

Report title **Strategic Risk Register – Employee Recruitment and Retention Risk**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Due to local and national recruitment and retention challenges there is a risk that this could impact our ability to deliver services for our city, in particular a risk that hard to fill vacancies across City of Wolverhampton Council may not be filled without focused action to mitigate the risk.
- 1.2 This risk could impact our ability to deliver Our City, Our plan as our people are our most important asset – it is essential we are able to retain and recruit talent to deliver for our city.

Across the council, this risk could impact on the following:

- Health and wellbeing of employees that take on additional responsibilities/duties to fill the gap whilst vacancies are filled.
- Increased use and cost of agency members of staff to fill vacancy gaps.
- Skill/knowledge or expertise to fulfil statutory and non-statutory obligations.
- Potential of burnout amongst employees that take on additional work.
- Turnover of employees due to high workload pressures whilst filling vacancies
- Increase in sickness absence due to workload pressures.
- Having a competitive 'offer' that attracts and retains talent.

2. Context:

- 2.1 The [LGA Workforce Survey 2022](#) provides information on key elements of the workforce within local authorities in England. All Heads of Human Resources in England were asked to complete a survey online between March and May 2022. 119 councils responded including 5 from the West Midlands. In relation to Recruitment and Retention:
- 62% said they were considering increasing apprentices in 2022/23
 - 94% said they were experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties.
 - Hard to fill areas included Planning Officer (over 50%), Childrens Social Workers (72%), Environmental Health Officers (45%)
 - 81% of all councils said they provided market forces supplements for some posts.
- 1.3 The following points evidence the impact of the recruitment and retention difficulties at the City of Wolverhampton Council:

- Turnover has increased from 10.4% in 2021/22 to 10.7% in 2022/23
- On average the council has 250 recruitment campaigns open at any given time which are at varying stages of the recruitment process
- CWC positions that are hard to fill include roles within Social Care, Digital and IT, Procurement, Finance, Building Control, and People Services (previously referred to as HR)
- In 2023 our top 5 service areas for in-house recruitment were City Environment, Childrens Services, West Midlands Pension Fund, Public Health and Regeneration
- In 2021/22 Mental Health sickness absence became the most common reason for sickness absence. This has continued into 2022/23 with 24.83% of all days lost. Whilst these include absence related to mental health (anxiety and stress) accounted for 66.75% of these absences, bereavement accounted for 20.24% of this absence and work-related stress accounted for 13.01% of mental health absence. This is not uncommon and follows a national trend – the Office for National Statistics reports mental health conditions as the third highest reason for sickness absence nationally in 2022. It should be noted that there will be differences in the way organisations record mental health absence and therefore like for like comparisons may not be reliable. However, the British Medical Association (2023) states; ‘the number of people in contact with adult Mental Health services in England reached 101 million in November 2022’ and ‘Mental Health services in England received a record 4.6 million referrals during 2022 – up from 22% from 2019’
- City Housing and Environment and Childrens and Adults Services combined reported 55.56% of the total number of days lost to mental health issues. These are three of the 4 largest directorates that together make up 47.03% of the workforce.

What are other Local Authorities doing?

- 1.4 Benchmarking has been undertaken at four other local authorities – Shropshire Council, Herefordshire, Solihull and Staffordshire Council. Several initiatives including rebranding, creation of new values and behaviours, review of CV/advert, refresh of recruitment information on internet pages, working with colleges, exit interviews and a review of the market forces supplement policy are being implemented to mitigate associated risks.
- 1.5 The CIPD report ([Labour Market Outlook – Views from Employers, Summer 2023](#)) states private sector employers are responding by upskilling existing staff, increase wages, increase duties of current staff. In contrast, public sector organisations are increasing the duties of existing staff at a significantly higher rate than the private sector, but also not increasing wages. Some public sector organisations are also considering automation of recruitment related processes.

Current activity we are taking to mitigate the risk:

- 1.6 The new starter survey outcome in 2019 recommended the council provide more information to new starters to enable them to make an informed decision on whether to apply for a role at the council. In response, WVJobs was launched and includes information to candidates on benefits of working for the council, provides key HR policy

information, staff equality forum details, careers available at the council, candidate information to help support interview preparation and more.

