



NEW CASTLE COUNTY COUNCIL PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING JUNE 17, 2025

Chair: Valerie George, Fifth District

**June 17, 2025
4:00 PM**

VIRTUAL ZOOM WEBINAR MEETING &
LOUIS L. REDDING CITY/COUNTY BUILDING
1ST FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBERS
800 N. FRENCH STREET, WILMINGTON, DE 19801**

AGENDA

A. Meeting Call to Order

B. Approval of Minutes

Vote to approve the minutes from the 1/21/25 Personnel Subcommittee Meeting.

C. Presentations

- Dr. Blakey, Chief Human Resources Officer - Presentation with Blackwell HR Solutions - Preliminary Findings Report.
- Sarah Marshall and Chase Barnes - Institute for Public Administration - Presentation of the Training Proposal.

D. Discussions

- Discussion regarding Legal Assistant position.
- Discussion regarding anticipated legal updates to the Employee Handbook.
- Discussion regarding additional, mandatory training for Council.

E. Other

F. Public Comment

G. Adjournment

AGENDA POSTED: 6 - 10 - 2025

*The agenda is posted (7) seven days in advance of the scheduled meeting in compliance with 29 *Del. C.* Section 10004(e)(2). The meeting may go into Executive Session to address issues that arise at the time of the meeting.

**Under Title 29, Section 10006A of *Delaware Code*, New Castle County Council is holding this meeting as a

telephone and video conference, utilizing  Webinar. In addition, this meeting is open to the public in Council Chambers (800 N. French Street, Wilmington, DE 19801). The link to join the meeting via computer, smart device, or smart phone is : <https://zoom.us/j/377322142> You may also call into the meeting (audio) using the following call in numbers: 1-312-626-6799 or +1-646-558-8656 or +1-346-248-7799 or +1-669-900-9128 or +1-253-215-8782 or +1-301-715-8592. Then enter the Webinar ID: 377 322 142. If you do not have a good connection with one, please try the others. Additional information regarding phone functionality during the meeting is available at: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360029527911-Live-Training-Webinars>

Meeting materials, including a meeting agenda, legislation to be addressed during the meeting, and other materials related to the meeting are electronically accessible at <https://www.nccde.org/2351/Agendas-and-Minutes> Members of the public joining the meeting may be provided an opportunity to make comments in real time. A comment period will be administered by a moderator to ensure everyone may have an opportunity to comment.

If permitted to comment, you will not be able to speak until called upon by the moderator. For those appearing virtually, there are functions in the program that allow you to do this. Please see the link in the previous paragraph.



Executive Summary

Confidential

New Castle County

Employment Services Assessment

April 2025

CONFIDENTIAL

TO: Dusty Blakey, Chief Human Resources Officer
Patricia Purnell, Assistant CHRO, Human Resources Manager
Leonette Davis-Collins, Executive Assistant to the CHRO
Maya Matthews, Employee & Labor Relations Administrator

FROM: Michelle Ray, CEO and Founder
Stacy Sines Smith, Director of Business and HR Operations

DATE: April 30, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to partner with New Castle County (NCC) in conducting a comprehensive review of the human resources functions and processes currently managed by the Employment Services (ES) team at NCC.

We have prepared the following Executive Summary of our findings and recommendations.

Evaluation Process & Goals

Blackwell HR Solutions was engaged by New Castle County in February 2025 to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Employment Services division's human resources systems, practices, and procedures. This evaluation was a critical step in ensuring that the County's HR infrastructure is aligned with both its strategic goals as well as legal and compliance obligations, while also providing a seamless experience for employees and candidates alike.

The primary objectives of the Employment Services assessment were to evaluate the effectiveness and compliance within the Employment Services functions by assessing key areas, including recordkeeping, compliance, recruitment, hiring processes, and onboarding, to identify opportunities for optimization. This evaluation was conducted to ensure that current HR policies, processes, and procedures comply with state and federal labor laws as well as relevant codes and regulations, such as the Merit System and all active Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs). Additional HR teams and departments, such as Employee and Labor Relations, Training, and Risk Management were identified in this assessment, as their involvement with the employee lifecycle is reflected in the work of Employment Services. Blackwell HR examined how current HR practices impact both the candidate and employee experience, particularly around recruitment, onboarding, and training,

and assessed the effectiveness of current HR practices in alignment with NCC's operational and strategic objectives, including employee engagement, retention, and talent acquisition.

Methodology

To ensure a thorough and accurate assessment, Blackwell HR employed a multifaceted approach to gathering data and insights. The combination of qualitative insights from stakeholder interviews, quantitative data from direct observation, and data audits of HR processes gave a well-rounded view of the current state of NCC's HR practices within Employment Services. These findings not only provided a snapshot of the current challenges but also allowed for the identification of immediate and long-term improvement opportunities. The insights gathered were essential in forming actionable recommendations that will enhance operational efficiency, improve legal compliance, and foster a better work environment for both employees and candidates.

- **Stakeholder Interviews |** Blackwell HR conducted interviews with key Employment Services personnel, department managers, and other stakeholders involved in HR processes as it pertains to Employment Services to help capture both qualitative insights and firsthand experiences from those directly involved in day-to-day ES functions.
- **Employee Feedback Sessions |** Blackwell HR gathered feedback from employees regarding their experiences with the recruitment, onboarding, and training processes, as well as their perspectives on ES's role within the organization. This was essential for understanding the overall effectiveness of Employment Services from an employee's viewpoint.
- **Document & Policy Review |** During the ES Assessment, Blackwell HR conducted a comprehensive review of existing Employment Services documents, including job descriptions, recruitment policies, merit codes and policies, active CBAs, and onboarding materials. This review offered insight into understanding whether all materials were up-to-date, legally compliant, and reflective of best practices.
- **File Audits & Data Analysis |** Blackwell HR completed a thorough sample audit of HR files, including candidate applications, employee I-9 forms, and background check documents, to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations were met and to identify any gaps or inconsistencies in recordkeeping.
- **Process Observation |** Blackwell HR team members observed ES team members as they carried out recruitment and onboarding tasks to identify potential bottlenecks or inefficiencies in the workflow. Utilizing this methodology allowed a hands-on approach that also provided an opportunity to assess the usability of the tools and systems in place, such

as PeopleSoft and NEOGOV, while understanding what current knowledge management practices were in place.

From this assessment, Blackwell HR developed strategic and actionable recommendations in alignment with the long-term goals of New Castle County's HR leadership to enhance the overall organizational effectiveness and the efficiency of the Employment Services function.

Overall Assessment

The assessment determined that New Castle County's human resources policies, procedures, systems, and practices largely adhere to core legal and employment standards and demonstrate general alignment with the provisions outlined in applicable collective bargaining agreements and current merit system codes.

Employment Services personnel are all highly dedicated to supporting NCC and its fellow employees. The ES team works diligently in their respective roles as they strive to meet the needs of the County's workforce.

In parallel, key Employment Services' functions are experiencing operational inefficiencies that compromise compliance, reduce productivity, and limit the overall effectiveness of HR service delivery. Key operational gaps and inefficiencies include:

- **Personnel Policies**

- Many of New Castle County's personnel policies are outdated, with some dating back over 20 years. Policies, such as employee application procedures or related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), are no longer aligned with current legal requirements or HR best practices. Several policies are no longer relevant, which includes, but is not limited to programs that have been discontinued for more than a decade. The publication of these policies can cause confusion among employees while also increasing the risk of non-compliance with federal and state regulations, exposing the County to potential legal risk and operational challenges. Many operational inefficiencies stem not only from outdated policies but from broader systemic gaps in the interpretation and application of the County's Merit System. These discrepancies have led to recurring confusion about recruiting and hiring processes and compliance obligations. Critically, the County must approach HR reform through a systemic lens—recognizing that addressing one issue (such as modernizing job descriptions) has cascading effects on recruitment, compliance risk, and candidate selection pipelines. A structured reform strategy is needed to correct these interdependencies and reduce future misalignment between policy intent and daily practice.

