

## WORK IN PRACTICE | EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT

# Recruitment – are you ready to beat the squeeze?

Housing organisations need to implement a strong management and recruitment plan in response to the wave of cost cutting measures across the public sector – and with the new Con/Lib coalition bedding in, there are almost certainly more on the horizon.

Siva Singh, head of housing at Training Synergy has some solutions.



Siva Singh

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The Chancellor's Budget speech way back in March signalled a series of cost cutting measures across the public sector. As a result of this, the majority of local authority housing departments are likely to experience rapid changes in the next 12 to 18 months, despite the change in national administration.

In this time of political and economic uncertainty, the state of the UK purse will mean that many local councils will still have to prioritise their budgets for frontline services, in tandem with actioning cost cuts across many departments.

### Redundancies inevitable

It is likely that local authorities will target their housing departments as areas that will bear cuts, despite the desperate need for additional council and social housing services throughout the country. Any cost reductions will most likely come in the form of redundancies and not replacing senior staff reaching retirement.

SPENDING MONEY ON MULTIPLE RECRUITMENT DRIVES IS NOT AN OPTION IN THIS FRAGILE ECONOMY.

With the effects of the recession still fresh, a number of key services in the housing sector are set to grow in demand this year. This will put pressure on remaining staff, ultimately meaning that the ability to engage and retain the required

amount of key employees with minimum cost will be a challenge.

In response, managers will need to search for innovative solutions in order to keep their skilled staff on board as well as implementing a long-term approach to how they manage the renewal of their workforce.

Although redundancies may be used by some local authorities to free up cash, many employers are beginning to look for more strategic solutions such as re-structuring their departments or redeploying their staff to quell the number of redundancies made.

### Creative recruitment

As a solution, many housing departments are looking to recruit entry-level staff as a way of keeping costs low and making sure that their departments can cope with an increasing demand on services.

Management can use trainees to reduce overall salary costs whilst providing the much needed support to existing members of the team who may have seen their department size decrease and workload increase. This is also an investment in the future resources for the organisation and reduces supply led inflation in the future.

The housing sector also has a key role to play in helping former private sector workers retrain and make use of their transferable skills. This will ultimately benefit local people as well as the housing organisation.

Through my work at Training Synergy, I have seen an increased number of local councils in the past year employing support staff as a solution to tightening budgets and an increasing workload. I have worked closely with many local authorities, including Medway Council in Kent, to implement an innovative recruitment programme with the aim to employ entry staff.

WITH HOUSING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE AGENDA FOR MOST COUNCILS IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THE SECTOR TAKES ACTION TO ENSURE IT SURVIVES THIS PERIOD OF BUDGET CUTS.

### Transferable skills

Our Kickstart programme provides shortlisted candidates with role-specific training towards their chosen career path during the interview process – allowing those without public sector experience to apply their transferable skills and life experiences to roles that would otherwise have been closed to them. Kickstart allows each housing department to control its recruitment drive by monitoring each candidate, assessing if they have the right skills to fit with the department's working environment



and culture.

It is imperative that any recruitment drive, be it for one candidate or for a hundred, looks to recruit staff that will be a long-term investment to the team. Spending money on multiple recruitment drives is not an option in this fragile economy.

“**MANAGERS WILL NEED TO SEARCH FOR INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS IN ORDER TO KEEP THEIR SKILLED STAFF.**”

Monitoring a candidate throughout the recruitment process, and giving them relevant training before they are enrolled into permanent employment, instills confidence in each housing department that they are ultimately selecting the right candidates for the job – thereby reducing the costs and risks associated with the recruitment process.

This year will be a test for all local authorities, but with housing at the bottom of the agenda for most councils it is imperative that the sector takes action to ensure it survives this period of budget cuts and staff losses. ■

CASE STUDY:

### Medway Council

Earlier this year Training Synergy implemented a

recruitment drive on behalf of Medway Council. The council was looking to recruit five full-time housing officers after experiencing an increased demand on services as a result of the recession.

Medway Council used Training Synergy's Kickstart programme to market and advertise the job vacancies in the local area as well as screen and put potential candidates through assessments and training to find the right employees for the roles.

The initial marketing campaign generated over 700 responses, many of whom were looking to make the move from the private to the public sector. After a rigorous screening process, 100 candidates were invited to an assessment day in the local area.

A final 50 attendees were then given a selection of tasks from numeracy and literacy tests to group exercises and informal 1:1 interviews – allowing the council to view potential employees in a variety of individual scenarios and working as part of a team.

Each module was scored and a final 10 candidates were selected to participate in a five-day training programme to assess how they would perform in the role and give the council a further opportunity to get to know the group of potential employees. The successful applicants went on to complete Training Synergy's two-week training programme.

The Kickstart programme gives shortlisted

candidates role specific training towards their chosen career path even during the interview process. The aim is to create the opportunity for candidates without public sector experience to apply their transferable skills and life experience to roles that would otherwise have been closed to them.

Vanessa Wilson, head of housing solutions at Medway Council, comments: "Traditional methods of recruitment would not have brought the calibre of candidate we have found for a trainee vacancy. Many of the attendees were long-term unemployed, so to give these people an opportunity to get back into work is a big bonus and supports our regeneration programmes, which we are 100 per cent committed to.

"Programmes like Kickstart support the creation of local job opportunities, especially when they are well executed and confidently handled."



Medway Kickstart



Aptitude tests