

**Cabinet**

**15 May 2024**

**Workforce Strategy – 2024 - 2027**

**Ordinary Decision**



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## **Report of Corporate Management Team**

**Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources**

**Councillor Richard Bell, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance**

### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

None

### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To adopt the council's revised Workforce Strategy for the period 2024 - 2027.

### **Executive summary**

- 2 The [Council Plan](#) for 2024 – 2028 sets out our vision and long-term ambitions for the county. This refreshed Workforce Strategy has been designed to support the delivery of Durham County Council's Council Plan.
- 3 The Council Plan aligns to both the council's Medium-Term Financial Plan which sets out how our priorities will be resourced and the County Durham Plan which is a spatial representation of our ambitions contained within the Council Plan around housing, jobs and the environment until 2035 as well as the transport, schools and infrastructure to support it.
- 4 Collectively these documents describe the ambition we have for the county and set out how we will approach this challenge over the next four years. The Council's Workforce Strategy sets out how we will ensure we have a workforce best equipped to effectively deliver on our strategic priorities and vision as set out in these plans.
- 5 The refreshed Workforce Strategy and associated delivery plans will provide a focus on what the council needs to do to ensure we have the

right workforce, doing right things in the most productive way, with the skills we need for the future.

**Recommendation(s)**

6 Cabinet is recommended to:

(a) approve the adoption of the refreshed Workforce Strategy.

## Background

- 7 The purpose of a Workforce Strategy is to ensure organisations plan and prepare their workforce to deliver on strategic priorities and prepare for changes and challenges ahead.
- 8 A well-defined Workforce Strategy helps optimise productivity, adapt to changing conditions, and support long-term improvement. The Strategy will enable the Council to continue to deliver Council Plan priorities, as the organisation becomes smaller, with reduced resources by optimising the workforce resource that we do have, ensuring we have the right people in the right roles doing the right thing with appropriate levels of skills and competence to address the challenges of today as well as tomorrow.
- 9 Having the right resource, doing the right things with the right skills at the right time does not happen naturally. A strategic approach to how we can achieve this is required through modernised and transformative HR initiatives and interventions which are set out within the proposed Workforce Strategy. These interventions will ensure we are taking the right steps in relation to recruitment, resourcing, workforce planning and development and being a good employer to ensure we have a stable, skilled, resilient, diverse and healthy workforce.
- 10 This Workforce Strategy does not intend to address specific service challenges as it will be underpinned by workforce plans relevant to each service area. The Strategy is to ensure at the highest level the Council is putting the right approaches, and people management practices and initiatives in place to enable service workforce planning to take place at a local level. This strategy will be monitored through a robust delivery plan of actions against each objective, with monitoring of impact and workforce indicators on an ongoing basis.
- 11 The Strategy is not intended to include specific actions which in the public domain may raise expectations or require consultation with Trades Unions. The strategy is therefore prepared in such a way to include broad objectives rather than specifics as much of this will be subject to Corporate Management Team agreement and Trade Union Consultation.
- 12 Whilst the Council faces many challenges, this refreshed Workforce Strategy is a positive future focused document which will demonstrate through our workforce, despite those challenges the Council will continue to deliver against our priorities for County Durham.
- 13 The strategy will build on the positive work undertaken over 2021-2023 to embed our organisational values, improve employee engagement and develop a council that attracts and retains high performing staff.

- 14 In developing the strategy, consideration has been taken to the challenges the council will face, strategic priorities, areas of risk and in particular feedback from the workforce, specifically from the 2022 Working Well Survey.

### **Our achievements so far**

- 15 The achievements from the previous Workforce Strategy (2021-2023) provides a great platform for us to build on. Our success in this part of our journey is demonstrated by the following achievements.

