

CABINET
23 January 2023

Our People and Culture Strategy

Report by Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve “Our People and Culture Strategy” annexed to this report outlining four priority areas of focus:**
 - a. Attracting, recruiting, and retaining talented people
 - b. Enabling our people to thrive and perform.
 - c. Enabling our people to grow and evolve for the future.
 - d. Enabling our people to lead and transform for the future.
2. **The Cabinet is asked to note the programme in place to support the delivery of the strategy.**

Executive Summary

3. The report introduces “Our People and Culture Strategy” which sets out the vision that ‘we develop and maintain a high performing, innovative, highly engaged, and agile teams, employing the best people, and 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 Oxfordshire residents.’
4. The strategy focuses on four priorities:
 - (a) Attracting, recruiting, and retaining talented people
 - (b) Enabling our people to thrive and perform.
 - (c) Enabling our people to grow and evolve for the future.
 - (d) Enabling our people to lead and transform for the future.

Background

5. In July 2023, a draft Workforce Strategy was shared with Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee. At that time, it was agreed that the strategy would be reviewed by the new Director of Workforce and Organisational Development starting in September 2023.
6. Following the arrival of the new Director a review of the draft has taken place. It was concluded that the organisational context had moved significantly since the early part of 2023 and some of the items had been delivered.

7. With the organisation focusing on being an employer of choice, partner of choice and place shaper of choice the Our People and Culture Strategy needs to underpin our ambition to meet these priorities.
8. Therefore, a decision was taken to redraft the strategy and create Our People and Culture Strategy which considers our philosophy about our relationship with our employees.
9. The strategy outlines ways to improve how our employees carry out their roles by assessing and nurturing employees' capabilities, as well as managing the relationship between the employees and the organisation. This puts skilled people in the right position to deliver what it takes to achieve the business goals.
10. Having a strategy with this focus has benefits in that it:
 - a. **Support and alignment for long-term business strategy** – Focusing on Our People and Culture Strategy and knowing how we want to support our teams will equip us to change more easily within our business.
 - b. **Builds Employee empowerment** – People are at the heart of achieving the organisation's vision. They will thrive when they are set up for success with the tools they need and a positive environment in which to work.
 - c. **Demonstrates our commitment to employees** – By publishing Our People and Culture Strategy we demonstrate the organisations commitment to our employees and how they benefit. It is also an important part of our employer value proposition (or our 'offer' to employees) and employer branding to support our recruitment and retention efforts.
 - d. **Supports a better response to uncertainty and changes** – When our employees feel empowered and supported, they are also more likely to be agile and innovative in finding solutions for new or unexpected circumstances and to support our organisational ambitions.
11. Our strategy is a living ethos underpinning what we do but more importantly how we do it. The culture of the organisation, how we act and behave, and our Values are the most important facet of success. The new strategy document has been designed to be digestible and easy to read. The intention is that the strategy is a corporate strategy not a work plan for Human Resources. As such stakeholders from across the business have been consulted on its contents.

Key issues

12. The vision for Our People and Culture Strategy is that 'we develop and maintain a high performing, innovative, highly engaged, and agile teams, employing the best people, and 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 Oxfordshire residents.
13. The strategy focuses on 4 priorities:
 - (a) Attracting, recruiting and retaining talented People - it is essential that we are able to attract, recruit and retain our talented People to deliver excellent services for the residents of Oxfordshire.

- (b) Enabling Our People to thrive and perform - creating a positive and inclusive work environment built on fairness, trust and transparency will allow our People to thrive and perform.
 - (c) Enabling Our People to grow and evolve for the future - providing growth opportunities both on and off the job to build our knowledge, skills and behaviours will help us all deliver the future together.
 - (d) Enabling Our People to lead and transform for the future - empowering our leaders to embrace the skills and behaviours needed to achieve high performance and effective outcomes.
14. A number of significant programmes of work have been identified to deliver to these priorities. These have been prioritised for year one:
- (a) Attracting, recruiting, and retaining talented people.
 - (1) Move to a new applicant tracking system to speed up recruitment.
 - (2) Create an in-house resourcing team (moving away from the Integrated Business Centre).
 - (3) Define our employer value proposition and developing our employer brand to raise our employer profile.
 - (b) Enabling Our People to thrive and perform.
 - (1) Give managers the tools and skills to effectively manage performance, absence, and change.
 - (2) Improve the speed of response to issues raised by our people.
 - (3) Enhance our wellbeing services through corporate wellbeing initiatives to improve people's resilience and reduce cost of living impact.
 - (4) Develop modern, simple to follow toolkits, policies, and digital systems to support our ambitions.
 - (c) Enabling our People to grow and evolve for the future.
 - (1) Continue to embrace the 12.3.2 performance management tool.
 - (2) Enhance our early careers offer to improve our talent pipeline specifically to increase numbers of graduates and apprentices.
 - (3) Develop skills and learning to support transformational change.
 - (d) Enabling Our People to lead and transform for the future.
 - (1) Introduce a range of people management controls to enable the organisation to operate within the budget envelope.
 - (2) Resize the organisation to deliver our ambitions within our budget envelope.
 - (3) Support our leaders to have the tools, skills, and resilience to lead transformational change.
15. The strategy aims to work with leaders, managers, and employees on the 'How' we do our work, as much as 'what' work we are doing. Helping people to be more empowered to be responsible and accountable, moving from a 'parent-child' relationship to an 'adult- adult' relationship and providing psychological safety for people to be innovative and try new things.
16. The strategy also aims to develop a positive work environment that is conducive to promoting high performing teams.

