![Staffordshire County Council logo]

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Monday 18 December 2023

People Strategy 2023 – 2027 Update on Progress

Recommendation(s)

I recommend that the Committee:

    a. Note the progress made against the Year 1 and 2 priorities of Our People Strategy 2023 – 2027.

Local Member Interest:

N/A.

Report of the Leader of the Council

Summary

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the progress that has and continues to be made against Our People Strategy 2023 – 2027. The Committee is asked to note the considerable progress against the year 1 & 2 action plan. People Services continue to work towards the plan as well as embedding activity that has recently been launched.

Report

Background

2. Our refreshed people strategy was launched in April 2023 after being developed in consultation with our people, managers, and leaders from across the council. Their feedback helped us to enhance and build a reflective and ambitious strategy to support the council through the uncertainty and challenges we face over the next four years.

3. The two-year workplan for People Services allow effective resource planning, but with the flexibility to reassess and amend plans at regular intervals.

4. Our year 1 priorities are:
    a. Develop and launch "how we lead and work around here" standards to set clear expectations for our workforce, to build the right culture and approach to achieve our ambitions. **Completed.**

b. Improving recruitment in a competitive market by raising our profile and promoting our employment offer. This is essential to ensure we have the right people to deliver against our strategic plan and make a positive difference for the people of Staffordshire. **Significant impact achieved.**

c. Design and introduce a core leadership and management offer. This will help managers and leaders to innovate, focus on communities and deliver on our ambitions. **In progress.**

d. Support leaders to workforce plan and identify opportunities for talent/key skill collaboration within and outside the organisation. Effective collaboration results in different and innovative approaches which can maximise success. **In progress.**

e. Support development of innovation toolkits and an idea submission process. Helping to achieve engagement across the organisation towards an innovation culture. **Completed.**

f. Embed personal responsibility in learning and development. **In progress.**

g. Give managers the skills and capability to prevent and manage absence and support wellbeing. **Significant impact achieved.**

5. Following evaluation of the changing internal organisational needs, some of the year 2 priorities have been brought forward to ensure those needs are met:

a. Improving and transforming our onboarding and induction processes of WeWelcome, Mandatory Training with a potentially new Learning Platform for employees. **In progress.**

b. Beginning the development and improvement of tools for our managers and leaders to create effective teams by managing change well. **In progress.**

c. Refreshing our policies and procedures to support our ambitions. **In progress.**

d. Improving time to hire rates and candidate experience through the transformation of issued contracts. **Significant impact achieved.**

6. The shift in these priorities have meant that delivery of core Leadership and Management offer has been moved to later in 2024 to enable greater consultation, market research and detailed business cases to be developed to ensure it meets the needs of the organisation. Some enabling products are being developed alongside this work so that managers have tools required for their operational roles.

Overview of current activity by Pillar

7. Key projects and activities have been identified which will deliver the outcomes of the strategy. These are detailed below against the four pillars of the strategy that contribute to the 1–2-year plan.

Pillar - Attracting and keeping talented people.

8. One of the key areas of improvement and focus for our recruitment team has been to enhance the infrastructure to ensure more efficient and effective recruitment processes.

9. Through the implementation of state-of-the-art technology, streamlined workflows, and a robust Applicant Tracking System 'WeRecruit', our team has been able to significantly reduce the time and effort required for recruitment activities. This not only improves the experience for both candidates and hiring managers but also enhances the overall reputation of the County Council as an employer of choice.

   a. Since the launch of WeRecruit, we have registered over 15,600 new candidates, receiving over 21,200 applications.

   b. Average applications per advert currently standing at 22.4 an increase by over 6 compared to the average at the end of 22/23.

   c. We have increased the number of male applications from 26.9% to 31.6% and increased LGBTQ applications from 6.8% to 7.9%.

   d. Increase in the number of under 30 applicants from 17.8% to 20.5%.

