

Workforce Strategy 2023 – 2025 and beyond

“Building our Workforce of the Future Together”

1. Foreword

A message from our chief executive

We have big ambitions for Oxfordshire and our strategic vision sets out how we’re going to make it a greener, fairer and healthier place to live, working in partnership to achieve our goals. To do so, we must overcome big challenges, locally and nationally – including some of the most pressing financial challenges we’ve seen in the sector for many years.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis have brought about massive changes in the working landscape. The cost of housing in Oxfordshire can also be expensive. Candidates are looking for organisations who offer flexibility about when and where they work; provide outstanding mental health and wellbeing support; foster an inclusive working culture; and who work collaboratively to enable colleagues to diversify their experience. Above all, employees want to have a voice – to be heard and be seen – regardless of seniority or length of service.

So what does that mean for our workforce strategy? It’s why we put our people first. Together, we enhance the lives of more than 725,000 people living in Oxfordshire. We recognise our working culture is essential to enable our brilliant colleagues to be the best they can for our residents. We provide a supportive environment, where individuals can be their authentic selves. We foster a culture of recognition and celebrating success. And we enable people to collaborate, speak up, develop, grow and progress.

In return, we seek out talented, committed and creative people to help us become a more efficient, high performing organisation. We need people who challenge the status quo and dare to do things differently. We need leaders who inspire and motivate their teams. And we need everyone to live our values so we can deliver the future together and become an employer of choice, a place maker of choice and a partner of choice. Put simply, ensuring our colleagues are happy, engaged and productive will have a positive impact on the lives of the people in Oxfordshire we serve.

That’s where this strategy comes in. Reflecting our overall strategic vision, it ensures we will have the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, at the right level and at the right cost. What’s outlined here is the result of extensive consultation with employees, including our delivering the future together champions. Now it’s over to our leaders to put this strategy into practice every day.

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

Our strategic priorities (will be revisited when these are updated)



Implementing our strategy

We will:

- Work closely with all employees to develop the effective plans to address our strategic priorities.
- Engage with key stakeholders, including the trade unions, to develop and deliver specific aspects of this strategy.
- Produce a detailed action plan which outlines the activities underpinning the strategy, to be regularly reviewed and updated to take account of changing priorities.
- Review the strategy annually with Cabinet and Scrutiny to ensure it still aligns with and supports the achievement of our organisational vision and aims.

Delivering the Future Together: our values

Delivering the Future Together (DTFT) sets out how we support our people through change so we can become an employer and partner of choice, together helping to shape Oxfordshire as a place.

Our organisational values and behaviours are at the heart of all we do and our DTFT champions facilitate regular team conversations to keep them in the forefront of our minds.

This strategy and its supporting action plan will help us to deliver the future together and be the best we can for our colleagues, our residents and our partners.



Our values:

- **Always learning.** We create an environment that enables people to grow and develop. We seek feedback and we act on it. We always look to be even better and learn from our feedback.
- **Be kind and care.** We value our people. We respect one another and we treat everyone with understanding and compassion. We care for the wellbeing of ourselves, our colleagues and our customers but each other.
- **Equality and integrity in all we do.** We embrace equality, diversity and inclusion, valuing the difference in others. We always act with integrity, working in honest, ethical and supportive ways to build effective relationships. We trust each other to do what we promise.
- **Taking responsibility.** We hold ourselves accountable and we take responsibility for what and how we deliver. We empower our people to make a difference and to actively contribute to delivering the best for all.
- **Daring to do it differently.** We innovate and look to do things differently. We're not satisfied with the status quo and we work creatively to solve problems and improve the way we do things every day.

