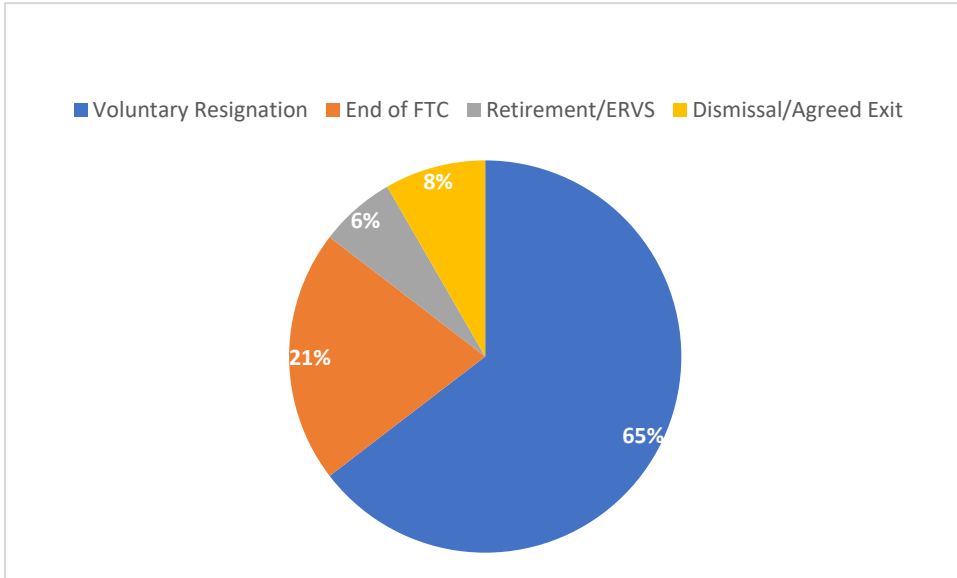


2. Within Customer and Digital 22 people exited:
 - a. 8 fixed term posts ended including 5 Seasonal Streetscene Operatives. Streetscene operates with an annual seasonal workforce.
 - b. 2 exits due to ERVS (Early Redundancy/Voluntary Severance)
 - c. 1 retirement
 - d. 11 resignations of which 5 were within Streetscene, 5 in Customer Services, and 1 in ICT.
3. Change and Delivery saw 4 people exit, all within HR:
 - e. 2 resigned
 - f. 2 fixed term posts ended
4. Voluntary resignations made up the leavers in both Communities and Finance, with 4 and 4 respectively.
5. Across Property and Planning 14 people left:
 - a. 10 resigned of which 4 were in Spatial Planning, 6 were in Property (1 person moved to a new role employed by SRBC).
 - b. 3 were managed exits

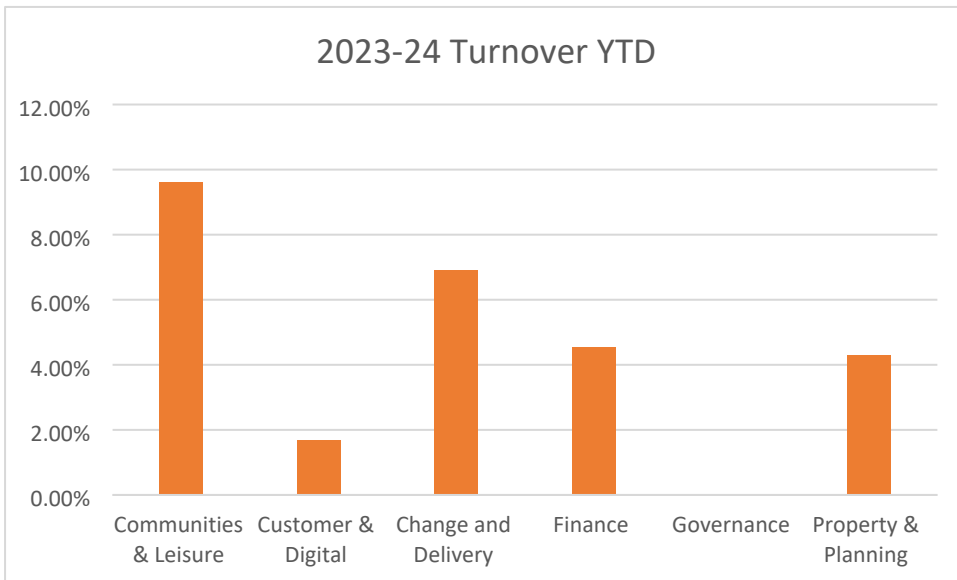
c. 1 person was dismissed

6. There were no leavers in Governance for Chorley as this is a function fully employed by SRBC as part of shared services.

