

## **Title of report: Herefordshire Council's Human Resources and Workforce Strategy**

**Meeting:** Scrutiny Management Board

**Meeting date:** 28 November 2022

**Report by:** Director of Human Resources and Organisational  
Development

### **Classification**

Open

### **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

### **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of progress against the strategic aims in the council's workforce strategy.

### **Recommendation(s)**

1. That the committee note the report.

### **Alternative options**

2. The committee could choose not to note the report. This is not recommended as scrutiny management board is a key part of the council's scrutiny function and workforce is one of the council's key priorities.

### **Key considerations**

3. The Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR and OD) function is broad and impacts all parts of the council. This report focuses on the key lines of enquiry identified by the committee's work planning process.

## **The HR Function**

4. The council's HR and OD function delivers three key areas of activity; employee relations, organisational development and health and safety. Employee relations refers to the HR work which is undertaken working closely with managers and services. This may include managing casework such as disciplinary, grievance, absence and performance or supporting change programmes and workforce planning activities. A key area of work for the employee relations side of HR has been supporting the improvement work in children's with particular emphasis on social work recruitment and retention. The employee relations team has received additional investment in 2021 to support the significant demands of supporting the children's improvement work.
5. The OD function leads on council-wide initiatives which aim to create the best possible working environment for staff to be able to succeed and deliver the council's strategic aims. Equality, diversity and inclusion for staff has moved to this service in the last 6 months. The team focuses on areas such as leadership, talent management, learning and development, culture, staff engagement and wellbeing. This team started from a very low base of investment but it now has sufficient resource to make a difference in these key areas of work.
6. The health and safety team comprises two advisers, one of whom leads on support for corporate teams and the second focuses on ensuring we have a robust health and safety policy framework for maintained schools.
7. Transactional HR activity such as HR administration, payroll and recruitment is provided by the council's majority owned limited company called Hoople Limited.

## **The Workforce Strategy**

8. The council has a workforce strategy in place which covers the years 2021 – 2024. The strategy was written before the pandemic and before the appointment of the council's chief executive. This means that 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 culture change programme called the 'Spirit of Herefordshire'.
9. The council needs a strategy that resonates with the workforce and it is therefore intended to bring forward the production of our next workforce strategy by a year so that we can build on these key ambitions.
10. A summary of progress to date against the aims of the current strategy is set out in paragraphs 12 to 35.

## **Workforce Strategy Achievements – Leadership Development**

11. Delivering successful leadership programmes requires sustained work and momentum, both of which were lost during the pandemic but this has now been regained.
12. A three-year contract for the provision of leadership development programmes was established in 2018. The programmes were aimed at:

- a. New managers in their first management role wanting to learn some of the fundamentals of leadership and management;
  - b. Experienced managers who had been in a management role for a while who wanted to refresh their approach and consider different ways of working;
  - c. Aspiring managers with potential to move into management who wanted to undertake some development to prepare them for the challenge of promotion.
13. A total of 117 participants have successfully completed one of the above programmes. Alumni refresher sessions were held during quarter one of 2022.
14. In January 2020 a Future Leaders programme was launched and 16 staff were accepted onto the programme. Unfortunately, due to covid and senior management changes the programme did not complete but lost focus and momentum. A review of the cohort will take place to assess its suitability for future fast track retention and promotion of internal talent.
15. Post covid and as flexible futures has been launched, the design and expectations of leadership are changing. As the council needs to transform the way that it works, it will require different skillsets of its managers and leaders, particularly in managing by outcomes and impact and within hybrid teams. Therefore, the existing leadership development programmes were not re-commissioned for 2022. A review of leadership will commence in November 2022 with a view to modernise the leadership development programme offer to meet the future need of the council and its leaders. Once reviewed a new procurement exercise will be undertaken to find a development partner for re-launch in 2023 or the next three years.
16. At the same time, an apprenticeship framework is being developed which will exploit the use of the apprenticeship levy and professionalise the role of a line manager through either CMI or ILM accreditation and qualification at level three and five of the leadership and management standards.
17. Collaborating with other organisations for wider system leadership experiences is also essential as we seek new and external perspectives and experimental development opportunities. The council has entered a team in the 2022 West Midlands Tri-Sector Challenge. Experiences such as these remain a high priority as part of the learning offer.
18. Underpinning all leadership development is how learning and new skills are applied and mastered whilst operating in the role. To support, in line with the commitment to develop a coaching style approach to line management, between 2019 – 2021 a series of “coaching essentials for managers” was delivered to 70 staff. The sessions were well received and feedback suggested that more was required across the organisation.
19. More work, however, is required to embed a coaching style approach in leadership across the council. Coaching will underpin the council’s new approach to appraisal which is called ‘My Conversation’ and the modernised approach to managing by outcomes and differing working styles. Work has started on the development of a coaching framework for the council due to launch in January 2023 and which will include:
- a. Coaching skills development for all
  - b. Differentiated development for line managers
  - c. The development of an internal coaching pool, again using the apprenticeship levy to upskill existing workforce to lead as internal coaches; and

