

North York Moors National Park Authority Finance, Risk, Audit and Standards Committee

3 September 2018

Staffing Update

<p>1. Purpose of the Report</p>
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<p>1.1 To update Members and seek their thoughts on a number of key staff related issues.</p>

2. **Background**

2.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide Members with a range of staff related information including staff numbers, turnover, gender split, health and well-being and apprentice training and development.

3. **Staff Numbers and Turnover**

3.1 Following the redundancy programmes from 2010 onward, the Authority's full time equivalent (fte) staff numbers fell from 142 in 2010/11 to 107 in 2015/16. Since then staff numbers have increased, mainly as a result of externally funded projects, and this year average fte numbers are predicted to be 124. Actual staff numbers are expected to be 175.

3.2 While only the Lake District and Peak District of the English national parks employ more staff than the North York Moors, it is worth noting that the figure of 124 fte includes 2 full time apprentice supervisors, 17 apprentices and 4 graduate level trainees.

3.3 In view of the financial pressures mentioned in papers elsewhere on the agenda, the long standing protocol that the Authority has previously had in place regarding recruitment has been reinitiated. This means that any vacancy is considered by Directors and the Chief Executive to determine whether or not it should be filled. Opportunities will be taken, wherever sensible to do so, to continue to reduce staff costs. Work is planned later this year to look again at work processes and improve resilience in a number of teams.

3.4 Staff turnover remains relatively low at just under 7%. This turnover rate, which excludes staff on fixed term contracts, means that staff with substantive contracts of employment are likely to stay with the Authority, on average, for over 14 years. While this certainly isn't a problem in itself, Officers are mindful that the workforce benefits from a blend of experience and new ideas with staff of different ages bring different perspectives.

3.5 Turnover in UK plc varies enormously depending upon the sector, the most recent large scale surveys (for example, Xpert HR in October 2017) suggest that UK wide turnover rates are 15.5%, with the voluntary sector, which is probably a reasonable comparator to the Authority, at 11%. Officers are not expecting turnover rates to change significantly within the Authority due to factors such as increasing retirement ages and the lack of availability of final salary pension benefits elsewhere.

4. **Workforce – Gender and Pay Balance**

- 4.1 The Authority operates a fair and robust recruitment policy designed to appoint the best available person for every post. There are no specific targets for a workforce equally balanced between men and women, although Officers are of the view that a mixed workforce with a variety of experience is likely to be the one that most closely fits our needs. The Authority's gender split across its Grades is as follows;

Men	Women	Grade
8	9	Apprentices
51	37	Grades A to C
29	41	Grades D to CEO

- 4.2 Overall the balance between men and women is remarkably even. There are a significant majority of women in what could be described as 'professionally qualified and managerial grades' and from this it is reasonable to conclude that the median salary for women is slightly higher than it is for men. It is worth noting that 2 of the 3 statutory appointees are women (Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer), but are not included in these numbers as though they are officers of this Authority they are employees of other organisations.
- 4.3 A paper on staffing matters wouldn't be complete without mention of volunteers. Members received an update regarding progress on delivering the Volunteer Strategy at June NPA this year. The very significant way in which volunteering is changing has contributed to the healthy, balanced mix of the workforce. Most teams have some input from volunteers, excellent opportunities are provided for young people via our apprentice and other training programmes and, as the table above has shown, there is a good gender balance.

5. **Staff Health and Well Being**

- 5.1 The number of working days lost to sickness is usually considered to be an indicator of the working environment within an organisation. The Authority's sickness absence has historically been low compared to the rest of the public sector and most of the private sector. The national picture is, however, changing quickly and the most recent data available from the Office for National Statistics (July 2018) reported that average sickness absence across the UK has fallen sharply to 4.1 days per person. The public sector average is 5.6 days per person while the 2017/18 figure for the Authority was 4.3 days.
- 5.2 Even with sickness absence rates similar to the national norm, there is a significant financial cost to the Authority. 530 working days were lost in 2017/18 and an average working day costs approximately £150 (including on-costs). This means that sickness absence has 'cost' the Authority over £79K in salary and on-costs alone. The final cost is likely to be higher as some of the absences will need to be covered by bringing in additional staff, while other absences delay the completion of key work tasks. This means that time spent on managing sickness absence, supporting staff to get back to work as quickly as possible remains an important part of HR and line manager job roles.
- 5.3 The Authority has a long term target of 4 days absence per fte member of staff. The actual figure achieved in 2017/18, 4.3 days, represented an increase of 1.2 days per person from the previous year.