   e. Increase in applications from ethnic minority groups from 18.1% to 33%.

   f. Filled 1077 positions over 12 months – 89.75 average per month. 68% have been filled by external applicants 32% by internal applicants. New starters reporting a positive experience of the Recruitment process average score 8.4/10.

   g. We have also seen a decrease in time to hire from 49.3 to 43.8 days. Voluntary turnover is currently 6.8% from 8.4% in 2022/23, and retention after 1 year is up from 77.6% in 22/23 to 83.1%

   h. We have introduced a monthly Integrated reporting suite through power BI, which can also be broken down into Directorate and subsidiary business units. This enables to the team to monitor performance and provide targeted support to managers as required.

Careers Website and Brand Ambassadors

10. In line with our People Strategy, the key driver to attract and retain exceptional talent is our Careers Website, known as the "shop window" of our organisation. The new Careers Website has now been launched with a refreshed look incorporating the Employer Branding and 20 Brand Ambassadors representing a diverse group of employees representing the communities within Staffordshire, with roles and career pathways from across the organisation featured in Brand Ambassador videos and content.

11. As the main marketing platform for external candidates the current website was identified as underperforming with only **2%** of individuals coming through the website applying for jobs at Staffordshire County Council. Developing a new website provided the opportunity to incorporate the Employer Branding and make it more engaging and accessible. There was also opportunity to refresh and design a number of new materials for recruitment events, which will also follow the same branding, look, and feel of the website.

12. The improvements to our career website have been informed by extensive research, both internally and externally, which identified several key themes that prospective employees value in a career's website:
    a. **Understanding Benefits and Flexibility:** Candidates want comprehensive information about the benefits and flexibility we offer, recognising the importance of work-life balance and employee well-being.
    b. **Authentic Insights:** Prospective employees seek to hear from real individuals within the organisation to gain a genuine understanding of our workplace culture and atmosphere.
    c. **Clarity of Purpose:** Candidates value clarity about the roles they would undertake within the organisation, emphasizing the significance of understanding their contributions.
    d. **EDI Commitment:** It is essential for our careers website to effectively communicate our commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Prospective employees desire a clear demonstration of our dedication to creating an inclusive workplace.
    e. **Representation and Diversity:** Candidates wish to see authentic representations of our diverse workforce, allowing them to envision themselves as part of our organisation.

13. Collaborating closely with the Communications and Digital Teams, we have aligned the design of the website with our brand identity while ensuring a seamless user experience. A 'mobile first' design approach

is being adopted, recognising that an increasing 70% of users access careers sites through mobile devices. Additionally, we are prioritising accessibility to offer a consistent experience for all users, irrespective of their background or abilities.

14. Our redesigned careers website is not merely an informative platform but a strategic tool for attracting top talent. By addressing these key themes and aligning the website with our brand and accessibility principles, we aim to establish a compelling and authentic digital presence that resonates with the informed, discerning candidates of today. This evolution of our career's website will play a pivotal role in our ongoing efforts to attract and engage the right talent, reinforcing our status as an employer of choice.

Candidate and Hiring Manager Surveys

15. To continually improve our resourcing services, we have launched a survey for candidates and hiring managers. The insights gathered will guide our efficiency with results anticipated in February 24. We aim to maintain an overall satisfaction score of 8.5/10 and a net promotor score of 65/100.

Contracts

16. To improve our first-time fill and time to hire rates, along with improving the onboarding experience and first impressions of the organisation, the current employee contracts are undergoing a review and rationalisation from the current provision of 70 reducing to an aspirational 20 contract templates. Consultation has also taken place with a number of workers forums to ensure language and provision is suitable and consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion requirements. Currently in discussions with procurement for the development of eSignatures as part of the new process. Potential options include distribution to new hires through WeRecruit ATS. There is an ambition that this will be completed and launched by March 2024.

