

## Progress report for the Devon County Council People Strategy Action Plan Report of the Director of People & Culture

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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.

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### 1) Recommendation

That the Cabinet be asked to:

- (a) endorse the content of this update
- (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

Cabinet approved the new [People Strategy](#) for the Authority in June 2023 and the associated [Action Plan](#) in September 2023 which was identified as a priority to develop in response to a number of issues.

A key priority for the People Strategy is also to 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, in a highly competitive market. 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. The Action Plan outlined how we will focus on delivery of this over the next 3 years and this report provides a summary of the progress to date.

### 3) Main Body

The Strategy focuses on 6 key themes of staff experience within Devon County Council:

1. Voice
2. Recruitment
3. Reward
4. Wellbeing

5. Belonging
6. Learning

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 the Authority and feedback from staff reference groups.

The themes were consulted on ahead of being presented to Cabinet in June 2023, as outlined in Section 5. The associated Action Plan provides the overarching aims within each theme and details the actions identified as required to achieve these. It is envisaged that the activities undertaken in relation to each theme will provide a clear framework to support improved performance and culture change across our workforce.

This 6-monthly report provides an update on the progress made to date against the People Strategy Action Plan and is supported in more detail by the presentation appended. Below is a summary of the progress by theme against the actions with indicative due dates before 1 April 2024:

<b>Voice</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>	<b>Status</b>
Develop and implement a communication and engagement strategy to deliver a one council approach	<p>The draft Engagement Strategy has been developed with input from both the corporate Communications team and the People &amp; Culture directorate.</p> <p>This included an appraisal of the various communication methods that the organisation will utilise to engage and involve staff in key messages and decisions that impact them.</p> <p>This will be circulated to SLT in February 2024.</p>	Completed
Use a structured approach to engagement and co-creation to maximise the value achieved from hearing our peoples’ voice	<p>A schedule of engagement activities for 2024 has been created and will be shared with the workforce creating transparency of what will happen and when, and how they can be involved.</p> <p>The People Strategy ‘Support and Challenge’, Group, made up of representatives from across the Council, have been tasked with creating an organisation wide perspective of engagement. This will highlight possible engagement challenges/gaps so that planned action can be taken to address.</p> <p>A review has been undertaken and proposals are currently being discussed with existing groups as to how staff forums/groups are supported within the organisation, ensuring more structure in our engagement with staff.</p> <p>One of the aims of this project is to strengthen and broaden mechanisms for engaging with representatives from our diverse</p>	Structure completed and remaining work ongoing

	workforce on strategic and operational matters as appropriate, so that everyone feels they are represented and heard. Staff Forums will be represented as part of the Equality Commission.	
Creation of a safe and shared space for achievements, success, kindness, and general feedback  <i>[Linked to an action under Reward]</i>	<p>The research phase, which included undertaking a SWOT analysis of the four key elements (achievements, success, kindness, and general feedback) has been completed.</p> <p>Benchmarking is underway to understand how other organisations are approaching this including identifying internal good practice across Directorates.</p> <p>Following benchmarking, a proposal will be developed and presented to SLT by end of March 2024. This will outline possible options and make a recommendation about the best way to proceed.</p> <p>The work is focused on 3 proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer to peer recognition</li> <li>• Long Service</li> <li>• A celebration event to recognise achievements</li> </ul>	On schedule

<b>Recruitment</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>	<b>Status</b>
Incorporate learning from an 'outward mindsets' approach with a review of the Principles & Behaviours	<p>An 'Outward Mindsets' approach is being implemented throughout the organisation through recognising that our most important asset is not solely our people, but the relationships that exist between our people.</p> <p>SLT will complete the second of two Outward Mindset sessions during Q1 of 2024/25 which will then influence how this action is taken forward.</p>	In progress
Design a recruitment strategy to deliver a balance between internal movement and external recruitment, to include reviewing our image and make us the employer of choice	<p>We are collaborating with our advertising agency (Penna) to develop an Employer Value Proposition (EVP) and launch a fresh look and feel Employer Brand. A distinct but linked recruitment brand for social work is also being delivered as part of this project. This is in the research phase which will see Penna deliver their first draft of the creative EVP in April 2024.</p> <p>Due to the current pressures within the Children's and Young Peoples Futures (CYPF) directorate, creation of a Recruitment &amp; Retention (R&amp;R) strategy for CYPF was prioritised over a corporate one. This has now been co-produced with the service and has been approved by their leadership team. Priorities within the strategy are now being progressed.</p> <p>The strategy includes proactively supporting CYPF to improve R&amp;R and reduce agency reliance. We are currently working through a targeted</p>	In progress

	and focussed ‘temp to perm’ conversion project where agency workers are encouraged to move onto substantive contracts.	
Complete a cycle of workforce planning to identify workforce needs and ensure alignment to current organisational priorities	<p>Work is underway to review the existing approach to workforce planning, taking into consideration recent findings published in the Local Government Workforce of the Future and other significant changes in the internal and external context.</p> <p>This is on track to be finalised by the end of March 2024 and then will be rolled out in a systematic programme of work across the organisation beginning in April.</p> <p>Common organisational themes from the Directorate Workforce Plans will be fed back into the Organisational Development team within People &amp; Culture, to consider how they can be reflected in the People Strategy.</p>	On schedule