- d. Signposting to external coaches where required.
20. Work is still to be undertaken, as a second phase during 2023-24 to develop and facilitate mentoring skills across the council. An exploration of the type of mentoring required is needed, however, all skills will support equality and inclusion, performance, and retention.
21. In December 2021 a new approach to line manager induction was introduced following review. Line managers either receive a personalised induction or a small group is established from within the same directorate, facilitated by a member of the HR team. However, recent feedback suggests that there is more that needs to be done to ensure a quick and efficient induction for those in line manager roles therefore further work is to be undertaken. A line managers' resource hub has also been created to welcome and support new line managers to the council.

### **Workforce Strategy Achievements – Recruitment and Retention**

22. The council, like every local authority across the country has seen significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff. The national shortage of workers to fill vacancies has been well reported and covers all sectors as organisations compete to fill vacancies.
23. Although the recruitment and retention challenges span nearly every service within the council there have been particular challenges within social care. The council has addressed these challenges by focusing a significant proportion of its HR resource on recruitment and retention and although there is still much to do, some of the key activities and work in progress to date are:

#### **Recruitment**

- a. Streamlining recruitment processes for managers and candidates
- b. Creation of simplified guides and training for managers
- c. Advice, guidance and support for recruiting managers
- d. Auditing our current processes to ensure they are fit for purpose and areas such as employment checks are robust
- e. Focusing on our advert content to tell our story, be clear on our roles and offer and sell Herefordshire as a great place to live and work
- f. Enhancing our advertising reach through using go-to advertising routes such as social media platforms and specialist sites such as Indeed and Community Care
- g. Holding recruitment events for particular roles to give the best candidates experience
- h. Utilising agency workers to cover vacancies whilst permanent recruitment is completed
- i. Utilising project teams to clear backlogs of work and cover vacancies
- j. Using specialist recruitment agencies to source the best candidates in the market for senior roles across the organisation
- k. Holding recruitment fairs in schools, colleges and local community forums
- l. Introduction of welcome payments for social care roles
- m. Branding our recruitment for particular areas such as children's social care
- n. Creation of dedicated microsites for senior recruitment campaigns
- o. Creation of a dedicated microsite for social care – launching in November 2022
- p. Researching other recruitment avenues such as international recruitment to aid longer term recruitment challenges

## **Retention**

- a. Launching our flexible futures policy across the organisation to ensure our ways of working are agile and reflect the market and therefore attract and retain people in the organisation
- b. Benchmarking our pay and benefits package against neighbouring authorities for hard to recruit roles to ensure we are competitive
- c. Enhancing our offer through using market forces supplements where there is a business case to do so
- d. Enhancing our offer through the re-procurement and launch of our voluntary benefits scheme and annual leave purchase scheme
- e. Strong focus on our well-being and support offer for employees
- f. Focus on personal and professional development
- g. Offering a range of internal secondment and acting up opportunities to develop internal talent and succession pathways
- h. Introduction of retention payments for social care roles
- i. Introduction of career graded roles within some services
- j. Looking how best to enhance our apprenticeship offer and use apprenticeship as a future pipeline of talent

## **Workforce Strategy Achievements – Learning and Development**

24. Learning and development opportunities are now an important part of our employment offer to staff; they support attraction, development and retention of talent. In addition to the leadership development offer there has been a consistent core offer for the workforce. Listed below are some of the sessions that have been available to the workforce and line managers from 2019:

- a. Recruitment and induction training for line managers
- b. Revised induction offer
- c. Meaningful conversations training
- d. Conducting My Conversation workshops
- e. Making virtual working work for line managers
- f. Mental health awareness and skills sessions for line managers
- g. Mental health first aiders training and peer support
- h. The 'art of being brilliant' and 'bouncebackability'
- i. Building personal resilience
- j. A suite of Covid 19 wellbeing sessions – yoga, Zumba, breathing, mindfulness and physical activity HIIT
- k. MS Teams and digital skills
- l. Conflict management and personal safety
- m. A range of skills development delivered by Hoople – assertiveness train the trainer, presentation skills, conflict and de-escalation, continuous improvement
- n. Unconscious bias

26. The workforce strategy prioritises resilience and wellbeing, in a post covid world. The changing landscape of personal and organisational health means that the health and wellbeing offer is constantly changing and increasingly becoming demanding as the council seeks to meet individual physical mental, social and financial needs. There has been a consistent investment into supporting mental health awareness development sessions. There has also been an investment in equality, inclusion and belonging by purchasing a new suite of equality eLearning modules covering a range of subjects from 'ally ship' through to understanding bias. There is more to be done.