7. Leavers by reason for 22/23 are demonstrated below.



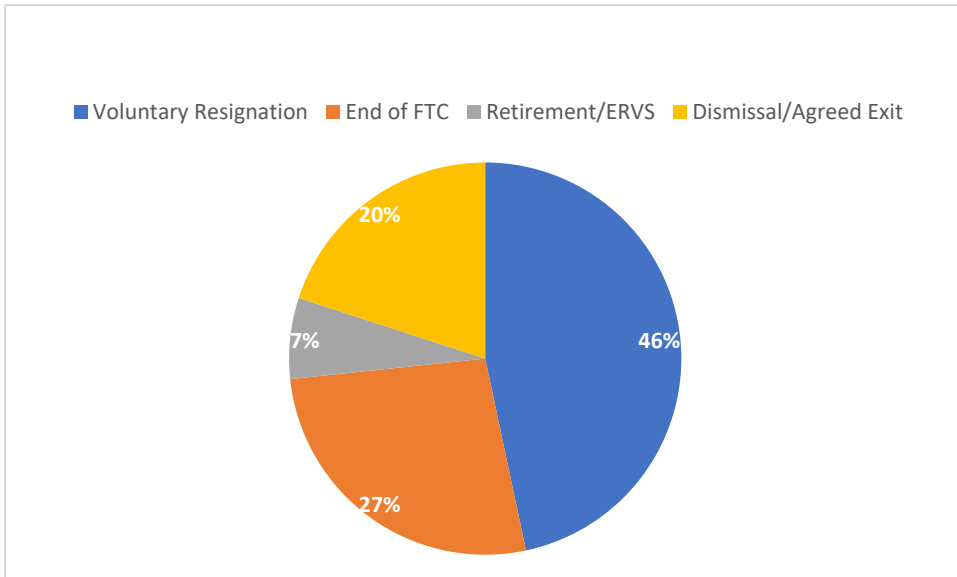
1. Year to date for 2023-24 turnover is 4.71%. The total leavers are 15.



2. Communities and Leisure have seen 4 people leave, 3 voluntarily and 1 on an agreed basis.

3. Customer and Digital have had 2 exits, both the end of fixed term contracts.

4. Across Change and Delivery 4 people have exited:
 - a. 2 voluntarily (1 person moved to a role employed by SRBC)
 - b. 1 redundancy
 - c. 1 due to the end of a fixed term contract
5. 1 person left Finance due to the end of a fixed term contract.
6. 4 people exited Property and Panning, all within the operational Assets function:
 - a. 2 resignations
 - b. 2 dismissals
8. There were no leavers in Governance for Chorley as this is a function fully employed by SRBC as part of shared services.
9. Leavers by reason for 23/24 to date are demonstrated below.



Hollie Walmsley explained that the corporate Recruitment and Selection Policies had been jointly agreed with UNISON.

She stressed that the Council wanted to minimise turnover, however it was equally important to have a steady influx of new employees to maintain a healthy organisation. She indicated that as regards the year to date, she would expect the final end of year turnover to be lower (i.e.14-15%). In comparison with other Lancashire councils, Chorley usually comes in about the mid-range. Compared with the private sector, the public sector generally has a lower turnover. However there are exceptions e.g. NHS which has a very high turnover.

Hollie clarified that staff moving to other areas within the organisation does not count as turnover.

Meeting - 3 October 2023

At the second meeting, held on 3 October 2023, Members were provided with the following information:

Behaviour policies – Grievance policy, Code of Conduct, Social Media policy, Disciplinary policy, Conduct Policy

Benefits policies – ERVS guidance, Pensions & long service, flexible retirement, Reservist Policy, Sustainable Travel Policy, Expenses policy.

Changes policies – Change policy and Written Statement of Particulars (examples with/without flexi etc).

Recruitment and Development policies – Capability policy, Recruitment Selection and Onboarding, Leavers Guidance, Probation form.

Website Recruitment Pages (job applications) - How to apply, People with Disabilities, Recruitment Equality Monitoring Guidance

Wellbeing Policies – Managing the effects of the menopause, Emotional wellbeing policy, Smoke free and substance use policy, Improving attendance policy

Work-Life Policies – Homeworking policy, Flexible working policy, Parental leave, Leave policy.

The documents above and those relating to equality monitoring and people with disabilities were provided via the [modern.gov. library](#).