Green Car Scheme

17. New electric & hybrid lease car scheme has been launched to develop the employee benefits offer and support our sustainability agenda. This scheme offers employees the option to lease electric & hybrid cars, after the first twelve months we have 52 cars on the scheme.

Pay structure benchmark.

18. We have undertaken a benchmark exercise to understand how our pay structure compares against the public and private sector market. This has allowed us to understand that our pay is at the median of the public sector market and for us to consider the future of the pay structure and wider job and organisational design.

National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)

19. We currently have two graduates who have just moved into their second year of the 2-year programme and one graduate who has recently joined us for the 2023 / 2025 cohort.

Vacancy Data Cleanse

20. A strategic review of all vacancies has commenced to ensure all current vacancies are required and aligned to service budgets. This will then allow better workforce planning and management activity.

Networks with schools and Universities

21. Connections have been made with our local schools and Universities; we have attended 17 career fairs in the last 12 months to raise our employer profile.

Apprenticeships

22. During August 2022 – July 2023 the number of apprenticeships who have started has doubled compared to previous year from 65 to 126.

Coming Soon

Digital ID checks

23. We will build on the functionality and efficiency of WeRecruit and bring further improvements to our recruitment offering by introducing Digital ID checks in January 2024. With a digital ID and right to work checks platform, the entire process will be streamlined and automated. It will eliminate the need for manual paperwork and reduce the time and effort required for verification, leading to quicker and more efficient onboarding of new employees.

Exit and stay interviews.

24. A corporate approach to exit and stay interviews is being investigated ready for implementation during 2024. This will replace the local arrangements in some services who currently have exit interviews to assist retention insights.

Reward & Recognition

25. Following an employee engagement survey in 2023 we will be reviewing the long service award and wider corporate recognition in 2024. Results of the survey are being used by the Directorates to inform local recognition activity. The Reward Team are continuing to consider what new corporate benefits could be launched in the future as well as considering how we develop local benefits within Staffordshire.

Employee Benefits

26. The uptake in our reward and benefits platform Vivup, continues to increase from the initial target of 27% in the first six months, which was achieved following launch in December 2021. Employee registration now currently sits at 66% in quarter two of 2023.

New Innovation Awards

27. To support the Innovation and Creativity Programme a new awards scheme is being designed and will be launching in 2024.

Work Experience

28. To support managers who require a work experience candidate guidance document will be created along with a dedicated page on SharePoint. Many business areas hosted work experience opportunities during the summer term. This work will support significant increase in 2024.

Pillar - Promoting a positive working environment.

How we Work

29. We launched our 'How we work' document in October 2023, which helps to put our values into action. Since the launch the site has been viewed by over 500 individuals from across the council.

SMART Working Guide

30. A new guide has been created to reflect our continued approach to smart working. The smart guide offers guiding principles on the What, When How and Why within a flexible framework, alongside some practical tools. There are activities and templates within the smart guide that support reflection on current practices and guidance to support with the creation of team charters. Since the launch in October 2023 the new smart page and guide have had visits over 1000 times which is a **447%** increase on visits and viewers from the previous month.

WellMe

31. Our wellbeing offer has been enhanced with additional tools and support across all four themes. A health and wellbeing calendar of events covering topics such as Menopause, Eating healthy on a budget, Burn out and Bounce Back, Thriving in a Hybrid World runs throughout the year. 60 Domestic abuse champions have been trained to support this critical issue. Our financial wellbeing offer has been enhanced to implement Salary Advance to allow employees access to their pay as its earned. The offer includes a wide range of support to help with the impact of the cost of living. We have also completed NPS surveys of our ThinkWell (89) and Physio (84) support achieving excellent feedback outcomes. ThinkWell is accessed by 8% of our people and physio by 5% of our people.

