

Case Study

Housing Solutions Group

Offering flexible retirement

The Housing Solutions Group is a Housing Association operating in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire. It has a wide age range of employees, with the youngest being 17 and the oldest 73.

The company prides itself on its open attitude to recruitment, focusing on people's experience and skills rather than their age and background.

"Over the last three years we have recruited people who happen to be close to what some consider the usual retirement age. From our point of view, the individual may continue to work for us for a further five to ten years so we don't see it as any sort of barrier to their effective contribution to the company."

John Petitt, group chief executive, Housing Solutions Group

When recruiting the organisation does not specify age limits or restrictions; personal details are detached from the application form and are not given to the recruiting panel. Applications are short-listed against the competency criteria and interview questions are agreed beforehand, which means that recruitment decisions are made objectively.

When it comes to retaining the skills and expertise of older members of staff, Housing Solutions are happy to offer a range of options. The company has a guideline retirement age of 65, but employees who wish to continue to work beyond this are welcome to do so. There are currently six employees who continue to contribute effectively.

The company can also arrange for people to 'wind-down' and reduce their hours in the year before retirement if they wish to, which helps them to get used to spending time away from work and avoids the sudden loss of their experience and expertise.

There are also instances where staff want to continue working but are perhaps finding their role too physical. The company tries to offer alternative employment where this is the case. For example, an estate warden who felt unable to continue with lifting and carrying was able to be transferred into an alternative, less physical role. This enabled him to continue working and the business didn't lose his valuable knowledge and skills.

In another example, a gas fitter moved out of working in the field and into an office-based role which still involved contact with his fellow tradesmen as it used his skills and experience in gas inspections.

Recruiting workers of all ages

Housing Solutions has structured its application form in a way that captures information about transferable skills and work experience. For example, if a potential candidate has organised social events or done community or voluntary work this would be considered relevant.

The benefits for Housing Solutions of an age-diverse workforce:

- Diverse workforce gives the company a useful mix of skills and a workplace where people are learning from each other
- Customers can talk to a wide range of staff who may understand and empathise with them
- Retain key skills and experience by continuing to employ knowledgeable people who are near or over retirement age.