

Progress report for the Devon County Council People Strategy Action Plan 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) endorse the content of this update
- (b) delegate authority for minor amendments to the action plan 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, it provides a framework to help staff to embed a positive culture across the workforce, with a key focus on the quality of our relationships, along with a responsibility to strive for better outcomes and best value for the people of Devon. The Action Plan outlined how we will deliver this over the next 3 years and this report provides a summary of the progress achieved within the first full year.

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 in the first year against the People Strategy Action Plan and is supported in more detail by a summary of the progress by theme against the actions with indicative due dates before 1 October 2024 (Appendix 1) and a presentation. (Appendix 2)

There are some actions that had originally been identified for completion within the first year, that due to resource constraints have been delayed until the second year of the Plan. This has been due to some staffing pressures combined with supporting other corporate wide priorities, such as restructures, which includes one across the People and Culture directorate. The rescheduled timescales are shown in the accompanying presentation in italics (Appendix 2).

Care Leavers

In addition to the work detailed in Appendix 1, the People Strategy also contains specific actions that target improvement of the experience of Care Leavers within Devon.

There are several other, more detailed progress updates being reported and progressed through the Corporate Parenting Strategy Board and subgroups. A summary of the significant actions is outlined in the presentation appended (Appendix 2), but to avoid duplication, the Corporate Parenting Strategy Board maintains lead oversight in relation to the development of Care Leaver priorities and the presentation titled Partnership Actions can be found [here](#).

All of the themes have been allocated an SLT sponsor to ensure this work is supported and championed corporately. The Director for Performance and Partnerships, Keri Denton, is the lead for Care Leavers in relation to the People Strategy.

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:

- Absence rates
- Employment relations cases (grievance/disciplinary)
- Net promoter score within annual staff survey (recommending the Authority as a place to work)
- Engagement rates as indicated by the completion rates for the annual staff survey
- Kindness and feelings of value being described by employees within the annual staff survey

Within the first year of the People Strategy being in place 85% of the respondents to our People Survey 2024 reported knowing about the People First approach or People Strategy. In addition, the following impact across the organisation is outlined below and a summary is also detailed within the presentation in Appendix 2. A thematic review of the survey responses is shown at Appendix 3.

Wellbeing / Reward

- A steady improvement in absence rates for the organisation. In 21/22 the average was 9.6 days lost per employee and in 23/24 it has reduced to 8.9.
- A reduction in the average monthly rate of employment relations cases (disciplinary/grievance) from 5.08 to 4.75, however in light of the restructures planned for 2024/25 this is likely to be impacted.
- Through the mid-life MOT programme, we have supported 244 employees to consider their work, wealth and wellbeing
- In support of their financial wellbeing, we are supporting 488 employees to plan for their retirement investing £176k a month into retirement savings
- The introduction of the benefits platform has enabled employees to purchase discounted gift cards leading to a corporate saving of £32k in the period April to June 24
- 75% of gift cards purchased have been for use in supermarkets which delivers a direct benefit to mitigate against the cost-of-living concerns employees raised in 2022
- 918 applications have been made to salary sacrifice schemes enabling employees to purchase at discount and spread the cost (with no interest applied) of home and electronic items through payroll.
- 148 employees have increased their annual leave allowances through purchasing additional leave. This has generated a saving to DCC of c£150k through savings on National Insurance contributions, for the first purchase window.

Belonging

- In the 2024 People Survey, 96% of our workforce report experiencing kindness in their teams
- Our workforce report an improvement in usage and familiarity of our Core Principles and Behaviours (increase of 7% since 2022) in the Survey
- Our workforce report through the Survey an improved percentage in whether they would recommend DCC as a good place to work (increase of 5% since 2022)
- The Survey reported that two thirds of our workforce report feeling valued and recognised

Voice

- The corporate engagement strategy was launched in March 2024. Through a structured approach to engagement and consistent involvement of SLT the response rates for the people survey have improved by 19% from the 2022 survey. In terms of staff numbers, this meant an increase of 817 responses.