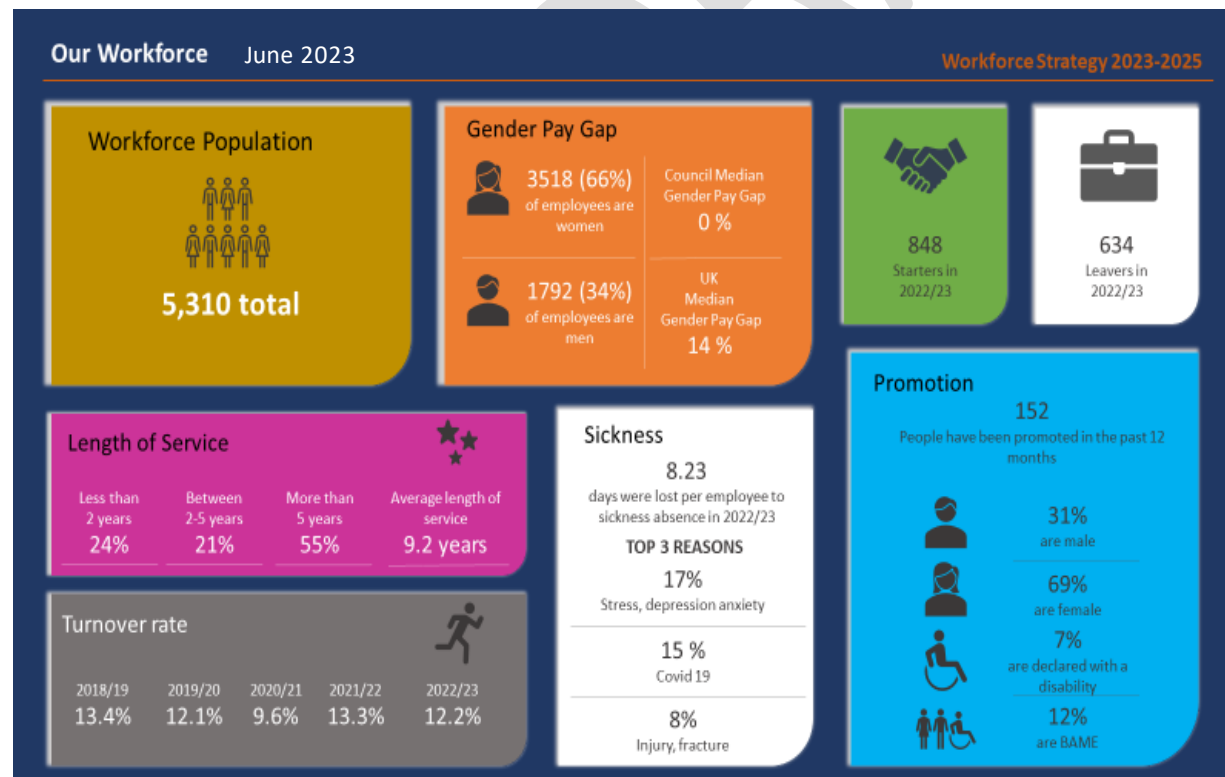
Our vision for our employees

Our **vision** is to be renowned for our innovative, highly engaged and agile workforce. We're committed to employing the best people, reflecting the communities we serve. We nurture an environment that supports diversity, equality and inclusion, and allows all our employees to bring their whole selves to work to deliver great services for our residents.

Our **aim** is to be an employer of choice.

Who we are

Understanding the demographics of people who work here helps inform future planning. We're committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion for all. As an employer, we want to ensure our people represent the communities we serve and that we attract and retain talented employees from a wide range of backgrounds with diverse skills and experience.



Age Profile

The average age of Council employees is

45

Gender Diversity – All Staff

Baby Boomers Before 1966	767	1357
Generation X 1967-1980	620	1296
Millennials & Gen Y Post 1980	405	805

1792 3518

Disability Status

6%

of the workforce have declared with a disability

Religion

Religion	% all staff	Religion	% all staff
Buddhist	0.64%	Sikh	0.30%
Christian	46.62%	Any oth religion / belief	2.87%
Hindu	0.80%	No religion or belief	44.63%
Jewish	0.28%	Prefer not to say	1.41%
Muslim	2.46%	Total:	3621 100%

We do not have data on religion or belief for **32%** of the workforce

Sexual Orientation

4.6% of workforce are either gay, bisexual or lesbian

However, we only have LGBT+ data for **61%** of the workforce

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	% all staff	Ethnicity	% all staff	Ethnicity	% all staff
Bangladeshi	0.30%	Other Black	0.15%	White Irish	0.89%
Indian	1.30%	Mixed African	0.08%	White Other	5.57%
Pakistani	0.94%	Mixed Asian	0.11%	Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.04%
Chinese	0.23%	Mixed Caribbean	0.21%	Other Ethnicity	0.47%
Other Asian	0.55%	Mixed Other	1.92%	Arab	0.11%
Black African	2.30%	White British	76.55%	Prefer not to say	5.99%
Black Caribbean	1.15%	White Eastern European	0.70%	No data provided	0.45%

Total 5,310 100%

Our priorities

We've identified four priorities, which are all linked. Retaining talented employees, for example, will rely on: modelling our values; promoting a positive and inclusive working environment; ensuring we provide opportunities for our employees to grow and develop; and ensuring we have skilled leaders and managers.

