

Cabinet
14 June 2023

Approval of new People Strategy for Devon County Council

Report of the Director of People & Culture

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That the Cabinet be asked to:

- (a) approve the new People Strategy for Devon County Council (DCC); and
- (b) delegate authority for minor amendments to the Director of People & Culture in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Organisational Development, Workforce & Digital Transformation.

2) Background

Recent issues highlighted from the Race Equality Audit (2021) coupled with other behavioural related concerns identified in Children's Services over the last year, through a high number of operational related HR matters, has driven the need to refocus on activities in relation to our staff and the organisation's culture. This started with the appointment of a new Director of People & Culture and marks a shift towards us being more values based, purpose driven, and people centred in our work.

A key priority for this role to lead on, and one of our current corporate priorities is the delivery of a new People Strategy, which will outline how we will ensure that we have the appropriately skilled and talented people we need to deliver services to our communities and ensure that our Council is fit for the future. Further to this, we want all staff to understand and embody our values of care and kindness, along with our responsibility to strive for better outcomes and good value for the people of Devon.

It is critical that we also focus on the quality of our relationships and engagement with key stakeholders and partners to ensure that working together our strong values and collective approach ensure the best outcomes for the people of Devon.

3) Main Body

The Strategy has been designed based around a focus on the 6 key themes of:

1. Voice
2. Recruitment
3. Wellbeing
4. Belonging
5. Learning
6. Reward

The 6 themes were shaped by feedback from previous staff surveys, findings from the Race Equality Audit, benchmarking against other organisations, research of the recruitment market, themes identified through 'Exit Interviews' with staff leaving DCC and feedback from staff reference groups. The themes have then been consulted on over the past 3 months, outlined in Section 5 below. The activities undertaken in relation to each theme will directly impact upon the culture and performance of our workforce.

As part of the strategy, we have actively sought to highlight our collective role as corporate parents and our responsibility to our children in care and care leavers. As a result, each theme has a commitment in relation to this.

The Strategy outlines our aims for each theme, coupled with statements of intent around the outcomes we are seeking to achieve. The feedback is also being used to shape an Action Plan to support the delivery of this over the next 2 years. The Action Plan will be brought back to a further Cabinet in September for review, and progress against it will be regularly reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

4) Options / Alternatives

There is no formal Workforce or People Strategy in place. Currently strategic and operational workforce activity is undertaken in a more ad hoc and often reactive way. It is an option to continue with this approach; however, a more joined up approach would make best use of resources, avoiding duplication and outline a more holistic and proactive way to address the issues raised. It also provides greater clarity over progress and reporting arrangements. A more integrated People Strategy will also enable staff to see the impact of all of the factors within it on the performance and culture of the workforce.

5) Consultations / Representations / Technical Data

We have designed the strategy collaboratively, with Senior Leadership Team engaging with staff, Trades Unions and elected Members throughout its development, to gain their views about what matters from their perspective. The draft strategy has been shared at different stages of its development to seek feedback and further comments to form it. The feedback has shaped the Strategy and is currently being used to design the supporting Action Plan to deliver this.

The following methods of consultation were used to inform the themes, aims and desired outcomes of the People Strategy:

- Staff engagement survey in November 2022 which received 1857 responses, the themes from this are shared here: [What you told us in our Autumn 2022 People Survey - news \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)
- Feedback from staff following Senior Leadership Teams virtual briefing sessions held on 14 March & 2 May 2023 [Catch up on our May Microsoft Teams Sessions with our senior leaders - news \(devon.gov.uk\)](#). Following the second briefing, 46 responses received to this survey.
- External survey and analysis undertaken by our external recruitment agency, ThirtyThree, to understand the ways of working people find most appealing; the perceptions associated with County Councils as employers and why someone may or may not want to work for a County Council. This survey had 2005 respondents working in the private sector.
- Regular consultation has taken place with Senior Officers across all parts of DCC over the past 3 months and members of the corporate Equality team.
- HR senior leadership team and key stakeholders, including Trades Unions, have been consulted and provided detailed feedback.
- Multiple visits to DCC offices by the Senior Leadership Team to engage, in person, with staff and gain a greater insight into the key factors that are important for them about working for DCC
- Session with care leavers and senior officers to understand their perspectives
- Exit interview data has been reviewed from those leaving DCC to understand their reasons
- Engagement with over 30 cross-party elected Members who attended the Member engagement day on 12 May 2023 and provided feedback
- Race Equality Audit [Race Equality Audit 2021 \(Anti-racism at Devon County Council\) - tasks and guides](#)
- Benchmarking and review of Workforce and People Strategies from other organisations across the public sector.

