

Title of report: Workforce Strategy 2024-2027 - Development and Consultation

Meeting: Scrutiny Management Board

Meeting date: Tuesday 21 November 2023

Report by: Head of Learning and OD

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To provide an overview of the work undertaken to engage staff in the development of a new Workforce Strategy for the period April 2024 to March 2027 and seek views from Scrutiny Management Board on the emerging themes of the strategy.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Scrutiny Management Board note the content of this report; and**
- b) Provide views and any recommendations it wishes to make on the emerging themes of the strategy.**

Alternative options

1. The Board could choose not to note the report. 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’, 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 Plan priorities into the strategy.
6. Central to the new strategy will be a theme of a ‘one council’ approach where staff not only work within their directorates but are able to work across directorates and we aspire to “grow our own” to achieve a one council culture.
7. 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.

Drivers for change

8. 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.
9. 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.

10. 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.
11. 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 2024-27 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

12. 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. Engagement with staff has taken place over the past three months and the values are work in progress.
13. During these sessions everyone has been 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. Each group were asked:
 - a. What's working well at the Council?
 - b. What would you like to see introduced / what should we be doing more of?
 - c. What do you think are our workforce priorities?
 - d. What would be your vision for the council in 3 years' time?
 - e. Describe the current and future culture of the council?
 - f. What values should we embrace in the future?
 - g. Which behaviours should we reward / encourage / celebrate?
 - h. How can we be more inclusive and create belonging?

All themes identified were explored 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).

14. The sessions highlighted a strong employee voice that is seeking a council commitment towards them as part of their employment deal. Therefore, in addition to our core values we are proposing a council wide workforce commitment to our workforce, that supports how we will work together and behave. The commitment provides consistency of expectation and of treatment across the council. The commitment being a two-way expectation.
15. In addition to the themes identified during the engagement sessions, feedback from SMB in January 2023 has also been taken into consideration, and where relevant, will incorporate:
 - a. A page within the strategy seeks to identify the golden thread of the County and delivery plan for staff. The linkages between these key strategic plans being essential for all of the workforce to understand how their role fits in to the bigger picture and how their contributions support the delivery of such strategic plans.
 - b. The workforce strategy is an overall strategy and seeks to deal with cross cutting organisation wide themes. It does not identify directorate specific actions. However, in the development of the strategy work has been undertaken with directorates to ensure synergy between directorate and council strategies.
 - c. The employee survey has been heavily utilised in the formation of the strategy and in the design of the engagement approach. We are now hearing that the council is engaging more with staff and that noticeable change is occurring.
 - d. There was a recommendation to measure time series data i.e. trend data further to a discussion about equality data reporting and the gender pay gap. Whilst the workforce strategy refers and includes strategies to reduce the gender pay gap and support equality, both pieces of work require more in-depth work and analysis. Therefore the workforce strategy is not an in-depth action plan addressing these points. To address the female to male ratio there is an emphasis within the new strategy to implement new policies and practices that support the balance of the workforce.
 - e. One of the key trends and areas for discussion during phase one engagement and as a key line of enquiry from SMB is recruitment and retention. The whole strategy, with all interconnected themes wrap around the need to recruit and retain a more permanent workforce.
 - f. The final line of enquiry from January 2023 was around learning and development. This is so prominent a theme that it has a whole section attributed. It is important that the financial support for learning and development is not reduced over time and prioritisation of developmental time within services is given to staff. To grow our own, recruit and promote internally and be seen as an employer of choice, it is crucial that our holistic offer, including learning and development is of good quality for staff.

New values and behaviours

16. The draft values and behaviours have been developed from the 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, sits at the core of our workforce strategy.

17. 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 at work and thrive.
18. At an all staff briefing on 26 April 2023 all staff were informed that work had commenced to change the council values. Staff were given an opportunity to submit their views of which values, for them, embody the council culture and future aspirations. The document attached as appendix one illustrates the outcome of the analysis. It shows by illustration staff feedback and the top three values following analysis. Work has commenced on defining the top three values. More work is required to cross-reference the values and test them out with the workforce and at CLT.
19. Upon analysis, several key themes emerged from our conversations with the workforce, these are stated below in bold. 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.
20. Each objective is supported in the draft strategy by a number of key priorities and intended outcomes are also identified for each. Measures of success will be identified and 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 that are supported to thrive.

21. Appendix one provides concept illustrations from the first draft of the strategy to provide a feeling for the look and feel of the final strategy.

Next steps: developing and implementing the strategy

22. The workforce strategy is being developed through strong staff engagement to create a clear mutuality of expectation between us as an employer and the workforce.
23. 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.
24. Following on from the initial period of engagement a well-developed first draft strategy has been developed. This draft has been consulted upon with the Corporate Leadership Team, Trade Unions, the HR & OD service and the Cabinet Member. It is not circulated to Scrutiny Management Board as this is a public report and open consultation with staff on the first draft has not yet commenced.
25. Following SMB we will be testing the emerging and final strategy with key workforce groups over the next couple of months but will continue to progress key activities that develop the conditions and environment to support our vision to become a high performing organisation. The timeline for future work on the strategy is:

Date	Audience	Activity
20 September – 10 November 2023	All staff open sessions Employee network groups	Consultation
7 November 2023	Scrutiny management board	Feedback and engagement
8 November 2023	All staff	All staff briefing update and values and behaviours consultation
13 – 24 November 2023	HR&OD	Revisions and sign off
5 / 12 December 2023	CLT	To approve strategy
December 2023	All services	To socialise the strategy and prepare to update documents, websites etc. ready for April 2024 launch
January 2024	Leadership Group	Soft launch
February 2024	All staff	Soft launch
April 2024	Whole council	Live

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 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

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 six 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 to this report at this point. As the strategy develops and in particular if the strategy does requires change, there would be a specific requirement for consultation with staff and (depending on change) representative bodies.

Risk management

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

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 emerging themes and contributed to the development of the new THRIVE values and behaviours.
40. Phase two, following Scrutiny Management Board will include face to face visits to office locations across the council to test out the strategy, specifically the new values and help shape the new behaviours so that they resonate with staff.

Appendices

Workforce Strategy development slides and all staff values feedback.

Background papers

None identified.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 26/10/2023
Finance	Judith Tranmer	Date 27/10/2023
Legal	Sean O'Connor	Date 26/10/2023
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 30/10/2023
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 27/10/2023
Risk	Kevin Lloyd	Date 27/10/2023

Approved by	Tracey Sampson, Director of HR&OD	Date 30/10/2023
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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:	Gathering and incorporating input and opinions from employees to improve workplace conditions, processes, and policies