

PC/25/1

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee  
27<sup>th</sup> March 2025

## Update on Voice and Wellbeing themes of the People Strategy

### Report of the Director of People and Culture

---

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

---

## 1) Recommendations

That the Committee be asked to:

- a) Acknowledge the wide range of positive work taking place across the Council to create a structured and consistent approach to staff engagement
- b) Be assured that supporting employee wellbeing is an organisational priority
- c) Be assured that employee voice is informing the development of the second year of the action plan for the delivery of the People Strategy.

## 2) Introduction

Cabinet approved the new [People Strategy](#) for the Authority in June 2023 and the associated [Action Plan](#) in September 2023.

A key priority for the People Strategy is to outline how the Council will ensure that it has the appropriately skilled and talented people it needs to deliver services to our communities and ensure that the Council is fit for the future in a highly competitive market. Further to this, the strategy provides a framework to help staff to embed a positive culture across the workforce with a key focus on the quality of relationships, along with a responsibility to strive for better outcomes and best value for the people of Devon.

This report describes the Council's work on two themes within the People Strategy; Voice, and Wellbeing. The report also identifies how feedback from employees is helping to shape the actions in the second year of the action plan. The request for a detailed update on the People Survey, specifically employee engagement and wellbeing activity was requested at the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee of 28 November 2024 where employee sickness absence and staffing reductions had been raised during People and Culture updates, and again at the meeting of 30 January 2025.

## 3) Progress in the Voice and Wellbeing theme

The aim of the Voice theme of the People Strategy is:

'To create an effective ongoing dialogue between leaders and the wider workforce, to engage, listen to and gain clarity about what is important to them. We will feedback on what we have heard and deliver actions.'

In order to do this, two clear actions were identified:

1. To have clear, inspiring and regular messaging about what is happening within the organisation and what the key priorities are.
2. To listen to our people, using a variety of different methods to engage with, listen to and respond to their views. This includes supporting our diversity networks.

A clear and consistent approach was developed and published in a newly designed Engagement Strategy. It set out how the Council will engage with members of staff and included a seasonal calendar of events to let our workforce know what engagement events were happening, when and how they could get involved.

It is the Council's intention to summarise and analyse the employee voice received through a variety of mechanisms and to use this evidence / feedback to inform updates and changes to people policies and practices at the Council. The information is anonymised and themed to inform activity and improvement within the six People Strategy themes. All teams across the People and Culture directorate can refer to the employee voice feedback when making decisions about future work and how to approach it.

A presentation has been circulated as an appendix to this report separately which outlines the engagement approach, a summary of engagement activity that took place in 2024, and the themes heard from the Council's People Survey and other activities.

The presentation also provides an update on how the employee voice is informing the work being undertaken in the People Strategy action plan now and into 2025-26, paying particular focus on the Wellbeing theme. The purpose of this is to provide assurance that there is ongoing and additional support for employee wellbeing in all areas.

## **4) Options**

The People Strategy has been endorsed by Cabinet and in order to ensure delivery of it, an Action Plan is required. 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 DCC's current context, including financial sustainability, and our cultural maturity.

## **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 were 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 Trade 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.

Since 2023, the Council has continued to listen to staff through a range of mechanisms. Staff feedback continues to inform the ongoing delivery of the People Strategy action plan.

## **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 [Corporate Plan 2023-24](#) which was linked to the Strategic Plan. The [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**

All activities are being delivered within available resources, including across service areas.

## **8) Legal Considerations**

There are no specific legal considerations.

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

Our work on Voice and Wellbeing will not negatively affect environmental issues.

## **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 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan and wider approach.

The strategy has been developed in liaison with the DCC 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 assessment is required, they have/ will be completed as part of that activity.

## **11) Risk Management Considerations**

Risks related to employee wellbeing are monitored via our Risk Management System. There is an active risk related to employee wellbeing:

- Mental Health in relation to the deterioration in the mental health of one or more DCC employees.

The work detailed as part of the Wellbeing Strategy aims to reduce the risks associated with employee absence, particularly related to absence due to mental health.

## **12) Summary**

This report and accompanying presentation have outlined the progress made with regard to engaging with employees across the Council. The report shows that there is a clear link between employee voice and resulting action from the organisation. In addition to this, the focused programme to support wellbeing is supporting and enabling employees to deliver the outcomes within the Strategic Plan.

**Name** 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