- 1.7 Targeted advertisement of senior vacancies – including in specialist publications, improved adverts, removing artificial barriers from job descriptions, microsites, collaborative working with community leaders and partners to encourage applications from diverse communities etc.
- 1.8 The advertisement template for council jobs has also been reviewed – these now include a diversity commitment statement on recruitment of ex-offenders, workshops delivered by Organisational Development, support for candidates, confirmation of work style (fixed, field or flex), salary information and a link to WVJobs.
- 1.9 Diverse recruitment panels and a trained diverse pool of employees supports the upskilling of employees from ethnic minority groups in gaining interview experience from an interviewer perspective. A review of the diverse panel process showed employees that have been trained in interviewing have gone on to secure promotions within the council. In addition, by having diverse panels, it demonstrates the council's commitment to diversity to all candidates going through a selection process.
- 1.10 Revised recruitment and selection training for panel members, the review included benchmarking to ensure council recruitment and selection practices are current, fair and transparent.
- 1.11 Market forces supplement policy has been considered – to ensure justification for enhancing pay for hard to fill vacancies (to mitigate risk against equal pay claims). The Pay Strategy Board oversees this process to govern the integrity of requests and monitor consistency in approvals.
- 1.12 Job descriptions and Person Specifications are reviewed before advertising to remove artificial barriers to entry to the council. It is hoped that this will support the activity of recruiting a workforce that reflects the communities represented in our city and ensures the council hires employees that are skilled and experienced as well as qualified where necessary.
- 1.13 Step up to Social Work campaign – this is a 14 month training programme for employees that want to re-train and change their career to become a social worker. This not only allows to remain true to our commitment to growing our own but also helps us to fill vacancies in an area that is notoriously hard to fill.
- 1.14 Reimbursement of social worker registration fees (Social Work England) – introduced this year to assist the attraction and retention of social workers at a time where experienced social workers are increasingly hard to find. In addition to this there is a council wide review underway of all professional fees paid by council employees.
- 1.15 A new and fresh People Services (formerly known as Human Resources) operating model has been created – with a dedicated Recruitment and Retention Lead and consultancy team to support managers to recruit the best talent and further drive our

commitment to growing our own and increasing opportunities for apprenticeships and graduate placements/roles. The lead will horizon scan and benchmark across the region and sectors to find new recruitment and retention ideas and initiatives. The team has historically been transactional only - by introducing a consultancy service managers and candidates will be better supported to ensure their vacancies are filled with the right people with the right skills at the right time.

- 1.16 The team will also support managers to proactively succession plan their recruitment needs to further embed growing our own opportunities and identify positions that may be difficult to fill early on and consider innovative methods to train or recruit candidates into post.
- 1.17 The People Services team are also working in conjunction with the Wolves at Work team – supporting 18-24's into work. The recruitment and retention lead has established regular meetings with members of the Wolves at work team to align all activities to the council plan in addition to ensuring Yoo Recruit as our agency partner is also aligned to support candidates in Wolverhampton within this age group to fill our vacancies.
- 1.18 A new employee benefits portal has also been launched, with regular communication to all employees scheduled throughout the year enhancing our Employee Value Proposition. The benefits portal is used to ensure employees receive more than a salary in return for the skills, capabilities and experience they bring to the council. This should in turn support employee retention.
- 1.19 A new exit questionnaire has been implemented, allowing data to easily be gathered and reviewed helping us understand why people choose to leave the council. This feedback will inform evidence-based actions needed to be taken in addressing any issues raised and taking preventative measures where required.
- 1.20 Care leavers are also offered priority interviews for apprenticeship posts – before this change apprenticeship recruitment campaigns were placed externally meaning any interested care leavers would compete against a larger applicant pool. This change means the council can support our care leavers to be one of the first groups to be considered for our apprenticeship posts and in addition, the council upholds its commitment to corporate parenting.
- 1.21 We have a strong and robust wellbeing offer – Health and Wellbeing is a priority for the Council and we have a dedicated Wellbeing Advisor in Organisational Development to ensure employee health and wellbeing is proactively supported. This role coordinates initiatives by working in partnership with People Services and public health colleagues. So far, People Services and Organisational Development have supported many well-being initiatives such as menopause chatty cafés, menopause panel events, a women's health survey, promotion of the employee assistance programme, mental health campaigns (lets talk stress, anxiety, men's mental health and wellbeing), suicide prevention workshops etc

