

Cambridgeshire County Council People Strategy

To: Staffing and Appeals Committee

Date: 25th February 2021

From: Assistant Director HR Services

Purpose: To provide Committee with an update on progress with the People Strategy action plan, and to summarise the additional people related work carried out as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to note the information contained in the report.

Officer contact:

Name: Janet Atkin
Post: Assistant Director HR Services
Email: Janet.Atkin@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07775 024309

Member contacts:

Names: Councillor Joshua Schumann
Post: Chairman of the Staffing and Appeals Committee
Email: Joshua.Schumann@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of progress with the implementation of the Cambridgeshire County Council People Strategy, and to summarise the additional people related work carried out as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Summary

- 2.1 The People Strategy was approved by Full Council in May 2019. We presented progress of implementation at Committee in November 2019 and since this time significant progress has been made to continue to embed the aspirations outlined in the strategy.
- 2.2 Through the monthly People Strategy Implementation Board we are continuing to monitor progress against the People Strategy action plan to ensure a coherent, joined up approach to all people and workforce related activities.
- 2.3 Over the course of the past 12 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our employees. The places that we work, the need for employees to undertake new and different job roles, and the need for widespread reprioritisation of all that we do had to take place virtually overnight in March 2020. This has led to new ways of working providing both challenge and benefits as well as many lessons to be learnt from these new practices.
- 2.4 As a result of these learnings and challenges, the people strategy action plan was revisited and significantly updated through a series of workshops with members of the People Strategy Implementation Board in October 2020. The revised action plan can be seen in Appendix One. This report provides a summary of progress towards this action plan and demonstrates how some of these learnings will continue to shape our workforce and future People Strategies.
- 2.5 An overview of the current workforce profile is provided in Appendix Two for information.
- 2.6 Progress to date is summarised under the five strategy themes of:
- Resourcing
 - Employee Engagement
 - Wellbeing
 - Skills Development and Behaviours
 - Reward and Recognition

3.0 Resourcing

- 3.1 A careers and job section has been developed on our website and is now live. This page can be found at: [Jobs and Careers](#). This page enables us to showcase the Council as an employer and provides an area for us to proudly publish our achievements, for example the Disability Confident status that we have recently been reaccredited with.
- 3.2 As a disability confident employer we have proudly been assessed as thinking differently about disability, and have demonstrated that we take action to improve how we recruit, retain and develop people with a disability.
- 3.3 Work to streamline our recruitment processes started last year with a review of the Council's recruitment policy and associated documentation. Carried out in collaboration with the Equality and Diversity Network, the aim was to ensure that any

unconscious bias is challenged at any potential point in the process. Our e-recruitment system is being re-developed to provide the option for candidates to submit anonymous application forms – removing the need for candidates to disclose their name.

- 3.4 The manager's toolkit that accompanies the recruitment policy has been re-written and now places much more emphasis on equality as well as an increased focus on the use of social media – something that we acknowledge in the action plan as needing developing across the Council.
- 3.5 Alongside the updates to the policy, a new recruitment training course has been developed. This is now delivered virtually and jointly by the Recruitment and HR Advisory team in an interactive training event, ensuring that essential skills are developed in addition to the knowledge shared on recruitment processes. The training aims to ensure that managers across the organisation are clear on their responsibilities as a good employer, demonstrating how the reputation of the County Council can be affected both positively and negatively by the experiences candidates have during a recruitment process - whether they are successful or not in their application.
- 3.6 We now have a team of recruitment advisers dedicated to the management of vacancies and the candidates who apply for roles in People and Communities. This investment has enabled a complete change to the way we recruit in the directorate, particularly within social care services. The long traditional application form has been transformed to a timely interactive process that sees the candidate as the most important person in the process.
- 3.7 Attracting candidates into certain roles in this directorate is often a challenge so the context of a pandemic has required the recruitment team to be even more creative. Over the course of the past year, despite the pandemic, the reliance on agency workers continues to be kept to a minimum with the focus firmly on the attraction of permanent staff. To do this, the creative advertising approach developed is continually refreshed and the use of social media has been a primary method of reaching out to the audiences we want to draw.
- 3.8 This refreshed approach makes us more competitive in the market and able to attract and engage candidates who may also be registering their interest elsewhere, a primary objective of the People Strategy.
- 3.9 The Government announced the launch of the national Kickstart scheme in September 2020, providing funding to create new job placements for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long term unemployment. In order to apply for the scheme employers must be able to provide a minimum of 30 placements, or apply through a Kickstart Gateway organisation who can apply on and facilitate placements on behalf of other employers.
- 3.10 Cambridgeshire County Council applied to be a Kickstart Gateway and in January 2021 received confirmation that the application was successful. This means that we are now able to arrange placements for ourselves, as well as on behalf of Peterborough City Council and other partner organisations that wish to host placements.
- 3.11 We have already had a lot of interest from partners, and hope that we will start to host placements from March 2021. This scheme is an excellent way to attract younger employees to the Council and help them see the Council as an attractive employer whilst also giving us a mechanism to encourage some of our own care leavers into roles - both things that we have outlined in our people strategy as being priorities.

