

To: Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

On: 14 September 2023

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

Heading: Progress report on the Council's People Strategy 'Our People Our Future 2021–2026'

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Council's People Strategy was approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board on 31 March 2021 following a review of approaches to organisational development and workforce planning, which identified areas where improvements could be made. This review highlighted our strategies at that time applied a "one size fits all" generic approach to workforce priorities, which did not take account of diverse service needs or where they were in their change journey, or unexpected developments like the COVID19 pandemic.
- 1.2 Since its approval, officers have taken steps to progress bespoke service actions identified in each of the immediate year 1-2 priorities, contained within the 3 key strategic outcomes, in line with the agreed timescales.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide the members with an update on the progress made, and to set the key workforce planning priorities over the next 2 years. These future-focused priorities align to 5 strategic outcomes of the Council Plan 2022-2027. However, the Council acknowledges priorities may change over the duration of the People Strategy as core services continue to redesign to meet service needs.
- 1.4 Section 4 of this report to members provides a strategic summary and general capture of progress made across the 3 priority areas with approximately 50% of the way towards implementing the plan in full.

- 1.5 Progress reports have been provided to all the trade unions as part of the joint trade union liaison meetings which take place with HR & OD colleagues and service managers.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Board is asked to note:
- The progress made by the Council in the last 24 months.
 - The next progress report will be submitted on 31 March 2025.
 - Approve the new Control of Smoking at Work Policy attached at **Appendix 1**.
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3. Background to the People Strategy

- 3.1 The Council has undergone significant transformation in recent years and continues to adapt to immediate and long-term financial and national policy challenges. In response to the challenges ahead, the Council's People Strategy 2021-2026, approved on 31 March 2021 set out how we intended to support our employees and deliver on the workforce priorities during our continued recovery from COVID-19 and the transformational change and reform programmes already underway. It set out 3 strategic outcomes containing a framework of activities within each outcome for delivery over the lifecycle of the strategy.
- 3.2 The People Strategy has helped to strengthen workforce resilience in areas of:
- **Health, safety, and wellbeing** - this remains our top priority for the council. We protected our staff during COVID-19 recovery ensuring safe working practices were in place to prevent any future spread of the virus. We now have placed a much wider focus on health, wellbeing, and attendance levels of staff by progressing activities to support and improve the physical, mental, social, and financial wellbeing of our workforce.
 - **Exploring new ways of working post COVID19** - Since COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed and then removed, the ways in which we work are different to how we worked before the pandemic. New ways of working introduced across services provides flexibility on how services are delivered, and where and when our colleagues work. Looking forward, the ways we work will continue to evolve as part of a wider programme of work for the council which commenced during 2021/22 which has seen a transition towards return to physical work locations for part of the working week. Work has also commenced on the use of our workplaces, office spaces, equipment, technology with focus on the benefits for our workforce.

- **Building on our staff communications and engagement** - Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the council provided colleagues and trade unions with weekly clear updates on changes to government guidance and safety protocols which was welcomed. We continue to build on this success and explore new ways of fostering a culture that empowers a well informed and engaged workforce. Positive relationships and engagement with our trade unions was essential in maintaining a safe and healthy working environment.

4 People Strategy Progress

4.1 Sections 4.2 to 4.4 of this report provides a summary of key progress made across the three priority areas of Health and Well-being, New Ways of Working and Communication and Engagement.

4.2 Health and Wellbeing

- We reviewed the impact of the current Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22 against the pandemic response which has informed the development of our new strategy, due to be launched later in 2023.
- We carried out an organisational health check that assessed the wellbeing of our workforce, both frontline and homeworking, asking questions about mental health, physical health and lifestyle including nutrition, exercise, quality sleep, self-checks/actions, alcohol consumption, loneliness and isolation supports. Outputs from this exercise informed the development of four new priorities: 'Mental, Physical, Social and Financial' wellbeing contained within our new draft Health and Well-being Strategy.
- Informed by our absence data, we have increased psychological & musculoskeletal support by targeting known hotspot areas within services and have provided more bespoke support such as: trained Mental Health First Aiders, Occupational Health, Advice Works, Employee Benefits/Savings etc, with greater focus on frontline service colleagues.
- We reviewed our Occupational Health and Employee Assistance provision and introduced a new contract during 2022. This provided services with increased Occupational Health Physician time and Occupational Health Adviser support. Appointments were provided face to face, virtually or over the telephone.
- We have promoted 'self-care' for our colleagues by launching new training on mental health awareness and introduced new 'wellbeing conversations' e-learning across all services. We have promoted the work of Mental Health First Aiders to improve opportunities for staff to talk freely and openly about mental health and seek support. Further self-care support included financial wellbeing stalls set up at 3 Council locations with more information available via virtual Ren Talks sessions.
- A new Managing Absence Policy was approved by Board in November 2022 to support improvements in attendance levels encouraging earlier

returns to work, where possible. Training was developed to champion new ways of thinking, where everyone understands how regular attendance at work impacts positively on the council's performance.

