

TITLE OF REPORT: Workforce Strategy 2022 to 2025

REPORT OF: Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to recommend to Cabinet a refreshed Council Workforce Strategy and to outline the priorities for 2022/23.

Background

2. The Council's Workforce Strategy and Plan expired in 2020 and due to resources being directed elsewhere during the Pandemic, work on refreshing the strategy has been delayed. The absence of a current strategy has been identified as a risk by internal audit, thus it is important to progress this work in a timely manner. Post-pandemic is also a timely point at which to re-consider the Council's workforce priorities which ought to be aligned with available resources and the wider Council service provision priorities.

Proposal

3. Attached at Appendix 2 is a proposed Workforce Strategy presented as an easily read, one page strategy which enables the Council's workforce related priorities to be captured in one place, and in a document which is clear, purposeful and outlines the Council's direction of travel for workforce development.
4. The strategy is deliberately presented in themes rather than being aligned to any particular area of the HR and Workforce Development Service. Ultimately every part is interlinked: for example, if workforce design and ways of working are effective, employees feel valued and are invested in, and with a culture which embraces health, safety and wellbeing, it is likely that the Council will be viewed favourably as an employer of choice. Similarly, if diversity and inclusion is valued and the Council's climate change agenda is embraced, it is likely that potential employees will be attracted to the Council for its values and purpose rather than solely for financial reward – this is particularly the case for younger people.
5. The strategy has been developed to support the Thrive agenda and other corporate strategies already agreed by the Council. It also reflects the recently adopted performance indicators, especially the indicator relating to employee satisfaction "*Gateshead Council, a great place to work*". The Council should also aim to be a place where its employees are proud to work.

6. A delivery/implementation plan will be developed for each aspect of the strategy. Such plans will be flexible and may cut across several areas of the strategy and of the Council. Some will be more complex than others depending on the nature of the task. Where appropriate, proposals will be suitably equality impact assessed.

Priorities

7. If resources were unlimited, all aspects of the strategy would be tackled simultaneously; however, clearly this is not possible so there is a need to decide which areas should be prioritised in year 1 (2022/23). Whilst the HR/Workforce Development Service will lead on the development and implementation of delivery plans, 'buy in' and commitment is needed across the organisation. It is important to be clear on priorities – these are to be delivered on top of the operational, regular responsibilities of the service, so they need to be realistic and achievable. If during the course of the year different priorities are identified, then it must be accepted that timescales will slip. The intention is to agree a realistic list and avoid trying to do everything at once and risk achieving little, which would be likely to have a negative effect on staff morale, within and outside the service.
8. Priority areas should be those which: (a) add the most value to the organisation; (b) mitigate any workforce related risks; and (c) address the most pressing workforce issues. It is therefore proposed that the following are agreed as highest priority:
 - **Attracting and retaining staff:** review of candidate attraction and recruitment processes
 - **Wellbeing, Inclusion and Engagement:** developing a wellbeing and inclusion framework
 - **Leadership Behaviours and Performance:** review of employee performance management systems (A&Ds)
 - **Workforce Design:** pay, reward and job evaluation review
9. Work has already commenced on the Apprenticeship Delivery Plan; embracing a health and safety culture; development of career pathways and succession plans; delivery of management development and leadership programmes; and embedding the hybrid working model.

Recommendations

12. It is recommended that
 - (i) the Workforce Strategy at Appendix 2 is approved; and,
 - (ii) the areas outlined in para 8 are endorsed as priorities for 2022/23

For the following reason:

To ensure the Council has an agreed Workforce Strategy which supports the Council's priorities.

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Policy Context

1. Whilst it is not a statutory obligation for an employer to adopt a workforce strategy, it is recommended as good practice to do so. This strategy sets out the Council's commitments to its workforce and employee representatives and aligns with its priorities and other strategic commitments.

Background

2. The Council's Workforce Strategy and Plan expired in 2020 and due to resources being directed elsewhere during the Pandemic, work on refreshing the strategy has been delayed. The absence of a current strategy has been identified as a risk by internal audit, thus it is important to progress this work in a timely manner. Post-pandemic is also a timely point at which to re-consider the Council's workforce priorities which ought to be aligned with available resources and the wider Council service provision priorities.

Consultation

3. The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council have been consulted and are supportive of the revised Workforce Strategy.
4. Trade Union colleagues have been consulted on the proposed strategy and are supportive of it. They have commented that real progress can be made if there is commitment to delivering outcomes. Unions are keen to be involved in and support the roll out of detailed delivery plans. The Council's Leadership Team has also been consulted and are supportive of the one-page presentation of the strategy and its content.

Alternative Options

5. None proposed

Implications of Recommended Option

6. **Resources:**
 - a) **Financial Implications** – none. The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms priorities determined as part of the strategy will be delivered within existing resource.
 - b) **Human Resources Implications** – the strategy will have a positive impact on employees within the Council.

c) Property Implications - none

7. **Risk Management Implication** - adoption and implementation of a workforce strategy supports the mitigation of those risks which can be associated with workforce planning and workforce development.
8. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - delivery of the strategy will have positive implications for employee equality and diversity, particularly the development of a 'employee wellbeing, inclusion and engagement framework'.

An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been carried out ensuring that we pay due regard to the Equality Act (2010); that the delivery of the strategy does not inadvertently disadvantage anyone directly affected, and wherever possible, proactively advances our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion across Gateshead Council. A copy of the IIA is attached at Appendix 3.

9. **Crime and Disorder Implications – none**
10. **Health Implications –** the strategy provides a framework which will support the delivery of consistent approach to health, safety and wellbeing across Gateshead Council, ensuring we meet both our statutory requirements and embrace best practice in its fullest sense, therefore positively impacting on employee health and wellbeing.
11. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - none directly, however, the adoption of smart working practices will contribute to the climate emergency commitments.
12. **Human Rights Implications** - none
13. **Ward Implications** - none