6) Strategic Plan

The Council adopted its “Best Place” Strategic Plan at its meeting on 2 December 2021. The Plan – <https://www.devon.gov.uk/strategic-plan/> - sets out the Council’s vision, ambition, and overall priorities for 2021 to 2025. The delivery of the People Strategy will be one of the areas of focus for the next 12 months, and successful implementation will enable staff to be best placed to deliver the outcomes in the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan is currently being reviewed and will come to a future Cabinet meeting for approval. The delivery of the People Strategy is one of the priorities being considered to focus on, and successful implementation of it will enable our staff to be best placed to deliver the outcomes within the Strategic Plan.

The People Strategy explicitly highlights our collective role as corporate parents and our responsibility to our care leavers. There is a clear indication of our commitment to this in each theme of the strategy.

7) Financial Considerations

The feedback from all of the engagement listed in Section 5 is currently being used to outline a range of activities that will enable delivery of this strategy. The costs of the strategy itself is contained within existing budgets from the HR Service in relation to redirecting activities around HR Strategy, Performance, Learning & Development, and Recruitment Strategy. The Action Plan which will support delivery of the strategy is currently being drafted and any additional costs attached to any of the themes will be costed and recommendations made to Cabinet in September about whether they are progressed.

8) Legal Considerations

Employment Law has been considered and impacts are reflected as part of developing this strategy. However, there will be further multiple Employment Law based considerations in relation to the detail of delivery of this strategy. Therefore, the lawful implications and consequences of the themes of the Action Plan will be considered and taken into account as part of its development.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

The Strategy itself has no specific sustainability impacts; however, depending on the activities that will be recommended for the Action Plan, there may be impacts, for example in relation to staff travel or office accommodation, and the subsequent effect on the environment, that will need to be considered. Therefore, in the same way that Financial and Legal considerations will be reviewed, and recommendations made in relation to the themes in the strategy, this will also be undertaken in relation to Environmental Impacts.

10) Equality Considerations

Equality matters are a focus of each theme within the Strategy and the area of 'Belonging' will predominantly centre around delivery of actions in relation to DCC's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion agenda. The strategy has been developed in liaison with DCC's Equality Team. As with the other considerations within this report, the Action Plan detailing the delivery of each theme, will require full Equality Impacts Assessments.

11) Risk Management Considerations

This Strategy will impact on two risks already cited on DCC's Risk Register. These include:

- Recruitment & Retention in relation to ensuring DCC is able to attract and retain the right staff in a highly competitive current market.
- Industrial Relations Climate with regards to any changes to current Terms & Conditions or environment having an impact on staff delivery of services, such as through Industrial Action.

The implications of each risk have been taken into account and mitigated where possible through the existing DCC Risk Register.

Financial sustainability will need to be considered as the Action Plan is developed and will be considered by Cabinet in September as part of the overall review of it. The current financial climate may restrict the ability to deliver some of the desired actions and have an impact on cultural transformation for the wider organisation.

In addition to these risks, there is the potential for legal challenge in relation to not addressing some of the cultural issues raised, such as those raised through the Race Equality Audit or behaviours within some services.

12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations

Adopting a People Strategy will provide a more effective and joined up approach to address workforce related issues.

This would enable better use of existing resources, avoiding duplication and outline a more holistic and proactive way to address the issues raised. It also provides greater clarity over progress and reporting arrangements. Issues raised in the Race Equality Audit and other behavioural issues raised are more likely to be addressed than by dealing with approaches in a siloed way.

Director - Maria Chakraborty, Director of People & Culture
Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Organisational Development, Workforce & Digital Transformation:
Councillor Andrew Saywell

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper

Date

File Reference

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