
Workforce Strategy 2019-2023

Refreshed 2021

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Change History

Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1.1	25 March 2019	Change format and increase focus on apprenticeships and EAS results	ROR
2	June 2021	Revised in the light of changing context post COVID 19, and to reflect ambitions of the Workforce Board. New project ideas added	RB

1. Introduction

1.1 The Workforce Strategy links to and supports the Council's strategic objectives by identifying what the workforce needs to look like and how it needs to operate to deliver the right outcomes for the residents of West Berkshire.

1.2 In 2019, West Berkshire Council (WBC) approved a Workforce Strategy for the four year period September 2019 to August 2023 to sit alongside the Council Strategy. The Council's Strategic priorities are:

- Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes
- Support everyone to reach their full potential
- Support businesses to start, develop & thrive
- Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy
- Maintain a green district
- Ensure sustainable services through innovation & partnerships.

These priorities can only be achieved through our workforce.

1.3 In August 2020, it was agreed that the Workforce Strategy should be revised. This was partly because good progress had been made in the linked projects, but also because of significant changes to the context for the workforce as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. There was also a desire by the Workforce Board to be more ambitious for our workforce.

1.4 The Council has kept a clear focus on its workforce for over ten years: gathering and analysing data; keeping ahead of legislative changes affecting employees; providing training and development; tackling recruitment and retention issues; dealing with organisational change; and listening to the views of employees. During this time the workforce has remained largely stable, engaged and productive.

1.5 This refreshed Workforce Strategy describes our current challenges, new context and our ambitions then sets out how we plan to rise to those challenges and work towards our ambitions for our workforce.

Background

2. Context

2.1 The picture of the workforce is one of stability and productivity. Staff turnover was 14.08% in 2019/20, with voluntary turnover at 12.14%, both down slightly on the previous year. This compares favourably with the turnover figure from the LGA's workforce survey of 2017/18 (most recent), at 13.4%. Both this turnover figure and the internal New Ways of Working (NWOW) reviews of services have shown that our pay levels remain largely competitive and appropriate. Employees have a 'can-do' attitude; are willing to 'go the extra mile' for the sake of clients and customers; and value the public sector ethos (which is exemplified in the values which staff have helped to craft: *Integrity, Customer Focussed, and Fairness*). This is illustrated by the results of the Employee Attitude Survey in June 2018 which had positive scores for employee engagement (higher than the average for local government).

2.2 The Council is very aware of its position as a significant employer in the district. In line with the strategic objective: *support everyone to reach their full potential*, WBC is committed to leading the way in developing opportunities in our own workforce for young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged. The Apprenticeship strategy, linked to the Workforce Strategy, sets out our commitments through initiatives like work experience, apprenticeships for young people and Kick Start.

2.3 The Council does not have a strategic aim to increase or decrease the number of employees. The number will fluctuate according to circumstances – it increased when the Council took over Birchwood Care Home and it decreased when staff in the Countryside Service were transferred to the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxford Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).

2.4 The workforce is supported by a comprehensive range of HR policies and procedures which are subject to consultation with managers and trade unions. All HR policies and procedures are available to employees on the intranet. These policies and procedures are developed and updated regularly by the HR team and command widespread support for their fairness and integrity.

2.5 The Workforce Strategy will be delivered by leadership from elected members and senior managers; by managers in services; by employees ‘going the extra mile’ and living the Council values of *Integrity, Customer Focussed and Fairness*; and by the efforts of the HR Service. The Workforce Board has contributed to this revised strategy and will monitor progress on the projects linked to the Workforce Strategy and towards the ambitions.

2.6 WBC has many people working and volunteering who are not covered by this Workforce Strategy: our teachers and support staff in schools; our foster carers; our library and other volunteers; our contractors; and our agency workers. These people are vital to the success of the district and to the operation of local services, however, the Workforce Strategy focuses on the 1,512 (at 31st March 2020) employees who are directly employed by the Council.

3. **Workforce Strategy - 2019 – 2021**

3.1 The Workforce Strategy was approved in September 2019.

3.2 The Workforce Board was established in November 2019. This is chaired by the Executive Director for Place and includes representatives from all services & departments. Terms of reference were agreed; the most central of which is the requirement to monitor progress against the workforce strategy objectives and delivery plan. Between November 2019 and December 2020 the Workforce Board has met every 6 weeks.

