

**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board**

03 September 2024

Workforce Strategy – 2024 - 2027

Ordinary Decision



Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) on:
 - (a) the council's revised Workforce Strategy for the period 2024 – 2027 following Cabinet approval in May 2024;
 - (b) the key achievements from the previous Workforce Strategy for the period 2021 – 2023.

Executive summary

- 2 In April 2021, Durham County Council adopted its first Workforce Strategy. The strategy was subsequently refreshed in May 2024 which sets out how we will ensure we have a workforce best equipped to effectively deliver on our strategic priorities and vision.
- 3 Whilst the Council faces many challenges, the 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 The achievements from the previous Workforce Strategy provides a great platform for us to build on. Our success in this part of our journey is demonstrated by the achievements as outlined later in the report.

- 6 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.
- 7 Many of the workforce initiatives within the strategy are reflective of what a good performing Council should be doing as set out in the Best Value Standards.

Recommendation(s)

- 8 COSMB is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this report;
 - (b) support the adoption of the new Workforce Strategy.

Background

- 9 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.
- 10 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.
- 11 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.
- 12 The 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.

Our achievements so far

- 13 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

- 14 The period of the pandemic had a profound impact on workforce issues for the council, as well as across the country. From the findings of [The Future of the Local Government Workforce](#) which was undertaken via 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.
- 15 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.
- 16 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.'
- 17 In addition, the Government's approach in ensuring all authorities carry out their functions in compliance with the Best Value Duty is based on a number of guiding principles.
- 18 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.

19 The refreshed Workforce Strategy is attached as Appendix 2.

Conclusion

20 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.

21 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

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.

Appendix 2: Workforce Strategy 2024 - 2027

See separate attachment.