

**Performance and Corporate Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

21 JULY 2023

Delivering the Future Together: update and impact

Report by Director of Finance

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Performance and Corporate Services Committee is RECOMMENDED to:

- a) Note the progress made by the Delivering the Future Together programme since its inception in 2021 and its impact.

Executive Summary

- 2. In 2021, the Council launched its internal programme for change – Delivering the Future Together (DTFT) – to help the organisation; be the best it can for its people, manage organisational change, and become an employer of choice.
- 3. This report sets out how the programme has developed since its inception in 2021 and outlines its impact.

Background and context

- 4. Oxfordshire County Council's ambition is to work in partnership to make the county greener, fairer and healthier. We can't do this without the skills, commitment and innovation shown by our employees.
- 5. Delivering the Future Together (DTFT) underpins everything our employees do: how we work together; how we make decisions; how we manage organisational change and development; and how we serve our residents. DTFT initiatives help us to reach our goal of being an employer of choice, a partner of choice and a place maker of choice.

6. Over the last two years, we've focused on becoming an employer of choice. We have co-created our organisational values; established a network of change champions; rolled out training to establish a framework for managing performance; transformed internal communications from broadcast to two-way dialogue; and fostered a culture of recognition.
7. As DTFT has matured, it's evolved from being a standalone programme to becoming our overarching organisational culture and internal brand, providing a consistent visual identity for employee initiatives. We don't refer to it as a 'programme'. Instead, we embed the narrative, values and behaviours into all our communications and conversations.
8. Workplace culture can support or undermine the success of any organisation, but it is well recognised that it is difficult to measure the impact of cultural change especially in large diverse organisations like ours. Culture is easy to sense, but hard to measure. To measure the impact of DTFT and to identify areas for development, we use several measures. These include feedback from our employees, monitoring engagement in DTFT initiatives, analysing results from employee surveys and data about our workforce.

Our values and DTFT champions

- 9 The first phase of Delivering the Future Together focused on workplace culture, an area of concern identified in an employee engagement survey conducted in December 2020.
- 10 Our organisational values were outdated and lacking support, so we embarked on a period of co-production involving over 600 people to refresh our values and introduce a behaviours framework. In early 2021, we launched five new organisational values:
 - i. always learning
 - ii. be kind and care
 - iii. equality and integrity in all we do
 - iv. taking responsibility
 - v. daring to do it differently.
- 11 These values underpin how we work together, how we serve our residents and how we make decisions. To fully embed them, we established our DTFT champions network in June 2021 to:
 - facilitate regular conversations across all services about how we live the values and encourage honest reflection when we haven't; and
 - enable dialogue between senior management and employees by providing a mechanism for two-way feedback.
- 12 Our objectives for the champions network were to:
 - recruit 150 champions by September 2021;
 - embed champions in all service areas by June 2022;
 - ensure teams regularly have conversations about our values, leading to positive change; and

- create a feedback loop to improve engagement and inform decision making.

13 We launched a multi-channel campaign to promote the programme and the champions opportunity internally, using a strong people-focused visual identity developed by our in-house team. We exceeded our target by recruiting an initial cohort of 162 champions by September 2021. Since then we have provided resources for our champions for monthly conversations with responses to their feedback every month. We established champions in every service area by April 2022 and continue to recruit and train new champions every quarter.

14 To support our champions, we provide training on their role and facilitation skills. At monthly meetings we focus on one value or theme, providing champions with resources to facilitate conversations about how they're living the values and what they could do differently. Champions have said this starts honest conversations about behaviour and culture. We've also published regular case studies about teams living our values and the difference this makes.

“Representing my team, I learn what’s going on across the organisation, contribute my team’s thoughts on what works well and what could be better at OCC. It’s given us a voice. DTFT has also given me the opportunity to learn useful new skills, and I now look forward to the monthly meetings which are full of positive and uplifting people.” DTFT champion, April 2023

15 Two years on, the DTFT champions network has consistently engaged over 180 active champions in every service area. We have trained 282 champions, who have facilitated over 3960 change conversations about values, which have engaged over 40 per cent of our people every month. In addition, champions in service areas regularly meet with their directors and assistant directors, which is allowing for more two-way feedback.