27. As the council increases its employee engagement and equality work it also seeks new and informative ways to signpost the workforce to new and good quality resources, either through accreditation with external bodies or development of in-house resources. Increasing the eLearning offer and the introduction of coaching culture will provide additional self-led resources. The council continues to grow additional resources such as the 'headspace app', 'ask bill' and other resources through our new benefit provider. All contributing to the wider benefits of working for the council.
28. The council continues to perfect the mandatory learning cycle and provision of mandatory eLearning offer. This portfolio of compliance learning is to protect individuals and the council and fulfil statutory obligations around health and safety, safeguarding and information governance. The council aims to achieve a 95% completion rate each year across all modules.
29. The recent employee survey was used to survey staff on the Learning & Development offer and as such a number of developments have been identified:
- The need to revise the Learning & Development offer
  - Offer more social and wellbeing activities to support mental health and reduce isolation
  - Review corporate induction

### **Workforce Strategy Achievements – Culture, Recognition and Reward**

30. Continually working on the council's employer brand and rewarding and recognising the workforce requires individual and specific investment and attention. During covid much work was undertaken to listen and recognise the work and effort of staff. How we now move post covid to normalise this work will be a focus from 2023. The investment of new resources within the learning and OD team will specifically focus on how we listen, engage, appreciate and recognise the workforce. The 2022 employee survey reinforced the need to invest in this area.
31. The council is not starting from a blank page. A new format all staff briefings led by the Chief Executive now includes workforce praise and recognition, the weekly Chief Executive update also highlights services, teams and individuals. As the council builds its new employer brand and bring the Spirit of Herefordshire to life, the new employee engagement concept of 'help us grow' and 'if you grow, we grow' will be shaped.
32. Including the voice of the workforce in what the council does do by engaging, asking and listening more has been well done through the use of the change and wellbeing champions in phase one of flexible futures. There are also plans to widen the Chief Executive's staff panel into a workforce engagement group.
33. In 2022 there has been a focus to widen the employee benefits offer. The council has:
- a. Signed up to 'gems at work' and 'perks at work'
  - b. Re-procured and launched a new benefits provider
  - c. Transitioned to a new employee assistance provider
  - d. Developed and launched initiatives such as 'coffee connections' which help staff informally connect with colleagues
  - e. Developed and launched a new annual leave purchase scheme
  - f. Introduced recruitment and retention payments

34. During 2023/24 there will continue to be a focus to widen the offer available to staff, including a review of HR policy provision, wider salary sacrifice schemes, introduce long service recognition and an employee appreciation programme for 'moments that matter'.
35. All of the work contributes to the council's culture change programme. The change programme will be led by our values and behaviours and ensure they are embedded in all that we do. HR&OD will actively support wider transformation programmes such as process and digital transformation ensuring that people are ready for change and have a growth mind-set. Change is inevitable and uncomfortable. Ensuring that the council role models change and places people at the heart of the change, providing them with the best organisational climate for them to succeed underpins all the council's OD work.

## **Performance Reporting**

36. The performance reporting framework for HR, like many of our services is under-developed but significant work is underway by the performance team to improve our performance reporting using the Microsoft tool called Power BI
37. Notwithstanding that work, the council collects a range of data that is used to monitor the health of the organisation from a HR perspective and produces a monthly data set of key indicator as a matter of routine. The routinely produced data set includes absence, turnover, agency spend, headcount and mandatory training completion rates. It is shared with directorates but it is unclear the extent to which it is used.
38. An annual health and safety report with quarterly updates is produced for the Cabinet Member and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). This ensures senior leaders are sighted on accident and incident trends.
39. The council's quarterly performance report is received by CLT and Cabinet and highlights some aspects of HR performance such as absence and mandatory training completion rates. Key diversity data such as the gender pay gap is reported annually and published on the council's website.
40. The committee has identified key measures it would like included in this report and these are included in appendix 1.

## **Agency Workers**

41. The council recruits agency workers for two main purposes. Firstly to fill vacancies whilst permanent employees are recruited such as in social work posts. Secondly the council might need to hire an agency worker to fill a short term need for a specific skill or task where it is neither necessary nor possible to recruit on a permanent basis. The vast majority of the council's agency workers are supplied through Hoople's resourcing team. For specialist or senior posts, the council relies on specialist recruitment agencies to provide suitably qualified and skilled agency workers.
42. In most cases, the council would prefer to have permanent staff in post and aims to reduce reliance on agency workers. However, agency workers are an important and valuable resource. The market for agency workers is highly competitive and it's essential that the council is able to provide a good working environment where agency workers are valued. Ultimately it is hoped that some agency workers will decide to transfer onto

the council's permanent staff and a simple 'Agency to Perm' process is in place to encourage this.

