

Title of report: Herefordshire Council's Human Resources and Workforce Strategy 2024 – 2028

Decision maker: Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services

Decision Date:

Report by: Head of Learning and OD / Director of HR & OD

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve, for implementation in April 2024 the council's Workforce Strategy 2024-2028.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) The content of this report is noted; and**
- b) The strategy be approved for implementation.**

Alternative options

1. The report could not be noted nor approved. This is not a recommended course of action as the workforce is one of the council's key priorities that is subject to scrutiny.

Key considerations

2. The council has a workforce strategy in place which covers the years 2021 – 2024. The strategy was written before the pandemic and although the strategy is current and reflects many of the aims and ambitions for our workforce, the strategy is silent on some important aspects of working in the council such as children’s improvement, our agile working programme which is called ‘Flexible Futures’ and our transformation and culture change programme called THRIVE as well as our emerging recruitment identity the ‘Spirit of Herefordshire’.
3. On 28 November 2022, the Scrutiny Management Board (SMB) considered Herefordshire Council’s Human Resources and Workforce Strategy. The committee were presented with a report and two supporting appendices presenting key human resources (HR) indicators and feedback from the recent employee survey.
4. The report presented included the key themes of the strategy and an update of progress made. There were several lines of enquiry and recommendations were made by the committee for consideration by the Cabinet Member. Due to circumstances and the timing of the local elections and a change in administration, no formal response to these recommendations has been offered, but the themes have been accommodated within the revised workforce strategy and referenced within this report.
5. One outcome of SMB in November 2022 was to bring forward the development of the next workforce strategy by a year (to September 2023) for launch in April 2024. The purpose of which is to be able to build on the Council’s key ambitions and integrate the County / Council Plan priorities into the strategy as a golden thread.
6. This requires new ways of thinking and working across the council. We have therefore undertaken engagement with the workforce to inform a new workforce strategy. This strategy will set out how we recruit, retain and support our workforce and ensure we have the skills and capabilities we need to deliver services in new ways for the future.

Drivers for change

7. The workforce strategy, has been shaped in response to a range of drivers which will create change within the council, including external factors and trends, themes within our key strategic plans, and internal and external challenges we face. It has been developed using feedback from employee engagement via a number of employee surveys, reviews, network group meetings and facilitated focus groups.
8. In addition, workforce drivers from children’s services improvement has also influenced the Workforce Strategy themes - if we are to build strong, trusting relationships with families and partners, we need a skilled and motivated workforce. We are reducing our use of agency staff, and investing in a clear focus on permanent recruitment and developing staff internally. Although recruitment in a number of our services is a challenge, both regionally and nationally the inter-connected themes within the strategy will support retention of staff and seek to attract new talent to the council.
9. However there is more that can be done. The Council needs to review and benchmark its terms and conditions that create the conditions to support and retain its workforce talent, demonstrating an inclusive culture. Analysis and insight highlight that we need to do more to demonstrate inclusivity and improve staff engagement. Building a more engaged workforce means our staff will be more receptive to change and drive higher performance which in turn drives better outcomes for local residents.

10. The workforce itself is also changing. There are different expectations and aspirations regarding work, career and life, while retirement has changed and evolved for many. This is why a workforce strategy for 2024-28 is being developed early to set out the council's commitment to its workforce. The strategy will support the commitments in the County Plan and will provide a clear promise to our current and future workforce to make the experience of working for us a collaborative, inclusive, productive and happy one.

Developing the new Workforce Strategy

11. The workforce strategy has been developed during a number of sessions. Staff were asked to discuss and share their experiences of working for the council. The session content took an appreciative inquiry approach that led to good insight from the workforce.
12. The feedback was reviewed and several key themes were emerging. The developing themes were explored at a later date with the leadership group (recruitment and retention, health and wellbeing, equality, inclusion and belonging, employee engagement, appreciation and recognition, learning and development and leadership development).
13. The themes have been the primary focus in developing the workforce strategy objectives further. The themes and objectives are at the core of the new workforce strategy and SMB are asked to comment on these themes:
 - a. **Culture and Belonging** - To achieve a truly inclusive workplace that embraces, celebrates and values the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, experiences and talents of our employees.
 - b. **Employee Experience** – To become an employer of choice, recognised for fostering a dynamic and inclusive workplace that attracts, retains and empowers top talent through exceptional and meaningful employee experiences.
 - c. **Wellbeing and Engagement** - Support a thriving and resilient workforce through physical, mental, emotional and social health, fostering and empowering a positive, engaging and safe work environment.
 - d. **Inspirational Leadership** – Grow and develop respected, empathetic and compassionate leaders at all levels, empowering them with the skills to inspire, guide others and drive the council forward.
 - e. **Agile and Adaptive Workforce** – Build a workforce that can quickly adapt and respond to new challenges, embrace and navigate change and thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape.
 - f. **Learning and Development** – maximise the potential of our workforce by prioritising continuous learning, enhancing employee capabilities to foster growth and support career progression.
14. Each objective is supported in the strategy by a number of key priorities and intended outcomes are also identified for each. Measures of success have been identified and will be monitored throughout the lifecycle of the strategy. All of these, if realised, will ensure we have a capable and talented workforce empowered to deliver the Council's priorities and ambition whilst being supported to thrive.
15. The Workforce Strategy is attached as Appendix 1.

