



*Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG*

## **QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Response by the Cabinet Member:

In order to address each of your questions I have copied them below with the responses underneath.

- 1a) Whilst you have commented that the problems faced in Powys are part of a “national recruitment crisis” please can you provide a further answer in request of the following:

Is the Council reviewing possible common themes behind the ongoing issues with missed and delayed waste and recycling collections in order to try and improve the situation?

Response:

We do review any reasons for missed and delayed collections and in this case it is principally down to the shortfall in the number of staff. There is unfortunately no escaping that there is a national recruitment crisis and this is affecting the private sector as much as the public sector. It is also affecting other authorities in the UK as has been widely reported in the media. It is of course very noticeable in Council Waste and Recycling Services as it immediately affects significant numbers of residents. Whilst still a problem for those departments trying to run essential services, staff shortfalls in other areas will only affect parts of the population to different extents.

- 1b) Whilst there may be national recruitment issues, please can you confirm whether you are reviewing exit interviews to assess the reasons why people are leaving?

Response:

Exit interviews are emailed to all staff when they are made leavers on the Council’s Trent computer system. It is then at the discretion of the employee if they complete this. If they do, the data is stored by the Human Resources Team in line with GDPR requirements, with the service notified of any issues which need addressing. The service has not received any such notifications.

We do, however, ask staff why they are leaving and receive many different reasons including:

- To work in the Council’s Highways Department
- To work in other Council Departments
- To work in a different type of role
- To complete Apprenticeship/other studies
- To work closer to home

- To work in better paid roles
- Retired/Ill Health/Died in Service
- Didn't like the job

There were no common themes, with only two stating that they had left for better paid roles and the same number because they didn't like the job. It is important to note that this is very physical work in all weathers which doesn't suit all.

- 1c) Are there any common sickness absence themes in this sector and are you reviewing how best to support employees with their health?

Response:

Again there are a number of reasons why staff are off sick, including the following which have affected more than one member of staff, although not in significant numbers:

- Covid 19 (note that until recently this has not been recorded as sick)
- Anxiety/stress – not work related
- Muscular Skeletal conditions
- Sickness and diarrhoea
- Low mood (as recorded on the fit note)
- Chest Infection/Lung issues
- Planned operations
- Other issues that have been occasionally reported include high blood pressure, sporting accident, diabetes, haemorrhoids and optical issues

Whilst there are no patterns here, the Council's absence management procedure is followed with all employees, which includes welfare visits, back to work interviews, informal support, counselling, and where necessary the disciplinary process.

Due to the physical nature of the work, sickness levels are generally quite high in this sector across all local authorities.

- 1d) Has the council carried out a comparison exercise with other surrounding local authorities and the private sector to ensure that the pay and employment benefits are as attractive as they can be?

Response:

Council officers sit on a number of benchmarking groups and this comparison exercise has been carried out between authorities as it is an issue affecting us all. To use drivers as an example, the top of the payscale (rounded up) for the highest paying Welsh authority is £26,500 compared to the lowest of £20,500. Powys is currently paying £23,500, which is the average. At a recent all Wales officer meeting it was reported that one of the higher paying authorities was having similar problems with recruitment.

In terms of the private sector, it is more difficult to benchmark but it is worth noting that we have recently recruited a member of staff who previously worked with one of our competitors in the trade waste business. It should also be noted that the Council does generally offer superior additional benefits to its employees, although we are not able to be as flexible as the private sector due to the agreed terms and conditions across all Council services. Whilst market supplements have been used for some specialist roles, to do so for the significant number of HGV drivers required would be a substantial cost to the authority.

- 1e) Does the council offer only fixed term or short term contracts and if so, why and is this the case in other local authorities?

Response:

All roles are advertised as permanent contracts, with any additional temporary requirements recruited through the Council's Agency contract.

- 2a) With regard to training HGV Drivers – are the council sign posting applicants without the appropriate qualifications and experience to appropriate training providers?

Response:

When advertising vacancies, it is clearly stated in the job descriptions and person specifications what the requirements are for the roles. There are a number of training providers for people to train as HGV drivers should they wish to do so.

- 2b) Is the Council working with any training providers in this regard?

Response:

The Council works with the Heads of the Valley Training Company and Dulson Training to upskill appropriate staff to drive HGVs.

- 2c) You state that Council staff have the opportunity to train as HGV drivers – can this training opportunity be provided to external applicants who have applied to work in this sector?

Response:

There is a cost to training staff as HGV drivers for which we require some commitment in return. External applicants who are successful can express an interest in training for their HGV licence which will then be considered on merit as not all employees are suitable for this role which does involve responsibility for a very large vehicle and the hazards that go with that. We currently have 7 loaders who are training for their HGV licences.

- 2d) Presumably not all vacancies need to be HGV drivers – what other qualifications are needed to work in this sector and what steps are the council taking to encourage those looking for work in this sector to obtain the required qualifications and experience?

Response:

HGV drivers are the main concern with recruitment as we are now back to capacity with loaders. For the loader roles, it is not qualifications or experience that we are looking for but more of an aptitude to carry out a physical role in all weather conditions as well as reliability as it is a service that our residents rely on.

3. With regard to the Council's ongoing recruitment in this sector, please can you confirm:

3a) How many positions within the waste and recycling department have been vacant in June, July and August?

Response:

37 in June, 38 in July, and 23 in August. However, it should be noted that many of these have been covered by Agency staff. Due to delays in the relocation of staff, there have been a number of long term Agency staff who are now being offered permanent roles following the recruitment process.

3b) How many applications have you received in each of June, July and August?

Response:

June – 5 Drivers, 27 Loaders

July – 4 Drivers, 39 Loaders

August – 7 Drivers, 57 Loaders

Of these, 13 Drivers and 67 loaders were invited for interview.

3c) How many positions have now been filled?

Response:

38 positions have been filled, although all have not started yet. Whilst loader positions should soon all be filled, taking into account the loaders that are currently being trained up as drivers, there is still a requirement for 4 drivers in the North of the County. These are being covered where possible through Agency workers, Foremen and Supervisors driving vehicles, Highways Drivers or moving Waste and Recycling drivers between depots. Annual leave is also being restricted where reasonable, but it is of course important that staff do take time off.

3d) How many positions are currently filled by agency workers?

Response:

40 positions are currently filled by Agency workers, although most of these are included in the filled positions above but are yet to transfer to the direct employment of the Council. It should be noted that the cost of employing Agency workers and direct employees is comparable when taking into account on costs.

3e) If someone applies for a job, how quickly should they hear from the council about whether or not they will be invited to the next stage? We are aware of applicants who have applied over three weeks ago and have not heard about whether they are to proceed.

Response:

The Council operates a Safer Recruitment policy where each applicant must be individually considered to ensure that they reach the minimum requirements of the job description. Not all applicants will be shortlisted but they should receive an automatic notification if they are rejected at this stage. Ordinarily there is a closing date after which the shortlisting process is carried out and applicants informed. We have, however, been operating on a rolling basis to speed up the process.