- 1.22 We have a national and local Graduate programme which has an established recruitment and training programme in place. This is to ensure the council recruits high calibre candidates into our roles, ensuring we recruit local people into local jobs and remaining true to our commitment of growing our own.
- 1.23 We have a range of secondments and work experience opportunities throughout the council and are revising our secondment policy to allow secondments for up to a maximum of two years (currently capped at 1 year) to allow employees to apply for development opportunities within the council.
- 1.24 We utilise apprenticeships to upskill current employees and/or recruit new apprentices to the Council. The council supports a range of apprenticeship packages starting at level 2 (equivalent to GCSE) to level 7 (Masters level degree) in a range of subject areas including Business Administration, Customer Services, ICT and more.
- 1.25 Commitment to growing our own and strong focus on development embedded into council culture using acting ups, honoraria, secondment opportunities, recruitment practices to advertise vacancies internal to the council prior to external etc.
- 1.26 Coaching/shadowing/mentoring schemes have also been introduced for employees within the council – to further support and embed employee continuous professional development.
- 1.27 Wrap Around Support is available to internal employees who have been unsuccessful at interview but are trying to secure a new role within the council. This includes providing employees with training on interview and presentation skills. In addition, external candidates that attend interview and are unsuccessful are signposted to organisations that can provide application, CV writing or interview skills training.
- 1.28 Organisational Development provides face to face interview skills workshops to support colleagues to interview in safe, judgment free environment.
- 1.29 Employees can also access the external coaching and mentoring pool through West Midlands Employers. This is specifically for employees looking to develop and gain one on one support from a dedicated mentor external to City of Wolverhampton Council.
- 1.30 There is also a Leadership and management suite of training to support current employees – this will be enhanced through the People Services Transformation programme. The current learning offer will be reviewed with key stakeholders and new learning and development opportunities to support development of our employees and growing our own.

3. Key Outcomes:

- 3.1 The revised recruitment and selection training is ensuring recruiting managers are confident to carry out hiring manager recruitment activities.

- 1.31 A review of the diverse panels process has demonstrated that employees that have participated as a diverse panel member have benefited from the learning of interviewing other candidates. Some of which confirmed they have gone on to secure promotions because of improving their own interview skills.
- 1.32 Our wellbeing offer is constantly under review by Organisational development, People services and Public health. The offer now includes the introduction of 'Lets talk mental wellbeing' and a new Stress group who are discussing absence data to analyse the impact on council employees and services; A wellbeing working group with representatives from OD, Equality Diversity and Inclusion and People services; suicide prevention training; substance misuse insight training and Cost of living – financial wellbeing workshops.
- 1.33 The councils first international employee requiring a Home Office certificate of sponsorship has started work in Childrens Services. Previously a student who had completed their placement with the council and now moving into a newly qualified social worker role. (note: This option can only be considered for select hard to fill roles that are pre-determined by the UK Home Office).
- 1.34 The hiring success rate for candidates from ethnic minority groups has increased from 3.7% (2020-2021) to 6.7% (2021-2022).
- 1.35 In line with growing our own, the largest increase in the proportion of employees from ethnic minority groups was in the upper middle pay quartile (grade 5 to 7 with an 8.1 percentage point increase).
- 1.36 42.1% of apprentices in 2021-2022 were from ethnic minority groups, making them a higher proportion than of the workforce as a whole (31.8%). This success can be attributed to recent change initiatives such as the introduction of diverse panels in recruitment and the removal of artificial barriers in job roles.
- 1.37 The number of employees from black or Asian ethnic groups holding positions at pay grades GR09-GR17 has doubled since 2018/2019, with a 100% and 106.3% increase, respectively.
- 1.38 The diversity of the workforce ethnicity profile has gradually increased in recent years, with a 3.4 percentage point increase in the proportion of employees from ethnic minority groups since 2019-2020.
- 1.39 Since 2017 the Council have enrolled 155 apprentices, with an increase each year – currently we have 43 currently on the scheme.
- 1.40 We have a variety of targeted programmes to attract and retain talent and promote growing our own – these are specifically aimed at addressing or ensuring employee recruitment and growth is accessible across demographic groups e.g. Brilliant Leaders / Breaking Through – to support colleagues into more senior roles. From the 12 delegates from the 2020 cohort, 5 (41.6%) are now in higher grade roles.

- 1.41 Several areas within the Council will have occupational specific development - e.g. Social Work with Assisted & Supported Year of Employment (ASYE), Best Interest Assessor (BIA), Advance Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) – these pathways can lead to alternative roles and next level grading.
- 1.42 The council currently has 29 graduates working across the council and a further 20 who have secured permanent positions since completing the National Graduate Development Programme.
- 1.43 Of the 24 employees who completed cohorts 1 or 2 of the Aspire into Management Programme, 14 are now in higher graded roles or secondments (58.3%).