43. The table below shows the council's agency spend over the last 5 years. Please note that the data below does not include spend where managers have recruited specialist or senior agency workers directly from specialist recruitment agencies.

	Agency Spend (£000)				
	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020 – 2021	2021-2022
Economy & Environment	559	503	471	321	725
Children & Young People	813	1,719	1,791	2,173	5,985
Community Wellbeing	1,055	959	857	1,129	1,840
Corporate Services	-	-	768	1,155	2,098
<b>Council as a whole</b>	<b>2,427</b>	<b>3,181</b>	<b>3,887</b>	<b>4,447</b>	<b>10,948</b>

## Staff Feedback

44. The council's staff survey had a fundamental review this year. The previous survey was held in 2019 and as significant change has happened since then, the new survey was designed to understand, at a deeper level, how people feel about working for the council. There were also a number of validating open questions meaning the council could more accurately understand the workforce sentiment and more importantly help to target change and address needs.
45. A summary of the outcomes can be found in Appendix 2.

## Leavers' feedback

46. The council-wide exit interview process offers two feedback routes for staff leaving the council. Leavers can complete an online exit survey or request a face to face exit interview with their line manager or another appropriate person. To try to encourage staff to share their feedback as part of the exit interview process, an electronic alert is automatically sent to those staff who are leaving reminding them of the exit interview process and providing a hyperlink to the online exit survey.
47. The data from completed online exit surveys is captured centrally, whereas records of face to face exit interviews are held locally by managers and therefore this summary does not include data for face to face exit interviews conducted with managers.
48. During the previous 12 months (August 2022 – August 2021) there were 262 leavers and of these leavers 106 completed the online questionnaire. This amounts to a response rate of 40.45%.
49. The key positive themes from leavers have been that the council has a positive and supportive culture, staff are well equipped to do their jobs, they feel trusted to get the job done, they are supported to do well, induction was good and they reported a good sense of commitment to the community to deliver good services.
50. Leavers reported the key areas where the council could improve as being pay and conditions, career progression opportunities, clear organisational direction, better



leadership and better access to training. Overall, 72% of those completing the questionnaire would recommend the council as a good employer and 28% would not.

51. The highest completion rate from leavers were for staff leaving the Children's and Young People directorate which reflects the increased focus the council has had on capturing exit data in this area. There were some strong comments in respects of the pressures felt by social workers. These range from the lack of permanent staff within the teams and the high reliance on interim and agency staff, pressures felt by the current situation that the department finds itself in, and a lack of supervision with managers. Further detail on the exit data reported by leavers for this service was reported at Children and Young People scrutiny committee in February 2022 and a link to that report can be found [here](#).

## **Conclusion**

52. The committee is asked to note the progress made against the strategic aims of the council's workforce strategy which has been achieved against a backdrop of significant change and challenge. Despite the good progress, recruiting and retaining good staff remains the key workforce challenge for the next two years and having great leaders will be essential in ensuring the council is able to meet that challenge.

## **Community Impact**

53. In accordance with the adopted code of corporate governance, the council is committed to promoting a positive working culture that accepts, and encourages constructive challenge, and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements for accountable decision making, policy development and review. Topics selected for scrutiny should have regard to what matters to residents.

54. 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. The committee should be mindful of these responsibilities when undertaking scrutiny work.

## **Environmental Impact**

55. Whilst this is an update on the work programme 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**

56. 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.

57. 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. As this report concerns the administrative function of the children and young people scrutiny committee, it is unlikely that it will have an impact on our equality duty.

**Resource implications**

58. The costs of the work of the committee will have to be met within existing resources. It should be noted the costs of running scrutiny can be subject to an assessment to support appropriate processes.

59. The councillors' allowance scheme contains provision for co-opted and other non-elected members to claim travel, subsistence and dependant carer's allowances on the same basis as members of the council. If the committee agrees that co-optees should be included in an inquiry they will be entitled to claim allowances.

60. It is suggested that a scrutiny committee should only have one in-depth scrutiny task group inquiry running at a time.

**Legal implications**

61. The council is required to deliver a scrutiny function. The development of a work programme which is focused and reflects those priorities facing Herefordshire will assist the committee and the council to deliver a scrutiny function.

62. The Scrutiny Rules in Part 4 Section 5 of the Council's constitution provide for the setting of a work programme, the reporting of recommendations to the executive and the establishment of task and finish groups within the committee's agreed work programme.

**Risk management**

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.

**Consultees**

63. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate Services and Planning.

**Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Key HR measures
- Appendix 2 - Staff survey feedback

## **Background papers**

None identified