3.3 Significant progress has been made against the objectives set out in September 2019. This includes:

- Employee Assistance Programme procured, which went live on 1st July 2020.
- 5 senior managers have signed up for Masters in Strategic Management & Leadership, funded by the apprenticeship levy.
- Work experience policy reviewed and published
- “Even Better Recruitment” day held in autumn 2019.
- Support to implement the with new senior management structure, following SMR 2019.

3.4 Progress has also been made against other objectives, including commercial skills training and the coaching and mentoring programme. These are projected to make further progress into the period of the revised Workforce Strategy, from April 2021 to March 2023. Some of the 2019 projects have been included in the *Rising to the Challenges & Opportunities* section below, together with a range of new projects which have arisen as a result of the changing context for the workforce, and also new ideas from the Workforce Board.

4. **Challenges & Opportunities**

4.1 **Culture** - There are a number of anticipated changes which could impact on the Council's positive organisational culture in the next two years, principally change in senior leadership and new workstyles as a result of Timelord 2. Senior leaders are the keystone to organisational culture, and in particular how managers manage; change at the top of the structure can create uncertainty or confusion for a period before the new expectations and direction are made clear. The proposed changes to how a large proportion of our staff work will result in less face-to-face management and teams working physically together. Whilst expectations and guidance can be set out, it may take time to understand the long term impacts of these changes on our organisational culture; we cannot fully anticipate what the impacts might be.

Without an active approach to fostering a positive and productive culture, these changes could result in a negative impact. The risk is that teams will become less cohesive as people meet less often or communicate in a different way. Staff could also feel less identity or connection with the Council if they are physically removed by working at home more. This, in turn, could impact on morale, performance for our community, recruitment and retention.

Senior and line managers are key to ensuring there is consistency in the organisational culture across the Council and previous staff surveys have highlighted that there could be improvement in this e.g. better communication and management application of policy in certain service areas.

It is also acknowledged that there are different sub-cultures in different services; this is partly related to the different professional groups and their own ways of working, and is a natural part of any larger organisation. However, there is a feeling that during the COVID 19 pandemic, the new urgency led to better cross-service working to respond speedily and well to the challenges to deliver for our residents. This strategy sets out an ambition about our culture and describes projects to actively foster a positive culture in our changing work context, which is shared across the whole workforce. This will also be supported by the internal communications plans outlined in the *Communications & Engagement Strategy 2021*.

4.2 **COVID-19** – The Council's workforce was forced to respond quickly in the spring of 2020 to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many short term adjustments were made to the way staff worked and the way services were delivered. This has led to discussions about how our workforce will work in the future in terms of the balance between home and office, our use of technology and the need to be located physically together. A staff survey was conducted in June 2020 to gather some experiences from staff and these have further fed those discussions and led to the Timelord 2 project below. The survey also highlighted the importance of considering employee wellbeing as part of the project.

4.3 Financial - The Council faces financial challenges common to all unitary and upper tier local authorities in that an ageing population is increasing the percentage of total Council expenditure spent on Adult Social Care (ASC) year on year. This means that the key challenge for the Council is to meet its statutory requirements, and its objectives set out in the Council Strategy, within its financial constraints. This challenge is addressed in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and it has an effect on the Workforce Strategy. Some of the objectives set out in Workforce Strategy will need to be considered by elected members against other bids for funding (known as 'pressures'). The consideration of pressures is an annual exercise which takes place in the autumn, working on the budget for the following financial year.

4.4 Recruitment and Retention - In the 2019 Workforce Strategy, recruitment and retention in certain service areas was a particular challenge that was identified. These are currently Children's and Adult's Social Workers, Adult Social Care (Reablement, Occupational Therapists, Registered General Nurses, and Clinical Leads), Civil Enforcement Officers and some specific professional groups. The HR Service identifies areas of recruitment difficulty and reports these to Corporate Board (CB) twice a year. HR currently work closely with managers recruiting to these roles to provide specific support and guidance to improve the success of recruitment, both in terms of numbers and quality of applicants. Recent approaches have included increased use of social media, dedicated webpages and amended recruitment processes. In addition, through the relevant workforce development groups, HR are creating a recruitment strategy for roles that are hard to recruit to, which includes support in developing a career path, as set out in 6.3.2 below, so there is a clear progression path and qualifications for the role can be funded via the Apprenticeship Levy. Before the pandemic, the issues were around near full employment in the district; the competition for staff from other care providers; the rural nature of the district meaning longer distances for employees to travel to clients; and the high cost of housing. The economic situation is changing rapidly in 2020 as a result of the COVID pandemic; unemployment is rising and opportunities for younger people are decreasing. Over the coming months we will have a better idea of how the changing economy will impact our own recruitment and retention.