Recruitment

- Focussed work on Recruitment and Retention in Children's & Young People's Futures (CYPF) is aimed to create a more stable workforce by increasing the number of permanent staff. For example, we have adopted a 'grow your own' approach by increasing the number of those recruited into Assessed & Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), with a record high of 28 due to join DCC in Sept / Dec 2024 as part of this. These permanent Social Worker's employed through the ASYE programme will be provided with additional learning and development support, with the aim of them being able to hold full caseloads by Sept 2026.
- As part of this, we are also continuing to actively work to convert Social Workers employed through agencies onto permanent contracts and have been successful in agreeing terms with 13 agency colleagues who have or are imminently joining the service on a permanent contract.
- We have implemented a new career progression route for Social Workers to attract a wider breadth of Social Workers to DCC by introducing a step between ASYEs and Experienced Social Workers which is more reflective of their level of experience.
- We have also developed a new Recruitment Brand both corporately, but also that can have a sub brand for Adult's & Children's Services.

Learning

- A series of Manager's Events were launched in September for all Managers within DCC. They aimed to be clear with managers about the direction of travel of the Council and its expectations, provide tools to develop a more relational based approach to staff management and provide increased understanding of key areas of priority or risk within the Council, The first two have been undertaken in September, within initial feedback being very positive about their impact.
- To date 104 people have undertaken the new 'Insights' cultural approach. This has been spread across SLT, the five cross organisational change teams and a number of Extended SLT. This approach has enabled a 'step-change' in how the Council work to embed a one council approach and build relationships. This approach is being rolled out further in the new year.
- In response to feedback from the workforce about the amount of time expected to complete the mandatory EDI training, a condensed version has been created to create wider impact.

Some of these indicators will now feed into the Corporate Performance Framework as well as the People & Culture Directorate Plan, which are monitored as part of a monthly 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 each action within 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, best value, employment law & best practice.

5) Consultations

The Cabinet Reports submitted in June 2023 [People Strategy](#) and September 2023 [Action Plan](#) 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, Diversity & Inclusion team.
- People & Culture 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
- Engagement with over 30 cross-party elected members who attended the Member engagement day on 12 May 2023 and provided feedback
- Exit interview data has been reviewed from those leaving the Authority to understand their reasons
- 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.

The annual staff survey for 2024 closed on 9th August 2024 and the results are currently being analysed. Themes coming from this will be reflected in the Action Plan for the year two and three actions. High level results are included in Appendix 2, but the more detailed analysis will be shared as part of the update report in March 2025.

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 was identified as one of the six areas of focus for the [next 12 months in the Corporate Plan 2023-24](#) which was linked to the Strategic Plan. The new [Corporate Plan 2024-25](#) outlines the People Strategy as one of the new Operating Principles, which underpin all activity within the Council. The successful implementation of the People Strategy 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 and all actions are delivered in line with our Operating Principles which include Best Value.

8) Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations relating to this report.

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 on a case by case basis. Therefore, in the same way that Financial and Legal considerations will be reviewed in relation to each specific action, 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 DCC's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan and wider approach.

The strategy has been developed in liaison with the DCC's Equality Team and an overarching high level impact assessment has been completed and presented to Cabinet in September 2023. For specific actions within the Plan, where an individual impact assessments is required, they have/ will be completed as part of that activity.

11) Risk Management Considerations

This Strategy and associated Action Plan impacts on three 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.
- Mental Health in relation to the deterioration in the mental health of one or more DCC employees.

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 now been in place for a full year. The alignment of corporate and directorate activity to the six themes is helping employees to understand the approach we are taking to address workforce related issues. The People Survey identified that 85% of the workforce are either familiar with or aware of the People First approach, and so although there is still work to be done to embed this further, this figure is positive as a starting point in some a large, diverse and dispersed organisation. There have been many significant areas of work completed, with some having ongoing requirements that will be encompassed into 'business as usual' work for teams across DCC and in particular within People & Culture. There is further work to progress in line with the Action Plan. The results

of the People Survey, alongside other measures, overall suggest that the impact in the first year of the Strategy is showing signs of success as an effective 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:

Name: Maria Chakraborty, Director of People & Culture

Telephone: 01392 383000

Address: County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon