

Report to	Policy & Resources Committee
Date	20 February 2025
By	Human Resources Manager
Title of Report	Diversifying the SDNPA workforce through the Recruitment Process

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to

- 1. Note the challenges to the Authority diversifying its workforce; and,**
 - 2. Endorse the Authority’s commitment to diversifying its workforce and the actions set out in this report.**
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I. Introduction

- 1.1 On 19 September 2024 the Policy and Resources Committee considered a report highlighting key areas of work in Human Resources (HR) carried out in the year ending 31 March 2024. The Committee discussed the recruitment process in relation to the lack of diversity of applicants as evidenced in the data provided in the report in September (see background document), particularly relating to the protected characteristic of race. This report presents a more in-depth consideration of the actions that have been or are being taken by the Authority to address the challenges in this area. Members of the committee are also invited to share their experiences of actions which have successfully furthered diversification of the workforce through recruitment.
- 1.2 Diversifying the workforce through recruitment is only one aspect of the Authority’s wider work in the area of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) which the Authority is committed to delivering on as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- 1.3 In 2021, we began monitoring and reporting on our recruitment data as we identified this as an important issue and it now allows us to track our progress and success. Data is updated annually and will be presented to the committee in the next HR report in September 2025. **Appendix I** shows EDI data that we have been collecting over the past 3 financial years.
- 1.4 Ensuring that our workforce is representative of wider society is a challenge facing all Protected Landscapes, and the environmental sector more broadly. This was noted at the English National Parks conference last year at Newcastle where the theme was equality diversity and inclusion.
- 1.5 There are challenges we face in being able to recruit a more diverse workforce:

 - The field of applicants we are recruiting from and can realistically expect applications from lacks diversity, particularly in the characteristic of race.
 - Ensuring that advertised career opportunities are reaching a diverse field of applicants.
 - Ensuring a robust, impartial selection process that aims to eliminate potential bias.

- The Authority’s workplace locations are difficult to access by public transport, requiring most staff to have their own vehicle which can limit the field of applicants for a role.
- 1.6 Taking into account these challenges, we have made significant changes to our recruitment process and procedures to encourage attracting and retaining more diverse employees.
- 1.7 It is worth noting that the Authority encourages and supports internal progression. Whilst this in no way guarantees internal applicants will be successful, it does often make them strong candidates. This means some vacancies will be filled by existing staff if they perform best within a competitive recruitment process.
- 1.8 It is also important to note that diversity should not only consider race but all protected characteristics outlined by the Equality Act 2010 and other groups e.g. socio-economic. The SDNPA workforce currently has varying levels of representation across all 9 protected characteristics and other groups. In recruitment during the last 12 months the Authority has been successful in attracting diverse candidates under a number of the protected characteristics, particularly the characteristics of sex, disability, age profile and sexual orientation.

2. Attracting a more diverse pool of applicants

2.1 We have already implemented the following to attract a more diverse pool of applicants:

- An Applicant Tracking System (ATS) which has a more accessible easier application process and replaces the need to complete an application form. This has already significantly increased number of applications
- Gender and ethnicity checking of language in adverts
- Our adverts include an EDI organisational statement, which promotes our approach to equality.
- A guaranteed interview scheme for applicants with a disability who meet the essential criteria for the post
- Adjustments are made to the interview process to accommodate applicants with physical and learning disabilities
- We offer virtual interviews
- Advertising of roles on the EDI platform “Diversifying”
- Advertising salary bands, benefits and that the Authority offers flexible working
- When using external recruitment agencies, we ensure diversity is a priority of their searching criteria
- We use a broad range of advertising media including national websites and social media to ensure our positions are advertised as widely as possible
- Recording and monitoring EDI data to support the evaluation of the effectiveness of actions taken.

3. Ensuring that the selection process is robust, impartial and avoids any bias

3.1 We have made the following changes to our recruitment process:

- Person specifications are scrutinised to ensure there are no unnecessary requirements included, which could prevent or restrict those who can apply
- Introduction of anonymised applications on the ATS so that recruiting managers do not have access to personal information (e.g. name, age, photo).
- The Pearn Kandola Inclusive Leader and Teams training modules are mandatory for all staff and challenges unconscious bias
- We use a scoring framework at both the shortlist and interview stage which is linked to the requirements of the person specification

- Interview questions are role focused and competency based, with responses to interview questions and any tasks being scored to ensure all stages of the process are objective and measured fairly and consistently
- All candidates are asked the same questions, with any deviation from these only to ask supplementary questions based on their answers.
- Shortlisting and interview panels must consist of a minimum of two people to ensure balance and fairness, incorporating diversity wherever possible. This also needs to be balanced to ensure the appropriate key members of staff are involved.
- Panels must agree on the final candidate selection based on the scoring results or if someone automatically qualifies for an interview under the guaranteed interview scheme.
- HR attend interviews that include internal candidates to provide a neutral perspective, whilst also ensuring a fair and consistent selection process is followed.
- We strive to foster an interview environment where candidates feel comfortable so they can showcase their true abilities.