4.5 Skills – The Council's workforce includes staff across a wide range of professional groups, many of whom are carrying out our statutory duties to our community. It is vital that the skills of our workforce are constantly developed to ensure that we can meet the needs of our community, our strategic priorities and the expectations of regulatory bodies overseeing our work. Priority areas in the coming years will be for skills in communication, project management and transformation.

4.6 BREXIT - The UK formally left the European Union on 31st December 2020. There will be impacts on the Council, both in terms of regulations and legislation but also relating to recruitment and retention of staff. A BREXIT working group is in place and other impacts will need to be monitored from 2021 onwards.

4.7 Wellbeing - The Council is committed to supporting our workforce in achieving their own wellbeing. This relates both to physical health and safety at work, but also mental well-being. The average number of days lost due to sickness in 2019/20 was 9.65 days (non COVID related); it was 9.84 in 2018/19 and 8.59 in 2017/18. This is higher than the LGA Workforce Survey 2017/18 figure of 8.6. The most common reason for absence was 'stress/ depression/ anxiety' which accounted for 23.5% (down from 25.3% in 2018/19).

The Council, particularly through its Community & Wellbeing department (C&WB), has already made progress in the area of mental health with the Dementia Friends and Suicide Prevention Training. C&WB promote employee health and wellbeing campaigns through its webpages and social media presence (which are accessible to staff and the public). During the COVID 19 pandemic employee mental health has been a key discussion point and this will continue to be considered carefully through the Timelord 2 project because the COVID Staff Survey of June 2020 showed that 37% of staff who responded had experienced a deterioration of their mental wellbeing during the first lockdown period. The 2019 Workforce Strategy included the establishment of an employee assistance programme (EAP) to support employee wellbeing and resilience. This went live in July 2020. The Stress & Mental Wellbeing Policy and Guidance was launched in January 2020. The Council wants to build on these developments to increase wellbeing and resilience for all staff.

4.8 Communication - The Council has developed a new Communication and Engagement Strategy, which arose partly from the feedback from 2019 LGA Peer Review but has also been influenced by the experience of COVID 19. In developing our approach to communication and engagement with our community, we also need to ensure that communication within our workforce is effective, especially given the changing working environment. We also need to ensure that the right skills and development are available to support the new strategic approach.

4.9 Apprenticeships - The Council is giving £210,000 per year (excluding schools) in contributions to the government's Apprenticeship Levy. This money is kept in a 'digital fund' and each month's contribution is lost to the Council after two years if it is not spent on providing apprenticeships. This provides a challenge to the Council to ensure that the Apprenticeship Levy funding is spent on apprenticeships and not lost to the Treasury. This challenge is addressed in the Apprenticeship Strategy 2020.

4.10 Employee Views - Employee feedback from the Employee Attitude Survey 2018 and the 'Let's Chat' employee workshops provided a challenge to the Council in a number of areas, which influenced the Workforce Strategy 2019 projects:

- Need to invest in and make time for staff development
- Use apprenticeships where possible
- Management training
- Job uncertainty and staff having to pick up more work has an impact – need to focus on developing staff resilience.
- Provide employees with opportunities for career development using shadowing and secondments.

A further Employee Attitude Survey was completed during summer 2021 and the results are being finalised before being communicated.

The Future

5. Ambitions

5.1 In reviewing the Workforce Strategy for 2021 – 23, the Workforce Board were keen to include more ambition and expression of how we could seek to improve the context for our workforce. The Workforce Board have agreed the following as five key ambitions for the Council's workforce. The projects linked to the Workforce Strategy will contribute to

progression towards achieving these ambitions during the two years to March 2023, as well as rising to the challenges and opportunities set out above.

