

**PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
18 July 2025**

Our People and Culture Strategy - Year One Progress

Report by Director of HR and Cultural Change

RECOMMENDATION

1. The People Overview & Scrutiny Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to note the report.

Executive Summary

2. The people who work for Oxfordshire County Council are what makes the organisation so special. Every day, they make millions of moments for thousands of people – bringing lasting change to all the county's communities. Their professionalism and commitment to delivering high-quality services supports the council's ambition to become a greener, fairer and healthier county.
3. Together, Oxfordshire County Council is on a journey to Deliver the Future Together and become an Employer of Choice. This ambition is underpinned by the Our People and Culture Strategy (Annex 1), which was approved by Cabinet in January 2024. The strategy aims to develop an inclusive and empowering culture, enabling all employees people to be the best they can be to deliver excellent services for everyone the council serves.
4. This report, and presentation (Annex 2), provides an overview of the significant progress that has been made in implementing the Our People and Culture Strategy in the first year. Further workforce data statistics to demonstrate progress, in addition to those included within this report, can be found in the [Workforce Report and Workforce Data Cabinet report Quarter 3 2024-25](#).

Our People and Culture Strategy

5. The vision for the Our People and Culture Strategy is that 'we develop and maintain 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'.
6. The Strategy focuses on priorities under four pillars:
 - Attract - Attracting, recruiting and retaining talented people

- Thrive - Enabling our people to thrive and perform
- Grow - Enabling our people to grow and evolve for the future
- Lead - Enabling our people to lead and transform for the future

Attracting, recruiting and retaining talented people - Year one progress

7. The council has made significant strides in reshaping its approach to talent acquisition. A new in-house Talent Acquisition and Resourcing team has been established, marking a strategic shift away from reliance on external providers. This has been complemented by the implementation of a modern Applicant Tracking System (ATS), Tribepad, which has streamlined recruitment processes. A new Employer Value Proposition (EVP) and employer brand have been launched, enhancing the council's visibility and appeal in a competitive labour market. Additionally, the transition to a new contingent labour provider (HAYS) has enabled tighter control over agency usage.
8. The job evaluation process has been enhanced through comprehensive training and digitisation, and an analysis of pay structure equality across the organisation has been completed. These initiatives are designed to ensure that resourcing and reward practices are fair, equitable, competitive, and attractive within the market.
9. This has already yielded measurable results. Agency spend has stabilised and hard-to-fill vacancies, such as those for Social Workers and Occupational Therapists, have decreased significantly, from 82.7 FTE in June 2024 to 46.99 FTE in January 2025. These outcomes contribute to a more stable workforce and improved service delivery for residents.

Enabling Our People to Thrive and Perform - Year one progress

10. The council has introduced a suite of modern, accessible policies, toolkits and manager training resources, including conduct, capability, grievance and sickness. These tools have empowered managers to address people-related matters proactively, contributing to a reduction in sickness absence. Furthermore the 2024 employee engagement survey was completed, providing valuable insights to inform service-level strategies.
11. There has been a positive trend in key workforce indicators. Sickness absence has decreased from 9.1 to 8.7 days per FTE and voluntary turnover has declined from 13.1% to 11.1% (rolling 12 months June 2024 to March 2025). The employee engagement index rose from 666.4 to 674.4 between February 2023 and February 2024, bucking the national trend of declining engagement. These improvements reflect a healthier, more engaged workforce and a more resilient organisational culture.

Enabling Our People to Grow and Evolve for the Future - Year one progress

12. The council has expanded its early careers offer, introducing a work experience scheme, a new internship programme, and extending the management trainee programme to include the Chartered Managers Degree Apprenticeship. The 12.3.2 performance management tool has been refreshed, and a reciprocal mentoring scheme has been launched to support EDI objectives. Secondment opportunities, including at senior levels, have been promoted to encourage internal mobility.
13. Apprenticeship levy spend has increased from 68.5% to 89.6%, and internal movement and promotions have risen from 4.8% to 6.9% (rolling 12 months September 2023 to December 2024). These trends indicate growing internal capability and a stronger pipeline of future talent. Feedback from the reciprocal mentoring scheme has been overwhelmingly positive, reinforcing its value in fostering inclusion and professional growth.

Enabling Our People to Lead and Transform for the Future - Year one progress

14. The council has made significant progress with organisational redesign, streamlining Tier 2 – 4 structures including Directors, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service, to improve efficiency and collaboration. Additionally, the council has implemented a range of people management controls to support financial sustainability, including tighter oversight of agency usage, honorariums, and overtime. A leadership specialist has also been engaged to support the development of inclusive and high-performing leadership practices.
15. The redesign of Tiers 2 and 4 has delivered £1.76 million in savings. Agency usage has decreased, and leadership capability has improved, as evidenced by more strategic and collaborative decision-making at senior levels. These changes are fostering a culture of accountability and alignment with organisational values.

Looking Ahead

16. In the second year of implementing the Our People and Culture Strategy, the focus is on organisational redesign to streamline layers, ensure consistent spans of control, and achieve savings. Wellbeing support is being developed for employees and managers affected by these changes, alongside the introduction of a career family role profile framework to ensure role clarity and support career progression.
17. The council will embed the new recruitment model to improve time to hire and reduce vacancies, while enhancing equality, diversity, and inclusion in recruitment. A new HR front door and helpdesk system will provide streamlined access to support, improve service efficiency, reduce response times, and enable HR teams to focus on complex, value-added work.
18. Other priorities include embedding wellbeing services into the organisational culture, enhancing the rewards and benefits offer, expanding the reciprocal mentoring scheme, developing HR workforce data packs, and enhancing

recognition efforts to celebrate everyday contributions. Further work includes reviewing volunteer engagement practices, delivering the 2025 employee engagement survey, and enhancing the onboarding and induction process through a digital-first approach. These initiatives reflect the council's commitment to becoming an employer of choice, delivering inclusive, high-performing services within its financial envelope.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

19. The Our People and Culture Strategy referred to in this report directly underpins the Council's ambition to become an Employer of Choice.

Financial Implications

20. The level of agency expenditure was a contributory factor in the year end overspend in services for 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25. On-going focus through the Our People and Culture Strategy is required so that costs can be managed within agreed service areas budgets for 2025/26.
21. The funding for implementing the Our People and Culture Strategy comes from existing service area budget and transformation funding that has already been approved. There are no new or additional financial implications.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
Drew.Hodgson@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

22. As there are no statutory requirements to produce a People and Culture Strategy, there are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Kim Sawyer, Interim Head of Legal & Governance (Legal),
Kim.Sawyer@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

23. The primary staff resource requirements for the programmes of work associated with the Our People and Culture Strategy are mainly drawn from the HR and Cultural Change service and Transformation, Digital, and Customer Experience service. The funding for these staff members comes from the existing service budgets and transformation funding that has already been approved. There are no new or additional financial implications.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

24. Equality and inclusion are integral components of the Our People and Culture Strategy and some key initiatives include implementing diverse recruitment