- **Technology & Process Integration**

- The lack of integration between New Castle County's HR technology systems, specifically PeopleSoft and NEOGOV, is causing significant inefficiencies. Data management is fragmented, and the recruitment and onboarding processes are slowed down by the inability to share real-time data between systems. Inadequate visibility into requisition approval progress and the inability to track candidate status in real time increases administrative burdens, complicates workflow, and introduces the risk of errors. The absence of seamless integration between these systems reduces the effectiveness of HR operations and delays key processes, including recruitment, onboarding, and compliance tracking.

- **Job Descriptions Updates**

- A significant portion of New Castle County's job descriptions are outdated. 114 job descriptions made publicly available on the NCC website, are dated over 20 years. This lack of up-to-date and accurate job descriptions has led to misaligned expectations among employees, leadership, and stakeholders about the essential functions and responsibilities of various roles. The outdated descriptions also create gaps in critical areas, such as missing physical requirements or FLSA exemption statuses, which may result in compensation misalignments and potential legal risks. Furthermore, these outdated descriptions contribute to recruitment challenges by attracting candidates based on inaccurate expectations, complicating performance management, and raising legal compliance concerns.

- **Recruitment & Candidate Screening**

- The recruitment process at NCC is heavily reliant upon manual processes that lack efficiency, particularly when it comes to candidate communication and the overall approval process for job postings. Job postings cannot proceed until approval from three key stakeholders – the General Manager (GM), Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) – is obtained, which causes delays, particularly during high-volume hiring periods. The assessment also found a lack of real-time tracking of the requisition approval progress, resulting in bottlenecks that slow down the recruitment process. Additionally, the screening process focuses solely on minimum qualifications rather than truly assessing the candidates based on the full spectrum of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required for finding success in the role, limiting the County's ability to select the most qualified candidates.

- **Interview Process**

- During the interview process, the assessment found that there is an operational hindrance due to an inefficient setup. This includes, but is not limited to, the requirement for large oral board panels consisting of 3-4 raters, leading to significant logistical challenges and delays in interview scheduling. The absence of standardized panel preparation and interview materials further compounds these issues, resulting in

inconsistent evaluations and added inefficiencies. Furthermore, delays in scheduling interviews coupled with poor communication, such as the failure to notify candidates promptly of their qualification status, contribute to a negative candidate experience and disengagement, ultimately affecting the County's ability to meet hiring timelines.

- **Job Offers & Onboarding**

- The process of extending a job offer was observed to be fragmented and lacking consistency, with multiple layers of approval, manual gathering of candidate data from various systems, and no standardized offer letter. This process is often prone to inefficiencies and errors, especially during high-volume or time-sensitive hiring periods. Candidates are often not required to sign or formally acknowledge job descriptions, potentially leading to legal or onboarding issues. The onboarding process also suffers from outdated or inaccurate documents, creating confusion and a suboptimal experience for new hires.

- **Background Checks & Pre-employment Screenings**

- The County's pre-employment background check process is outdated and includes unnecessary screenings, such as a three-hour physical examination for positions that do not require extensive physical exertion. These screenings create barriers for candidates and delay hiring timelines. Furthermore, the process lacks transparency and clear communication with candidates regarding the required steps, contributing to the ongoing frustration and inefficiencies throughout the hiring process. There is no clear policy justifying the need for these physical examinations, especially for low-exertion roles, making it difficult to ensure that screenings are aligned with the actual physical demands of the positions.

- **I-9 Compliance**

- The New Castle County I-9 compliance process is marked by inconsistencies, with some forms missing required fields or supporting documentation. There is no clear process for removing inactive I-9 records or ensuring proper retention and destruction of outdated forms. This creates compliance risks and inefficiencies which leads to struggles when it comes to maintaining accurate and up-to-date records for all employees.

- **Workforce Capacity and Interim Staffing Resources**

- The Employment Services team is currently operating under significant strain. There are critical changes needed in this department including updating decades-old job descriptions, implementing new systems, and revising critical HR policies. While the County may not require a long-term increase in permanent full-time employees (FTEs), the short-term workload demands additional resources.