5.2 The ambitions are:

1. **To be a workforce that represents our community, working towards greater representation of the young, the disadvantaged and people of other minorities, and to increase diversity across all areas and levels of the workforce.**
2. **To be a workforce that takes pride in what we do and celebrates success.**
3. **To actively foster an organisational culture that is positive and productive, which values and listens to staff, built on trust and respect for all.**
4. **To support the career aspirations of all and grow our own future leaders.**
5. **To increase wellbeing and resilience for all staff.**

5.3 We will be able to recognise progress towards these ambitions in some of these ways:

1. Our workforce is currently representative of our population in relation to ethnic background. An improvement would be for our workforce to be more diverse than our community, according to the 2021 census results, and representative of our community's age and disability profile. Another improvement would be to see greater diversity in our senior leadership team, which is not currently representative of our community.
2. We are seeking to actively encourage disadvantaged young people into our workforce. Success would be a good take up of our work experience and Kick Start schemes, leading to paid employment for a number of young people who might otherwise experience challenges.
3. In a workforce which has a positive culture, listens to staff, built on trust and respect, this would be apparent through improved staff feedback through the Employee Attitude Survey, trade union discussions and anecdotally through managers and employee engagement like Let's Chat session.
4. If the career aspirations of our workforce are supported, as well as their development, we will see an increased number of more senior roles being filled internally. We may also see an increased uptake in apprenticeship opportunities and short courses.
5. If employee wellbeing and resilience is increased, this will be evidenced by a decrease in staff sickness and increase positive staff feedback through the employee attitude survey and other employee engagement.

6. **Rising to the Challenges & Opportunities**

6.1 The projects linked to this strategy are split into five key areas:

- Succession Planning and Career Development
- Leadership & Management
- Recruitment & Retention – “Workforce of the future”
- Employee Wellbeing
- How we work – styles, location, technology, culture

6.2 Each of these key areas has links with the challenges and ambitions above, e.g. our diversity ambition links to succession planning and career progression because we are aiming to increase diversity at all levels of the workforce through greater opportunities for our staff.

6.3 Succession Planning and Career Development

6.3.1 **Apprenticeships** will continue to provide a wide range of opportunities for career development, both for younger workers as part of a more traditional apprenticeship, and also for employees who are further on in their career who wish to study for management or professional qualifications. This can also enable staff to train for a different profession whilst continuing to work for the Council. The Apprenticeship Strategy sets out commitments to recruit and support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and provides full information on the Council's plans for apprenticeships. This work is overseen by the Apprenticeship Steering Group.

6.3.2 **Career pathways** - It is proposed that a project is undertaken to consider the development of career pathways across a wide range of job groups. There are already some professional groups within the workforce who have defined career pathways; these give staff a clear route upwards through the organisation, and inform training and development, usually linked to apprenticeship levy funding. One example of this is the growth of our own qualified social workers within both CFS and ASC. Structures in other services have become increasingly flat in recent years, with minimal opportunities for progression. This observation was reflected in the Employee Attitude Survey (2018) results for some services. This project will not necessarily result in restructuring of teams, rather it will consider defined development and support routes to career progression as well as the availability of opportunities for promotion.

6.3.3 **Review of Performance Management Processes and Competency Frameworks** – the aim of this review will be to emphasise the importance of consistency for managers and the aspiration to continually improve performance of teams and individuals, linked to the WBC values. The revised competency framework will inform training & development for managers (see section 6.4 below) appraisal and performance capability. The review of the performance management processes will aim to foster people-centric conversations that enable positive culture, allow continuous feedback from customers/ stakeholders as well as managers.

6.3.4 **Training & Development Programme** – The Council has a wide-ranging internal training and development programme which encompasses many specialist courses for social care and children's workforce as well as more generalist opportunities. To rise to the challenge to ensure that our workforce have all the necessary skills, both to meet the needs of our community, the Council's strategic objectives and the standards required by regulatory bodies, a full review of the training programme will be undertaken. Some specific elements to be considered include commercialisation training (featured in the 2019 workforce strategy), digital skills, and communication and engagement.

6.3.5 **Career Progression for Women** - The Workforce Board has recommended a project be undertaken with women in the Council's workforce. The purpose of the project will be to seek views about career progression and any barriers within the

workplace for women. The results of the research will be used to inform future projects, and in particular the Diversity in Recruitment project (see 6.5.1 below).

6.3.6 The **Coaching and Mentoring** project was described in the 2019 Workforce Strategy. A pilot is currently being set up to train ten volunteer managers from different services and levels in the Council to undertake coaching and mentoring. These ten managers will then be matched with staff who are seeking coaching and mentoring. The pilot is due to be completed by the end of 2021. The learning from this will be considered before the scheme is rolled out to a larger group of staff. The aim of this project is to support those who wish to progress in their career and to support that progress within the Council, encouraging their retention, but it will also be a development opportunity for mentors. It is hoped that the scheme will encourage staff from more diverse backgrounds to be confident to pursue promotion. It should also spread good management practice through the sharing of knowledge and skills between mentor and mentee.

6.4 Leadership & Management

6.4.1 **Leadership & Management Development Programme** – the Council already offers a wide range of development opportunities to its managers and senior leaders. These include qualifications through the apprenticeship route, from level 3 (Team Leader & Supervisor) through to the masters programme with Birmingham University in Strategic Public Management and Leadership. Short courses in specialist topics are also available in-house. The development of apprenticeship routes has diversified the development options available to managers and leaders, so we plan to review all the activities currently on offer to ensure that we are providing access to a comprehensive programme which meets the Council's needs and priorities. In addition to the current offer, there is a need for management and leadership development in-house to ensure that the Council's managers have the required skills in line with our competency framework, and a shared understanding of the expectations of those with management responsibilities across the organisation. We will procure any additional training which is deemed necessary and then publish as a full programme. By publicising the development opportunities more widely, we aim to support the career aspirations of all, and grow our own future leaders, in line with our ambitions.

6.4.2 **Senior Leaders** - To support and encourage progression into senior roles (at Tier 3 and above), the assistance and development available to staff moving into these roles will be set out clearly to ensure consistency, and in a way which can be used in recruitment to those posts. This will include, for instance, the offer of mentoring through SOLACE as a standard.

6.4.3 **Management Induction** - In order to ensure that new managers feel confident and supported, as well as having the information and confidence to undertake their people management roles, it is proposed that a management induction be established. This would consist of two days' training covering the competency framework for leaders of people (shown below) together with discussion of the Council's values of *Integrity, Customer Focused, and Fairness*. The aim would also be to improve management consistency and foster a positive and productive organisational culture, in line with our ambitions. Any further development needs should be identified through the appraisal process, which includes assessment against these competencies.

	Leaders of people
When working with people	Understand stakeholders' motivation and objectives Be a skilled influencer (communicate the vision and objectives, inspire and motivate, develop buy-in and trust) Expect, encourage and support high standards of performance from team members Use a range of leadership styles appropriate to individual team members and the situation Develop team working and a sense of common purpose; manage conflict
In relation to learning and development	Actively develop the team to meet current and future challenges Encourage team members to reflect on experience and learning; actively encourage transfer of learning Seek feedback on own performance to improve self-awareness and own development needs
In their approach to work	Be a role model (demonstrating drive, purpose, integrity, fairness, enthusiasm, openness, resilience) Adapt to change, taking prompt and appropriate remedial action where required
When managing performance	Set/agree clear objectives, and quality and performance measures (for tasks and staff) Monitor and evaluate budgets, staff performance, and objectives Recognise good performance, and challenge underperformance and conduct Develop and empower team members to make decisions (coaching)

6.4.4 Manager Networks - To encourage further consistency in people management, it is proposed that manager networks be set up. The aim would be to connect a group of managers who could meet together, in person or virtually, and use their connections to share issues and learning in their management roles. It is hoped that these networks might encourage the sharing of good management practice and information, provide support, and act to increase knowledge and consistency across different services, also reducing the risk of silo working. The members of each network would have something in common e.g. first line managers. It is proposed that a pilot network be set up first with the aim of encouraging a wider take up after considering the learning for six months.

6.5 Recruitment & Retention

6.5.1 Diversity in Recruitment - Working with the Equality and Diversity Officer, the HR team will undertake a project to actively promote diversity in recruitment. This is likely to include:

- Reviewing promotional materials, including the website, to ensure maximum diversity in images used
- Ensure that our non-pay benefits are fully promoted to potential employees.
- Using mobile-enabled software to ensure that younger applicants can apply easily

- Reviewing language used in job descriptions and recruitment advertising to encourage diverse applications e.g. reconsidering masculine language in engineering roles, or feminised language in care roles.
- Considering the results of the project about women in the workforce and any actions arising from this.