<b>Reward</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>	<b>Status</b>
Deliver a benefits platform to broaden the benefits we can offer to our people	<p>Development and promotion of new staff benefits platform (Vivup) which launched 9 October 2024, offering a wide range of over 900 lifestyle discounts schemes, including for supermarkets and fuel, as well as access to salary sacrifice schemes for home and electronic goods, electric lease cars, cycle to work, Additional Voluntary Contributions to Pensions, and Child Care vouchers.</p> <p>The salary sacrifice schemes generate savings for both the employee and employer in the form of tax, National Insurance and/ or pension contributions, and can spread the cost over a salary deduction period.</p> <p>Statistics as at 24 January 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3200+ registrations</li> <li>• 337 orders</li> <li>• Savings to the Authority in current financial year of c.£18k</li> </ul> <p>As part of the staff benefits platform, Annual Leave Purchase was launched 29 January with the first purchase window open from 1 February. 25 purchase applications have been made so far (as at 7 February).</p>	Completed
Develop and deliver a framework to celebrate achievements in both formal and informal ways, creating a one	<p>Benchmarking is underway to understand how other organisations are approaching this including identification of internal good practice across Directorates.</p> <p>Following benchmarking and research a proposal will be developed by end of March 24 to discuss with SLT. This will outline possible options and make a recommendation about the best way to proceed.</p>	On schedule

<p>council approach</p> <p><i>[Linked to an action under Voice]</i></p>	<p>The work is focused on 3 proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer to peer recognition</li> <li>• Long Service</li> <li>• A celebration event to recognise achievements</li> </ul>	
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<b>Wellbeing</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>	<b>Status</b>
<p>Review and update the 1:1 and appraisal conversations, ensuring wellbeing, learning and organisational objectives are included.</p>	<p>This action was completed in December 2023. The refreshed appraisal, 1:1 guides and supporting materials were shared via the <a href="#">People Hub</a> (a newly developed single site for managers and staff to easily access HR related material). The People &amp; Culture team held four listening events during January 2024 to understand how tailored support can be designed and delivered to ensure quality effective conversations are taking place.</p> <p>The feedback is being analysed with a view to a report recommending options for support (in direct response to the feedback heard) being put in place during April and May 2024.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>Procurement of an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) ensuring it delivers best value, is effective and meets the needs of the organisation</p>	<p>The new EAP will go live on 1 April 2024 following the contract being awarded to Vivup, as an extension of the benefits platform.</p> <p>This will be provided to all employed staff in addition to elected members, foster carers and care leavers.</p>	<p>Completed</p>
<p>Procurement of an Occupational Health service, ensuring it delivers best value, is effective and meets the needs of the organisation</p>	<p>The current contract ceases in October 2024 and work is underway to procure a service that offers an improved experience for our staff and managers and contributes to supporting people to be well at work.</p> <p>The specification is due to be completed by March 2024. Contract award is due by July 2024.</p>	<p>On schedule</p>

<b>Belonging</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>	<b>Status</b>
Support the Corporate Equality Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, to include improving organisational understanding of EDI through updated mandatory learning modules	<p>The EDI Essentials e-learning was refreshed and relaunched in January 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The range of new materials includes films and a personal workbook</li> <li>• All new staff are expected to complete the modules during their corporate induction programme and existing staff are expected to complete it by the end of 2024 (and no longer than two years since completing the previous EDI Essentials training), although some Services Areas have set earlier deadlines for their staff.</li> <li>• On 31st January 630 people had completed it, which is 11% of the corporate workforce.</li> <li>• 728 people have provided feedback on the course.</li> <li>• 54% said they have learned more, or much more, than expected. Only 1% said they learned less than they expected.</li> <li>• The Equality Team will provide a full report of completion statistics, feedback analysis and proposals for further action to SLT in February.</li> </ul>	Updated training implemented and support to the Corporate Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan is ongoing
Use learning and data from engagement strategy, including staff surveys and exit interview feedback, to help better understand what makes our people feel safe and belong.	<p>A report identifying the key learning from the exit survey data has been produced for review. The key themes arising from the feedback have been identified and this information will be shared with the SLT theme leads to incorporate into current activity delivering against the people strategy action plan.</p> <p>The findings extend beyond the Belonging theme and span across all six themes.</p>	In progress

