

Cambridgeshire County Council People Strategy

To: Staffing and Appeals Committee

Meeting Date: 22nd February 2022

From: Janet Atkin, Assistant Director HR Services

Purpose: To provide Committee with an update on progress with the People Strategy action plan, and to summarise the process being followed to develop the new People Strategy.

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

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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of achievement against the Cambridgeshire County Council People Strategy, and to summarise the process being following to develop the new People Strategy.

2.0 Summary

- 2.1 The current People Strategy was approved by Full Council in May 2019 and progress against the action plan that was developed to accompany it has been presented to Staffing and Appeals Committee annually since implementation of the strategy. The People Strategy covered the years 2019 – 2021.
- 2.2 Bi-monthly People Strategy Boards, led by the Director of Customer and Digital Services, and attended by a number of service representatives as well as members of the HR Team, 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 24 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our workforce. The places that we work, the need for employees to temporarily undertake new and different job roles to support the corporate response, and the need for widespread reprioritisation of all that we do had to take place virtually overnight in March 2020. This 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 Board in October 2020. The revised action plan can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 2.5 As we come to the end of the current people strategy, work has started to develop the new strategy which will come into effect later this year. This report provides an overview of progress against the actions that were outlined in the original people strategy as well as the new actions that were agreed in October 2020. Additionally, a summary of people related measures taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have been outlined where relevant.
- 2.6 An overview of the current workforce profile is provided in Appendix 2 for information.
- 2.7 Progress is summarised under the five strategy themes of:
 - Resourcing
 - Employee Engagement
 - Wellbeing
 - Skills Development and Behaviours
 - Reward and Recognition

3.0 Resourcing

3.1 Recruitment Internet Site

A [careers and job section](#) has been developed on our website making it easier for potential employees to find roles with us and a dedicated page has been created for [Social Workers](#) with quicker and easier ways to apply for these roles.

3.2 Disability Confident Accreditation

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 Dedicated Recruitment Team

A dedicated social care recruitment team provide a professional approach to recruitment for roles in Social Care and continuously develop new campaigns to attract candidates and monitor vacancies in the services.

3.4 Recruitment Process Improvements

Carried out in collaboration with the Equality and Diversity Network, a review of the recruitment process led to a streamlined process, an increase in the use of different social media platforms and more inclusive images and wording. Alongside this, a full review of all aspects of recruiting and onboarding new employees is now underway with a target of early summer for a roll out of a refreshed approach.

3.5 E-recruitment System

Building on these improvements, a wholesale review of the end-to-end recruitment process has commenced alongside the re-procurement of a new e-recruitment system. This project involves colleagues from across the Council and will result in the introduction of a new system, improving the recruitment experience for both managers and candidates, and creating a positive and inclusive candidate experience, whether someone takes a role with the Council or not.

3.6 Recruitment Training

A new recruitment training course has been developed with the aim of ensuring that managers across the organisation are clear on their responsibilities as a good employer. This interactive remote session demonstrates how the reputation of the County Council can be affected both positively and negatively by the experiences candidates have during a recruitment process.

3.7 Advertising

Attracting candidates into certain roles in social care is a known challenge so the context of a pandemic has required managers and the recruitment team to be even more creative. Over the course of the past two years, 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. The dedicated [Social Workers](#) webpage mentioned above is one example of this.

3.8 Retention in Social Care

Retaining candidates once they are in role is equally as important as attracting them and certain areas, such as Social Care teams, have experienced particular challenges with turnover levels in some teams reaching 24%, not helped by how competitive the market place is. To mitigate this, retention payments have been developed, approved and are being implemented in some social work teams. Eligibility is team specific depending on turnover and recruitment challenges. Eligible Social workers receive an additional 20% of their starting salary paid as three non-consolidated payments over a period of three years. Although the scheme has adopted some principles of the successful Peterborough City Council scheme, the success of the scheme within Cambridgeshire will be monitored by reviewing turnover and recruitment levels as the scheme embeds.

3.9 Kickstart Scheme

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. To date we have employed 10 individuals under the terms of this scheme and have already seen one of the individuals successfully progress to a permanent role with us.

3.10 T-Level Placements

Following a Member request to make contact, in September of this year, we entered into a partnership with Cambridge Regional college to offer T-Level placements to eight students. These 315-hour work experience placements intend to provide students with a practical insight into work. Both the Kickstart and the T-level placements are an excellent way to attract younger employees to the Council and help them see the Council as an attractive employer.