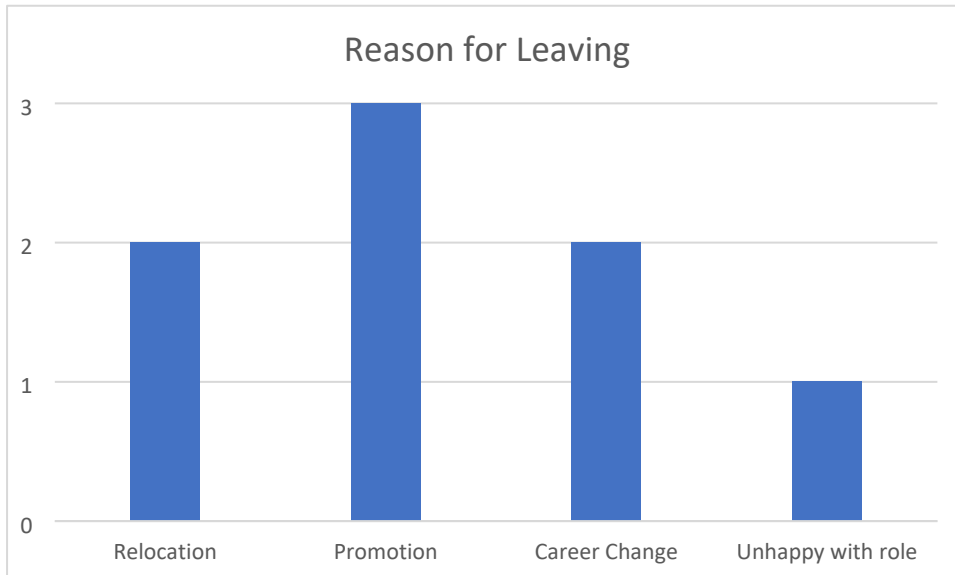
A note was also provided which clarified the respective roles of elected members and the Chief Executive with regard to staffing and recruitment. (See Appendix B).

Detailed information was provided regarding the following:

1. Exit interview data analysis and an example exit interview
2. Living Wage Accreditation summary and next steps.
3. 2023/24 Recruitment Strategy report to SMT and project plan
4. Workforce planning summary

Exit interviews

The exit interview process was refreshed and relaunched in July 2023. All leavers were offered an exit interview, however this was not compulsory and as such only 8 people had so far engaged.



The report summarised that reasons for leaving were due to relocation, promotion, other opportunity in a different sector and one was unhappy with working for the council.

The responses to the subsequent exit interview questions were as follows:

7 would recommend the council as an employer one would not;

7 would work for the council again one would not;

7 agreed that the council is a good employer and 1 does not.

The negative responses were all from the same person

The Task Group noted that due to the extremely small sample size it was not useful to identify service level trends or issues, so the information was considered in conjunction with other employee feedback including staff surveys and PDR comments to provide a broader picture.

A summary of the data received so far demonstrated the following positives:

- The majority of the people surveyed thought our benefits in relation to leave, pension, allowances, work life balance are either good or very good.
- Mainly positive feedback about support from line managers throughout their career with the council.
- Positive about colleagues, working together, friendly teams and staff.

The following negative comments demonstrated areas of for improvement:

- Some negative feedback regarding our learning and development offer and our office accommodation. Some leavers feel this can be improved.
- We received feedback that our benefits are good but we could advertise them better so more people know about them and use them.
- Lots of snippets of information regarding the line manager and some feedback that workloads are too heavy. Some people had been promised things which didn't materialise.
- Leavers feel that recognition could be better and communicated to the wider business, but some teams do this well.
- Some negative feedback about the burden of bureaucracy and politics.
- Communication across teams could be better.

Hollie Walmsley explained that people who had already raised issues previously were more likely to complete exit interviews, which tends to be reflected in the figures. However, Human Resources try and get as much feedback as possible either in person or in writing.

The Council also obtains feedback from its employees throughout their employment, via regular one to one meetings with line managers, and personal development reviews.

Full graphical data and analysis of exit Interviews and the exit interview questionnaire can be found at Appendix C.

Living Wage Accreditation

Requirements

The Living Wage Foundation has two main criteria:

1. The Organisation in question pays its employees a 'Living wage', to avoid confusion with the national minimum wage this is referred to as the Real Living Wage. The Council pays all employees the Real Living Wage, other than apprentice employees in their first year, who are all paid the top rate of national minimum wage. This is accepted as good practice due to the amount of training a first year apprentice is expected to undertake, in comparison with working time.
2. The Organisation has a plan in place to ensure that its contractors are paid a 'Living Wage'
 - The Living Wage Foundation casts a 'wide net' in who is considered to be contracted, essentially all staff the organisation comes into contact with must be paid the Real Living wage (e.g. if you rent space in a Building with other organisations, that Buildings cleaners must be paid the Living Wage)
 - The Foundation does allow some leeway by allowing accreditation through a phased implementation approach, provided that at some point contracts are renewed include the Real Living Wage. Similarly, sub-contractors can

- continue at their agreed rate provided there are plans in place to source alternate contractors at some point who do pay the Real Living Wage.
- Chorley Council does not currently require contractors to pay a Real Living Wage. The scale of this would need to be understood.

Hollie Walmsley explained that at present although the Council paid the Living Wage to all its directly employed staff, its sub-contractors were not all meeting that criterion. Hence the Council currently did not have the Living Wage Accreditation.

It was suggested that options be explored to address this e.g. via the procurement route. This would be a long term project as would involve a review of the Council's contracts once they were due to expire.

The next steps would be:

- Commence an assessment of rates paid by contractors. Undertake an analysis of the scale and gap.
- Seek approval to commence the accreditation process.
- Work with Procurement and individual contract managers to develop a plan for phased implementation.

