

Leicester
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED
ALL**

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:

Cabinet

15 July 2002

VACANCIES WITHIN THE CITY COUNCIL

Report of the Town Clerk and Corporate Director Resources Access and Diversity

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the current situation regarding vacancy levels across departments. Departments were asked to provide information for the six-month period to 30 April 2002.
- 1.2 To consider the strategic issues and implications for:
 - Frontline service delivery
 - Budget management
- 1.3 To respond to the Finance Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee's request that the Cabinet give consideration to the vacancy situation across the Council.

2. Summary

- 2.1 At its meeting on 8 May 2002 the Finance resources and Equal opportunities Scrutiny Committee requested that the Cabinet give consideration to the vacancy situation across the Authority and particularly the concern expressed that some departments may be managing unfilled vacancies to assist with the management of Departmental budgets at the expense of service delivery.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee expect that their views will be sought on any proposals to replace the existing job evaluation scheme and grading structure in the Authority before this matter is considered by Cabinet

2.2 The Scrutiny Committee requested the attendance at its September meeting (when it is due to receive the next programmed half-yearly report on vacancies) of the Personnel Managers from each department to answer questions about specific situations.

They also requested that the Cabinet lead with responsibility for HR issues should also attend the same meeting to participate in the debate.

2.3 The Supporting Information provides:

1. A snapshot of current vacancies
2. A summary of the key issues for each Department

2.4 Corporately a working group is meeting to discuss recruitment and retention problems. A number of issues are being considered and a paper is to be presented ant the next Personnel Managers Group with proposals for:

- long service annual leave
- changes to the flexible working scheme
- market increments

Work is also continuing on graduate recruitment, a casual register for professional staff, “cafeteria benefits” and workforce planning.

3 **Headline Financial and Legal Implications**

Unfilled vacancies may save money for the organisation, however carrying large numbers of vacancies may lead to a deterioration of the service and places a burden upon employees covering unfilled posts. There are also additional costs of filling posts by using consultants and agency staff.

4 **Recommendations**

4.1 That the issues for and action being taken by Departments be noted

4.2 That the Cabinet consider whether any further action is required before the Scrutiny Committee reconsiders this matter.

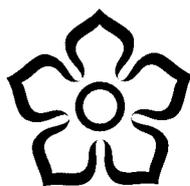
5 **Other Implications**

Other implications	Yes/No	Implications
Equal opportunities	Yes	Any departure from the evaluated grade of a post may lead to equal value claims by an individual employee or group of employees.
Sustainable environment	No	

Crime and Disorder	No	
Human Rights Act	No	
Elderly/people on low income	No	

2. Report Author/Officer to contact:

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1 BACKGROUND

Department	Established posts (as at 30.4.02)	Vacancies (wte)	Trend
Chief Executives Office	42	5	No significant recruitment difficulties reported
Resources Access and Diversity	537.67	64	Difficulties in Audit and Senior Solicitors Measures are in place in both areas
Housing	897.2	96	Housing Management is considering the introduction of a career grade. Hostels have difficulties due to the nature of the work Housing Benefits experience difficulties due to specialist nature of work
Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal	559.7	57.98	No significant difficulties reported for the period
EDD (formerly E and	505.39	45	Difficulties for Environmental health

D)			Officers and Building Control. Introduction of Market increments and training packages to alleviate this
Formerly commercial services	1204.43	50*	Difficulties in recruiting staff within Construction Services. Constant high turnover of cleaning and catering staff.
Education	632	54	Educational psychologists remain a problem
Social Care and Health	1669	C200	Significant shortages because of national shortages of qualified staff in specific areas, e.g Social Work and Occupational Therapy Budget shortfalls also require management of vacancies for all non-frontline posts

* This does not include Citywide Cleaning or City Catering vacancies due to constant turnover. Vacancies average between 25-50 per week.

2. Report

2.1 Resources Access and Diversity

It has proved difficult to recruit to a number of key posts in recent years and this is still the case in some areas although over time, some problems can ease, whilst new ones arise. The problems in this department have not directly affected frontline service delivery apart from the Switchboard. They have however sometimes delayed support to other Departments and the implementation of projects. Vacancies sometimes increase the pressure on staff to maintain services. Whilst there is a salary saving from vacancies there are additional costs of recruitment and of covering essential work through more expensive external means. The net effect is to increase the Department's budget pressures, and sometimes our charges.

Key issues in the Services are:

Legal Services

The service is facing sustained recruitment and retention difficulties in a very competitive market. Some posts remain vacant after repeated advertising. An HR Strategy has been developed to tackle this including internal opportunities through a career grade, recruitment agencies and a panel of external providers to complement in-house provision.