### **Planning for the future**

- (a) Comprehensive workforce plans in place for Children and Young People's Services and Adult and Health Services enabling a stable and skilled workforce for the future;
- (b) A strategic approach to recruitment and resourcing corporately and across services to enable the Council to attract and retain the best talent;
- (c) A comprehensive digital skills programme to upskill the workforce;
- (d) The delivery of the Apprenticeship Strategy and Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Policy. A retention rate of 71% of apprentices into posts with the council;
- (e) Significant progress with new ways of working including "hybrid" and workplace redesign all centred on smarter working;
- (f) Workforce interventions to support key priorities such as climate change, health, safety and wellbeing and equalities and diversity;
- (g) The digitisation of our learning and development system, digital training offer and HR and Payroll system, enabling our managers and employees to self-serve.

### **Building leadership capacity**

- (a) A robust corporate leadership and management development strategy and programme in place which has resulted in 83% of managers completing the main leadership programme;
- (b) The delivery of strategic leadership engagement events and managers briefings;

- (c) Succession plans across services for key management posts accompanied by an approach to develop new and aspiring managers and leaders;
- (d) A strengthened approach to managers induction enabling our new managers to have the support they require;
- (e) The use of Management Apprenticeships as part of our development offer with 126 managers completed or studying towards;
- (f) High priority areas of development planned and delivered including business continuity, cyber security, company governance, risk management and commercialisation.

### **Developing the workforce**

- (a) The delivery of corporate and service workforce development programmes, including mandatory training to support knowledge and competencies in key priority areas, such as GDPR and climate change;
- (b) Workforce development plans across all frontline services in place to deliver mandatory training;
- (c) Apprenticeship standards aligned to professions to support the apprenticeship first approach to upskilling the workforce;
- (d) Talent pipelines developed through apprenticeships to grow our own, particularly in harder to fill roles;
- (e) The digitisation of our learning and development system and training offer, enabling a more cost effective and accessible approach;
- (f) A strengthened approach to performance management, including digitised Performance and Development Reviews.

### **Being a good employer**

- (a) A comprehensive health, safety, and wellbeing offer;
- (b) A strengthened approach to wellbeing through our Wellbeing Portal with latest information, guidance, and support in one centralised place;

- (c) The implementation of the Working Well Survey resulting in very pleasing results, with subsequent actions being addressed;
- (d) A refreshed employee benefits offer implemented, communicated and embedded;
- (e) Achievement of various workplace accreditations:
  - Disability Confident Leader status
  - Maintained Excellence in the Better Health at Work Award
  - Gold award of the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme
  - White Ribbon Accreditation
  - North East Rainbow Alliance
- (f) A commitment to being a Dementia Friendly organisation and a supportive employer through the Menopause Pledge;
- (g) Continued development of our employee networks to help promote an inclusive and supportive culture;
- (h) Significant working in partnership with our Trade Unions;
- (i) Recognition schemes including our staff awards and long service scheme;
- (j) New initiatives such as our Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme.

### **Our Workforce Priorities – 2024 - 2027**

- 16 The period of the pandemic had a profound impact on workforce issues for the council, as well as across the country. From the recent findings of [The Future of the Local Government Workforce](#) which was undertaken the County Councils Network and PWC, highlighted workforce capacity is 'one of the biggest challenges' facing local government in England, worsened by over a decade of funding challenges and exacerbated in recent years by post-pandemic trends.
- 17 In particular to local government:
- (a) Demand pressures, particularly in social care;
  - (b) Funding struggles / financial challenges;
  - (c) Competitive wages;

- (d) Specialist skills and workforce shortages;
- (e) Ageing workforce with limited demographic spread;
- (f) Attracting to local government and retaining through good experiences in the workplace;
- (g) The need for new skills and training to equip the workforce for the future.

18 Many of these workforce challenges are persisting well beyond the pandemic with remote working, digitisation, the renewed emphasis on employee wellbeing and diversity and inclusion being integrated parts of the 'new normal.'