16 Feedback from employee engagement sessions and partners tells us that our values are now well established across the organisation. Having conversations about our values is changing behaviours resulting in a culture of continuous improvement.

“What you are enabling within the DTFT network is hugely powerful and something which I just wanted to actively acknowledge and celebrate. The DTFT Champions presented to me as a collective of difference who are centred around a common goal, embrace the value of actively and consistently role modelling enabling values and behaviours, create the space for active reflection and learning and put the human dimension at its heart!” External change management consultant, May 2023

17 Our DTFT champions tell us that the experience of being a champion not only supports improvements in teams, but also provides them with personal and professional development opportunities.

“We use the language of the values all the time now in our work lives and support other team members to live up to these values.” OCC officer, June 2023.

“I’ve been a DTFT champion since the beginning of the programme. I was really enthused and encouraged by the network lead’s passion, which resonated deep within me and I felt the network was something I could be a part of to make a difference for my colleagues and the organisation.” DTFT champion, July 2023

“I joined OCC in May 2021 and soon volunteered as a DTFT champion. It was the best decision I made. I have seen first-hand the difference our champions make, how they help to embed our values and behaviours and their enthusiasm to make the council an even better place to work.” DTFT champion, July 2023

Managing for performance

18 In 2020, feedback from our employee engagement survey highlighted that we needed a more consistent approach to managing performance across the organisation. We introduced a three-module training programme for all managers focussing on our performance framework called ‘the 12.3.2’. This references 12 one-to-ones that all staff should have over the course of a year; 3 extended one-to-ones to discuss setting and reviewing objectives and the individual’s personal development plan; and 2 team meetings to discuss how the team contributes to the council’s priorities.

19 Investing in management development is important as the quality of relationship employees have with their manager is a key indicator as to whether they will stay working for an organisation and remain engaged. The 12.3.2 training covers embedding our values and behaviours, management styles, setting objectives, giving feedback, and dealing with challenging conversations. 93 per cent of our 855 managers have completed all three modules and a further 5 per cent are part way through this programme.

20 To build engagement, we’ve been showcasing the difference we’re making – sharing testimonials and case studies with positive stories about how 12.3.2 is helping people get the support they need from their manager. We’ve also produced videos and posters to help those who aren’t managers better understand what to expect.

“Just a quick note to say I love the new 12.3.2 posters I saw around county hall on this week, the design is really lovely and fun, just what we need for summer! Thanks for everything you do.” OCC officer, May 2023

21 In the March 2023 engagement survey, which was completed by 55 per cent of employees, 79 per cent of respondents reported that one-to-one conversations with their manager are worthwhile. In addition, 74 per cent of employees feel supported by their manager. We have analysed these responses and will target refresher training and support to specific groups of

managers over the next 6 months. We are also introducing spot checks to ensure the framework is being effectively implemented across the organisation.

“The 12.3.2 training echoes all we are striving towards in the DTFT champions network, putting values and behaviours at the heart of all we do and making OCC an even better place to work.” OCC manager, December 2022

- 22 In May 2023 we launched a training programme for all new managers that includes the 12:3:2 modules. This programme has been designed to equip managers with all the information they need to support their team. Existing managers can attend modules as required. So far 205 places have been taken up on the programme, which includes modules on leadership and management, health and safety, monitoring sickness absence, recruitment and selection and project management. The programme offers wrap-around support including networking opportunities, coaching and mentoring.
- 23 One immediate impact of this work is the increase we have seen in engagement in our managers’ network. In 2022 the average number of attendees was 25; in 2023 this has grown to 114.