Financial Services

There have been problems in recruiting to a number of key professional posts. The current key issue is difficulty recruiting Auditors, impacting on the amount of audit activity we have been able to undertake whilst demand has increased. This has been one reason to bring in private sector partners to carry out part of the audit plan; these are due in September.

ICT and Customer Access

After considerable recruitment problems in recent years the ICT market is now fairly buoyant. The Service has developed a flexible approach which responds to the market, matches client demand and charges costs on a project basis. The Switchboard has continuing recruitment problems. Demand on this seems likely to fall due to the Council's new telephone access strategy, so temporary arrangements are being employed.

2.2 Chief Executives office

Within the Communications Unit there are two half time vacant posts and within policy and performance two vacant policy officer posts and two posts at policy and team assistant level vacant due to secondments.

2.3 Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal

Three vacant directorate posts are currently being recruited to and are currently covered by acting up arrangements.

Within the Resources Division there is one full time equivalent post vacant in the Personnel and Equalities Section, 1.5 vacancies in Corporate Resources being covered by acting up arrangements and three vacant posts in Strategy, Policy and Development.

In Parks there are 12.58 vacant posts pending a review which is on hold awaiting the outcome of the Environmental Services Best Value Review and Revitalising Neighbourhoods initiative, essential services are however being maintained. There are four full time equivalent vacant posts in Sports.

In Arts there are 11 vacant posts including posts at the De Montfort Hall where posts have not been recruited to. In Museums there are 16 posts vacant the majority of which are pending recruitment decisions.

Major changes in respect of Revitalising Neighbourhoods have meant that it is inappropriate to fill some vacancies. In the six month period up to 30 April 2002 there were no specific recruitment and retention problems encountered. There is high turnover of centre attendants and library assistants but these posts always attract large

numbers of applicants. The Departmental Management Team consider every request to fill posts on its merits and the effect on front line service delivery is a factor which is taken into consideration. However consideration would also include budget pressures and the ability to use a combination of acting up arrangements and temporary staff to cover essential work.

2.4 Environment, Regeneration and Development

Environmental Health Officers (EHO's)

There is a national shortage and we have not been offering salaries comparable with similar or/adjoining authorities. This issue is currently being dealt with by means of market increments so as to minimize the problems caused by vacancies. In some areas it has resulted in the engagement of consultants, as well as EHO'S working excessive overtime so as to ensure that inspections targets are met.

In the past EHO's were recruited with 7 market increments – most have stayed for a number of years. There are currently vacant EHO posts, which have been advertised with three market increments. Even with the three market increments we have not been paying the going rate for EHO's.

Building Surveyors

The situation in this group is similar to the above.

Regeneration Group

In partnership with other local authorities the City Council has secured £85 million to support the regeneration of the City's most deprived communities during the period 1996-2006. The management of these resources, and the development and implementation of the appropriate regeneration programmes is with the Regeneration Group. The overall vacancy rate in the first half of 2001 was between 30% -50%. Given that these posts are fixed term contracts of 3 –7 years is a factor in the high turnover.

There is concern that the Job Evaluation Scheme takes no account of the labour market pressures or the complexity of partnership working. There are also inconsistencies between the rates paid to Programme Managers employed by different Government initiatives. Some of the salaries are 25-30% higher than the SRB programmes.

The principle has been established that City Council posts employed for and paid from externally funded programmes are outside the City Councils JES. This has allowed for linked grades equivalent to three market increments to be added to all externally funded posts on SO grade and above.

Construction Services

There are problems recruiting and retaining professional staff due to the skill shortages in the Construction Industry, which is a result of recent Government Policies. The research undertaken by the department indicated that whilst there is not a significant retention problem there is a need to implement a retention strategy to ensure that there is not a significant retention problem in the short to medium term.

There is also the issue in terms of our professional agency staff. There is a conflict because their hourly rate is greater than that of our own staff and we cannot, therefore recruit them easily on a permanent basis.

Property

There are similar issues in building surveying as highlighted above. Engineers and technicians have also proved hard to fill.

Food & Community Public Health

Recruitment (and retention) is still a big problem in Food & Community Public Health.

Planning

The position with Planning is giving increasing cause for concern. The latest concern is that Nottingham City has recently advertised 4 jobs all paying more than comparable jobs in Leicester. Only one has been recruited to so far but the job has gone to one of our existing staff. It's a Team Leader post paying substantially more than we do so it's a worthwhile sideways move to make. There is a chance therefore that we may lose more staff in respect of the other posts advertised.

Cleaning and Catering

This area has a very high turnover of staff, which is due to a number of reasons including the number and availability of hours, and the hourly rate of pay. It is recognised that these areas of work traditionally have a high turnover.