3.11 Ongoing Actions

Further work to be carried forward into the new action plan include:

- Continue work to ensure that the diversity of our workforce is more representative of the communities in which we work

4.0 Employee Engagement

4.1 Engagement Surveys

Regular engagement surveys were launched in June 2020, with the purpose of collecting feedback from all staff about a given topic. Since this time, surveys have included staff engagement, wellbeing, Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), the way we work, development and career progression and respect @ work. Regularly responded to by over 1000 employees, the feedback and resulting action plan from each survey is published on Camweb. Workforce related actions from these surveys feed into the people strategy action plan. Topics for the next twelve months will be:

- February/March 2022 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- May 2022 - Wellbeing, health and safety
- September 2022 - Communications and engagement
- November 2022 - The way we work
- January 2023 - Respect@Work

4.2 Corporate Communications

Corporate communication has been particularly high since the start of the pandemic, with frequent, and at times 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 regularly in line with national or Council changes.

4.3 Trade Union Engagement

We pride ourselves on our good working relationships with our recognised trade unions. In addition to the monthly Corporate Joint Panel meeting, we engage trade unions in a wide range of people related activity and during the COVID-19 pandemic weekly or fortnightly meetings with all three recognised trade unions have taken place.

4.4 The Cambridgeshire Conversation

The introduction of fortnightly 'Cambridgeshire Conversations' has been particularly popular and well received. These Microsoft Teams sessions are hosted by the Chief Executive or other members of the Corporate Leadership 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, and these are regularly viewed by around another 600 people.

4.5 Ongoing Actions

Further work to be carried forward into the new action plan include:

- A review of employee engagement once a widescale return to office takes place – ensuring that networking groups and employee engagement remains inclusive and accessible to all.

5.0 Wellbeing

5.1 Wellbeing Group

Although a wellbeing group was established at the time the current people strategy was launched, the start of the pandemic in 2020 highlighted that employee wellbeing needed an even greater focus than the aspirations first outlined in the strategy. In April 2020 the wellbeing group was re-focused and through collaboration across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, a single wellbeing group started to meet weekly and attended by colleagues from Public Health, H&S, HR, L&D, Communications and IT. The primary focus of the group was, and remains to be, promoting wellbeing support and resources in the organisation, as well as finding and creating new resources at low to no cost. The wellbeing group have been conducive in creating many of the initiatives outlined below and have developed the Council's wellbeing support into the extraordinary offering that it is today.

5.2 Wellbeing Portal

The wellbeing portal was launched in 2020, creating a central space for employees to access information and resources on our wellbeing offer. In the last quarter of 2021, the portal was getting up to 5,700 views per month. Some of the most popular blog posts have received up to 1,100 views, as well as comments and offers to share personal stories. This is complemented with weekly wellbeing articles in Friday Focus, posts on Yammer and from December 2021, a dedicated Wellbeing Newsletter.

5.3 The Wellbeing Hour

The Wellbeing Hour was launched in September 2020, as an opportunity for a regular shared experience focussed on wellbeing, something that our employees told us they felt was lacking in our new remote-working culture. This is an hourly session, via MS Teams, during which time our employees can hear from an expert, learn about a topic that could support their wellbeing, and share that experience with others. 15 sessions have taken place to date including topics that have been requested (Coping with Anxiety), as well as planning some to coincide with our wellbeing calendar (Menopause Awareness). These are recorded available to watch later, along with associated resources, on the Wellbeing Portal. The sessions are frequently attended by more than 200 employees with the menopause session fully booked at 350 registrations. Feedback is consistently positive and where we have had particularly positive sessions, we have used this as a springboard to expand our internal offer e.g. launching a 'Sleep and Resilience workshop' as part of our existing contract with Mental Health in the Workplace as well as engaging with the provider of the Menopause Awareness session for 'Train the Trainer' and therefore upskill a number of internal trainers to deliver more of these sessions.

5.4 Respect@Work Policy

We recognise the challenge to wellbeing that occurs when individuals do not feel respected at work and we have engaged extensively via surveys and also focus groups with our employees to understand what they need. Following this feedback, the Council's Respect@Work policy (launched in March 2019) was reviewed in November 2020 and again in April 2021 to ensure it was still fit for purpose. 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.

The next steps involve expanding our Respect@work contacts whilst continuing to ensure that the policy remains up to date, accessible and well communicated to the whole workforce.