6.5.2 Develop a Total Reward and Recognition Strategy – with the aim of expressing how we recognise excellent performance, meeting the needs of the business and linked to our values. The aim will be to create a culture of reward and recognition. This fits with the ambition to “take pride in what we do and celebrate success”.

6.5.3 Honorariums are additional payments made to staff for a variety of reasons, including additional responsibilities or “acting up”. Although there is a clear policy, there is some concern that this is not being applied consistently across the workforce and honorarium payments may disguise recruitment and retention issues. There is also the potential for inequality or equal pay issues through these payments, which are included in gender pay gap calculations. A project is proposed to look at the use of honorariums in detail and propose a revised approach which will ensure consistency and fairness, and also uncover any recruitment and retention issues which may currently be hidden.

6.5.4 Work Experience - The Council will increase its investment in accepting candidates for work experience, especially from disadvantaged groups. This will act as a ‘stepping stone’ to allow the candidates to apply for apprenticeship posts with the Council. The Work Experience Policy was revised in 2019 and the Council is actively participating in a number of schemes including Kick Start which offer work experience to young and disadvantaged people.

6.5.5 The Council’s **job evaluation scheme**, based on HAY, determines the grade for every post. Our Diversity in Recruitment project aims to reconsider the language we use, and the qualification routes and career paths for different professional groups. Following on from this, there will be a need to undertake a review of the job evaluation scheme to ensure these changes are reflected and do not have a negative impact on pay and grading. This review would need to be undertaken by a consultant and would be subject to a successful pressure bid.

6.6 Employee Wellbeing

6.6.1 Mindfulness applications - The Workforce Board will consider options for mindfulness applications e.g. Headspace and Calm. The aim would be to make one of these services available to all staff to support mental wellbeing.

6.6.2 Mental Health First Aid - The Council has a considerable number of staff who have been trained in mental health first aid. These staff undertook this training voluntarily, and it was largely funded by the Public Health team. In order to support the wellbeing of our workforce and increase resilience, the role of mental health first aiders should now be clearly defined and a network of mental health first aiders should be established and publicised, much like first aiders and fire wardens. This would include setting out initial and refresher training requirements, providing a role description and the support for individuals undertaking the role.

6.6.3 Workplace Health Initiatives – as part of the commitment to employee wellbeing, the Council will consider wellbeing indicators for the workforce, for instance the 2021 Employee Attitude Survey. We will then identify key health and wellbeing areas for action and plan to deliver workplace health initiatives to facilitate improvements in those areas.

6.7 How we work – styles, location, technology, culture.

6.7.1 Timelord 2 - The Council's Accommodation Group has already started a project to review our workstyles, ICT and space needs, as currently set out in our Mobile and Flexible Working procedures. The group aims to consult on proposals with trade unions and all staff in early 2021. The aim is to allow more staff to work at home for more of the time; the results of the COVID Staff Survey of June 2020 showed that 85% of staff who responded wish to work at home for at least part of their working week. The project will include:

- Reviewing workstyles, and T&Cs connected with these e.g. contractual work base, ICT equipment, furniture etc.
- Guidance on managing remotely and team cohesion e.g. team meetings and communication
- Reviewing office accommodation requirements.

Depending on the details of the changes, there may be a significant project to implement the changes e.g. contract and policy changes. During and following the implementation of the Timelord 2 project, training will be provided to support the changes. It is anticipated that training in managing remotely will be important to ensure that all managers have the necessary skills for this new way of working and supporting staff.

6.7.2 Workplace Culture - One of the ambitions for this strategy is *“to actively foster an organisational culture that is positive and productive, built on trust and respect for all”*. In developing policy and guidance around the new workstyles, culture and team cohesion will need to be carefully considered and communicated. This should be developed further through organisational development activities once implementation is underway. This may take the form of structured “Let’s Chat” sessions with different staff groups. Consideration will also need to be given to the Employee Attitude Survey results in 2021 in deciding on topics for discussion or development. These activities will consider any impact of senior management changes on culture and expectations.

6.7.3 Review People Processes – the aim of this review will be to ensure stakeholder focus and a culture of fairness and inclusion. The a new HR Service Lead, the HR team wish to review the way we work to support managers and work with staff, whilst ensuring that business needs are met.

