

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	9 June 2022
Report Title:	Workforce Strategy 2021-2025 – Progress Review
Report of:	Jane Burns - Executive Director, Corporate Services
Report Reference No:	CP/2/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	ALL

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update members on progress against delivery of Cheshire East Council's Workforce Strategy 2021-2025 up to March 2022.
- 1.2. The strategy sets out how the Council will develop the capacity and capability of our workforce to support the priorities identified within the Corporate Plan and deliver our Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 1.3. The Workforce Strategy supports the Council's vision for an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East, as set out in the new Corporate Plan. In particular, the Strategy supports the priorities for an open and enabling organisation, by putting in place plans to support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient, and empowered.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Council's Workforce Strategy was agreed by Corporate Policy Committee in November 2021. Progress is reported below on the first four months of the Strategy's accompanying action plan has been made under four agreed strategic themes.
- 2.2. This report focuses specifically on the progress made for each of the actions that had either an ongoing timescale or were identified as to be completed by the end of March 2022, but progress is outlined on work commenced on other actions, where appropriate.
- 2.3. Current data issues with Unit 4 ERP are being addressed as a priority with colleagues on the Best 4 Business team, to better inform our workforce profile and priorities.

3. Recommendations

3.1. It is recommended that Corporate Policy Committee:

- 3.1.1. note progress in delivering the Workforce Strategy; and
- 3.1.2. agree to receive further updates every six months to monitor progress.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

4.1. The Workforce Strategy outlines a clear vision for the development and retention of our workforce, to enable the Council to have in place the resources required to deliver against its commitments as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25. Corporate Policy Committee has oversight of progress against the actions contained within the Strategy as part of the Council's commitment to openness and transparency.

5. Other Options Considered

5.1. Not applicable.

6. Background

6.1. Our four-year strategy was adopted in November 2021 and builds on the previous workforce strategy, its achievements, and our organisational cultural change.

6.2. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on our workforce and the way in which we work. It has demonstrated our workforce's ability to respond brilliantly and adapt quickly to the many challenges we face. It has also presented an opportunity to re-shape the way in which we work in the future, building in more agility and flexibility to respond to new circumstances. This strategy reflects this alongside our current workforce profile.

6.3. The Strategy has been developed, using our workforce profile to identify key issues and in consideration of the feedback provided through Service Workforce Plans. It is built around four key strategic themes:

- Delivering Our Future;
- Living our Values and Delivering our Employee Deal;
- Inclusive Workforce – Ensuring Everyone has a Voice;
- Empowering Our Workforce.

7. Progress to Date – Delivering Our Future

7.1. Strategic workforce planning is critical to our longer-term success, using the insight and data that is available to us. Work has begun on understanding how we can use the HR metrics, available through Unit 4 ERP to better inform workforce planning. HR has been working closely with senior managers across the Council to develop, implement and monitor workforce plans for each service area through regular meetings and on-going actions to address the identified issues.

- 7.2.** Recruitment and retention are becoming an increasing priority nationally and for the Council. To address this, a programme of work is being undertaken with all services to identify local and strategic issues and solutions. In addition, salary benchmarking is being carried out and baseline analysis developed. Our employee offer is under review to ensure Cheshire East Council remains attractive in an increasingly competitive employment market.
- 7.3.** An updated programme of senior leadership engagement and development has been in place since January 2022, with face-to-face sessions recommencing for both the Wider Leadership Team and the Wider Leadership Community. These sessions are aligned to our corporate priorities and designed as an opportunity to promote a 'one team' approach. Manager Share and Support sessions continue to run each week for all line managers across the Council as a mechanism for cascading initiatives, sharing best practice and to allow remote networking. Feedback on these sessions from attendees is always consistently good. Work is ongoing on developing an annual 'All People Managers roadshow' for delivery later this year.
- 7.4.** Work has been continuing to achieve the actions set out in the Council's Apprenticeship Action Plan, which was reported to this committee on 2 December 2021. Apprenticeship training continues to be commissioned using the approved YPO procurement framework wherever possible. Work is underway to ensure all anticipated training provision is accessible via an approved procurement framework. The take-up of new start employee apprenticeships nationally was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic but 2021/22 saw improvement with the number of new apprentices at Cheshire East Council increasing from 9 in 2020/21 to 17 in 2021/2022. This compares to 27 in 2018/2019 and 22 in 2019/2020. These figures relate to new start employees to the organisation and does not include those existing staff that had accessed an apprenticeship qualification as part of their further development. Overall figures for 2021/22 for both new start and 'staff' apprentices are illustrated below:

Year	CEC	AH&I	Children's	Corporate	Place	Schools	ASDVs
2021-2022							
Headcount	3596	1041	1120	653	772	3064	538
Target	83	24	26	15	18	71	12
Uptake							
New		1	1	4	8	2	1
Staff		20	14	9	2	8	1
Total	59	21	15	13	10	10	2

