

**EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BY
HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

Report of the Director of People and Property

Author: Claire Howarth 01992 556670

Executive Member: David Beatty

1. Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on action being taken to improve the statistics on employment of people with disabilities within the County Council.

2. Performance Indicators

The County Council set a target for the employment of disabled people of 3.9% for 2003/4. The out turn was 3.1%. The target for 2004/05 has been set at 3.5%.

It is not possible to draw a direct comparison with the population of Hertfordshire because the 2001 census did not specifically gather the data. The results of the census did find however that 3% of people seeking employment are permanently sick or disabled. This suggests that HCC compare well.

Across the public sector, 2.2%¹ of the workforce declared themselves to have a disability last year. The un-audited BVPI's for this current year suggest that Hertfordshire continues to compare very well against other local authorities, i.e. within the top quartile of all County Council's.

3. Workforce Data Held

The Committee may recall however that last year Hertfordshire's workforce figures could not be relied upon as an entirely accurate reflection of the current make-up of the whole workforce. This was because the Council only had disability information on 71.5% of employees. As a consequence the Committee expressed its concern about the current difficulties with data capture and welcomed the expected improvements resulting from the new HR [Human Resource] system within SAP. A further report was requested in a year's time, when more accurate data should be available.

The new HR system was introduced on schedule in April 2004 and has provided a much more satisfactory data capture facility. Existing data was transferred into the new system and efforts are now being made to improve the completeness of the database by re-surveying employees in specific departments.

Given that there is a requirement for this work, the original estimate of improved data by 2004 was unrealistic and it is expected that a more accurate set of data will be available early in 2005.

¹ Source: Personnel Today HR benchmarker 2004

4. Under-reporting

Additionally, our evidence suggests that there is under-reporting by employees and applicants for employment of their disabilities.

The County Council has a prominent and active Disabled Employees Forum which meets twice a year and a Disabled Employees Co-ordinating Group (Decog) which is a sub group of volunteers.

The reasons for the under-reporting of disabilities have been explored with our Disabled Employees' representative groups and there appears to be three main issues:

- People do not see themselves as disabled, although they do satisfy the statutory definition in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act
- Fear of discrimination. This is more a symptom of the way that disabled people have been treated by society in general, and it is therefore important that people with disabilities see the County Council as positive about disability.
- Finally, some people will consider their disability has no impact on their job and therefore see it as irrelevant.

Officers work closely with our disabled employees' representative groups to take forward ideas and suggestions to improve employment practices and to seek ways to encourage employees to disclose their disability so that we have a more accurate picture of our workforce. As a way of making further progress, it is suggested that Members attend the next scheduled meeting of the Disabled Employees Forum to have more detailed and direct discussions in these areas. Members direct involvement might also help to reassure employees that the County Council uses disability monitoring information constructively to improve work practices.

The next meeting of the Disabled Employees Forum is due to be held in January 2005.

If members are in agreement with this approach, then the Resources Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in April 2005 could consider a fuller report on all the issues. Improved disability data from the new HR system should also be available at that time.

5. Access to Service Implications

There are no implications by virtue of considering the contents of this report. However future consideration of this issue when more and sufficient data becomes available may lead to conclusions being made which may improve access to services for all disabled persons.

6. Conclusion

The Committee is invited to consider the nomination of Members to attend a future meeting of the Disabled Employees Forum in order to discuss ideas and suggestions to improve employment practices and to seek ways to encourage employees to disclose their disability so that the Council have a more accurate picture of its workforce.