The Task group agreed that one of its recommendations would be to investigate the feasibility of working towards a Living Wage Accreditation.

Recruitment Strategy

Hollie Walmsley outlined a number of improvements the Council was making with regard to recruitment, including use of LinkedIn, and developing a dedicated front-end micro website for job vacancies. This would reduce recruitment costs as the Council would not be relying on outside agencies.

Hollie Walmsley also outlined other recruitment initiatives such as promoting the Council at careers events (e.g. for school leavers) and investing in the local community via apprenticeships / opportunities to gain professional qualifications with the Council. This "upskilling" approach was something the Council also promoted to its partners. It was noted that a "careers day" was due to be held on 9 October.

The Task Group enquired about learning agreements, where people must stay with the Council for a certain length of time after gaining a qualification (this doesn't apply to apprenticeships, however). Hollie Walmsley stressed that where a learning agreement was in place, employees would be provided with a clear pathway of career development. She also stressed that this approach ensured that new employees quickly move off the "bottom rung" of the organisation, freeing up space for new recruits and refreshing the workforce.

A copy of a report to Senior Management Team, outlining the new approach to the recruitment and action plan, was provided to the Task Group.

The report explained:

1. How we intend to ensure an intelligent approach to recruitment
2. The projects and tasks that will constitute the upgrade in our approach.
3. The priorities for upgrading our current recruitment processes.

It was identified that over half of employers have “hard-to-fill” vacancies and a third anticipate significant problems in filling roles (CIPD, 2023). Amongst rising inflation pushing salaries higher, and an increase in the availability of hybrid roles, recruitment has becoming increasingly challenging.

Both South Ribble BC and Chorley BC had experienced this over the past 12 months. 23%, almost 1 in 4 of external recruitment campaigns across the councils were unsuccessful in appointing someone. This sample size was taken from the 7 months between May – Dec 22.

The Council had already taken action to improve recruitment methods including a dedicated recruitment and talent advisor and procurement of a new recruitment system to enhance the applicant experience. These measures were already achieving benefits with improvement in roles appointed to. There were further opportunities to improve the current recruitment approach to make it more efficient and effective as part of a cohesive strategy to support building our workforce for the future.

The objectives were as follows:

What	How	When
Implement a recruitment system with a focus on candidate experience and manager self-service.	Update on recruitment system procurement to be presented to SMT.	Implementation Q3 2023\24
Develop an employer brand to increase proactive recruitment ability and communicate this brand.	Define our brand and intensively communicate using digital channels including social media.	From June – October 2023
Use a data-based approach to support workforce planning and recruitment trends	Monitor and report on recruitment metrics, using intelligence in discussions with managers. Develop reporting and dashboard functionality in the new recruitment system.	From June – October 2023

Develop a diverse talent pool	Develop talent pool functionality in the new recruitment system. Signpost job seekers to register with the talent pool. Work with OD to develop and support internal talent.	From June – October 2023
Upskill managers to be confident and capable recruiters	Use training, masterclasses, coaching, and drop-ins to develop a cohort of skilled managers.	By December 2023.

The full report to Senior Management Team on the Council’s Recruitment Strategy can be found at Appendix D.

A Recruitment Project Plan was also provided, which can be found at Appendix D.

Workforce Planning

Workforce planning is the process of assessing current and future workforce needs, taking into account internal and external factors and establishing a strategy. This is undertaken by the Council at service level on a quarterly basis. There are a number of considerations with workforce planning, however the following focusses on recruitment and retention, specifically difficult to fill roles.

The following demonstrates the number of services by risk level, based on the difficulty to fill roles due to a known skills gap. Red services are those which, should no interventions be implemented, would experience significant short and long-term service disruption. Amber services are those where there are established plans already in place to mitigate risks. Green services are considered unlikely to be impacted by skills gaps.



A breakdown by Directorate and Service revealed the following:

Directorate	Service	RAG
Change and Delivery	Investment and Skills	G
Change and Delivery	Economic Growth	G
Change and Delivery	HR	G
Change and Delivery	Performance and Partnerships	G
Change and Delivery	Transformation and Change	G
Change and Delivery	Communications and Visitor Economy	G
Communities	Public Protection	A
Communities	Communities and Housing (Ch)	A
Communities	Leisure (CH)	A
Customer and Digital	Neighbourhoods and Waste	G
Customer and Digital	Streetscene and Waste	G
Customer and Digital	Customer Services	R
Customer and Digital	ICT	R
Finance	Finance	A
Governance	Audit and Risk	A
Governance	Democratic Services	G
Governance	Legal	A
Planning and Property	Planning and Development	A
Planning and Property	Operational Assets	G
Planning and Property	Major Projects	G
Planning and Property	Planning and Enforcement (Ch)	R
Planning and Property	Spatial Planning	R

Service plans

In the majority of services, it is a small number of specific roles which can present difficulties should they be vacant.