- A new Supporting Menopause at Work Policy was introduced earlier this year with the key purpose of providing a range of supports to women with menopause, raising awareness of what menopause is, and encouraging discussions openly and confidently, should they wish to do so.
- A new Pregnancy Loss Policy was introduced earlier this year to support colleagues who experience pregnancy loss with paid time off and access to a range of support provisions.

4.3 New Ways of Working Post Pandemic

- We engaged with services, colleagues, and trade unions to explore opportunities for new ways of working post-pandemic. This included: carrying out a review of our estates and facilities, the provision of new supporting technology, embedding hybrid working where it works best, and adapting some customer facing front line service delivery practices, learning from our past experiences.
- Managers and staff have been supported on cultural change with training via iLearn modules, created on topics such as Managing a Virtual Team, Living Our Values, Leading Our Values, alongside topics such as Managing Business Continuity and Coaching.
- We have completed 8 cohorts of CMI accredited Leadership and Management development training with 75 managers, to date, successfully completing the programme. Four new cohorts, totalling 46 managers due to complete later this year.
- We reviewed each stage of the employee lifecycle starting with recruitment, induction, and onboarding, through to exiting the council. This ensures necessary changes are considered and being made within our HR&OD plans, policies, and conditions of service to support new ways of working.
- We worked closely with economic development colleagues to promote the council's social and economic priorities by embedding employability programmes into service workforce plans, with our policies and processes supporting routes into employment creating a more inclusive workforce.
- We implemented several new and revised HR&OD policies to support new ways of working including Recruitment, Managing Absence, Flexible Working, Flexible Retirement, Menopause and Pregnancy Loss.
- We successfully harmonised the Pay, Grading and Terms and Conditions of Employment for 'Building Services Craft Employees' to 'Local Government provisions.
- Within the Council's Digital Strategy priorities, we have partnered with West College Scotland to reduce digital barriers and exclusion by investing in training to upskill our front-line service colleagues. We've introduced 13 Digital Champions to provide peer support and build digital confidence across the workforce.

- We implemented a revised pay and grading model for approximately 6000 colleagues. This consolidated the Scottish Local Government living wage into our pay model as the minimum hourly rate of pay and helped to reduce our gender pay gap to 0.48% in favour of male, the lowest in the Council's history.

4.4 **Staff Communication and Engagement**

4.5 Working in collaboration, colleagues from HR&OD and the Communications team have:

- Regularly acknowledged the commitment and values colleagues have shown during the pandemic and recovery. This is part of the employee journey we are building to create a positive, healthy, and inclusive workplace culture.
- Made positive progress with the programme to embed our values across our employee lifecycle with priority given to Recruitment, Induction and Onboarding processes and HR Policies.
- Provided training for our leaders in role modelling our values and bringing these to life and continue to train all colleagues on living and promoting our values with approx. 3500 colleagues completed the training so far.
- Continued to provide up-to-date, regular information on safety, wellbeing, and new working conditions as they are developed and agreed.
- Reviewed our current approaches to communications to explore new technologies to improve our communications council wide. This will help provide managers with the right tools to communicate council messages differently and effectively to frontline and remote teams.
- Started a review of how we engage with colleagues, exploring the opportunity to re-introduce local forums and focus groups within services. This will ensure that views and ideas are obtained from colleagues on how to improve levels of engagement, allowing communications to flow freely from the council to colleagues and vice versa.
- Started developing a package of training for managers to empower them to deliver clear, inclusive, accessible, and appropriate communications to their teams, adapting messages to suit different groups, whilst being aware of staff with numeracy or literacy support needs.

5. **Key People Strategy priorities for the next 24 Months**

5.1 Having reviewed our progress against our outcomes, we have taken the opportunity to reset our key people priorities in agreement with our trade union colleagues and services for the next 24 months. These priorities, outlined below, will align to, and support the 5 strategic outcomes of the Council Plan 2022-2027 and will be delivered using a collaborative approach with various stakeholders.