16. Contained within the strategy is also a new workforce commitment. During the engagement sessions our workforce told us that they are seeking a consistent experience across the council and described this as a commitment towards them as part of their employment offer. Therefore, in addition to the new core values we are proposing a council wide workforce commitment. The commitment provides consistency of expectation and of treatment across the council and is a two-way expectation.
17. The commitment being regardless of who or what position is held within the council “we will trust, respect, appreciate, support, engage, empower and develop you”. This is so that all staff can be their authentic, best version of themselves and thrive at work.

New values and behaviours

18. The Council has also taken the decision to refresh its core values and supporting behaviours to ensure that they reflect the culture of the council and act as our DNA in all that we do.
19. The values and behaviours have been developed from co-production sessions with staff and leaders across the council when discussing their expectations and vision of our council culture. As we aspire to attract the very best talent and retain our current workforce the workforce commitment, along with the values and behaviours, sit at the core of our workforce strategy.
20. Following research, engagement, analysis and testing out of the proposed values they are being recommended as trust, honesty, responsibility, inclusivity, value and empathy – THRIVE values.

Next steps: developing and implementing the strategy

21. The workforce strategy has been developed through strong staff engagement to create a clear mutuality of expectation between us an employer and the workforce.
22. Phase one engagement and consultation involved the Corporate Leadership Team, Leadership Group, HR&OD service, UNISON, all staff through an all staff briefing and open workforce sessions, including sessions with all of our employee networks. These were a combination of face to face and online sessions.
23. Phase two and following on from the initial period of engagement a well-developed first draft strategy was been developed. This draft was further consulted upon with the Corporate Leadership Team, Trade Unions, the HR & OD service and the Cabinet Member. A report detailing the approach to the development of the strategy and high level themes for discussion was circulated to Scrutiny Management Board (SMB).
24. Following SMB further work has been undertaken with the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Trade Unions. The draft attached will need final tweaks as the County Plan is also being revised at the same time. There are minor tweaks that will be required to the context of the strategy. The themes and details of the workforce strategy will not be amended.
25. Subject to the strategy being approved a communications plan for implementation has been developed and it is proposed to launch the new values and behaviours on 24 April at an all staff briefing and the strategy, along with other key strategies at a special all staff briefing in May.

Community impact

26. The council has a County Plan, Delivery Plan and ambitious THRIVE transformation programme, as well as a number of other council priorities such as the Children's Improvement Plan. This ambition for Herefordshire public services and our communities requires a talented, diverse, committed, engaged and high performing workforce to deliver and realise our priorities. In order to deliver the commitments set out, we must ensure that we have an aligned workforce strategy that is developed to recruit, retain and invest in a skilled and well-trained workforce.
27. A key priority for the council has been improving the services we provide to our children and young people. Whilst there is a dedicated children's and young people improvement plan and workforce strategy the council workforce strategy sets the overall strategic framework to attract, retain and develop our workforce.
28. The term 'corporate parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for children who are looked after by the council. Being a good corporate parent means we should; accept responsibility for children in the council's care; make their needs a priority; and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

Corporate parenting responsibilities are not confined to elected members. All officers share the responsibility to promote the needs of looked after children. Key responsibilities of all officers are: to promote the life chances of looked after children and care leavers in their area of responsibility; and to consider the impact of decision making on looked after children and care leavers.

The workforce strategy will ensure that where identified and relevant to do so, opportunities to support those in our care will be realised.

Environmental Impact

29. Whilst this is a decision on back office functions and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy.

Equality Duty

30. The workforce strategy embeds specific actions for the Council to reflect the range of equality, diversity and inclusion people related issues identified through staff engagement sessions. The strategy also seeks to ensure that we are delivering against best practice and to achieve our aspirations to be an employer of choice.

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 31. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
- 32. The implementation of the Workforce Strategy will have a significant, positive, impact on our council compliance with the Equality Act. The proposed themes will enhance diversity by recruiting, developing and retaining talent from a broad spectrum of backgrounds and with different protected characteristics. This allows the Council to benefit from a wider pool of skills, perspectives and experiences. This not only enriches the potential of the workforce but also fosters a sense of belonging for staff and seeks to improve employee experiences working for the Council and encourages retention with an employer that values and supports diversity and equality. The implementation of focussed work, to be identified as part of the strategy, should have a ripple effect in the broader community and recruitment pool beyond Herefordshire.
- 33. As part of the development of the strategy employee networks have contributed to shape the strategy. Several of the networks over the past 12 months have been formed and have, in some networks, an affinity with some of the nine protected characteristics of the Equalities Act. The Diff-Abilities (disability), LGBTQ+ (sexual orientation), Black and Asian (race) and Parents and Carers (gender) networks have been consulted from an equality perspective.