From broadcast communications to two-way dialogue

- 24 Almost 1,000 people participated in our internal communications survey in spring 2022 – internal communications being one of the main workstreams for the DTFT programme in 2022. The common themes arising from the survey were:
- Reduce reliance on email;
 - reduce duplication of content across internal communications channels;
 - provide more opportunities for conversation across teams and engagement with senior leaders.
- 25 In response, we redefined the scope of our channels to give each one a clear purpose. We made improvements to the chief executive’s regular email, designing a new online template to showcase content aligned to our values, as well as inviting different members of our senior leadership team to write the introduction every other edition.
- 26 We identified the online collaboration tool Yammer (Viva Engage) as a tool with potential to start more conversations across the organisation. We produced a user guide for senior leaders to encourage them to post more frequently and developed a bespoke content plan to open conversations on specific themes. In addition, we ran two Q&A sessions with our senior leadership team. As a result, Yammer usage increased by 55 per cent in the second half of 2022, with some posts viewed by up to 3,500 individuals. 1,962 messages were ‘liked’ in May 2023. This is the highest number of likes recorded in a month.

26. We introduced online engagement events for colleagues to join senior leaders for interactive sessions. 601 people attended DTFT events. 260 joined an online event with Martin Reeves and Councillor Leffman in April 2023 with 96 people watching the recording published online. Feedback has been very positive, with sessions typically rated between 4.2 - 4.7 out of 5.

“More of these sessions in future – keep the momentum going. Suggest quarterly or even bi-annually if these can’t be done more often” OCC Officer, April 2023

“Was good to have both statements from leadership as well as responses to questions” OCC Officer, April 2023

A culture of recognition

- 27 Recognition is an important part of workplace culture as it enhances workplace satisfaction and improves staff retention. In October 2022, we launched Vivup high five – an app which allows anyone in the organisation to give someone a virtual high five and send a personalised message to recognise how they’ve demonstrated behaviour aligned to our values.

- 28 Since the launch 12,985 messages have been sent by 41 per cent of our employees celebrating others for living our values. In January and June 2023 directors congratulated colleagues who had received the most high fives in team meetings and sent personal thank you emails with e-badges. These were very positively received.

“Wow thank you. Thank you for the recognition it means a lot. I do what I do because I genuinely care about the people I serve and this kind of recognition makes it even for fulfilling and rewarding” OCC officer, January 2022

- 29 The number of Vivup high five messages sent every month remains consistent with users from every directorate.

Agile working

- 30 Since establishing our values and champions, we’ve worked hard to ensure that employee engagement is embedded in every aspect of organisational change. One example of this is our response to agile working and the development of our framework for agile working. The framework was co-created by senior leaders and our DTFT champions.

- 31 Working with our DTFT champions and colleagues from across property, information technology and human resources, we responded to employee feedback and developed how we support employees to adapt to new ways of working post lockdown. This has included responding to employees about the technology, equipment and workspaces they need to work in an agile way. Our people and Union representatives value this approach and the difference it is making to working conditions.

“UNISON support delivering the future together. OCC is actively listening to staff, making good changes based on the staff’s suggestions/input. Building new ways of working collaboratively across the organisation, celebrating our success is also receiving great feedback and definitely helping to empower, inspire and support staff to share more of their ideas and their team’s best practice”. Unison representative, July 2023

*“For many, working from home is so important, but for me it’s the flexible approach to working hours which is crucial. As I say, I don’t know if I could ever get a job with an employer which isn’t as agile as OCC. Thank you for all your hard work, since long before I joined OCC, making this possible!”
National graduate scheme employee, January 2023*

- 32 As part of our agile framework, we are creating new collaboration spaces, including one in Oxfordshire County Library, which is being utilised at least 80 per cent of the time (higher usage than any other meeting room). Colleagues have fed back that this space is enabling collaboration across teams and reducing the need for external room hires. Our newly designed spaces at Union Street and the Common Hall in County Hall receive positive feedback from employees and customers. This feedback is informing decisions about future workspaces as we rationalise our estate in line with our property strategy.
- 33 Our 2023 employee engagement survey results showed 75 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that agile working is well supported. We have conducted an in-depth analysis of the results to inform our actions to further embed agile working.

Recruitment and induction

- 34 Our values are now part of our recruitment process: they are included in our job descriptions and discussed in interviews.
- 35 Employees report during the recruitment process that our values are positively influencing their decision to work for our organisation. New starters report that the culture of our organisation reflects our values - the kindness of colleagues, recognition approaches, and the flexibility of our agile framework are frequently mentioned as positives by new starters.

