

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SCRUTINY
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 22 MARCH 2007**

MEMBERS

* Cllr S M Fairman - Chairman

* Cllr B C Evans - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr G J Fielden
* Cllr P W Hitchins
* Cllr C M Pannell

* Cllr J T Pennington
* Cllr G Rothwell
* Cllr J W Squire

* Denotes attendance

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:
Cllrs N A Barnes, M F Saltern and R O Yonge

Officers in attendance: Head of Personnel and Payroll and Personnel and Training
Officer

SC.59/06 MEETING AGENDA

During the introductions to the meeting, a Member wished for it to be noted that she felt it unnecessary to hold this meeting, bearing in mind that it contained only one substantial agenda item. In response, the Chairman advised that Members had specifically requested that turnover, recruitment and retention practice and monitoring be considered by Scrutiny and that further items had been removed from the draft agenda due to unforeseen circumstances. In addition, this meeting had been fixed into the calendar at Annual Council on 11 May 2006, to allow for the provision of any call-ins which could have arisen from the Executive meeting on 8 March 2007.

SC.60/06 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny held on 22 February 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC.61/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none was made.

SC.62/06 TURNOVER, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRACTICE AND MONITORING

Members considered a report which provided an overview of the Council's Recruitment and Retention practices.

The report stated that in a labour intensive industry such as local government, strong emphasis should be placed upon how local authorities recruit and retain their workforce. As a public body, there was a clear responsibility on the Council to manage these processes in an open and transparent manner. The Personnel and Payroll team considered recruitment to be a key service provided by them on behalf of the Council and provided a professional level of support to service areas. Specialist software had been invested in to enable much of the process to be delivered electronically and further developments were planned with web-based recruitment which would help maintain the Council's position in the national job marketplace.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A number of Members expressed strong concerns that Members were no longer being kept informed with regard to staff starters, leavers, reshuffles and office relocations within the Council. In acknowledging these concerns, the lead Executive Member for the Personnel and Payroll service advised that he had taken steps to address this issue. The Executive Member had now requested a weekly statistics breakdown on starters, leavers and recruitment process updates. In reiterating their concerns, some Members stated their firm belief that Members should be made more aware of staff starters and leavers and where possible, should receive improved communications on Personnel-related issues. Members felt that a regular starters and leavers update should be included in the Council's internal Members Bulletin publication and it was noted that any Member could request a paper version of the Bulletin be sent to them if they so preferred;
- (b) Members expressed regret that the Monitoring Officer had ruled that Members who did not sit on the Personnel Panel were unable to attend during the consideration of certain staffing issues. Some Members felt that all Members should be entitled to attend every meeting, if they were so minded. In noting these views, the Leader of Council reminded Members that the Panel did not consider the movement and recruitment of staff. In addition, the ruling had been made that specific personnel issues relating to individual staff were not considered to be a matter for non-Panel Members' concern;
- (c) Members were reminded that they were responsible for budget and policy setting and therefore established the staffing numbers in the employ of the Council;

- (d) Reference was made to the current work pressures on the personnel service. Members noted that the current single status project (anticipated to be concluded by July 2007) was placing a considerable added burden onto what was already a service without plentiful staff resources;
- (e) Officers advised that there were a number of indicators (e.g. internal targets relating to staff turnover and sickness absence, and external inspections including Investors in People and Comprehensive Performance Assessment) which were in place to determine the employment standards and culture of the Council. Interested Members were also informed that they could request a copy of the adopted Human Resources Strategy, which underpinned the Councils' practices as an employer;
- (f) It was confirmed that web based recruitment was an additional method of accessing job information and therefore did not exclude potential applicants from applying for posts who did not have access to the internet;
- (g) Members noted that the ethnicity of staff employed by the Council reflected the ethnicity of the South Hams' population. Whilst processes were devised to ensure non-discriminatory recruitment practice, it was recognised during the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003 that disproportionate emphasis should not be given to attracting a pool of resources which did not exist. With regard to the high number of staff who had not declared their ethnicity, officers advised that whilst it was compulsory for the Council to ask the question, it was not a requirement for staff to provide a response;
- (h) Officers advised that the practice of restricting access to staff medical records was strictly adhered to;
- (i) On the subject of the gender profile of Council staff, Members were informed that whilst the Operations Team predominantly comprised of male staff, the remaining Council services were fairly evenly balanced between male and female staff members;
- (j) The increasing trend of Council employees being aged over 65 was welcomed by some Members. The point was also made that this trend could continue in light of the current demographic age profile in the South Hams;

- (k) The importance of attracting local education student leavers to the employ of the Council was highlighted. A Member stated that Devon County Council was currently promoting a policy to work with district councils to appeal to such groups, particularly in areas experiencing a current skills shortage. Officers advised that the Council had a long standing good relationship with schools and colleges and informed of a number of activities undertaken by the Council within schools and colleges (e.g. careers evenings and work experience events). However, it was noted that such events were demanding upon staff resources;
- (l) In response to a question, Members were advised that there were no current proposals for the Council to provide crèche facilities, due to the high set-up costs. Officers pledged to keep Members informed should there be opportunities in the future for such a facility, by virtue of a partnership arrangement with another organisation;
- (m) Members endorsed the comments expressed by the Leader with regard to healthy staff turnover levels. The Leader stated that it was his belief that the Council should conduct quality training to enable its employees to progress and employees should not be discouraged from developing their careers elsewhere. Furthermore, the recruiting of new employees would result in fresh ideas and concepts being brought into the Council.

In conclusion, Members welcomed the report and wished to extend their thanks to the officers in the Personnel service for their dedication and hard work.

RESOLVED

That Scrutiny has fully discussed the contents of the report and wishes to see a return to the regular notification of starters and leavers and where possible, improved communication for Members on Personnel issues.

SC.63/06 **AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OF SCRUTINY**

Members considered the schedule of future items for consideration and in particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the Internal Audit – Corporate Governance item being deferred from 19 April 2007 to the Scrutiny meeting on 24 May 2007;

- (b) the Chairman having received feedback from her letter to the Chief Executive of South West Water. The letter advised that the Chief Executive would ensure that a representative would attend a future Scrutiny Group meeting to explain its budget setting process;
- (c) feedback on the outcomes of the West Devon Borough Council meeting held on 20 March 2007, where representatives of the Primary Care Trust were present. In addition to the given update, it was also noted that a brief summary of this meeting would be included in a future edition of the Members' Bulletin publication.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.40 am).

Chairman