

# Recruitment and Retention: Doing Things Differently within Development Management



## Context

With a UK shortage of planning professionals and a decreasing number of university planning courses available to students, especially in Scotland, the Development Management team had to think differently on how to recruit for 13 vacant planning posts in April 2023.

## What Happened

To address the recruitment and retention challenges, the following workforce framework initiatives, derived from staff consultation and feedback were implemented:

- Links were developed with Robert Gordon University Architectural Department & Aberdeen University Geography Department to encourage students into the planning profession from



a broader degree skills base. The focus was on transferrable skills and key attributes required for the planning profession rather than the requirement to have an accredited planning qualification. The careers service within each university worked with Aberdeenshire Council to promote the opportunities in planning. Work in this area has continued, with the planning team now being a work experience partner for Aberdeen University. The work experience package allows a student to apply for a work experience day in planning and implementing this ensures that the planning profession is continually being promoted to students.

- The refocus on transferrable skills and key attributes allowed professionals from a broader work experience background to apply, including applicants interested in a career change.
- The planning service participated in university recruitment fairs. As part of this process, it developed a career in planning leaflet to promote the profession to a diverse degree skills base in partnership with the HR Team.
- An updated the recruitment package was developed with additional information and opportunities for relevant degrees to apply and to be mentored and trained as a planner on the job with Aberdeenshire Council.
- An updated the interview process was introduced with a focus on transferrable skills and key attributes.
- The services implemented a work experience programme in partnership with Aberdeen University Careers Service and secondary school Advanced Higher Geography students which provides opportunities to promote the planning profession. The work experience programme allows students or 6th year school pupils to apply for a work experience day based in the Stonehaven Office within the planning service. The day involves an introduction to the workplace; the planning team and its structure; an introduction to the council; and democracy. A site visit around Stonehaven discussing planning issues including flooding, introduction to the National Planning Framework; Local Development Plan; viewing maps; and learning how to process an application.
- An induction, mentoring and training programme was developed to ensure the development and progression of new staff from a more diverse background.
- The planning service implemented exit interviews to inform improving staff retention.
- Planning staff workshops and training were introduced, focusing on building the new team as important and the need to dedicate time to ensure 13 new staff are fully integrated into the planning service.
- A new planning career progression scheme was developed which allows recognition based on work experience and learning on the job rather than RTPI accreditation levels.

## Areas of Collaboration

Implementing the Development Management workforce framework has been led by the Management Team in partnership with HR and staff, incorporating many ideas from staff suggestions and feedback. Partnerships have been developed with local universities to promote career opportunities for local students who want to seek local employment after graduation.



## Overall Result

Implementing the workforce framework has allowed the service to re-focus and adapt to different methods of recruitment, training and staff development to attract and retain 11 new staff within the Development Management service.

The outcome of the new recruitment approach has been positive, with 13 vacancies within Development Management in April 2023, 11 of these posts were filled by December 2023.

## Lessons Learned

### Successes

The key success was changing the recruitment process and implementing a focus on transferable skills and key attributes rather than the requirement to have an accredited planning qualification. This allowed students or professionals from a broader degree or work experience skills base to apply for the Development Management staff vacancies.

Developing a detailed induction package, checklist, training and mentoring programme with lots of useful educational resources such as videos and presentations has been extremely useful. This resource can continually be utilised and developed by new and current staff for training and refreshers.

### Challenges

To attain RTPI Chartered membership status is a lengthy process (5 years) if your qualification is classed as not relevant. Due to the closure of accredited planning schools, numerous discussions have been held with RTPI membership to broaden their criteria, as having a relevant degree reduces the time taken to achieve chartered membership status to 4 years. At present the RTPI has been immovable on this and as a result the planning service has made the decision to review the Career Progression Scheme to remove links to progression based on RTPI membership status and replaced with work experience checklists and performance.

Embedding 11 new staff into three area teams with an emphasis on home working has been a challenge, however ensuring a rota of staff across teams and a structured mentoring and training programme has helped to integrate staff.

### Lessons Learned

The importance of working in partnership with local universities and schools to ensure a long-term promotion of the planning profession. Due to the cost-of-living crisis there has been an increasing number of students choosing to study at their local university and wanting to seek local employment after graduation. The universities have been monitoring this trend and placing a key focus on developing local recruitment opportunities.



*This case study has been prepared in collaboration by Aberdeenshire Council and the National Planning Improvement Team at the Improvement Service. We publish good practice case studies identified through our work on the National Planning Improvement Framework and the National Planning Hub. They aim to support the sharing of good practice and build collaboration across the sector in addressing common challenges. Please email us at [npi@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:npi@improvementservice.org.uk) if your authority has a good practice case study to share.*