- 7.5.** The Government's £3,000 incentive payment for new apprentices has been secured by 17 of those identified above as new apprentices. Incentive payments are diverted to the individual team employing the apprentice. During 2021/22 there were 9 apprentices who secured permanent or temporary positions with Cheshire East Council. The range of apprenticeships offered at the Council is constantly under review, specifically in line with workforce skills gaps, and new apprenticeship standards are put into place as soon as they become available. Annual cohorts of social work degree apprentices are in place as well as apprentices on all levels of health and social care qualifications and candidates in the Place Directorate are now undertaking planning degree apprenticeships too. In addition to this and as part of the workforce planning cycle and development of training plans for each service area, discussions are held with each team to identify apprenticeship opportunities that might be appropriate, paying close attention to skills gaps and succession planning, career pathways and building future resilience. The CPD process is also monitored to ensure apprenticeships are maximised for any training and development identified for members of staff.
- 7.6.** HR continues to support the Care Leaver Apprenticeship Review Action Plan, led by colleagues in Children's Services. An apprenticeship Co-ordinator for Cared for Children and Care Leavers has been appointed. All care leaver apprentices will receive additional financial support through the Government's financial incentives for those with a cared for background and will also receive additional practical support through their apprenticeship from colleagues in Children's Services and the Workforce Development Team.
- 7.7.** The theme for National Apprentice week (8th-13th February 2022) was 'Build the Future', aimed at encouraging everyone to invest in their workforce by upskilling staff, filling skills gaps to build a workforce that is future ready. This fitted perfectly with Cheshire East Council's Employee Deal which outlines the commitment to succeeding together and offering opportunities for staff to learn and develop further. Information sessions were held via Teams, and a communications campaign carried out promoting case studies from staff currently continuing their development via an apprenticeship.
- 7.8.** Cheshire East Council's Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Fund scheme has had a highly successful year with its highest ever amount of apprenticeship levy funding being transferred. During 2021-2022, £207,000 of unspent levy funds has been transferred to other businesses in Cheshire East to support them in upskilling staff and taking on new apprentices. This has prevented this funding from reverting to the Government.
- 7.9.** Work with colleagues in Adults, Health & Integration to support the delivery of the Government's Kickstart programme has continued, with candidates now progressing from work experience placements through the Kickstart programme onto apprenticeship opportunities at the Council.
- 7.10.** The HR schools team continues to work closely with maintained schools and academies to support them to meet their workforce needs in terms of

employment relation issues and longer term needs through restructures and academisation. This has been a challenging period, given the introduction of a new HR and Payroll system, as part of Best for Business. The team has provided support during the implementation of the Unit 4 ERP system to ensure accurate and timely processing of salary and HR records for the workforce.

8. Progress to Date – Living Our Values and Delivering Our Employee Deal

- 8.1** Our cultural transformation journey began in 2018 following a review by the LGA review and significant progress has been made since then, supporting Cheshire East Council to become the place where people want to work. The latest 'Pulse' staff survey, launched in March 2022, has been designed to explore what workplace culture means for our staff and inform the development of the next phase of our workplace culture programme. The results of this survey have been mainly positive, with 76% of staff indicating that they enjoy their job and 76% of staff describing their wellbeing as good. The results of this survey are illustrated in appendix one.
- 8.2** More recently, the easing of all Covid-19 legal restrictions has also provided the opportunity to fundamentally review the way in which we work. We are developing a hybrid model of working that is fit for purpose and better able to allow our staff to maintain an improved work life balance many benefited from due to enforced working from home. This hybrid model is balanced alongside customer needs and service delivery but also supports our priority as a council to be carbon neutral by 2025 and addresses recruitment and retention challenges.
- 8.3** An updated agile working policy was launched in the Autumn of 2021, alongside a 'Future Workplace Guide' and team conversation toolkits were issued to support services to explore how a future way of working could work for them. The 'Spring Back Together' initiative, planned for May and June 2022 supports staff to refresh relationships across teams and transition to hybrid working.
- 8.4** HR has been providing support to managers in relation to managing absence throughout the pandemic. A comprehensive action plan is in place to continue to undertake focussed activity to proactively manage and reduce absence.
- 8.5** A review of the Making a Difference Recognition Scheme was undertaken in 2021 to reflect our new ways of working, removing the monthly recognition element of the scheme in favour of more focus on instant recognition. Engagement with the Made My Day element of the scheme has remained steady, with approximately 200 sent each month, a slight increase on the figures from last year which averaged at approximately 170 per month. There has also been an increase in team recognition through the Made my Day, following improvements to the online submission form.