4. Further initiatives to be explored this year

4.1 We are continuing our review of the recruitment process by exploring the following initiatives and monitoring their effectiveness and suitability:

- Promotional materials at careers fairs.
- Use of targeted Facebook advertising where appropriate with the aim of increasing the diversity of the field of applicants.
- Working with the advertising agency, Web Recruit, to identify other advertising platforms to increase diversity in applications.
- Further information on our vacancies page to include staff experience of working for the National Park Authority, the range of opportunities and diverse roles that can be undertaken and further promotion of benefits on offer.
- Working with the Communications team to collate a library of photos that we can provide to Web Recruit that reflect diversity and inclusion.
- Investigate if we qualify to use any accreditations such as the Disability Confident logo.

5. Working with Other National Park Authorities

5.1 Attracting a more diverse workforce is an issue shared by all National Park Authorities and across the wider environmental sector. Officers meet regularly with the other NPA HR Managers and at a recent meeting we were asked to share our challenges, actions that we are all taking and any learning points. This is currently being collated by another NPA and we will update the committee in the annual report presented in September 2025.

6. Raising awareness of career opportunities

6.1 Raising awareness of career opportunities within the SDNPA is also vital and we will be working closely with:

- Learning, Outreach and Volunteering Team – engaging young people, especially those from our target audiences, in pathways to Green Careers through school sessions, career events, work experience and youth volunteering programmes. We also work with local Careers Hubs to support school and college staff to access and promote information relevant to careers with the South Downs National Park.
- Colleges to re-introduce the apprenticeship scheme – to provide entry level opportunities whilst undertaking a mix of practical and classroom training. The purpose is to learn skills that are directly relevant to undertake a particular career, and gain work experience in that area which may not normally be accessible without specific qualifications etc. We have funding in place now to do this and are ready to re-introduce apprenticeships this September.

- Communications Team – generic marketing throughout the year even when we don't have vacancies to promote the SDNPA as an employer with a commitment to diversity using examples the work we do. These posts would keep our organisation and its opportunities in people's consciousness, as well as provide general promotion of our culture.
- Different partnerships groups we are engaging with to promote ourselves as an employer and the opportunities we have, e.g. Community Works in Brighton.

7. Supporting staff through the induction process

7.1 Supporting diversity and inclusion is essential to ensure that we retain new staff and should therefore also be noted in this paper. This is a key focus of our work in HR and we have the following in place:

- A high level of wellbeing support (which scored very highly in our recent staff survey).
- An internal EDI Steering Group and action plan.
- Inclusive Leader and Teams training for all staff.
- An online catalogue of EDI training courses.
- Wellbeing meetings with new starters.
- Adjustments made to working arrangements to accommodate staff with disabilities.
- Hybrid working and access to work remotely from other area offices.
- Regular staff 121's with managers and the formal PDR process encourage an open dialogue to understand employees' aspirations, training needs, barriers or challenges, putting support in place as appropriate to allow individuals to be their authentic self at work.

8. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Existing budgets cover works described above and future work planned as outlined in this report.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Delivery of an efficient recruitment service contributes to the effective running of the organisation and the Authority overall, achieving value for money.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	Effective and diverse recruitment processes and practices support the work of the Authority across all PMP and Corporate Plan objectives.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Close working with other NPAs on recruitment as similar challenges are shared across the sector.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	NA
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	There are no procurement processes arising from this paper.

Implication	Yes*/No
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	The HR function delivers an Equality Act compliant services through recruitment, training and workplace adjustments. This report sets out ways the Authority strives to exceed the requirements of the Equality Act and further diversify the Authority's workforce. We have an equalities policy and all staff complete the Equality and Diversity ELMS training module and further inclusive leader or team training through Pearn Kandola.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Human Rights implications in this paper
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Crime & Disorder implications in this paper.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Health and Safety implications arising from this paper.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	The HR Team has due regard for the Data Protection Act 2018 and all collection and processing of personal data is compliant.

9. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 9.1 The main risk is that, despite the actions set out in this report, the Authority is unsuccessful in further diversifying its workforce. As has been highlighted, whatever actions are taken, the effectiveness of them ultimately remains restricted by the potential applicant pool for any particular role. The actions above aim to widen the applicant pool for roles as far as possible so as to attract diverse candidates and to ensure a fair and equitable application and interview process for all.

Vicky Paterson

Human Resources Manager

South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer: Vicky Paterson

Tel: 01730 819224

Email: Vicky.paterson@southdowns.gov.uk

SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Director of Landscape and Strategy; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Head of Finance and Corporate Services

External Consultees None

Background Documents [2023/24 Annual Human Resources and Health & Safety Report submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee by the HR Manager in September 2024 \(Report PR24/25-05 page 159 Agenda item 13\)](#)

The following table shows the total number of applications, candidates shortlisted, and appointments made for external recruitment, by year.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Applicants	269	328	293
Shortlisted	<i>not recorded</i>	114	99
Appointed	15	32	24

The following bar charts show the percentage of applicants (all), shortlisted applicants and appointed applicants by protected characteristic.





