Service	Issues	Solutions
Spatial Planning	Shortage of planning policy officers. Historic approach to recruitment. Local Plan.	Graduate roles Contractors as an alternative to employees Direct approach recruitment search
ICT	Skills gaps – cyber security, software developers, senior technician.	Recruitment and talent advisor – CV search, LinkedIn. Have filled 3 roles. Graduate and apprentice roles. Career pathways.
Planning and Enforcement	Building control – competition from private sector.	Shared services. Development role with qualifications at all levels.

Customer Services Officers	Specialist skills within local government. Ageing workforce. Internal recruitment – internal talent pool	Apprentice first approach to recruitment. Cohorts of developing employees.
Environmental Health	Ageing workforce Skills shortage Lack of local training providers	Influenced local educational providers to set up course Graduates and apprentices.
Housing	Competition from housing providers.	Developing internal staff e.g. customer services officers into housing officers. Career pathways.
Finance	Management and financial accountants skills shortage nationally – require specific public sector knowledge.	Career pathway approach – graduates, apprentices, professional apprentices.
Leisure	National shortage of swimming teachers Anti-social and part-time hours	Roles with training full and qualifications Generic roles to create full-time hours across contract
Legal	Procurement in public sector skills shortage	Graduate role.
Audit and Risk	Ageing workforce Skills shortage – audit	Trainee auditor role with full training and qualification.

The Task Group enquired about the impact of staffing levels on the performance of the Council (for example, recently members had been informed the Statement of Accounts was published late due to staffing levels). Hollie Walmsley explained that staffing structures are very lean, and it was the responsibility of Shared Leadership Team to manage resources in line with service need.

Members highlighted “pinch points” at certain times of year which could be predicted and form part of business planning e.g. garden waste is seasonal. Hollie Walmsley explained that this detail would be addressed at Service Plan level. She stressed that transferring staff from other services is generally not practicable, because skill sets are different and teams do not have the capacity.

People Strategy

Emily Monk, Transformation Officer (Organisational Development) gave a presentation on the People Strategy, which included the feedback from staff via the Pulse Survey carried out in 2021/22 and May 2023.

It was noted that some feedback, i.e. in relation to job descriptions related to South Ribble due to Shared Services. Hollie Walmsley also confirmed that there were no back pay issues (which had affected some other Councils nationally).

It was noted that staff had recently experienced a lot of fast paced change which had generated a substantial amount of internal communications. The Task Group were assured that the approach would now be more engagement with the Pulse Survey. Emily monk indicated that the response rate had increased and so had staff satisfaction levels.

A copy of the presentation can be found at Appendix E.

Meeting – 19 October 2023

Interview with Lesley Miller, UNISON Branch Secretary

The Task Group invited Lesley Miller, UNISON Branch Secretary, to make representations on behalf of her members regarding recruitment and staffing levels as part this review.

Lesley was asked if, in her discussions with Chorley Council staff who were UNISON members, there had been any general patterns / trends in respect of views expressed on recruitment and staff retention.

Lesley referred to a meeting held the previous day where she had been chatting to apprentices and the following trends were identified from the feedback given:

- There appeared to be some inconsistency when comparing the apprentices' experiences in different departments, for example comparing customer services with 'back office' functions such as revenues and benefits.
- Customer services apprentices felt that due to more experienced staff leaving, staff training was being left to less experienced staff.
- Customer services apprentices felt that pressure to meet performance indicators (e.g. in relation to answering phone calls) was impacting on their capacity to learn effectively. They also said that they did not feel sufficiently confident or experienced enough to deal with the volume of calls.

Hollie Walmsley, Head of HR acknowledged some of the issues associated with Customer Services, provided some context and explained ways in which the Council had addressed those issues. She indicated that there had been a planned review of customer services at Chorley, which was then delayed due to the move to shared services. During that period, a number of people left the Council and in addition, as the experience gained in customer services was often in high demand, staff in the team tended to quickly move on to other areas in the organization.

Hollie indicated that the shared services arrangement had now been implemented, and a number of vacancies had been filled. The Council had identified the need, and now appointed, a dedicated Training Officer for the customer services team. She also stressed that this year was the first time a cohort of 18 apprentices had been taken on, and the lessons learned will lead to an improved experience next year as part of long term plan.

A member of the Task Group asked Lesley if she was aware of any situation where lack of staff in post; wrong skill mix / level training; terms and conditions, pay or morale - have led to service failure or poor level of service that have affected the running or reputation of this Council.

Lesley indicated that she was not aware of any specific instance where the above issues had led to service delivery failure. However, she was aware of instances where staff had left the council for increased pay and that subsequently services had suffered due to staff leaving. She said that a lot of services had been cut right to the bone. She cited the example of Housing Options, where experienced staff had been lost. Salaries at Chorley were often less competitive than other local councils e.g. Preston City Council.