Resource implications

- 34. The workforce strategy is a council-wide strategy and any financial implications arising from the implementation of this strategy or new initiatives will need to be met from within existing budgets.
- 35. Digital, data and new technology are impacting on both quality and customer expectations, and therefore our digital strategy and workforce strategy must be closely aligned, to build capacity and deliver digital systems, whilst ensuring the right people are in place to deliver different customer services. Interactions and ways of working with both partners, and residents are therefore being transformed. There is therefore a need to develop the skills of our workforce to meet the needs and raised expectations of our residents, in addition to the changing requirements of the council.

Legal implications

- 36. There are no specific legal implications other than those considered in other parts of this report.

Risk management

- 37. The workforce strategy reflects activities that will mitigate against the following corporate risks:

Risk / opportunity Mitigation	Risk / opportunity Mitigation
There is a reputational risk to the council if the scrutiny function does not operate effectively.	The arrangements for the development of the work programme should help mitigate this risk.
The inability to recruit and retain staff.	The workforce strategy will support new ways of addressing this need.
Failure to adhere to the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.	Appropriate measures are in place to ensure compliance.
Failure to comply with HR related legislative requirements.	HR policies, procedures and training is being developed to help support line managers in their responsibilities.

Consultees

38. Phase one engagement and consultation has involved the Corporate Leadership Team, Leadership Group, HR&OD service, UNISON, all staff through an all staff briefing and open workforce sessions, including sessions with all of our employee networks. These have been a combination of face to face and online sessions.
39. The contribution from all parties has shaped the strategy's themes and contributed to the development of the new THRIVE values and behaviours.
40. Phase two, following Scrutiny Management Board included a further all staff briefing, CLT and trade union engagement.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Herefordshire Council Workforce Strategy 2024-2028

Background papers

None.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published		
Governance	Jen Preece	Date 02/04/2024
Finance	Wendy Pickering Karen Morris	Date 27/03/2024 26/03/2024
Legal	Sean o'Connor	Date 25/03/2024
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 25/03/2024

Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 03/04/2024
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 25/03/2024
Risk	Lee Washbrook	Date 02/04/2024

Approved by	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
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Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Organisational Development (OD)	Organisational development is defined differently between organisations. At the Council OD has a strategic focus on culture, workforce planning and talent management, employee engagement, health and wellbeing, equality, change, improvement and learning and development. Our vision is “Creating and supporting a thriving organisational culture and environment to enable the workforce to belong and succeed”. At heart everything we do is to ensure the Council is a good employer that attracts new and retains talent that are engaged and perform for the best interests of our residents and customers.
Workforce Strategy:	A comprehensive plan and set of actions designed to align the Council’s workforce with its strategic goals and objectives.
Recruitment:	The process of identifying, attracting, and hiring qualified candidates to fill job vacancies within the Council.
Retention:	Strategies and initiatives aimed at keeping talented employees within the Council and reducing turnover.
Culture:	The shared values, beliefs, and behaviours that define the identity and character of the Council – our DNA and the way we do things around here.
Employee capabilities:	The collective skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities of the Council’s employees.
Employee Engagement:	The level of emotional commitment and dedication that employees have toward their work and the Council.
Training and Development:	Activities and programs designed to enhance the skills, knowledge, and abilities of employees to perform their jobs effectively and advance their careers.
Employee Networks:	Employee networks are voluntary, employee-led groups within the Council that have been formed based on shared characteristics or interests. They provide a platform for employees to connect with others who have similar backgrounds, experiences, or affiliations and are focused on promoting change and improvement from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective within the workplace.
Appreciative Inquiry:	Appreciative Inquiry is a problem-solving and change management approach that focuses on identifying and building upon an organisation's strengths, positive experiences, and successes rather than dwelling on its weaknesses or problems. It is a philosophy and methodology that seeks to create a positive and sustainable transformation within an organisation.

Values:	Values are the fundamental beliefs, principles, and ethical standards that guide and shape the culture, behaviour, and decision-making. The values should serve as a moral compass for the Council and the workforce. The values help influence how we interact with each other, customers, partners, and the broader community.
Behaviours:	Workforce behaviours refer to the observable actions, interactions, and conduct of the Council and the workforce. The behaviours are influenced by various factors, including the Council's culture, values, policies, and leadership. Workforce behaviours play a crucial role in shaping the work environment, contributing to the achievement of goals, and reflecting the Council's identity.
Employee Feedback:	Employee Feedback: