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**To:** Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board

**On:** 21 November 2024

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**Report by:** Director of Finance and Resources

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

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Council's People Strategy was approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board on 31 March 2021.
- 1.2 Since its approval, the Council has progressed with the 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 A progress report was approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board on 14 September 2023, providing members with an update on progress on year 1-2 priorities and informed on the key workforce planning priorities being progressed over the next 2 years.
- 1.4 Therefore, the purpose of this report is to provide the members with an update on the progress made with implementing the key priorities since September 2023.
- 1.5 **Appendix 1** of this report to members provides a strategic summary and progress made across the key priority areas, with approximately 80% of the way towards implementing the plan in full.

- 1.6 A Best Value audit was recently undertaken by external auditors (Azets), on behalf of the Accounts Commission, with a thematic approach, reporting on Workforce Innovation. The report, which was presented to the Audit, Risk & Scrutiny Board on 23 September 2024, outlined the auditors' findings in relation to 6 question areas, key messages and suggested areas for improvement. The findings overall were positive, with comprehensive evidence provided to support each question area. Colour gradings were used by the auditor, which were red (fundamental absence or failure of arrangements), Orange (Arrangements are inadequate or ineffective), Yellow (No major weaknesses in arrangements but scope for improvement), and Green (Effective and appropriate arrangements are in place). Across the 6 question areas, we achieved a positive outcome, with 4 yellow gradings and 2 green gradings indicating no areas of concern.
- 1.7 Progress reports have been provided to all the Trade Unions as part of the Joint Trade Union Liaison Meetings.
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## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1 Members are asked to:**

- Note progress made by the Council in the last 12 months on the Council's People Strategy 'Our People Our Future 2021–2026'.
  - Note the next progress report will be submitted in November 2025.
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## **3. Background to the People Strategy**

- 3.1 Members were informed in previous reports that 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 Since its approval, the People Strategy has helped to strengthen workforce resilience in areas of: Health, safety, and wellbeing; Exploring new ways of working post pandemic; and Building on our staff communications and engagement and exploring new ways of fostering a culture that empowers a well informed and engaged workforce.

## 4. People Strategy Progress

4.1 **Appendix 1** provides a progress update on the following:

- Priority 1 - Improving our Employee Experience to Evolve our Culture;
  - Priority 2 - Workforce Planning to Support Service Redesigns; and
  - Priority 3 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
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### 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. **Climate Risk** – None.
13. **Children’s Rights** – None.

14. **Cosla Policy Position – None.**

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**List of Background Papers**

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**Author: Eddie Simpson, Strategic Lead OD Partner Finance and Resources**

## Appendix 1 – Progress on key priorities

<p><b>PRIORITY 1 – Improving our employee experience to evolve our culture</b></p>	<p>Our planned programme of training continues to be rolled out on living our values and we celebrated World Values Day in October 2024, publishing an article on 28 individual and 3 team nominations for being fair, helpful, collaborative and value learning. We are supporting our managers and leaders as visible role models, providing training on role modelling our values and bringing these to life, to improve engagement and communication with their teams. Training continues to be delivered for everyone on living and promoting our values, with approximately 6,000 employees completing this module(s) to date (71% of the Council’s workforce). This will help ensure colleagues are productive, feel valued and supported through regular team meetings and 1-2-1 performance discussions.</p> <p>We continue to work closely with our trade union colleagues to embed our values through new and revised HR&amp;OD policies and suite of learning resources, helping to create a healthy and inclusive working environment.</p> <p>Children’s Services are focusing on supporting staff and pupil attendance through the lens of our Council Values. This innovative approach to supporting the workforce focuses on supporting staff in relation to absence management processes/procedures; violence and aggression processes and procedures; universal training offers and how this supports newly qualified staff and staff retention; building the capacity of the workforce; and the attendance champion role.</p> <p>Consultation with our trade unions on a new modern and sustainable package of terms and conditions of employment for local government employees is progressing, ensuring we continue to attract and retain top talent. Officers are currently in discussion with our trade unions to modernise public holiday entitlement, providing all employees with more flexibility to decide when to take some of these days throughout the year, and support services to continue evolving, making them more flexible and accessible in future, as our communities have come to expect over recent years.</p> <p>Our new Health, Safety and Wellbeing Plan was approved by Members in February 2024. This Plan outlines the Council’s Health and Wellbeing vision by providing a ‘safe, healthy, and inclusive workplace’ that recognises people are individuals with different life experiences and needs that may impact on our Physical, Mental, Social and Financial wellbeing. Since the plan’s approval, officers have continued to support services on managing absence. Informed by our absence data, we have increased interventions, providing psychological &amp; musculoskeletal support by targeting known hotspot areas within services and have provided more bespoke support such as: increasing the number of trained Mental Health First Aiders, enhanced Occupational Health supports such as physiotherapy and CBT, Advice Works, Employee Benefits/Savings etc, with greater focus on frontline service colleagues.</p>
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Following the implementation of our new Occupational Health contract in 2022, officers are currently in the process of reviewing the current employee assistance contract (Time of Talking), with a view to re-tendering early 2025. It is anticipated that a new employee assistance contract will be in place by spring of 2025.