2.5 Housing

Internal promotions within Housing Benefits and Management Branch cause perpetual vacancies at the lower level i.e. S2/3. This creates a need for frequent advertising and places pressure on service delivery. This should be rectified by an intense induction process which has just been implemented for Management Branch who are also planning to introduce a career grade. The recent regrading for Housing Benefit Officers may encourage more applicants, as there is now the potential for higher earnings.

Recruitment and retention problems within Hostels are in part attributable to the environment and volatile client group and as a result adverts do not attract high numbers of applicants.

The departmental response has been to reposition job opportunities in Hostels as part of a wider career in social housing; to re-evaluate posts in Housing Benefits; to develop a comprehensive customer-focused induction process, and a career grade, to retain skilled professionals in Housing Management.

The Department uses agency staff where this is essential to maintain service delivery, but exercises caution as this may place a strain on budgets.

2.5 Social Care and Health

In common with most Social Services Departments nationally, high levels of staff turnover (of the order of 21%) are experienced in Leicester. Innovative methods of recruitment and retention, including the establishment of a casual register for Social Workers and other staff are continuing. The use of “golden hellos” and market increments for posts has continued but financial constraints continue to place a burden on the ability to place vacancies. Difficult to fill vacancies continue to exist in a number of areas, particularly Children’s Social Workers, Occupational Therapy and Care Assistants.

Severe budget pressures are another feature shared with most Social Services Departments nationally. The effect of this is that recruitment to many non-frontline vacancies has been subject to delay. Steps are taken to reduce the effects on service provision to the public through the careful targeting of which vacancies are subject to delayed recruitment.

Details of the above situation have been discussed with the Cabinet Lead and reported on many occasions to the Social Services and Personal Health Scrutiny Committee.

2.6 Education

The impact of vacancies on frontline service delivery has been minimised by the use of current employees acting up into the vacant posts or by employing temporary employees. There are no budget implications as these employees are paid at the 'rate for the job'.

Policy and Resources division

There are vacancies where staff have been seconded to cover maternity leave elsewhere within the division. In EDISS there are vacant posts of Principal Technical Support Officer and Senior Technical Support Officer. In Human Resources there are vacant posts of Human Resources Consultant and Recruitment Strategy Manager both are being advertised. The post of Education Officer (Finance) is currently being advertised. There are three vacant Accountant posts and one vacant Assistant Accountant. There is also a vacant Group Bursar, which is about to be advertised, and an Admin Officer in this area.

The Head of Property and Contracts has now been filled as has the Head of Policy and Communications.

In Administration and Committee, an Administration Officer post and a Customer Service Officer post are being advertised.

Lifelong Learning and Community Education

There is a vacant Principal Children’s Officer and there is a vacant Nursery Education Development Officer in the Early Years and Childcare team.

The halftime post of Child Minding Network Co-coordinator is vacant and a Team Assistant is due to be advertised. The Workplace Nursery Manager has not been filled pending the outcome of a review. There is a vacant Administrative Assistant (finance) in Awards, Grants and loans.

Standards and effectiveness

There is a vacant Key Stage 3 Science Consultant and a Study Support Centre Manager. There is also a fixed term Key Stage 3 Strategy and e-learning Consultant be advertised. There are also vacancies for an Education Officer, an Advanced Maths Centre Teacher, which is due to be advertised, and an Excellence Challenge Co-ordinator.

Two posts of Learning Mentor are due to be advertised in Multi Cultural services, one for displaced children and one for Somalian pupils.

Pupil and Student Support

There is a vacant teacher post in Sure Start and a vacant Ancillary post at the Parkfield Nursery.

There is a vacant Support Assistant in the Special Education Service covered by a Standby Clerk, a vacant Finance post due to a secondment and a vacant Finance Systems Officer.

Within the Psychology Service there are a vacant Educational Psychologist post and a vacant Senior Educational Psychologist. There is also a vacancy for a Bi-lingual teacher, an Admin Officer and an IT Support Officer.

In Education Welfare there are two vacant Clerical Assistants.

In the Student Support Service there are vacancies for a teacher in the Arc Project, a further teacher and a Senior Vocational Support Worker in the Exclusions Team. Due to be advertised shortly are a Support Worker and an Admin Assistant. There is also a temporarily vacant post for an Admin Assistant in the Exclusions Team-Key Way Centre.

3 CONSULTATION

Departmental Personnel Managers have been consulted about the content of this report. The officers contacted were: Nim Rajagopalan, Val Betteridge, Lynn Roffee, Christine Geschke, Sue Kehr, Jay Webb and David Oldershaw.

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS-LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Report: Vacancies in the City Council Finance, Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee 8 May 2002.

4 REPORT AUTHOR/OFFICER TO CONTACT

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