Lesley stressed that dedicated staff work very hard to prevent service delivery failure. The feedback from staff was a general feeling that some services were close to the edge.

The Chair enquired as to whether figures could be obtained regarding staff sickness and where this attributed to staffing levels. Hollie Walmsley indicated that absences due to mental ill health are complex and often there are a combination of factors. The Vice Chair however felt strongly that the information would be helpful to the Task Group.

Lesley indicated that the feedback she had received from apprentices in customer services was that that they were just about managing to meet their time allocation for learning and development associated with their apprenticeship, compared to other departments such as Council Tax and Revenues and Benefits where apprentices were allocated specific time for this purpose (which should be 20% - about 1 day per week).

Lesley acknowledged that for the first cohort of apprentices, there was less paperwork whereas for the second cohort, a training officer had introduced personal development plans so it was an improved experience, however some of it was being completed in their own time not work time.

Hollie Walmsley indicated that the 20% time allocation was part of their employment contract and she would prioritise addressing this following the feedback received. It was also planned that apprentices would meet with their line manager to see what their aspirations are and how the Council can better support them e.g. if they want to move to another service area.

The Task Group then discussed issues arising from Aged Debts (which had been identified in a report to Governance Committee). Hollie Walmsley explained that the Council had been pulled up on its ineffective processes in that individual services had not been chasing up / collecting on their debts, and it was customer services' role to keep a record of those debts. The Council was to implement a solution where ownership was taken by each service of their debts – the issue was not specifically related to recruitment or retention of staff.

The Task Group also discussed staffing levels in procurement; Hollie Walmsley informed members that this had been addressed with the creation of two extra posts.

The Task Group discussed the issues of recruitment and retention more generally, with a view to identifying positive measures the Council was not already taking. It was noted that Chorley Council offered an excellent benefits package e.g. discounts at local businesses. It was acknowledged that due to the current financial climate and cost of living crisis some people would prioritise salary over other benefits. However, in comparison with other Lancashire Councils, Chorley offered very good terms and conditions particularly in the area of mental health and wellbeing. Hollie Walmsley informed members that this included the following:

- Signposting
- Emotional wellbeing support
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Counselling
- 1-2-1 discussions with line manager, identifying what we can do as an organisation to support employees, and to try and remove any barriers

The Task Group requested that figures be obtained regarding staff sickness to indicate where this linked to issues with recruitment and retention in specific services.

The Task Group agreed that one of its recommendations would be that the Council actively promotes health and wellbeing (including mental health) support available as part of its overall employee benefits package.

Recruitment Strategy Update – New Recruitment Website

Hollie Walmsley presented a working draft of the new recruitment website which will go live on 8 January 2024.

During the presentation Hollie explained that:

- the site will contain job descriptions, videos, and employee stories;
- applicants will be able to register, login and upload their CVs, allowing the Council to search for skills;
- enable monitoring of equality and diversity information. The Council had also been assisted in its Recruitment Strategy by the learning experiences of Leicester University, which had spotted trends e.g. on interview panels, and how they were able to improve their recruitment practices by having more mixed and diverse panels.

Overall, members were very positive about the website.

You can view the new recruitment website here ([About Us - Chorley South Ribble](#))

Data on Pulse Survey (Staff Survey)

Emily Monk, Transformation Officer provided the following Pulse Survey data for Chorley Council:

Response Rate:
June 2022 – 103
May 2023 – 103

Employee satisfaction:
June 2022 – 68%
May 2023 – 82.52%

Meeting – 30 November 2023

Staff Sickness Figures – specifically where they are linked to recruitment and retention issues

The Task Group was provided with the following information:

In total, since April 2023 for services shared with SRBC (regardless of the employer of the person) or Chorley council employees:

788 days of absences recorded for mental ill health - 30 instances in total

181 days lost attributed wholly or in part to work - 6 instances, 5 people

Of the 181 days wholly or in part attributable to work, two absences of 19 and 20 days respectively were attributed to workloads.

These two absences were both within customer services, both are South Ribble employees working within a shared service.

Arising from queries from members, Hollie informed members that there was not one service disproportionately represented, the figures just highlighted overall trends. She confirmed that in some service areas, (e.g. relating to the Local Plan), staffing issues related to difficulty to recruit rather than sickness.

Responses to Survey Questions – Senior Management Team

At the request of the Task Group, Hollie Walmsley circulated a survey to members of the Senior Management Team regarding recruitment and staff retention.

The full set of questions and responses are attached at Appendix F to this report.

Hollie Walmsley gave a presentation on the survey responses received. The responses reflected issues and trends already identified during the course of the study, but they also detailed what measures had been taken to address and hopefully resolve those issues.