5.5 Mental Health in the Workplace Training

Mental Health in the Workplace training was provided to Directors in 2019 and was subsequently rolled out across the Council for all employees with additional targeted sessions available for line managers. The training has been very positively received with feedback from the sessions being excellent. In total over 2000 workshops have been attended by employees. We are working with the provider to create an online version that will be available to all employees when our contract ends with them.

5.6 Mental Health First Aiders

The Council have had Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA's) for a number of years. More recently the capacity to support individuals in times of crisis increased through doubling the numbers of trained MHFA's. 50 employee volunteers now offer a non-judgemental listening ear and signposting to other sources of support.

5.7 Employee Assistance Programme

The Council have had an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for a number of years now, but more recently, and in line with the wider wellbeing agenda, we have increased the communication and promotion of the scheme. As a result, the use of this scheme has increased by 14.5% in the past year. In the same period, the percentage of people who were in work at the end of a period of EAP arranged counselling has also increased from 50% to 60%. This suggests that the counselling offered has had a direct impact in helping employees to manage their wellbeing and enabling them to remain at work during times of difficulty.

5.8 Wellbeing Study

During 2020 we partnered with the University of Cambridge to offer our employees the opportunity to be part of a wellbeing study, the findings of which are intended to evaluate the kinds of wellbeing interventions that are most effective to offer in a work environment. This is ongoing and learning from this study will help to form wellbeing actions that will be outlined in the new people strategy.

5.9 Our Conversations

We have made conversations about wellbeing central to our new supervision and appraisal approach, 'Our Conversations' as well as ensuring that our induction includes signposting to the sources of support available.

5.10 The Protected Hour

The protected hour was announced in November 2020 as a commitment from JMT to help encourage all employees to take a break from their work. It was identified that during the winter months whilst a large proportion of our workforce were still working from home, the middle of the day might be the only time employees can go outside in daylight. JMT's commitment meant that by blocking the hour of 13.00 – 14.00 in diaries, employees have the

confidence that there will be an hour in the day where they will not be involved in an internal meeting.

5.11 Office-based Working

Whilst most teams and employees have continued to work from home since March 2020, a process was been put in place whereby managers could 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 was granted to individuals where there was evidence that working from home was having a significant negative impact on their physical or mental wellbeing.

5.12 Ongoing Actions

Further work to be carried forward into the new action plan includes:

- The continuation of employee wellbeing activities, with wellbeing remaining a strong focus of the new people strategy.
- Learnings gained from the University of Cambridge wellbeing study will be fed into the new strategy.

6.0 Skills Development and Behaviours

6.1 Our Conversations

A priority and huge achievement for this theme has been the development of a new appraisal process for Cambridgeshire – “Our Conversations”. This piece of work saw the implementation of a totally new conversational based performance management framework. The new scheme was implemented in April 2021 – after a one-year delay due to Covid. The new scheme, which focuses much more on robust and regular conversations with a strong wellbeing focus, has been very well received by managers and employees. A new eLearning course was developed and published to support the rollout of the Our Conversations – by the end of November 2021 this had been completed by over 1000 employees with a further 350 attending the more comprehensive virtual training.

6.2 Incremental Progression

Feedback from employees demonstrated that the annual appraisal process was often viewed as a paper-based exercise completed mainly to determine whether a pay rise would be awarded in the form of incremental progression. This de-valued the appraisal process and identified a need to distance pay conversations from the day-to-day supervision meetings as much as possible. A new performance rating process has been developed which takes pay conversations outside of the Our Conversations process whilst still retaining performance related pay. The new incremental progression scheme will be reviewed once the full cycle has taken place after April 2022 to determine how successful this has been and whether any further changes need to be implemented.

6.3 Our Values and Behaviours

A new values and behaviours framework was launched alongside Our Conversations in April 2021. Although still needing work to fully embed the framework into all of our people related processes and policies, a direct link has been made with the new incremental progression scheme, meaning that employees performance and impact is assessed not only on their achievement against outcomes, but also against how they demonstrate our values and behaviours. This has been instrumental in increasing progression opportunities for people in relatively fixed roles who previously would have struggled to demonstrate that they were eligible for an increment.