We have promoted a programme of 'self-care' for our workforce by launching new training on mental health awareness and introduced new 'wellbeing conversations' e-learning across all services. We continue to promote the work of our 91 Mental Health First Aiders to improve opportunities for staff to talk freely and openly about mental health and seek support.

The Council has provided further self-care support on financial wellbeing which includes the introduction of Safer Gambling awareness in collaboration with RCA Trust, with the launch of supportive information planned for the Safer Gambling week in November 2024. To further support this, training on Safer Gambling will be delivered to the Mental Health First Aiders early November.

We implemented several new and revised HR&OD policies to support wellbeing, including Carers Leave, Discipline and People, Performance and Wellbeing. Supporting and retaining people with caring responsibilities is one of our key workforce planning objectives. We were awarded the highest accreditation by Carer Positive as an 'exemplary employer' recognising enhanced paid leave provisions and offering bespoke support provision, using the 'Carer Passport' tool and the Carers Connected Forum, where working carers come together to support each other, share experiences and support the Council's Wellbeing Agenda.

We have been shortlisted within the finalists for the Best Employer for Carer Identification, Best Employer for Practical Support and Best Overall Large Employer categories for the Carer Positive 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Awards, due to be announced on 13<sup>th</sup> November 24.

We are 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 RenTalk session held in October 2024 was attended by 129 people, focusing on menopause, with other RenTalk sessions on Learning for Life: Stress Awareness, Insights to CBT; and Time for Talking being delivered during November 2024. Work is currently underway to establish a Menopause Forum, similar to what is in place for our working carers.

In collaboration with OneRen, we introduced Walk Leader Training. This allows people to organise and participate in local health walks, supporting social interaction, physical & mental wellbeing and reducing isolation. OneRen also offer discounted leisure facilities to our people, to encourage maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle.

Officers have continued to explore new technologies to improve our communications council wide, enabling managers to communicate council messages differently and effectively to frontline and remote teams, resulting in better frontline engagement and digital inclusion. Alternative delivery approaches such as Toolbox Talks containing key content from

	<p>mandatory training modules and provision of classroom training, resulting in over 1,000 course completions to date, overcoming any digital challenges faced by our frontline workforce. Hybrid working teams within Customer and Business Services have their own MS Teams chat for team engagement/support whilst homeworking and have expanded use of a wellbeing checklist created at the start of pandemic for all team members.</p> <p>Get Safe Online works with the police force and local communities to provide up-to-date online safety advice. Renfrewshire’s Online Safety Ambassador training helps volunteers from the community as well as the workforce support friends and colleagues with online safety advice. This also supports our New Ways of Working with employees who work within the hybrid working model and other remote locations.</p> <p>The Council has recently re-established Employee Engagement forums to obtain views and ideas from colleagues on how to improve levels of engagement, allowing communications to flow freely from the council to colleagues and vice versa. Other forums include Carers Connected and a focus group on Menopause, led by our Menopause Champion for People &amp; OD, is being progressed that will support wellbeing and enable shared experiences to inform future communication for our colleagues.</p> <p>A new Council-wide Employee Engagement survey was undertaken during the month of September 2024, to capture feedback on a range of themes relating to how our people feel about working in the Council. Approximately 23% of the workforce responded to the survey (c.2000 employees). Results are currently being analysed and an update will be provided to members in the next progress report. Early indications highlight overall that the response was positive.</p>
<p><b>PRIORITY 2 - Workforce Planning to support service redesigns</b></p>	<p>In partnership with SOLACE Enterprises, a comprehensive Leadership Development Programme for chief officers and senior managers was delivered throughout 2023-2024, covering the following key modules: Effective Communications and Elected Member Relations; Programme Management, Leading and Navigating Strategic Change; Risk Management and Governance; Transformational Leadership; and Delivering Corporate/Team Values and Vision. Feedback for the evaluation of Cohort 1 has been very positive, indicating a high level of satisfaction. Cohorts 2 and 3 have recently completed their training and feedback is currently being evaluated.</p> <p>A new Council Workforce Planning group has been established to support the Council with continuing to deliver on its People Strategy priorities and outcomes. The group are currently undertaking Workforce Planning training which is also being rolled out to managers across all services. Recommendations from the recent Best Value audit undertaken by external auditors (Azets), on behalf of the Accounts Commission, with a thematic approach, reporting on Workforce Innovation are also being taken forward by this group.</p> <p>A new suite of People Metrics data, for example absence, turnover, age demographics, etc, has been developed to support managers with workforce planning and will be available to members for scrutiny. Providing and using quality</p>

workforce data will be critical to measuring impacts on achieving a sustainable workforce and ensuring future service delivery.