Some examples were:

- Finance – issues had been resolved by the implementation of a longer term strategy including the creation of ‘career grade’ posts.
- Use of consultants for planning policy and planning enforcement;
- ICT – using external partners / consultancy where appropriate;
- ICT – career progression – as individual skills develop, salary and expectation increase. So the more basic level tasks are delegated to another person (e.g. at entry level) or are automated through use of technology
- Director of Communities – re-examined their approach to graduate positions, in terms of career progression

Hollie explained that sometimes using a consultant was better value for money, for instance where recruitment costs are high and the post is required less than five days a week. In such instances, the monies would be re-allocated from the staffing budget to another budget.

In some circumstances, outsourcing is more appropriate (having a “bank” of agency staff). The most important thing is to ensure that whatever approach is used, it demonstrates best value for money.

It was important to acknowledge that in some sectors, such as building control and ICT, there would be a higher turnover of staff due to the attraction of better pay in the private sector. In addition, ICT had an extra level of competitiveness due to the fact the industry can recruit internationally as often roles can be performed remotely. One option would be to become a sponsored employer and so recruit non UK residents. It was also noted that as yet not all the vacancies had been filled following the ICT restructure. Arising from the discussion, Hollie clarified that all staff who attend late/evening meetings outside the flexi time bandwidth are entitled to time off in lieu.

Hollie summarised that the issues cited in the survey were being addressed as part of shorter or longer term plans (such as in the examples given) and/or as part of a new recruitment strategy.

Meeting – 14 December 2023

One member highlighted that the latest version of the corporate risk register was made available to the Governance Committee at the last meeting on 29 November 2023 (Agenda page 98) Risk 5, directly related to lack of resources money and staff to deliver services. Hollie Walmsley, Head of Human Resources was asked to provide a risk update to give a full picture of the current position and any mitigating actions currently being taken.

Hollie Walmsley indicated that the initial report presented to the Task Group in September 2023 outlined 5 main objectives:

- a. Implement a recruitment system with a focus on candidate experience and manager self-service;
- b. Develop an employer brand to increase proactive recruitment ability and communicate this brand;
- c. Use a data-based approach to support workforce planning and recruitment trends;
- d. Develop a diverse talent pool;
- e. Upskill managers to be confident and capable recruiters.

She informed members that since September 2023 progress made was as follows:

Implement a recruitment system with a focus on candidate experience and manager self-service.

The new Eploy system has now been implemented and will go live on 8 January 2024 to capitalise on the increased numbers of active job searchers in the new year.

Eploy has been fully tested with managers across the councils and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

The front end of the system is the recruitment microsite which was demonstrated to the task group in November. The enhanced functionality of this system will enable a data-based approach to recruitment, and to manage our talent pool.

Develop an employer brand to increase proactive recruitment ability and communicate this brand.

Activity to develop the employer brand includes the use of LinkedIn and other externally focussed media channels.

Additionally, since October 2023:

- a. A series of LinkedIn masterclasses have been delivered to Shared Leadership Team (SLT) – following which we have seen increased use and posting on LinkedIn by SLT.
- b. Two articles have been published in the Management Journal to aid senior recruitment.

Upskill managers to be confident and capable recruiters

A series of masterclasses are planned to follow the implementation of the new system, to support the processes around it. These masterclasses will include:

- Advert writing
- Interview techniques
- Passive vs active job seekers and the differing approaches

In-person training on the recruitment system has taken place.

Coaching with managers has improved the outcomes of recruitment drives.

Benefits

From September -December 2023, across both councils, 69 roles have been advertised and 64 have been filled, a success rate of 93%.

The use of direct approaches to passive candidates has enabled the appointment of 2 software developers, a cyber security officer, and a bio-diversity net gain officer. These are very difficult posts to fill.

The average time to hire has reduced from 53 days to 29 – time to hire is defined as the time from when a vacancy is created to when a formal offer of employment is made.

The Council has appointed 5 senior leaders on the first attempt and the quality of the applicants was extremely high.

The Task Group thanked Hollie for the updated information. She was also requested to obtain comparative information from other local authorities which will be provided on an annual basis, in line with other local authority reporting frequency.

Interview with the Executive Member (Resources), Councillor Peter Wilson

The Executive Member (Resources), Councillor Peter Wilson, attended the meeting to relate his views and perspective on the issues raised during the course of the review.

He highlighted the following points in relation to recruitment and staff retention at Chorley:

- As a relatively small district – we do very well to recruit and retain high quality candidates especially in respect of shared services, where there is more responsibility and expectations of the candidates appointed. For example, we recently carried out a recruitment to vacancies within Senior Management Team and were able to attract and appoint very good candidates to the posts. This was reflected in both shared and non- shared services and could be attributed to the key elements of pay and employee benefits / support forming part of the attractive Chorley offer.
Chorley Council compares favourably with its neighbouring local authorities.
- It was acknowledged that certain teams (e.g. ICT, planning) experience certain recruitment challenges due to the pay being higher in the private sector. The gaps in specialist areas like planning are a concern.
- In respect of customer services, it was noted that the team had recently moved to shared services and there were challenges, however the situation was moving in the right direction. Councillor Wilson acknowledged that the issue regarding apprentices being put under pressure had been identified and there

was a need to allow time for people to develop skills balanced against the demands of the service.