“After a few months, I feel settled, welcomed, challenged and encouraged, for what it is worth I was actively encouraged to apply for a promotion to return to my old organisation - I politely declined. I have every faith that I am seen as an individual with the ability to develop and be encouraged and supported to achieve whatever I set my personal goal to be. This is the first time in my entire career I have been able to say that. The move to OCC - not to be over dramatic - has for me, been life changing”. OCC officer, June 2023

“Of the 3 local authorities I have worked for OCC is by far the best place to work.” OCC officer, June 2023

What difference are we making?

36 Workplace culture can support or undermine the success of any organisation, but it is well recognised that it is difficult to measure the impact of cultural change. Culture is easy to sense, but hard to measure. To measure the impact of DTFT and to identify areas for development, we use several measures. These include feedback from our employees, monitoring engagement in DTFT initiatives, analysing results from employee surveys, and data about our workforce.

37 We monitor the 'hot' and 'cold' spots of the organisation in terms of engagement with DTFT initiatives and are targeting interventions to support late adopters. The 2023 engagement survey results showed a direct correlation between areas that have been engaging with the programme and positive survey responses from our employees.

38 Since the start of the DTFT programme in 2021, we have seen an increase in employees from all directorates engaging with organisation wide initiatives. Examples include:

- Increase in response rate to our employee engagement survey from 28 per cent in 2020 (1416 responses) to 55 per cent in 2023 (3041 responses).
- 68 per cent of employees responding to the 2023 survey reported they were proud to work for our organisation (19% neutral).
- In the first 3 months since its launch, our recognition and benefits app engaged over 60 per cent of the organisation. No previous initiative has received this level of engagement.
- Our DTFT champions network consistently engages over 180 people from every directorate.

39 We have also seen the following:

- Internal promotions increased by 28 per cent
- Number of days off sick for stress reasons has reduced by 10 per cent
- Ethnic diversity of staff has increased by 11 per cent
- 86 per cent of leavers who completed exit interviews in 2022- 2023 reported that they would recommend OCC as an employer.

What's next?

40 This is just the start of the journey, and we recognise that we have lots more to do. We will continue to keep values and behaviours at the core of all we do and build on the success of the work so far.

41 Action plans are currently being developed both corporately and within service areas to respond to the feedback raised in the March 2023 engagement survey, with areas for development including clarity of leadership, engagement of managers, and wellbeing. We are already addressing these areas and will continue to review our progress through regularly listening to

feedback from our employees, monitoring engagement in DTFT initiatives, analysing results from employee surveys, and data about our workforce.

- 42 We will continue to work with 'cold' spots in the organisation encouraging more employees to be DTFT champions in these areas and working with leaders and managers to improve workplace culture and engagement in organisation wide initiatives and change.
- 43 Agile working will remain a key focus over the next 12 months as we implement our property strategy and develop our accommodation and workspaces to respond to the needs of employees, members and residents.
- 44 Delivering the Future Together will continue to help us to address our key challenges and maximise our opportunities as an organisation. Our workforce strategy sets out how we will continue to build on the successes of work achieved so far to become an employer of choice.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

- 45 Delivering the Future Together initiatives aim to support an effective workforce with the aim of the organisation becoming an employer of choice, partner of choice and place maker of choice.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

- 46 The values that underpin Delivering the Future Together's workplace culture include equality and integrity in all we do, supporting and promoting equity and inclusivity within the workplace.

Sustainability Implications

- 47 This paper has no direct sustainability implications. However, the values and behaviours that underpin Delivering the Future Together's workplace culture include a commitment from staff to take steps to minimise impact on the environment whenever possible. This has been promoted as part of the work of the DTFT champions working with the climate action team.

Financial Implications

- 48 There are no direct financial implications from this report. Comments checked by: Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance Lorna.Baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

- 49 There are no legal implications arising from this report. Comments checked by: Paul Grant, Head of Legal Paul.Grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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