6.4 Our Ways of Working

Our agile working policy was relaunched to “Our Ways of Working” in September 2019. Although seemingly very ambitious at the time - with aspirations to encourage people to work from different locations and using technology to reduce travel to meetings, the COVID-19 situation led to some very quick learning and developments in this area which, in part, helped with the embedding of some of the agile principles. Taking some of the early learnings from the pandemic into account, we have further developed this policy and introduced new worker types, encouraged new ways of working and have adopted a ‘flexible from first day’ approach to our employment contracts and introduced flexible bank holidays, giving many employees the opportunity to work bank holidays and take the leave at an alternative time. These initiatives are above and beyond statutory requirements for flexible working and are more forward thinking in this area than many public and even private sector employers.

6.5 Cambs2020

Through close alignment between the new Our Ways of Working approach and the Cambs2020 project, we have been able to influence the design and fit-out of New Shire Hall and the spokes buildings. By designing spaces that fit our aspirations around new ways of working, we are able to help shape the culture change needed to embed these practices.

6.6 Apprenticeships

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.

6.7 Management Development

The Leadership and Management offer has been undergoing a review and refresh since the repatriation of Learning and Development from LGSS. Two new modular programmes have been developed and delivered in a virtual classroom (via Teams) which focus on the knowledge, skills and behaviours of Leadership and Management rather than processes. Content includes emotional intelligence, empathy and resilience.

6.8 Climate Awareness

In partnership with colleagues from Place and Economy, Learning and Development have supported the development and delivery of Carbon Literacy training to JMT and Members. Additionally joint work has been undertaken to develop Our Climate Emergency eLearning module which is expected to go live early 2022.

6.9 Ongoing Actions

Further work to be carried forward into the new action plan includes:

- Reviewing the impact of the Our Conversations process
- Improve the take up and offer of coaching and mentoring
- Further embedding of the values and behaviours
- Commercial and climate awareness training is completed by more employees
- Review how well the principles of agile working as outlined in 'Our Ways of Working' are implemented upon widespread returning to buildings.

7.0 Reward and Recognition

7.1 Incremental Progression Scheme

As outlined above, the appraisal review resulted in the need to develop a new mechanism to progress employees through the Cambridgeshire pay scales. This new scheme was launched in April 2021 and increases the ability for more employees to be progressed, through more inclusive criteria and a new ratings system that aims to be more motivating than the previous scheme.

7.2 Long Service Awards

A long service award has been re-introduced within the Council, providing recognition to long serving employees through shopping vouchers and a day's leave.

7.3 Real Living Wage

The real living wage has been introduced within the Council for all directly employed staff. Work has commenced to consider the impact of this on all contracted and commissioned services, with the aim of the Council becoming a real living wage accredited employer.

7.4 Covid Specific Recognition

As a thank you for keeping the Council's services running, all staff were given the three-day break between Christmas and New Year 2020 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 Temporary Pay Adjustments

To assist with the Council's response to the pandemic, further pay initiatives over the course of the past two years have included:

- A temporary increase of the grade ceiling at which employees can claim overtime, meaning that more employees can claim overtime for COVID-19 related work.
- The simplification of overtime rules ensuring that employees who were taking on extra hours to deal with COVID-19 related work could easily claim.
- Relief employees received average pay during the two major national lockdowns in services that were closed or reduced.

7.6 Ongoing Actions

Further work to be carried forward into the new action plan includes:

- A review of the new ratings process to ensure it has been applied equitably and addresses the concerns raised about the previous scheme.

8.0 Summary and Next Steps

8.1 The development of the new People Strategy is the priority for this coming year and Staffing and Appeals Committee will have the opportunity to input into the development of this. Any incomplete actions or on going work from the existing action plan, as highlighted above, will be carried forward into the new action plan in addition to the actions outlined in the pay gap action plan.

8.2 The stages of development for the new people strategy are proposed as:

- i. a thorough review of our workforce data including workforce gaps, vacancy rates, turnover levels and recruitment activity.
- ii. workforce assessment to validate the findings from the data review, as well as considering intelligence from managers. This stage involves discussions with stakeholders, Members and Senior Managers from across the Council. Managers will be asked to outline their current business priorities and challenges, their workforce demand, business critical roles as well as upcoming strategic projects and plans and the implications these may have on the desired future workforce.
- iii. external benchmarking - regional and national trends in workforce planning and strategy will take place. More locally we need to ensure our strategy and approach aligns with, and more importantly does not conflict with, our partners strategies.
- iv. Engagement with managers, employees and Members will help shape actions and themes within the strategy.

9.0 Source documents

9.1 None