We Talk Toolkit

32. The refreshed We talk toolkit was launched in November 2023 to ensure our leaders and managers have the necessary tools and skills to manage their staff. The 6 aims of We Talk toolkit are:
    a. Connect to the Organisation
    b. Clarify Expectations
    c. Check in Regularly.
    d. Give and Receive Feedback
    e. Build the Team
    f. Resolve Issues Early

Post Covid 19 Syndrome

33. A support offer has been developed which is designed to support affected colleagues across the council.

Trauma Preparedness Training and Professional Resilience Pilot

34. This support is being offered to colleagues in Children & Families to equip them with the knowledge and skills and support our people after

a traumatic event. This support seeks to minimise the risk of people experiencing long-term psychological harm and addressing prevention and quick identification of when further support is needed.

WeResolve mediation service

35. A new mediation service has been launched to support managers to resolve workplace issues quickly. Managers and employees can refer to the service via the Advice and Guidance team, who will triage the matter and ensure it is appropriate to proceed for mediation or offer advice on other options to resolve issues informally.

ASK People Services

36. This product has resulted in a decrease in time to resolve queries by 0.5 days compared to 2022 when it launched.

People Policies Reimagined

37. Since the launch of the five key people policies of Disciplinary, Capability, Resolving Grievances, Anti Bullying and Harassment, absence, and an Appeals procedure, further polices have been updated including Flexible Working, Whistleblowing and Fostering Friendly.

Absence Reduction Plans

38. Following the introduction of the revised policy and supporting toolkits, we have a targeted programme of interventions including weekly absence reports, absence hotspot reviews, regular absence advice surgeries for managers to provide training and support, continued focus on return-to-work completions, Assistant Director absence deep dive meetings and a new occupational health referral process and guidance. Absence has reduced by 1.76 days in last 12 months. Occupational Health appointments have been delivered within 6.9 days calendar days following referral. 90% of reports with managers the same day. Occupational Health Net Promotor Score 50 achieved.

Coming Soon

New Health and Safety System Digital Modules

39. Three modules being implemented over next 3 years. Workstation Assessments being implemented in February 2024. The system has been designed and is currently undergoing user acceptance testing. This will reduce management activity and streamline processes whilst improving governance.

H&C Absence Pilot

40. The Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service has developed a business case which has been approved to implement additional occupational health activities to target absence reduction of both long- and short-term absence in Health & Care. We aim to launch this new approach in January 2024.

Revised Alcohol and Drug Misuse Policy

41. A revised Alcohol and Drugs Misuse Policy is under development for launch early in 2024. This Policy will be supported by new testing provider contract.

WeResolve

42. The next stage of development of the service is to provide training and support for managers to give them the confidence and skills to facilitate difficult conversations and resolve matters early to prevent matters escalating to formal procedures.

People Policies

43. More policies and processes are now being updated to reflect our People Strategy, values and contribute to promoting a positive working environment. Whilst we continue to work through reimagining our remaining policies we are now at a point where we can start to review the embedding of the big five policies as the first tranche were launched in September 2022.

Managing Change Well

44. A project group is working together to improve our policies, procedures, and processes to improve the change experience for the business and for our employees. This includes developing toolkits and support mechanisms for managers.

Health Care Cash Plans

45. Launching Spring 2024 are Health Care Cash Plans to support employees to purchase through their pay access to an insurance policy to meet the cost of routine healthcare such as dental for them and/or their family to support health and wellbeing.

Pillar Developing skills for now and in the future.

We Welcome

46. We have embedded our new induction approach to help colleagues in their first few critical months to feel safe, happy, and confident. With an NPS score currently standing at 54. The programme supports them in three ways:
    g. A warm welcome to the organisation and your team
    h. An understanding of the organisation
    i. Providing a way to hit the ground running.

Mandatory Training Manager

47. Dashboards providing managers with clear overview on completion rates for current mandatory training have been introduced. Compliance has improved on completion rates for Mandatory Training up to 62.8% with monthly improvements being seen.