A review of current induction and onboarding processes has commenced with a view to streamlining our processes to make the experience more inclusive. Also, a new managers induction programme has been developed, which sets out the Council's expectations on key managers' responsibilities. The programme is currently in the testing phase with a view to being rolled out early 2025.

Following approval of the Council's new People, Performance and Wellbeing Policy earlier this year, training and additional guidance for managers and employees has been developed and is due to be rolled out early 2025. This policy supports and compliments the Council's workforce planning approach by enabling services and staff to review performance and identify skills gaps and areas for development that align with the Council's Values.

We reviewed our estates and facilities, to create more efficient use of office space and resources, provided new supporting technology, with printing and stationery cost reductions, through the Green Print Strategy, enabling hybrid working where it works best, and adapting some customer facing front line service delivery practices, learning from our past experiences.

The Council is currently undertaking a review of the Digital Strategy, working with partners and managers to better understand our digital capabilities and challenges, with a view to defining a new roadmap for the future strategy. A key outcome of this strategy will be a better understanding on where investment in skills and training are needed to close digital skills gaps and reduce digital barriers/exclusion across the workforce.

Earlier this year the Council launched a new and improved e-learning platform for all employees to learn and develop at a time which suits them. Training on various mandatory and non-mandatory modules can now be accessed on a range of different devices, such as a laptop, desktop, tablet or even handheld devices such as smartphones. This is making our offer of training more inclusive and accessible to all staff across our council. Since its launch, approximately 66% has undertaken one or more modules of training.

The Council is working in collaboration with West College Scotland to reduce digital barriers and exclusion by investing in training to upskill our front-line service colleagues. Within the depot at Underwood Road, we are removing technical barriers that exist from iPad usage, and literacy challenges, to tailor a more effective digital learning solution to our workforce based there. We now have 15 Digital Champions providing peer support and building digital confidence and enablement across the workforce.

To support the Council on its cultural change journey and new ways of working, a range of new training has been launched on subject matters such as Managing a Virtual Team, Managing Business Continuity and Coaching. Over the coming months these programmes will continue to be promoted and rolled out across the Council.



	<p>The Council has supported HSCP and trade union colleagues to finalise the review of the Home Care Workers role. This has resulted in modernising the job role, aligning service provision more closely with the needs of our communities and clients.</p>
<p><b>PRIORITY 3 - Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion</b></p>	<p>Earlier this year the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan was approved by members which was based on feedback from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion employee survey. The key focus of the plan is to deliver on 3 outcomes which are: 1. Immediate Priorities – the brilliant basics of inclusion; 2. Next steps of inclusion; and 3: Sector Leading Inclusion – Become the Best Place For People To Work. The following highlights the key progress achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All HR&amp;OD policies are equality impact assessed prior to approval and are written using a friendly and inclusive language and tone.</li> <li>• The Council participated in a Scottish Government feasibility study to establish a model for recruiting to healthcare roles that are increasingly difficult to fill from the UK Labour Market using international recruitment processes. We achieved success with being the first participating organisation to bring 4 overseas workers in, direct from South Africa to fill permanent roles within Care at Home, which were being delivered by agency workers or covered by overtime costs, as part of this pilot programme.</li> <li>• The Council is embedding our economic development employability programmes throughout our recruitment processes ensuring barriers faced by employees and interns are removed. As part of the Council's commitment to #KeepThePromise, a Promise Lead Officer was appointed and established a Promise Oversight group involving representatives from the council and its partners. Through this initiative, the Promise remains at the forefront of our service delivery and design. For employability groups such as The Promise and DFN Project Search, who apply for entry level job roles, the council is currently considering guaranteeing an interview to those who meet the essential criteria, to help remove any barriers into employment. These are ways the Council is demonstrating our commitment to supporting care experienced people into work.</li> <li>• Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Awareness is now one of the Council's mandatory training modules and all employees are being supported and encouraged to complete the training, whether that be online or via face to face/toolbox talks. 62% of our workforce have completed their training to date.</li> <li>• The Council and trade unions have agreed to re-establish Employee Equality Forums, focusing on Race and Disability. This will ensure people from minority backgrounds/underrepresented groups have their voices heard, feel represented and included and any barriers in the employee journey are removed.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plans are in place to roll out communications to the workforce throughout November to encourage employees to update their personal equality monitoring information currently held by the Council. This will enable the Council under its statutory duty to ensure the most up to date information is held and policies/strategies, etc are meeting the needs of our people.</li><li>• We are currently reviewing our successful Lead to Succeed management development programme. A new module on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion will be embedded within this, ensuring our managers are clear on their responsibilities and are ED&amp;I role models for the Council.</li><li>• Work has already commenced on preparing for the statutory bi-annual reporting on Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes, due to be published by April 2025.</li></ul>
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