- 3.12 As a local authority, we were only able to utilise the Government's Furlough Scheme for a small number of roles in services that were externally funded, for example, the Outdoor Centres. The impact of COVID-19 meant that overnight, the workload for many services significantly increased whereas other services had work put on hold. A redeployment hub was set up to manage resources across the Council and as a result we were able to redeploy hundreds of employees to areas of need. This also gave us the ability to provide work to employees that had to work from home due to shielding, but could not carry out their substantive roles remotely. A survey sent out to employees who were redeployed identified that some employees really enjoyed their time in a redeployed role. This process which was established and set up, with template redeployment agreements and employee checklists, within a number of days was a great demonstration of how resource can be swiftly moved across the organisation to areas of demand – an aspiration within the People Strategy. The learnings from this will be considered in future policy reviews.

4.0 Skills Development and Behaviours

- 4.1 A priority for this theme has been the development of a new appraisal process for Cambridgeshire – “Our Conversations”. This piece of work has been developed alongside Peterborough City Council to implement an overarching performance management framework, removing the need for a burdensome paper based annual process. The new scheme was due to be launched in April 2020, but was delayed for one appraisal year due to Covid-19 and is on track to be in place for April 2021. Feedback from employee focus groups has had a direct influence over the proposed new model which will focus much more on robust and regular conversations with a strong wellbeing focus.
- 4.2 A new behaviours framework has been agreed and is being launched early 2021 with a 12-18 month rolling campaign to embed the values across the Council. In addition, “Our Values and Behaviours” will be fully integrated into the new performance management framework as well as other people related processes and policies such as recruitment and induction.
- 4.3 Our agile working policy has been rebranded to “Our Ways of Working” and fully reviewed to both encompass some of the learnings gained from the new ways we have been working over the past 12 months, and to also incorporate “Our Values and Behaviours”. Although seemingly very ambitious when launched in September 2019 the COVID-19 situation led to some very quick learning and developments in this area which, in part, has helped with the embedding of some of the agile principles.
- 4.4 We currently have 123 employees undertaking an apprenticeship qualification in a variety of professions and across a wide range of apprenticeship levels. We have many established apprenticeship frameworks in place across the Council and will continue to develop these over the next year, linking in with other initiatives such as the Kickstart scheme.
- 4.5 Aligning the principles of the ‘Our Ways of Working’ policy with the Cambs2020 programme has meant that we have been able to start planning the design of the hub and spokes buildings to facilitate agile working practices. Physical space configurations and furniture choices have taken the ways of working into consideration and as a result we have made changes to the way in which we propose to use the buildings space in a number of our office locations. In addition, training has been developed for managers and employees incorporating these new ways of working and these will continue to be delivered during 2021.
- 4.6 The Council took a corporate decision to extend all new employees probation review periods at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic meant that we had to look to recruit and engage in a different way including the induction of new

employees. This is something that we continue to work on as remote working continues.

5.0 Wellbeing

5.1 The Council's Respect@Work policy was reviewed in November 2020, 18 months after being launched, to ensure it was still fit for purpose and being used. Individuals who have used the policy were encouraged to provide feedback that led to a number of significant positive changes, including:

- Statements added to the policy providing examples of behaviours that are appropriate and ensuring that it is clear that the Council has a zero tolerance approach to any bullying or harassment.
- Adding a specific section about discrimination, covering all protected characteristics, but making it clear that as a Council we take a firm stance that discrimination isn't acceptable, rather than it just being a legislative requirement.
- A series of case studies were developed providing examples of behaviours deemed appropriate or inappropriate.

5.2 The Mental Health in the Workplace training that was provided to Directors in 2019 has rolled out across the Council. These sessions have been very positively received with feedback from the sessions being excellent. So far, over the past 12 months, 491 employees have attended the general Mental Health Awareness workshop. In response to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic and the difficulties that managers have expressed about continuing to support their teams remotely, an additional course was developed and roll out commenced in December 2020, specifically for managers. 32 people have attended this to date and further dates are planned.

