

**County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023****Question to Councillor Phillip White  
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills****By Councillor Pardesi**

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**Question**

The Government is keen to get people, who have been inactive, back to work after the pandemic to fill job vacancies. Has the County Council had difficulty filling job vacancies? If so, in which roles? Which employment incentives are most likely to encourage people back to work in Staffordshire?

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**Reply**

Like many other local authorities and large employers across the country, Staffordshire County Council experiences regular staff turnover, which is partly reflected in the number of recruitment adverts we place as an organisation.

There has been considerable effort over the last 18 months to create a more distinctive profile for the County Council reflecting its status as a modern and forward looking employer with the introduction of **'WeRecruit'** our new applicant tracking system and our revamped careers website.

Over the last year the County Council has placed 956 adverts and advertised more than 1500 positions, and, whilst some of these positions will have been filled by internal candidates, we have appointed almost 750 new starters.

Since the launch of the 'WeRecruit' platform on 31<sup>st</sup> October, from a total of 211 appointments, 63 (or around 30%) were taken by internal applicants, with around 70% of recent appointments taken by new starters.

We currently average around 10 applicants per vacancy although find it difficult to recruit to certain roles such as social workers and lawyers, in common with many other local authorities.

Focusing in particular on lawyers, we operate in an exceptionally competitive market place where the private sector is often able to offer

higher remuneration, and more recently than in the past, can now compete with the County Council around a flexible work offer.

Working with the People Services team our Legal Services team has developed '**Brand Legal**' using feedback we had received that we had not always highlighted the exciting scope of services and work available within a local authority legal service.

This alongside modernisation of job descriptions will enable us to facilitate options for staff to transfer more easily between legal disciplines which will promote individual development and make us more resilient to changing demands from our client base.

Ensuring that we are competitive within the wider recruitment market is crucial to ensuring we are properly resource. Using market rates wider intelligence we are creating talent pools in conjunction with our People Services team and we have had great success in recently appointing a number of Educational Psychologists and a substantial number of Social Workers over the past 12 months.

We strongly believe in growing our own people and looking to the future, we are working with People Services to design relevant apprenticeship plan and job descriptions to open up pathways for new entrants to the County Council. For example in our legal services team we take students from further education and support them, in five to six years, to qualify as lawyers.

This approach to growing our own will help us in ensuring that we are able to recruit the very best talent available, including from those cohorts who have traditionally not had university as an option that they feel is open to them.

Through our Open Door programme, we continue to successfully encourage people who are out of work into the labour market through structured 12 week voluntary placements many of which are within the County Council, giving people the confidence and skills they need to enter the world of work. In the two full delivery years of pre-pandemic Open Door delivery (2018-20) the Council supported 136 candidates with 31 (23%) gaining employment. Following the pandemic, the Open Door programme has seen 39 candidate starts since April 2022 and with 8 of these gaining full-time employment and the interest in the programme continues to grow.

Our structured approach to training and development helps us to retain our staff and grow their skills and rising through the business. We're seeing a positive increase in the number of people who are likely to recommend SCC as an employer, with our Net Promoter Score increasing from +11 in Q4 of 2021/22 to +19 in Q1 of 2022/23 which is considered a good score.

The top positive themes arising from the most recent eNPS results indicate that employees value the support and encouragement they receive from their line manager and senior manager; that the workplace is a friendly and warming environment, and that the council has a very positive culture.

In addition, the January 23 SMART survey demonstrated a direct positive connection between smart working and our ability to recruit and retain people as it enables us to draw from a much wider pool of people. Flexibility in our work offer is considered a highly attractive feature of working for the council.

Staffordshire as a whole, performs better than many areas in terms of Economic Inactivity rates which in the latest data (October 2021 to September 2022) stood at 16.3% of the working age population compared to 21.2% in England.

Similarly our Employment Rate (81.0%) and Unemployment Rates (3.3%) from the same data series are also better than the England averages.

Recognising the link between job vacancies and activities to bring people back into work, our new Staffordshire Jobs & Careers brokerage service is now fully live and currently staffed by a team of 6 dedicated Employment Brokers. This service is designed to match local people with employer vacancies, to fill jobs and provide people with the jobs and careers they need. It is responsible for the management and delivery of free recruitment and support services to businesses, supporting Staffordshire residents into work. The team is now ready to help with tailored support and practical help. Their job is to help put together and support clients with a bespoke package of support for the right job, career, and training path for them, working with and alongside our partners.

The Staffordshire Jobs & Careers service website is a comprehensive single point that provides information on jobs, training, and career opportunities all in one place. The website has become quickly established since launching in November 2022 and it is currently promoting around 12,000 job vacancies and continues to grow in usage with 6,546 website engagement activities doubling during January 2023 to February 2023, resulting in 10,620 page views.

The brokerage service also supports wider government programmes such as DWP's Plan for Jobs, and it will also target the linking of opportunities with key employment sites such as the West Midlands Railfreight Interchange in South Staffordshire, HS2, i54 Western Extension and recent investments such as the Pets at Home Distribution Centre in Stafford.

The County Council, supported by the 8 District and Borough Councils, invested £6.9m on the 'Staffordshire Means Back to Business' programme that supported businesses and residents through the pandemic. This programme delivered: 418 new Apprentices, 321 companies supported with free training, 187 businesses supported through the business start-up/step up programmes, 28 start-up loans made, and 13,500 students received training in starting a business.

Other factors which can influence economic inactivity include the cost of childcare, meaning that some low-income families can find themselves worse off in work, and also delays in NHS waiting lists, exacerbating health conditions among the population and potentially removing people further from the labour market. These are of course national issues, but we should note their potential impact on local economic activity.

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