- 5.4 Taking long term absences out of the 2017/18 figures reveal an underlying absence rate of 2.6 days per fte. Again, this is a small increase from the previous year. An analysis of the causes of short term sickness absence shows no discernible patterns of illness and this, coupled with the frequency of absence, suggests that there are no significant issues.
- 5.5 During 2017/18, there were 5 long term absences (defined as over 4 weeks) which made up over 40% of the total days lost. The breakdown of causes of long term absence in 2017/18 is as follows;
- Mental health issues – 3 absences totalling 134 days
 - Musco-skeletal – 1 absence totalling 73 days
 - Cancer – 1 absence totalling 39 days
- 5.6 It is worth noting that 25% of sickness absence was due to mental health issues, including stress, and was the single biggest cause of sickness absence. Members have previously been made aware of the Health and Safety Executive's findings nationally that mental health now causes nearly 50% of all absences in the UK.
- 5.7 The Authority has a sickness absence policy that is designed to support staff who become ill to enable them to recover and return to work as quickly as possible. The availability of external counsellors and encouragement to use techniques such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (through the employee benefits package Health Assured) are part of the assistance that is open to staff with mental health issues. A number of staff have been trained as mental health first aiders to help colleagues showing signs of mental health problems. Amended working hours and temporarily reduced responsibilities are used, in conjunction with medical advice, to enable all staff to return from longer absences as quickly as possible.
- 5.8 Mental health problems have a wide variety of causes some of which may be work related and others which are not. Given the level of mental health related absence in the Authority, Officers have considered whether there are any significant work related issues that may be contributing to this.
- 5.9 The staff surveys in 2012 and 2014 did not highlight that work related stress was an issue. The 2017 survey generally showed improvements in the survey scores. The question in relation to having a realistic and achievable workload, however, didn't show any improvement and this tallies with anecdotal evidence, particularly in some core parts of the organisation, that workload is sustained and demanding.
- 5.10 The Authority doesn't have a long working hours culture and staff hours are monitored monthly; staff are also very positively encouraged to take their full annual leave entitlement. Officers are also mindful, however, that technology means that staff can easily access the full IT network from home and the prevalence of portable devices means that access to work emails is never more than a couple of 'clicks' away. This means that excessive working may not necessarily manifest itself in long hours at work.
- 5.11 For many years, the Authority has been very positive about allowing staff to have flexible patterns of work to enable them to manage their commitments outside work alongside their commitments to the Authority. Maintaining an appropriate balance between work life and home life is also one of the desired behaviours contained within our appraisal scheme.

5.12 Officers will continue to monitor sickness absence and working hours closely. Workload is currently a standing item on Joint Consultative Forum agenda when Officers discuss staff matters with UNISON and a regular item on Director and Management Team meetings.

6. **Apprentice Forum**

6.1 Over the course of the last 12 months, the Authority's apprentices have been given a great deal of encouragement to see themselves as a coherent group. They have set up their own Forum to discuss matters of interest and a social media account to enable them to communicate with each other more easily. There had previously not been a great deal of contact between apprentice teams in different locations and disciplines and the Forum has helped change this significantly for the better.

6.2 The Forum is convened by one of the more experienced apprentices and is responsible for setting up a programme of events to enable the apprentices to better understand the work of the National Park and to share their knowledge and experience with apprentices in other Authorities. A small budget has been allocated and the Forum is guided, where necessary, by the Head of Recreation and Ranger Services and the Head of Corporate Services.

6.3 Activities in 2018 have included a trip to the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District National Parks to meet apprentices working there and to gain an appreciation of the different landscapes of these 2 National Parks. This has resulted in a reciprocal visit from Lake District apprentices. .3 current and recent former apprentices from Exmoor have spent a week working with our apprentice and Ranger teams, while 2 of our apprentices have worked in Exmoor for a week as well.

6.4 Two of our apprentices took advantage of fully funded places on a leadership development programme run by Rotary for young adults. The apprentices met young people from other organisations and engaged leadership scenarios, problem solving strategies and tested out a range of approaches to leadership.

6.5 Officers believe that these initiatives will help apprentices to continue to develop their organisational, leadership and budgeting skills as well as helping to produce more rounded individuals to going into the local jobs market at the end of their apprenticeships.

6.6 Three of our apprentices have had success in finding full time permanent jobs during the summer. The employers benefiting from our training include Pennyholme Estate, Ryedale District Council and the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

7. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

7.1 There are no additional financial or staffing implications to the contents of this report.

8. **Legal Implications**

8.1 There are no significant legal implications to the issues outlined in this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 That Members note and comment on the contents of this report.

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Background Documents to this Report

Office for National Statistics – Sickness Absence Data July 2018

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/sicknessabsencefallstothelowestratein24years/2018-07-30>