- 8.6** The decision was taken not to hold an annual awards event for 2021, due to continued uncertainty around Covid-19 and an increase in infection rates. However, the 12 Months in 12 minutes, a thank you to all staff video was produced to celebrate and thank staff for their contribution during 2021. This helped to recognise the diversity of work undertaken across the council and feedback showed staff appreciated the gesture. Options are currently being explored for an annual awards event for 2022.
- 8.7** The Council has made a clear commitment to every member of staff, through the Employee Deal, to care for their health and wellbeing. To support this, work has been undertaken to better promote our internal team of Mental Health First Aiders. There are now 64 trained Mental Health First Aiders across the organisation. Further promotion is planned for this year, as well as the continued development of their skills, understanding people's lived experiences and linking in with colleagues on Domestic Abuse support.
- 8.7** In November 2021, our second virtual Winter Wellbeing month helped to highlight the need to look after our physical and mental wellbeing, with a range of activities available and information shared. Since the start of 2022, events worldwide, such as the war in Ukraine and increased cost of living has had an impact on staff wellbeing. To help support staff, wellbeing messages have been increased, including financial wellbeing tips and work is underway to improve the wellbeing information available on the CEntranet, so staff have one place they can go to find out what support is available. 'Time to Listen and Chat' calls have been in place since the start of the pandemic to support the wellbeing of staff, as well as a package of additional stress and resilience training and additional wellbeing conversation toolkits.

9. Progress to Date – Inclusive Workforce – Ensuring Everyone has a Voice

- 9.1** New joint trade union and management consultative arrangements were implemented from January 2022 and work is on-going to embed these to ensure efficient and effective processes, with decisions being made at the appropriate level to support business delivery and good employment relations throughout the organisation. The arrangements will be reviewed at the end of the first year of the new arrangements. Questions have been included in a recent Pulse Survey to provide information to report to the Cheshire East Joint Negotiation & Consultation Panel in response to the newly agreed workload agreement.
- 9.2** The programme for staff engagement has been aligned to hybrid working, with themed Pulse Staff surveys undertaken to understand how the workforce is feeling and help inform the direction of future workforce culture priorities. Brighter Future Champions meet monthly and continue to provide a critical friend role for the organisation. Work in underway to ensure the Champions are as representative of our workforce as possible.

- 9.3** HR continues to support the work of the EDI Board and the delivery of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Work Plan, which were reported to the April meeting of the Committee.

10. Progress to Date – Empowering Our Workforce

- 10.1** The Council's e-learning platform, Learning Lounge, was significantly redeveloped at the end of 2021, with additional functionality to book onto all training courses being switched from the Oracle system to Learning Lounge. This has also resulted in the redevelopment of the Member specific pages on Learning Lounge, ensuring ease of access to training. A briefing and a demonstration of the system was provided at a recent Member Input Panel.
- 10.2** Since then, HR has been working to further develop the system with easier navigation, single sign on and the inclusion of the electronic recording of PDR conversations.
- 10.3** The second phase of the upgrade was carried out in March 2022 with a new look and feel, and a new learner dashboard allowing staff to view all their courses, upcoming bookings, CPD log and PDR status in one place. This has been further enhanced with the introduction of a new 'managers zone', making it easier for managers to track the training records of their team, and find additional documents and links to support their development.
- 10.4** Training programmes have been reviewed considering the additional functionality that Learning Lounge brings, and additional training offered to support hybrid working. A bespoke new e-learning module has been developed and launched to support the Council's Customer Experience Strategy.

11. Implications

11.1. Legal

- 11.1.1. There is no legal requirement to produce a Workforce Strategy. However, it is necessary to provide a clear articulation of our workforce priorities and to ensure alignment with the Corporate Strategy.

11.2. Finance

- 11.2.1. The delivery of the actions set out in the Workforce Strategy is within existing budgets and approved business cases.
- 11.2.2. Those actions contained within the strategy that relate to the delivery of apprenticeship will be funded through the Council's existing apprenticeship levy funding.

11.3. Policy

- 11.3.1 The Workforce Strategy supports the Corporate Plan and the Council's vision for an "Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East". The Strategy supports the priorities for an open and enabling organisation, by putting in place plans to support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient, and empowered.

11.4 Equality

- 11.4.1 The Workforce Strategy aims to improve the experience of working for the Council for all members of staff. It also sets out key priorities and actions to ensure our workforce is inclusive to all and our recruitment and selection processes promote recruitment and selection for all underrepresented groups. It supports the delivery of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy.

11.5 Human Resources

- 11.5.1 The Workforce Strategy covers the breadth of services with HR and sets the priorities for Human Resources to work towards for the next four years.

11.6 Risk Management

- 11.6.1 There are risks to service delivery across the Council if plans are not put in place to address skills gaps and work is not undertaken in relation to recruitment and retention in an increasingly competitive market.

11.7 Rural Communities

- 11.7.1 There are no specific implications for rural communities.

11.8 Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 11.8.1 The delivery of the Council's Action Plan for Apprenticeships includes work to increase the number of apprenticeships available across the Council for our cared for children.

11.9 Public Health

- 11.9.1 There are no public health implications.

11.10 Climate Change

- 11.10.1 The delivery of the priorities within the Workforce Strategy that are focussed on new ways of working and the delivery of the agile working policy will contribute towards our workforce becoming more carbon neutral, through reduced commuting into work and commuting in between buildings to attend meetings in person.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Sara Barker, Head of HR Sara.barker@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01270 686328
Appendices:	Appendix One - Pulse Survey Infographic
Background Papers:	None