Recommendations

The resulting recommendations aim to enhance HR practices with Employment Services to improve policy alignment while mitigating risks associated with outdated procedures and modernizing NCC's talent acquisition practices. Many of these recommendations may require the support and cohesive effort of other HR Divisions and Departments as it relates to the Employment Services functions. To address the above issues and enhance the Employment Services operations, we recommend the following actions:

- **Personnel Policies & Merit Code**

- Update all federal and local related policies immediately to ensure compliance. Establish a plan to update all policies in the immediate future.
- Clearly define in the Merit System (Sec. 26.03.305. and Sec. 26.03.309.) what constitutes "written notification" to allow for full electronic communication. Eliminate physical mailing of rejection or failure letters. Transition to digital communications to save resources and expedite notification.
- Create a reference guide that is updated with any changes to code, personnel policies, and/or the CBAs that can be used to ensure compliance and consistency across the County.
- Provide standardized training for SMEs and hiring managers on structured interviewing, evaluation scoring, implicit bias, and compliance with Merit System principles.

- **Technology & Process Integration**

- Integrate PeopleSoft and NEOGOV or implement middleware to share real-time data across systems to include SME review tools, bilingual postings, real-time approval tracking dashboards that provide visibility into where each requisition sits in the workflow, to which the County is not currently using.

- **Job Descriptions Updates**

- Strategically plan to update all job descriptions in the organization utilizing an updated template.
- Consider reviewing and aligning application screening with KSAs and minimal physical requirements, (26.03.304), not just minimum qualifications, to reflect the actual demands of the role.

- **Recruitment & Candidate Screening**

- Implement electronic-only communication (email, SMS) for status updates, including qualification, ranking, failure, and offer rescission notices.
- Migrate all Eligibility, Promotion, Transfer, and Qualification lists into NEOGOV, ensuring a secure, centralized, and audit-friendly recordkeeping process using clearly defined

criteria, expiration timelines, and version-controlled access by HR Technicians and department leaders.

- Leverage NEOGOV's Report Builder tools to streamline list creation, data exports, and candidate tracking (e.g., create a dashboard or reporting tool within NEOGOV to allow CHROs and GMs to track promotional pathways, internal candidate engagement, and talent pipeline depth).
- Develop a digital knowledge library and documented procedures accessible to all Employment Services staff containing:
 - Interview guide
 - Candidate evaluation templates
 - Recruitment timelines
 - CBA-aligned selection checklists
 - FAQ documents and training materials

- **Interview Process**

- Partner with NEOGOV's customer success or training teams to deliver targeted training sessions for HR Technicians, HR Administrators, and General Managers, tailored to their respective roles in the recruitment lifecycle to ensure current and efficient utilization of the system.

- **Job Offers, Onboarding & I-9 Compliance**

- Integrate an electronic signature platform to streamline offer acceptance.
- Complete a full I-9 audit to correct any inaccuracies of information and ensure that an I-9 is on file for each active employee.

- **Background Checks & Pre-employment Screenings**

- Review the expense and necessity of the three-hour physical examination for low-exertion positions (e.g., administrative roles), thus eliminating unnecessary screenings for those roles and tailor physical criteria to job demands. There is no evidence in the Personnel Policy or language in the code (26.03.304) to substantiate these requirements.

- **Workforce Capacity and Interim Staffing Resources**

- Execute a structured reconciliation, conducted jointly by HR, Finance, and department leadership, enabling the ability to do more accurate workforce planning, support interim staffing requests, and ensure budget transparency minimizing fiscal waste.

In addition to the recommendations listed above, there are several compliance risks that should be addressed with the Legal department.

The above recommendations will assist in streamlining NCC's recruitment and onboarding processes, improve compliance with regulatory standards, and enhance both the candidate and

employee experience. By prioritizing the modernizing systems, updating policies, and optimizing workflows, NCC can improve organizational effectiveness and overall stakeholder satisfaction. In paying immediate attention to these areas, NCC will be able to mitigate operational inefficiencies, which can reduce legal risks and support the County in achieving its strategic goals.