17. An example of a work programmes that might achieve this includes early resolution for issues to reduce grievances and absence. We know that early conversations and addressing issues before they escalate can be hugely beneficial and creates a more positive environment for people to thrive.
18. Several Key Performance Indicators have been identified to track progress. These include:
 - (a) Time To Hire
 - (b) Agency Spend Reduction
 - (c) Voluntary turnover rate
 - (d) Employee FTE
 - (e) Employee Demographics
 - (f) Average Days lost to sickness per employee
 - (g) Apprenticeship levy optimisation
 - (h) Internal movement and promotion
 - (i) Gender & Ethnicity pay gap (yearly)
 - (j) Employee engagement index (yearly)

Corporate Policies and Priorities

19. Our People and Culture Strategy aligns with the Delivering the Future Together vision of becoming an Employer of Choice, by ensuring we have the right people, with the right skills, attitude and behaviours, in the right place, at the right level and at the right cost to support the delivery of organisational ambitions.

Financial Implications

20. It is anticipated that any cost of delivering the programme that cannot be met from the existing budget for Human Resources will be funded by the Transformation Reserve. Further work to confirm these costs is being undertaken.

The financial benefits anticipated as a result of implementing the Our People and Culture Strategy are expected to reduce the need for spend on agency workers, reduce the cost of sickness and support the achievement of the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox
Head of Corporate Finance
Kathy.wilcox@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

21. There are no legal implications of any outcomes detailed within this report.

Comments checked by:

Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer
paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk (Legal)

Staff Implications

22. This is an ambitious programme and will require some of the current HR/OD team to be redirected to focus on the priorities outlined. There will also be a requirement to bring in additional specialist resource to support the programme of work outlined.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

23. Our People and Culture Strategy has inclusion at the heart of its intention. It is intentional that EDI is not an individual thread within the strategy with the aim of embedding the importance of EDI in all that we do.
24. An EIA has been completed and has shown a positive impact on all protected characteristics, additional community impacts and relevant additional wider impacts through: the improvements that will be made to our resourcing and reward practices, supporting teams to build local responses to people data and insight, creating a talent development programme for underrepresented groups, identifying and develop diverse leaders of the future through a future leader programme, a reciprocal mentoring scheme and enhancing our early careers offer.

Sustainability Implications

25. A climate impact assessment has been completed. Our People and Culture Strategy has positive impacts on transport and connectivity through our employees' benefits and rewards which promote active travel, use of public transport and electric vehicle use. It also has positive impacts for promoting health and well-being through wellbeing initiatives such as the employee assistance programme.

Risk Management

26. Risk assessments have been completed and the key risks associated with Our People and Culture Strategy programme relating to the HR OD team include limited project management support and expertise and team capacity to deliver alongside business as usual. Risks relating to the wider organisation include limited capacity, which could affect engagement with the programme and participation in initiatives, and potential lack of buy in if this is perceived to be a HR OD team programme.
27. To minimise these risks additional project management support is being sought (a senior project manager joined the team in January) and coaching and training in project management will be provided to the HR OD team. Work within the Programme has been prioritised and some will be delivered by external

consultants. A stakeholder engagement plan will be developed and the capacity of managers and employees will be taken into account when scheduling initiatives and existing meetings will be used where possible.

Consultations

28. Key stakeholders across the business have contributed to the strategy. The strategy was considered by Informal Cabinet on 9th January 2024

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

Annex: Our People and Culture Strategy

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

Contact Officer: Cherie Cuthbertson, Director for Workforce and
Organisation Development,
cherie.cuthbertson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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