5.3 The intense pressure on front-line services, coupled with a mass overnight move to wide-spread remote working in March 2020, presented an immediate need to ensure that engagement with our employees on their wellbeing was regular and effective. The existing Wellbeing Action Group, developed when the People Strategy was launched in 2019 and comprising colleagues from a range of services (HR, Public Health, Health & Safety, Communications), rapidly increased the level of activity ensuring that our workforce were supported through the changes.

5.4 The Wellbeing Action group launched a single landing page on the Council's intranet site in April 2020, collating all wellbeing topics and links to resources (The Wellbeing Portal). Since its launch this has generated 2,316 unique viewers and 9,187 visits. In addition, the group have led and developed the following during the COVID-19 situation:

- Regular promotion of wellbeing topics and resources via Wellbeing Tips, included in all staff bulletins and newsletters e.g. Friday Focus. There have been 83 staff bulletins, issued daily during lockdowns, and at least weekly outside of lockdown periods. Each of these has included at least one Wellbeing Tip, directing employees to resources and sources of support, both within and outside the Council. Additionally, these tips have been included in 45 newsletters since March 2020.
- Launch of Wellbeing Hours. This is an initiative intended to provide more in-depth information on wellbeing hot topics, via a virtual meeting, which is recorded in order to be available afterwards on the Wellbeing Portal. These sessions create an opportunity for people to come together from across the organisation, ask questions, give feedback, and feel part of a shared session. To date there have been 4 sessions, held once a month and these have been well attended:

- #1 Intro to wellbeing (September): 170 bookings + 288 combined views (CCC+PCC) for the summary article with replay video
- #2 Back Care (October): 142 bookings + 466 views
- #3 Mind calm space (November): 237 bookings (no recording available)
- #4 Alcohol awareness (December): 104 bookings + 159 views

Feedback is sought after each session and any questions asked in the chat are followed up with the relevant subject matter expert. For two of the sessions, 100% of participants answered that they found the session useful; the other two sessions were 85% and 95%, indicating a high degree of satisfaction.

- 5.5 Whilst most teams and employees have continued to work from home since March 2020, a process has been put in place whereby managers can request for members of their team to return to an office location when they have concerns about the individual's wellbeing. A Buildings Recovery Group was established by JMT to support this process comprising of Heads of Service from Business Improvement & Development, Property and HR and permission is granted to individuals where there is evidence that working from home is having a significant negative impact on their physical or mental wellbeing.
- 5.6 IT equipment has been provided for employees who are working from home, and a significant amount of support and information has been provided by our Health and Safety team on how to create a good work space at home, and work safely whilst acknowledging that not everyone has dedicated work areas at home.

6.0 Employee Engagement

- 6.1 Engagement with employees throughout this year has remained high, and despite the challenges caused by COVID-19, focus groups and policy and training pilots have continued to take place with employee engagement being even more of a priority during this time. Workshops, focus groups and staff consultations have taken place with different groups of employees to consider:
 - The Respect@Work policy review
 - The recruitment policy updates
 - Cambs2020 moves and changes to ways of working
- 6.2 Corporate communication has been particularly high since the start of the pandemic, with frequent, sometimes daily, all Officer Emails being sent out as national guidance is issued. Accompanying these messages has been a frequently asked questions document, managed by the HR team, and updated weekly in line with national or Council changes.
- 6.3 Office365, and with it Microsoft Teams and Yammer, has been launched over the past 12 months. This has proved to be an essential tool to encourage teams to get together virtually when we cannot meet in person.
- 6.4 We pride ourselves on our good working relationships with trade unions. In addition to the monthly Corporate Joint Panel meeting, we engage trade unions in all people related activity, have had trade union attendance at the recent focus groups and during the COVID-19 period we have held weekly or fortnightly meetings with all three recognised trade unions.
- 6.5 Specific COVID-19 engagement related actions included a Council wide wellbeing survey carried out in May 2020. The response rate for this survey was high with 1717 respondents and the resulting action plan was published. These plans are referred to regularly in identifying key topics, trends, and resources to promote via employee communications.

- 6.6 New monthly pulse engagement surveys have been launched focusing on specific topics. The first being Wellbeing and the second one Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The pulse surveys have proved to be a success with good response rates and will continue to be run monthly.
- 6.7 More recently, the introduction of the weekly 'The Covid Conversations' has been particularly popular and well received. These weekly Microsoft Teams sessions are hosted by the Chief Executive and other members of the Joint Management Team. The 25 minute sessions are open for all employees to join and they focus on a different subject each week. Up to 350 employees can join at any one time with the sessions also being recorded and posted on Camweb. Sessions to date have focused on the vaccination programme, balancing home schooling and working, and a Council financial update.