5.2 These priorities are:

Priority 1 - Improving our employee experience to evolve our culture.

- **We will** accelerate our plans to embed our cultural change journey, taking opportunities to celebrate how well our colleagues are 'living our values' each day. We will build on our range of learning and training resources to help managers and colleagues embed these values into everything they do.
- **We will** work closely with our trade union colleagues to continue embedding our values through new and revised HR&OD policies and suite of learning resources, helping to create a healthy and inclusive working environment.
- **We will** use the feedback from our equality, diversity, and inclusion survey to provide managers with a range of tools that will encourage engagement and communication so all colleagues regardless of their role feel supported, valued, and informed.
- **We will** introduce an employee recognition scheme that will enable us to recognise and reward colleagues for the excellent work they do and support the Council's culture of continuous service improvement.
- **We will** implement a new modern and sustainable package of terms and conditions of employment for local government employees, in agreement with our trade unions, ensuring we continue to attract and retain top talent.
- **We will** support our managers and leaders as visible role models to improve engagement and communication with their teams. This will help ensure colleagues are productive, feel valued and supported through regular team meetings and 1-2-1 performance discussions.
- **We will** ensure the health, safety and well-being of our colleagues remains our number one priority, focusing on service led needs, aligned to physical, mental, social, and financial wellbeing. The latest health and safety policy, which has been developed in collaboration with services and our trade union colleagues is the 'Control of Smoking at Work Policy', attached at **Appendix 1** for approval. This policy replaces the Council's policy on 'Tobacco, Control of Smoking at Work' and ensures a smoke free environment at work for all, covering all forms of smoking and smoking materials such as vapes and e-cigarettes.

5.3 Priority 2 - Workforce Planning to support service redesigns.

- **We will** improve our workforce data provision to managers to support future service redesigns. This will help us respond pro-actively to future challenges whilst exploring new opportunities that will modernise services.
- **We will** provide workforce planning training for managers to support service redesigns.
- **We will** support the integration of these new people strategy priorities into our service improvement plans ensuring activities become embedded in day-to-day business and outcomes are easily demonstrated.

- **We will** work with services to identify skills gaps and equip managers with tools to enable the up-skilling of colleagues and support our new ways of working.
- **We will** embed our economic development employability programmes throughout our recruitment processes ensuring barriers identified by our employability groups such as 'DFN Project Search' and 'The Promise' are removed, creating opportunities for the Council to create a more, inclusive, and diverse workforce.
- **We will** review our end-to-end recruitment processes to support service workforce planning providing a more inclusive and efficient process for attracting, appointing, inducting, and onboarding our future diverse workforce.
- **We will** implement a revised appraisal process to ensure performance is managed, talent is recognised and celebrated, enabling our people to reach their full potential.

5.4 Priority 3 - Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- **We will** review our policies and processes, using feedback from an Equality, Including and Diversity survey carried out in June 2023, to support our ambition to create an inclusive environment where everyone can feel valued and thrive, regardless of their personal characteristics or circumstances.
- **We will** ensure all our learning and development and management and leadership development programmes include Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, providing focus on the benefits of being a diverse and inclusive employer, demonstrated through strong leadership.
- **We will** review, promote, and maximise participation on our mandatory training modules that support Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, ensuring these are accessible to all managers and colleagues.
- **We will** review the impact of existing internal staff forums and create new focus groups using the results of our Equality, Diversity, and inclusion survey to ensure underrepresented groups of our workforce are supported and have a voice.
- **We will** build trust and encourage our workforce to share their equality monitoring information with us to help inform improvements in policy and strategy and improve the experiences of colleagues working in Renfrewshire.
- **We will** continue to take steps to improve our gender pay gap which is currently gap to 0.48% in favour of male, the lowest in the Council's history.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – The People Strategy is supporting the Council's ongoing financial sustainability which is dependent on the ability of the Council to transform and modernise services.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – As outlined in the report.

3. **Community Planning** – None.
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** – None.
6. **Information Technology** – None.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** -

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** – None.
9. **Procurement** – None.
10. **Risk** – None.
11. **Privacy Impact** – None.
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – None.
13. **Climate Risk** – None.

List of Background Papers

None.

Author: **Marlene Boyd, Head of HR & OD**