These factors underpin our refreshed Workforce Strategy which is structured around three workforce priority areas:

### **Priority 1 – Enabling the organisation to deliver through our people**

- (a) Implement efficient and effective future working practices and business processes;
- (b) Enable the delivery of a modern digital council, putting technology and information at the heart, digitising HR systems and learning where possible to empower employees;
- (c) Effectively use workforce data across the employee lifecycle to inform workforce planning and decisions concerning our workforce;
- (d) Develop modern approaches to organisational re-design, restructuring and change ensuring a resilient, flexible, and sustainable organisation for the future;
- (e) Promote the council as an employer of choice whilst attracting, recruiting, and retaining the best talent;
- (f) Deploy innovative workforce planning and resourcing strategies to ensure our services are sustainable in terms of key deliverables and priorities to our residents;
- (g) Develop strategies to target occupational shortage areas of the workforce to ensure future sustainability and resilience;
- (h) Build community wealth and address inequalities through targeted employment opportunities.

## **Priority 2 – Being a good employer and creating a people first culture**

- (a) Prioritise the health, safety, and wellbeing of all our colleagues and communities, whilst continuing to reduce sickness absence through a preventative and holistic approach;
- (b) Revise our behavioural framework to embed our values in everything we do;
- (c) Embed cultural change through employee engagement and communication to improve the employee experience and shape how we make decisions on service improvement;
- (d) Develop a diverse, inclusive, and flexible workforce where diversity is valued, and employees feel they belong;
- (e) Ensure we have modern and enabling HR policies and procedures which underpin an agile workplace culture;
- (f) Embed performance management arrangements to support our employees to develop and grow.

## **Priority 3 – Building capacity and developing great talent**

- (a) Develop our people to ensure we have the right skills to deliver high quality services;
- (b) Ensure a technologically confident and skilled workforce;
- (c) Build leadership capacity and capability to effectively lead the organisation through change and deliver the priorities set out within the Council Plan within the resources available;
- (d) Build a strong internal talent pipeline with clear career pathways, underpinned by a 'grow our own ethos;'
- (e) Work with our partners, colleagues, universities and schools to ensure a pipeline of talent coming into the council as our age profile demographics change;
- (f) Maximise the use of our apprenticeship levy to develop existing employees and attract new talent through our apprenticeship programme.



- 20 The initial equality impact assessment has been updated which shows that the refreshed strategy will deliver on the council's corporate equality and inclusion priorities as set out within the Council Plan.

## **Conclusion**

- 21 The refreshed Workforce Strategy sets out the council's workforce ambitions for the future under three key themes:
- (a) Enabling the organisation to deliver through our people;
  - (b) Being a good employer and creating a people first culture;
  - (c) Building capacity and developing great talent.
- 22 The adoption of the refreshed Workforce Strategy provides a framework within these ambitions which can be delivered and aligned to the interlocking objectives in the 2035 Council Vision, whilst working in partnership with Trade Unions and the workforce to deliver and embed the various initiatives within the strategy.

## **Background papers**

- [Workforce Strategy 2021-2023 – Cabinet 21 April 2021](#)

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The initiatives set out within this report will ensure the council is acting in accordance with employment legislation and best practice.

### **Finance**

The refreshed Workforce Strategy sets out a framework for the delivery of the council's workforce ambitions. Delivery within this framework will be managed within a range of project and programme environments, each with individual financing provision, monitoring and control. There are no additional financial implications associated with the strategy.

### **Consultation**

Consultation has taken place with recognised Trade Unions. Consultation on individual initiatives will take place with employee representatives and staff network groups.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

The initial equality impact assessment has been updated which shows that the refreshed strategy will deliver on the council's corporate equality and inclusion priorities as set out within the Council Plan.

### **Climate Change**

The strategy will support climate change by ensuring the approach is filtered through workforce initiatives aligned to agile working and digital transformation.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

The refreshed Workforce Strategy covers council employees (excluding schools) and will be co-ordinated by the OD/WFD Team within HR and Employee Services, Resources.

### **Accommodation**

None.

**Risk**

The proposals set out within the Strategy will enable the council to proactively manage workforce risks.

**Procurement**

None.

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## **Appendix 2: Workforce Strategy 2024 - 2027**

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See separate attachment.