Attract, recruit and retain talented people

Attracting and recruiting talented people and keeping the skills we have already will be key to our success. While we accept that some of our talented employees will move on to new opportunities, we want to ensure that our existing skilled employees and our volunteers want to stay and build a career in Oxfordshire.

Promote a positive and inclusive working environment

We will work hard to ensure a positive and inclusive working environment for everyone by living our values and challenging others to do the same. We will create diverse and effective teams; embrace new ways of working that allow us to work productively and make best use of our assets; utilise all the tools we have available; and support each other as we change.

Enable growth and development

We will focus on developing skills for now and the future, and the provision of opportunities for all. This means improving development opportunities for our employees to enable them to pursue their careers. We will utilise our apprenticeship levy wherever possible and provide support for volunteers to ensure we have the skills we need for the future across our whole workforce.

Develop leadership capability and high performance

We recognise in this strategy that strong and effective leadership has a significant role in the success of the organisation and in improving performance. We must provide all our leaders with support and development to be able to fulfil their important roles. We have leaders everywhere in our organisation – not just people in senior positions – taking ownership of programmes and projects, commissioning services and working with volunteers and partners.

Attract, recruit and retain talented people

We have big ambitions. We want to nurture and develop talented people with the skills we need for the future, alongside welcoming new colleagues who can fill skills gaps and bring new ideas. We want to optimise the employee experience, which means our employees are excited about coming to work and are motivated to do great work. We know that the best people will want work in a modern, stimulating, positive and inclusive environment and we need to take steps to meet those expectations.

We are mindful that how we recruit is changing rapidly. Candidates' expectations about ways of working and organisation culture are important, alongside health and wellbeing and good pay and benefits, so we need to take a different approach to attract talented candidates. We acknowledge that housing across Oxfordshire can be expensive. We need to strengthen our attraction as an employer and develop a strong brand for Oxfordshire so that we create a desirable place to work that is diverse, inclusive and promotes equality. Everyone benefits when we embrace and value the diversity of thoughts, ideas and ways of working that people from different backgrounds, experiences and identities bring to the organisation. That's why we need to redress a number of imbalances in our workforce so it is more representative of Oxfordshire's economically active population. We want to retain the best people we already have working for us while attracting outstanding new talent.

Our focus is to:

- Create a distinctive employer brand that highlights us as a place to build a career and to become an employer of choice.
- Have inclusive attraction, recruitment and retention practices.
- Ensure candidates have a great experience throughout the recruitment process.
- Foster high employee engagement and brand advocacy so that our employees recommend us as a great place to work.
- Reduce reliance on temporary agency workers and the associated costs.
- Develop an approach to reward and recognition that attracts and retains a diverse and talented workforce and enables us to react quickly to market pressures.
- Explore ways in which the organisation can address the challenges around cost of housing through key worker partnerships.
- Ensure that our change management arrangements support those who stay and those who leave the organisation, so that we remain a good employer throughout periods of change.
- Increase the number of successful applicants for niche skills and hard to fill roles.

Promote a positive and inclusive working environment

As we live in a world that is becoming more complex and uncertain, we need a strong and committed workforce and culture if we are to achieve our strategic aims. We will be demanding a lot from our people over the next few years as we become leaner, more efficient and higher performing. We need to enable our employees to work effectively and feel valued by creating the right working environment and infrastructure with the right tools. We want our employees to want to work for us and be dedicated to us, using their skills and ideas to help us provide better services and adopt innovative strategies.

We want a highly engaged workforce. That means that we want everyone to enjoy coming to work and to feel challenged by, and appreciated for, what they do. We want each employee to make a positive difference to the lives of their colleagues and, most importantly, to the people of Oxfordshire. People function at their best when there is strong and effective leadership, as well as a positive, encouraging and inclusive work environment. This environment will benefit employees as well as our residents through the effective provision of services as a result of lower absenteeism rates, better performance, a willingness to accept personal responsibility and a strong commitment to organisational goals.