Future planned activity:

- 1.44 The council is committed to ensuring fairness and equality in recruitment practices to ensure we continue to attract diverse candidates into the council to support and serve our diverse city. We continue to consider new and improved methods to increase awareness within the candidate market of our status as an employer of choice and are working closely with West Midlands Employers to review our recruitment processes through an inclusion lens. Work has commenced on this and we look forward to receiving the independent outcome of our recruitment practices. This will enable us to challenge our recruitment processes, isolate unwanted recruiting behaviours and avoid recruitment assumptions. The review will include everything from job design, marketing and recruitment through to selection, induction and onboarding.
- 1.45 Career pathways are in place in social care and are being further developed by Organisational Development and People Services for other service areas. This would potentially create recruitment pathways for employees to continue to support our commitment to growing our own and retaining our existing employees.
- 1.46 We will continue to promote our strong Organisational Development offer for employees ensuring no employee is left behind and that our offer is having an impact on developing and retaining our talent.
- 1.47 We will continue to offer a variety of formal qualification pathways – often utilising the apprenticeship levy as a funding source.
- 1.48 We will also continue to promote our Apprenticeship scheme and encourage managers to consider apprentices as a priority.
- 1.49 Discussions are taking place with Heads of Service for future service area workforce plans – these will identify future development requirements for role or business need, including service apprenticeship requirements to ensure we benefit from the apprenticeship levy.
- 1.50 National Graduate Development Programme – continue to introduce talented graduates into the organisation (including local young people).

- 1.51 We will be rolling out the next Cohort for the Aspire into Management (AIM) Programme – to provide an entry point for employees who aspire into an initial supervisory or management role and are not eligible for levy funded or other routes.
- 1.52 We are also considering alternative selection processes such as sharing interview subject themes prior to the interview to promote a change towards having discussions with candidates. The selection process should be a reciprocal process for the candidate to learn about the council and the post they have applied for and for managers to assess the suitability of the candidate for the post.
- 1.53 We will continue to work with local universities, colleges and schools, with a commitment for People Services to attend Careers fairs with Wolves at Work and the possibility of holding career discussions with school leavers to promote jobs, careers and apprenticeships within the council to attract local people into jobs.
- 1.54 The new recruitment consultant roles in People Services will head hunt and consider an incentivisation scheme for friends/family recommendations to work at the council.
- 1.55 We are aiming to roll out a second new starter survey to understand what else that council could do differently from a candidate perspective - also understand barriers in the recruitment process.
- 1.56 We are introducing a survey to candidates that have been shortlisted for interview but were unsuccessful to learn from our recruitment processes and how these can be enhanced.
- 1.57 A review of the professional development process will also take place as part of the People Transformation programme, ensuring managers continue to discuss career progression and development with employees on a regular basis, liaising with Organisational Development where required.
- 1.58 An ongoing review of the data from the exit questionnaire process will take place to understand why employees leave the council and make evidence based decisions to influence employee retention.
- 1.59 Further consideration for supported Internships is taking place, working with the supported employment team to develop a process to suit individual's needs (job carving) specifically for disabled candidates.
- 1.60 We are improving the promotion of cost reimbursement for candidates attending an interview if traveling by public transport to encourage candidates to participate within the selection process and prevent withdrawal.
- 1.61 The newly appointed Recruitment and Retention Lead will continue to attend regional strategic resourcing board meetings to ensure the council is informed of recruitment and selection activities at neighboring councils and upcoming trends.
- 1.62 The newly created Recruitment and Retention team within People Services will create a recruitment and retention strategy – the team will work with Heads of Service/Deputy

Directors to agree service specific strategies by understanding the individual service requirements, planning actions to support the retention of existing employees along with identifying the most suitable recruitment activities.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 To continue to monitor our recruitment activity, retention rates and the impact of the activity taken to date to proactively respond to this risk and implement the planned future activity.
- 4.2 The strategic risk register will be updated as required and presented at approximately quarterly intervals to the Committee. The strategic risk register does not include all the risks that the Council faces. It represents the most significant risks that could potentially impact on the achievement of the corporate priorities. As stated above, other risks are captured within directorate, programme, project or partnership risk registers in line with the Council's corporate risk management framework.