7.0 Reward and Recognition

- 7.1 The appraisal review has involved developing a new pay mechanism to progress employees through the Cambridgeshire pay scales, whilst retaining the performance related element of progression. Launched alongside this in April will be a promotion of existing reward and recognition mechanisms such as the Council's Honoraria scheme and the Employee Recognition scheme.
- 7.2 Long service awards have been re-introduced within the Council, providing recognition to long serving employees through shopping vouchers and a day's leave.
- 7.3 As a result of the COVID-19 situation and the increased pressure on all services at the start of the 2020/21 appraisal year, JMT took the decision to delay the requirement to set appraisal objectives to October 2020. Objectives set in October were proposed to cover the period October 2020 – March 2021.
- 7.4 As a thank you for keeping the Council's services running, all staff were given the three day break between Christmas and New Year as a thank you without having to use their annual leave entitlement. This was really positively received by employees and allowed the vast majority of our workforce to have a restful break over the Christmas period. For those that had to work over this period, the three days were able to be taken at an alternative time.
- 7.5 Additional guidance and detail to support the Council's Critical Incident Policy was developed in March 2020. This led to changes to simplify the Council's overtime rules ensuring that employees who were taking on extra hours to deal with COVID-19 related work could easily claim. Additionally, the grade restrictions for claiming overtime has temporarily been increased meaning that more employees can claim overtime for COVID-19 related work.
- 7.6 As the COVID-19 situation progressed, it became apparent that there was a large cohort of our relief employees that were not offered any work as they worked in services that were not operating or had much less work than normal. Our relief employees play an important role in our Council, many of them choosing to work regular hours despite not having any obligation to take on work that is offered to them. Legislatively, there was no obligation to offer these employees any work or pay for this period however, as the Furlough scheme was not available for Local Authorities to utilise, JMT took the decision to pay our relief employees 80% of their average pay for the months April – September. These staff were redeployed and paid their normal rate of pay where possible, but many of them typically work so few hours it was not always practical to train them into a new redeployed role. The pay offered to these individuals during this difficult time was well received and enabled us to retain them for when the services they work in started to open up again.

8.0 Next Steps

- 8.1 The resourcing related actions to focus on in the coming year will be to implement the Kickstart campaign, looking to integrate this with existing apprenticeship frameworks and Council career paths. Work is also planned to review how we can positively encourage applications from a more diverse candidate base through our advertising.
- 8.2 A new Working Ambition Board has been set up to take forward some of the HR, Property and IT related learnings from the COVID-19 period. This board will be key to outlining the roadmap of our vision as a Council and engaging our employees so we all understand how we can work differently and maintain the benefits that have been gained over the last year into the future. In addition, there will continue to be a significant amount of engagement with employees on the Cambs2020 programme as the physical move to new buildings is concluded during this year.
- 8.3 Wellbeing will remain an important priority for the next 12 months. The Wellbeing Action Group will continue to ask employee opinion on a number of wellbeing related topics through the regular pulse surveys and the monthly wellbeing hour.
- 8.4 Following the recent repatriation of the Learning and Development team from LGSS to HR Services within the Council, a new Head of Learning and Development has been appointed. A priority in this area for the next 12 months is Corporate Development, incorporating the leadership and management training and development that is highlighted in the action plan as an area to focus on. In addition, succession planning will be a focus, looking at how we can develop our internal workforce in line with current career paths within the Council.
- 8.5 Next year sees the launch of the new performance related scheme with links to both Our Conversations and Our Values and Behaviours, commencing in April and first being used for appraisal ratings from January of next year. A thorough review of this scheme will take place after the first year.
- 8.6 A final, but significant, next step for the coming year will be to start to develop the next people strategy, to take effect from the start of 2022 when our existing strategy comes to an end. Members will be engaged in this process and have the opportunity to help shape and develop the new strategy.

9.0 Summary

- 9.1 The next year brings more challenges for our workforce, both continuing with the good progress that has been made towards the existing people strategy, but also doing so in light of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and significant impact this has had on us all. We will continue to ensure that our people activity is coordinated and joined up, our workforce is engaged, and employee wellbeing remains a priority throughout this period. Our aim is that people will be moving in the direction aligned to the priorities of our Council whilst managing and coping with the additional uncertainty that the pandemic is creating.
- 9.2 Staffing and Appeals Committee is invited to comment and take note of the detail within this update.

10.0 Source documents

None