Arising from questions by the Task Group, Councillor Wilson made the following further points:

- Despite reports in the national media about some Councils experiencing financial difficulties, Chorley is fortunate to be in a financially stable position. It therefore has the advantage to promote itself as an employer able to offer a good career in local government.
- Councillor Wilson saw his role as Executive Member (Resources) to hold officers to account and provide challenge to ensure that human resources were in place to deliver the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Policies.
- The Council is committed to quality apprenticeships, and going forward we will ensure that our stated aims, development plans, mentoring etc. are all specified as part of the package we offer. The Council does not want to rely on apprentices to deliver a service and will ensure a blend of apprentices and experienced staff within teams.

The Task Group thanked the Executive Member (Resources) for his attendance.

Conclusions

The Task Group reviewed all the evidence, interviews and discussions that had taken place. It then considered its conclusions in light of the aims and objectives of the scrutiny review.

The conclusions were as follows:

1. The Task Group are satisfied that the new Recruitment Strategy is tackling the issues identified in the report.
2. That service delivery is being maintained; however it should be highlighted that there are challenges in certain service areas as identified during the course of the review.
3. That Executive Members and Directors hold heads of service to account where on occasion performance gaps are being attributed to lack of staffing, when there are other identifiable reasons.
4. That the Task Group recognises the dedication of all its employees and thanks them for their hard work.

Recommendations

1. That the Council's Senior Management Team be requested to investigate the feasibility of the Council working towards the Living Wage Accreditation, and if promising, present their proposals to Executive Cabinet
2. That the Council actively promotes health and wellbeing (including mental health) support available as part of its overall employee benefits package.
3. That the Executive Member for Resources monitor recruitment and retention figures over the next 6 – 12 months especially in identified key risk areas
4. That a member learning session be arranged on an annual basis to update on workforce planning
5. To include performance reporting data on recruitment and staff retention on the new members portal.

Appendices

Appendix A -Scoping Document

Appendix B – [Exit interviews and exit interview questionnaire - analysis](#)

Appendix C – [Briefing note regarding role of Chief Executive and Elected Members](#)

Appendix D – [Recruitment Strategy – full report to SMT](#)

Appendix E – [People Strategy presentation](#)

Appendix F – [Responses given by SMT to survey questions](#)

Scrutiny Inquiry Project Outline

Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry Project Outline

Review Topic:
Retention and Staff Recruitment

- Objectives:**
- To ensure service delivery is maintained
 - To identify service areas at risk of failure and to look at how we can make recommendations to address this
 - To identify aspirations and capacity for improving services

- Desired Outcomes:**
- To achieve accreditation and awards for staffing
 - To improve organisational reputation
 - To maintain service delivery
 - To retain staff
 - Work to achieve the real living wage accreditation
 - Attract and retain the best workforce

Terms of Reference:

Members of the Task Group will be clearly focussed on the high level, policy and strategic aspects of the retention and recruitment of staff, which is within the scope of councillors' role in decision making as per Governance arrangements within the Constitution.

The Task Group will only scrutinise operational processes (which is within the remit of officers) insofar as they may be impacting service delivery and/or impacting our role as councillors.

Equality and diversity implications:

Oversight into recruitment processes, which impact on equality and diversity issues (e.g. accessibility for people with a disability or neurodivergent)

Risks:

- To identify instances, if any, where service delivery is at risk due to recruitment and staff retention issues
- Manage expectations
- Ensure activities of the task group do not impede and impact ongoing work or relationships.
- Avoid scope creep.

Venue(s):

Town Hall, Market Street, Chorley.

Chair: Councillor Le Marinel

Timescale:

Start: September 2023

Finish: December 2023

Information Requirements and Sources:

Documents/evidence:

- Clarification on role of head of paid service as regards recruitment and staff retention and the role of councillors
- Breakdown of recruitment – vacancies
- Full set of standard employee Terms and Conditions
- Recruitment Strategy & Process
- Oversight of workforce planning
- Benchmarking retention, recruitment figures
- Selection training (for managers)
- Exit interview data – themes
- HR policies
- Oversight into recruitment processes – Accessibility, Equality and Diversity
- Process of accreditation to become a Living Wage Employer
- Staff surveys/pulse surveys

Witnesses:

- Directors and relevant Executive Members
- Unison representative

Consultation/Research:

■ External benchmarking

Site Visits

n/a

Officer Support:

**Lead Officer: Hollie Walmsley
(Head of HR)**

**Democratic and
Member Services Officers: Clare
Gornall**

Likely Budget Requirements:

Purpose £

Total _____

Target Body¹ for Findings/Recommendations

Executive Cabinet

¹ All project outcomes require the approval of Overview and Scrutiny Committee before progressing

Chorley
Council