Our focus is to:

- Be known as a progressive employer due to flexibility and inclusivity with a confident, capable and engaged workforce.
- Be viewed as a place where people want to work, with roles that provide meaning and purpose.
- Establish our values and behaviours as the norm, ensuring we can all explain how they have had a positive impact on our own and our colleagues' working environment.
- Empower all employees, including our staff networks, to help shape and build an inclusive workplace.
- Encourage our employees to be innovative, flexible and drive positive change within our organisation.
- Make sure that the mental and physical wellbeing of our employees is a priority and is embedded into our culture through our policies and practices.
- Provide fair and equitable pay and rewards and review Job Evaluation.
- Provide mechanisms to enable employees to be involved in, listened to and invited to contribute their experience, expertise and ideas.
- Ensure our employees and managers understand and utilise our agile and flexible working frameworks.
- Make sure that issues brought up by our employees are addressed in a prompt and equitable manner.
- Ensure our employees are valued through effective employee engagement, recognition of their contribution and that success is celebrated.

Enable growth and development

We already have highly skilled and committed people working here. Looking ahead, we know the way we work and deliver services is changing and many employees need new skills both now and for the future. We know that jobs, careers and skills are rapidly changing. The perception that career progression means 'climbing the ladder' has shifted with career progression going in every direction.

We want to foster an environment where employees lead their own areas of learning and development based on the role they do, the needs of their team and their individual career goals. At the same time, we will support managers to identify and address any key skills they believe employees need to develop further.

We want everyone to be able to continuously develop new skills and find career paths within the organisation. Wherever possible, we will utilise the apprenticeship levy to support this and invest in programmes to help people move into new roles and provide learning and development that enables employees to develop critical skills. This will create a culture of learning among managers and recognition for developing their employees so that we retain the best talent.

Our focus is to:

- Provide and embed inclusive learning and development practices and opportunities for everyone so they can continuously grow and progress to achieve their full potential.
- Establish a range of workplace benefits and rewards that reflect our values and recognise contribution.
- Develop an approach to reward and recognition that allows flexibility to support the growth and development our people.
- Concentrate on developing talent from our existing workforce using succession planning to identify and fill skills gaps in preparation for future positions and opportunities.
- Provide accessible and easy access to learning and development, delivered through blended learning.
- Use organisation design principles and succession planning to develop pathways so that accessing a desired career is more achievable
- Ensure that our employees are confident that we are investing in, and supporting, their professional and personal growth.
- Foster a highly engaged and high performing work culture, with skilled people to deliver our priorities.

Develop leadership capability and high performance

Traditionally we think of leaders as those who hold the most senior roles in an organisation and a position of authority. There are leaders of people and work and there are political leaders, but leadership is also about influence and leveraging strengths to have a positive impact and deliver high performance. We want all our leaders to be role models, championing our values consistently and adopting working practices that are sustainable and supportive.

We want to bring more diversity to our leadership and management roles so that we have a broader wealth of knowledge and varying perspectives to meet our challenges. Leaders who manage teams will be the first port of call for employees who want to understand the changing nature of the organisation and who need support to manage this change. It will be important that our employees understand our organisational objectives as well as the values and behaviours that underpin them. We will invest in all our leaders to support them in their roles.

Our focus is to:

- Establish a strong leadership pipeline.
- Create a clear development pathway that aspiring managers can access and ensure managers at all levels understand what leadership development is available to them.
- Promote more diversity in leadership and management roles.
- Ensure that our leaders and managers consistently demonstrate leadership behaviours and model our values.
- Ensure our managers and leaders have the tools they need to have a more flexible approach to reward and recognition that is fair and equitable, while also recognising contribution and high performance.
- Make sure our managers are capable of successfully leading their teams through change, while offering a clear vision for the future.
- Ensure that our managers and leaders can effectively manage performance by giving them the tools they need.
- Equip managers with the skills necessary to interact, communicate and lead agile teams, while fostering team and individual wellbeing and performance.

All four strategic priorities will be supported by a robust action plan and measured through easily accessible management information.

Our workforce strategy is underpinned by:

Wellbeing

Supporting our colleagues with their health, safety and wellbeing is one of our key priorities. Following a wellbeing survey in 2022, we have identified a range of things we can do to provide support on those areas that matter to our colleagues. A more recent employee engagement survey will give

us further information about this and will help us to identify any further actions we need to take. A range of information and support is already available on our Well at Work intranet page, and we are taking steps to raise awareness of this and to make it easier to access.

With our employees now working in an agile way, including working remotely, we know that this continues to bring several challenges for some of our colleagues. Our working arrangements are now very flexible and support those with caring responsibilities, as well as providing a better work life balance. We know they have had positive impacts and we will continue to support further flexible working arrangements in the future.