<b>Learning</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Update</b>	<b>Status</b>
<p>Design and deliver a corporate learning strategy that is aligned to our priorities, supports our people to understand our council and develops professional learning.</p> <p>This includes developing a programme to roll out an 'outward mindsets' approach to support the</p>	<p>The corporate learning strategy is due for delivery by August 2024 and will be developed by the newly strengthened L&amp;D Team, following the completion of the restructure within People &amp; Culture.</p> <p>SLT are scheduled to complete their second 'Outward Mindset' session during Q1 of 2024/25 which will then influence how this action is taken forward.</p>	On schedule

foundations of a trusted, inclusive and innovative council.		
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## Care Leavers

In addition to the work detailed in the tables above, the People Strategy also contains specific actions that target improvement of the experience of Care Leavers within Devon.

As all of the themes have been allocated an SLT sponsor to ensure this work is supported and championed, the same approach has been adopted for Care Leavers, with Keri Denton, Interim Director for Performance and Partnerships leading this role.

The actions and the progress made against them is detailed in the presentation appended.

## Measuring Impact

The People Strategy and Action Plan have been developed to provide a framework to support cultural change through 6 themes that all impact on staff experience. Whilst we can measure our progress against delivering the specific actions, measuring *culture* is less linear.

We can however, clearly identify links between the deliverables within the People Strategy and Action Plan with the Corporate Performance Framework, through instead measuring the *organisation climate* using key metrics such as:

- Turnover
- Absence rates
- Employment relations cases (grievance/disciplinary)
- Net promoter score within annual staff survey (recommending the Authority as a place to work)

Some of these indicators will feed into the Corporate Performance Framework as well as the People & Culture Directorate Plan, which are monitored as part of a regular Quality Performance Review Meeting (QPRM).

## 4) Options / Alternatives

The People Strategy and associated Action Plan have been endorsed by Cabinet. There are multiple options that have been scoped as part of designing the Action Plan, considering a range of feedback received through the consultation and engagement outlined in Section 5. Those selected have been based on considerations such as the Authority's current context, including financial sustainability, and our cultural maturity.

## 5) Consultations

The Cabinet Reports submitted in June 2023 and September 2023 outlined the extensive engagement and collaboration undertaken to design the strategy with staff, Senior

Leadership Team, Trade Unions and elected Members to gain their views about what matters from their perspective.

As part of shaping the strategy, feedback was collated from all of the stakeholders outlined above around the key actions required to deliver the strategy which have been used to create the Action Plan.

The following methods of consultation were used to inform the development of the Action Plan:

- 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 an 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 the Authority 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 the Authority 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 the Authority
- Session with care leavers and senior officers to understand their perspectives
- Exit interview data has been reviewed from those leaving the Authority 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.

A report taken to Cabinet on 12 July 2023 outlined the corporate plan for the next 12 months, linked to the Strategic Plan. The delivery of the People Strategy is identified as one



of the six areas of focus for the next 12 months, and its successful implementation will enable staff to be best placed to deliver the outcomes in the Strategic Plan.

It will also contribute to supporting the delivery of our corporate Equality, Diversity & Inclusion agenda, most predominantly through the 'Belonging' theme but also underpinning our approach across all areas of the Strategy.

The People Strategy explicitly highlights our collective role as corporate parents and our responsibility to our care leavers. The Action Plan outlines work both underway and planned in relation to each theme of the strategy.

## **7) Financial Considerations**

The feedback from all of the engagement listed in Section 5 was used to design the Action Plan which enables the delivery of this strategy. The costs of the Action Plan is being contained through existing budget allocation to the People & Culture directorate.

## **8) Legal Considerations**

There are no legal considerations to note in this update

## **9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)**

The Strategy itself has no specific sustainability impacts; however, there may be impacts that result from future actions undertaken 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 the Authority's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion agenda.

The strategy has been developed in liaison with the Authority's Equality Team and an overarching high level impact assessment has been completed and presented to Cabinet in September 2023.

## **11) Risk Management Considerations**

This Strategy and associated Action Plan impacts on two risks already cited on the Authority's Risk Register:

- Recruitment & Retention in relation to ensuring the Authority 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.

Financial sustainability has been considered as part of developing the Action Plan and so activities have been contained within scope of the budget allocation for the People & Culture directorate.

## **12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations**

The People Strategy has been adopted and delivery of the associated Action Plan is well underway and delivery of the majority are in line with timeframes allocated; many of the actions noted as 'on schedule' are expected to be completed during Q1.. It remains the expectation that this programme of work will provide a more effective and organisation-wide collaborative approach to address workforce related issues.

### **Name**

**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: Approval of new People Strategy for Devon County Council

Date: 14 June 2023

Background Paper: Approval of new People Strategy Action Plan for Devon County Council

Date: 13 September 2023

### **Contact for enquiries:**

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