Innovation and Creativity Programme

48. We are establishing a taskforce of 45 colleagues who will champion creativity and innovation across the County Council. We have launched ACE Idea campaign and held workshops for staff to ignite engagement and develop skills. To date 15 members of the taskforce have undertaken the training, four of which have become facilitators supporting the first Staffordshire Innovation Challenge, with others being used to facilitate Senior Leadership conferences and service away days and activities. The second cohort of 15 representing all directorates have begun their training with the third and final cohort commencing their training in April 2024.

Innovation Toolkit Pilot

49. A toolkit of resources have been developed to provide staff with information and guidance on creativity and innovation techniques. The toolkit was used as a test pilot with the Staffordshire Innovation Challenge and by the attendees of the Let's Get Ace events. Both the toolkit and events have been well received with 75% of attendees at the Let's Get Ace events accessing the toolkit, with an overall satisfaction of the learning experience as 4/5.

Love Learning Campaign

50. A 12-month campaign of learning designed to put some excitement and energy into what and how we learn. Every month will focus on a key

theme that is important to us as an organisation, with themes being drawn from our work, the people strategy, and the wider strategic plan. Ultimately creating a learning buzz and embedding a self-directed learning culture. Since launch there have been over **1000** visits to the Love Learning site, **9 live learning** sessions held in October with **5 Live** session in November with plans developed to the end of the year and into 2024.

Coming Soon

Mandatory Training

51. A full review of Mandatory Training is currently underway following the release of the new Manager dashboards in August 2023. The plan and way forward for Mandatory Training will be presented to SLT in December 2023 and implemented throughout 2024.

Learning Hub Review

52. Our learning management system and digital learning content contracts will be re procured at the end of 2024 to maximise the offer and ensure value for money.

Refreshed approach for Apprenticeships & Early Careers

53. We are working with the LGA to assist us to consider how best to utilise the Apprentice Levy as part of a wider Early Careers Strategy.

Pillar - Developing leaders for now and in the future

Employee Net Promotor Score (eNPS)

54. Our employee engagement tool (eNPS) shows us that between the period January 2022 to July 2023 more employees would recommend SCC to their friends and family as a place to work, positively impacting on our ability to retain and attract talented people. In the most recent wave culture, wider leadership and management support have become the largest topic of advocacy. The directorates have all made positive progress in their own areas and are using data from the eNPS to inform service-based activity and their People Strategy Directorate Delivery Plans. ENPS Score up from 11 to 26 in 18 months across SCC.

How we Lead

55. 'How we Lead' principles were launched in October 2023 to show leadership in action across 4 key themes:

a. We Deliver Results
b. We Drive Innovation
c. We Empower and Support
d. We Are Role Models

56. These will form the basis of a leadership development programme in 2024.

Leadership Conference on Creativity and Innovation

57. The May 2023 Senior Leadership Conference created the launch platform for our Creativity and Innovation programme. Led by Dr Mark Batey a leading expert approach to innovation activity and provide leaders with skills and awareness they can use immediately and build further on.

Coming Soon

Management Development and Leadership Development

58. A new management development and leadership development programme is being scoped for agreement and launch in 2024.

Workforce Planning

59. Work has commenced to identify and shape tools that will assist managers to effectively workforce plan.

People Strategy Directorate Delivery Plans

60. Each directorate is working towards its own Directorate Delivery Plan. This enables the wider workforce to engage in the People Strategy and for the directorates to focus on particular areas of challenge for their own areas as well as incorporating feedback from employees in those teams. Where they exist, the employee voice groups are working with colleagues to ensure that the plans are relevant and meaningful for all colleagues.

Link to Strategic Plan

61. Our Strategic Plan sets out our ambitions for our communities and our People Strategy mirrors these ambitions for our people.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

62. None identified.

Community Impact

63. A Community Impact Assessment was completed when we developed the People Strategy, and this has been kept under review and no additions or changes have been required to date.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – People Strategy 2023 – 2027
Appendix 2 – Community Impact Assessment – People Strategy.

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