Our monthly wellbeing newsletter provides information on upcoming wellbeing events, webinars and information on topics such as mental health, menopause and healthy eating. Managers are provided with tools and information to support them in managing wellbeing issues in their teams, and other professional support is available through an occupational health service and an employee assistance programme that offers telephone support on a 24/7 basis. The action plan associated with this strategy will include wellbeing activities that will ensure that the mental and physical wellbeing of our employees is always a priority and is embedded into our culture.

Diversity and inclusion

We understand the importance of having a diverse workforce and we are committed to recruit and retain one that reflects the communities we serve and ensures our employees feel valued and respected. It is well known that a diverse workforce is the most productive, the most creative and best placed to serve local people.

We want to improve as an organisation, so we are open to listening and further learning, particularly about those equality and diversity issues that have a negative impact on our employees. To recognise what makes us different, as well as what we have in common, is pivotal to delivering our strategic priorities successfully. We need to ensure our managers have the capability to manage people in an effective way, from recruitment opportunities to equal pay and access to training and development. Everyone benefits when we respect and value the range of perspectives, ideas and working styles that individuals with various backgrounds, experiences and identities contribute to the organisation. The action plan associated with this strategy will include activities that will ensure we have a more diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace and working environment.

Climate action

Our goal is to be carbon neutral by 2030. That means it is everyone's responsibility to consider the negative impact they have on the environment, whether as an individual or as part of the service they deliver. We need to change how we do things by using zero carbon travel options wherever possible; electrifying our vehicles; reducing travel for work; going paperless; and reducing or reusing waste before recycling. We also need to focus on the bigger impacts that we have, including our property services and day to day operations. The action plan associated with this strategy will include activities that will ensure we are taking steps to achieve this goal.

Measuring our success

It is important we see this as a journey. If undertaken properly we will be able to predict future demands and how we will meet them. Success for us includes the following aims. Those marked with an asterisk are our priorities for 2023/2024 with targets assigned.

Attract, recruit and retain talented people:

- increase overall applications for defined hard to fill and niche roles
- increase the number of applicants from underrepresented groups
- improve equality, diversity and inclusion at recruitment, application and appointment* (from 6.06% to 7% disclosing a disability)
- increase conversion rates from candidate to employee
- reduce agency expenditure* (by £1.5m)
- improve candidate feedback
- reduce employee turnover* (from 12.2% to 11.5%)
- increase internal appointment and promotion
- increase under 25 employees* (from 232 to 300)
- increase employee engagement index
- increase engagement in our recruitment platforms.

Promote a positive and inclusive working environment:

- improve equality, diversity and inclusion at recruitment, application and appointment
- increase all employee retention statistics
- increase the employee engagement index
- reduce employee relations matters
- increase internal promotion and movement
- reduce sickness absence* (from 8.23 days off sick per employee per year to 7).

Enable growth and development:

- retain talent through a reduction in employee turnover
- increase employee engagement
- improve employee succession planning through developing skills to 'grow our own' for employees to achieve their maximum potential
- identify and remedy skills gaps through effective workforce planning to develop training programmes to upskill people
- growing our early careers talent through our apprenticeship offering.

Develop leadership capability and culture change:

- reduce agency spend for leadership roles through succession plans for internal candidates
- increase internal promotions* (from 152 to 160)
- develop and improve leadership capability through a comprehensive leadership and management programme
- provide flexible career pathways into leadership roles and progression routes following an organisation wide skills gap analysis
- support all employees to role model our values and behaviours
- Increase underrepresented groups in leadership and management roles.

Overall, we aim to achieve great leadership throughout the organisation with our managers being advocates of change. We want all our people to be living our values in the way they perform their work and how they interact with others. This will be measured through regular temperature checks and through employee surveys (bi-annual employee engagement, wellbeing and communication surveys) and other documented reports, including our:

- pay policy statement
- workforce diversity report
- gender pay gap report
- ethnicity pay report
- climate action report.

Next steps

For our next steps we will:

- Work closely with the strategic leadership team, managers, employees, trade union colleagues and other key stakeholders to bring to life and embed the workforce strategy and prioritise actions to be delivered.
- Create detailed action plans, establishing baselines to monitor and measure progress against our four priorities.
- Carry out a regular review of the action plan and progress against actions and amend these as necessary to align with any revision to the council's strategic priorities and plan, considering any emerging economic and environmental pressures.
- Work closely and in collaboration with programme boards and steering groups (for example: Delivering the Future Together; equality, diversity and inclusion; climate action board; and colleague networks).

We will review this strategy annually with Cabinet and Scrutiny.