6.7.4 HR & Payroll Systems - In order to support the workforce effectively, the HR & Payroll teams plan to undertake a number of projects to ensure we are working efficiently and effectively to process pay and benefits. The biggest of these is HR and payroll system development, which may be linked to much larger systems purchasing decisions for finance. This should also impact positively on the access managers and staff have to pay and staffing information and reporting. Other development includes teachers' pension reporting and payrolling benefits to make reporting requirements more efficient.

6.7.5 Raising Concerns project - The HR team will undertake a project to review a number of different but linked policies and procedures: grievance, whistleblowing & bullying and harassment. Best practice around these policies has moved on in the last few years and we have become aware that we could offer more cohesive and interlinked policies and procedures around these topics which would ensure that staff feel empowered to raise concerns, be those about matters in the public interest or concerns about their employment. We also want to re-emphasise our commitment to protecting all staff against bullying and harassment on any grounds by ensuring that we are adopting best practice in these areas. This project links to the workforce strategy ambitions around culture and also diversity.

6.7.6 Internal Communications – The Council published its Communications and Engagement Strategy early in 2021. This includes aims around internal communications. The HR team will work with communications colleagues to review internal communications as a result of the new strategy, and contribute to any project work arising from this. This supports the ambition to foster an organisational culture that is positive and productive, but also the ambition about valuing and listening to staff.

6.7.7 Commitment to Carers – The Council seeks to be a supportive employer, as reflected in its current family friendly and diversity themed policies e.g. the Menopause Policy and active promotion of flexible working. Our trade union colleagues have fed back that carers within our workforce feel less supported and recognised than some other groups of staff, which is significant considering our largely female workforce and age profile. We are therefore proposing to develop an agreed approach to supporting carers in our workforce, with input from managers, carers and trade unions. This supports our ambitions around positive culture, and valuing staff, as well as supporting diversity, as women still make up the majority of carers in our society.

7. Conclusion

7.1 This refreshed Workforce Strategy has been developed to bring the 2019 Strategy up-to-date for 2021 - 2023. This was both because good progress had been made in the linked projects in the 2019 delivery plan, but also because of significant changes to the context for the workforce as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. There was also a desire by the Workforce Board to be more ambitious for our workforce.

7.2 Most workforce indicators remain positive e.g. turnover and diversity figures. Recruitment to many posts is likely to become more attractive in the current economic conditions, although there will remain pockets of recruitment and retention challenges. There is also a need for the workforce to rise to meet the Council's strategic challenges e.g. in communications and engagement, and also potential triggers for culture change through senior leadership change and Timelord 2.

7.3 The Workforce Board have set out 5 new ambitions for our workforce, which have guided the direction of the projects set out, together with the challenges and opportunities listed.

7.4 Five key areas of focus have been identified, based on the challenges identified. Each of the projects set out aims to address one or more of these challenges. These areas are:

- Succession Planning and Career Development
- Leadership & Management
- Recruitment & Retention – “Workforce of the future”
- Employee Wellbeing
- How we work – styles, location, technology, culture

7.5 A new delivery plan has been developed, which will be monitored by the Workforce Board. Each project aligns to one or more of the key areas, and one or more of the ambitions set out for our workforce. Some of these activities will be led by the HR Service and some by other managers. Many will require buy-in from large sections of the workforce. Some of these projects and activities are dependent on additional funding or resource.

8. Related Documents

Workforce Strategy 2019
 Apprenticeship Strategy 2020
 Annual Employment Report 2019/20
 Equality & Diversity Strategy 2021
 Communications & Engagement Strategy 2021

9. Delivery Plan

9.1 The Workforce Strategy Delivery Plan for 2021 – 23 is at appendix A.

9.2 Our progress against each of these ambitions is measurable:

9.2.1 Diversity statistics are reported through the Annual Employment Report. Employment of disadvantaged young people will be measured in line with the targets set out in the Apprenticeships Strategy.

9.2.2 The Employee Attitude Survey (EAS) asks questions about attitudes to working for the Council. These can be compared with previous results.

9.2.3 The EAS engagement scores assess how positively staff feel about working for WBC.

9.2.4 We can measure the number of staff who are promoted by internal appointment and compare this with previous years. The EAS also asks questions about career opportunities and training.

9.2.5 The EAS asks questions about wellbeing and resilience.

9.3 Further actions may be added during the lifetime of the Workforce Strategy to meet the needs of the organisation and employees.