PEOPLE STRATEGY:
ATTRACTION, PERFORMANCE AND WORKFORCE RESILIENCE (2023-2027)

Contents

Introduction

Surrey Heath Borough Council (the Council) has considerable evidence to support that it is a high performing organisation, with a strong and positive culture that is engaging and attractive for staff. Recent reviews including the 2023 staff survey and the Local Government Association Peer Challenge has supported that the people who work for the Council are, generally speaking, dedicated, hardworking and committed to their employer and that the Council is seeing positive results within their improvement journey in the delivery of their services and outcomes.

Uniquely perhaps amongst public sector organisations, the Council demonstrates an optimism for the future and has managed difficult processes positively such as the last two years of budget reviews, showing change-agility and confidence that future challenges can be met.

However, the challenges facing the organisation are significant. There is a £4 million budget gap within the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) that must be closed if the Council is to remain financially sustainable. This represents nearly a quarter of our net cost of services of the Council and this gap will increase with inflationary pressures on pay, contracts and goods and services, as well as increasing service and legislative demands.

In addition to the above, the world of work is rapidly changing. The pandemic has accelerated the need for agile working partly as a method of attracting and retaining high quality staff, reducing the overhead cost of office accommodation, but also (and perhaps more importantly) as a method of reducing the environmental impact of commuting and encouraging climate friendly behaviour change. The drive for greater agility has had many work place benefits (such as increased productivity, improved attendance and more positive mental health, better work life balance for staff, reduced commuting time, however it also means that there is an increased need to invest in technology, in processes and practice that supports organisational cohesion, and a move away from traditional office design, to a more flexible and collaborative office environment that underpins the more agile approach.

The employment market is undergoing changes with significant reductions in numbers of people with specialist skills available for work and the social trends in working preferences, and many employers including the Council need to adapt to this in order to remain competitive. In the recent past, people have wanted to work in the public sector for reasons of job security, a desire to have meaningful work, attractive pay and pension provision, flexibility in hours, supported career pathways and development to allow for progression and good benefits. However this is being eroded by private employers building these into their own employment offerings and an inability of the public sector to respond to pay expectations as a result of budgetary constraints.

Nationally the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will change the way of work, particularly in professional knowledge based activities, this has the potential to be even more profound than previous technology advances (such as the introduction of computers and web based technologies) have done in the past. It is important that the Council embraces the opportunities with AI but also recognises it's limitations and threats in terms of cyber risk and error driven by technology and not recognised by people.

The Council's workforce (following national trends) is predominantly female and aged between 45 and 65. This means that over the next 5 years, a considerable proportion of talented employees will retire unless working conditions can be made sufficiently attractive to encourage then to stay longer in the workforce through partial or flexible retirement options.

Evidence indicates that technically specialist jobs (such as Planning, Building Control, Building Surveyors etc) are being drawn into the private sector away from the public sector and this trend is expected to continue (see RTPI research: https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2019/june/the-uk-planning-profession-in-2019/)

This leaves the Council with an ageing workforce and a contracting talent pool in the employment market. It will be necessary for the Council to be clear how its overall employment offer sets it apart from other local authorities, and other public sector and private sector organisations.

The purpose of this document is therefore to address these key challenges to create a workforce and working environment that is:

- Attractive and welcoming to all with an organisational brand that enables Surrey Heath to stand out in a highly competitive employment market
- Delivers high performance through clear priorities, effective empowerment and positive performance management, and by successfully aligning the needs of the employee with the needs of the organisation
- Builds workforce resilience in terms of skills, innovation, motivation, succession planning, health and wellbeing, retention and change agility

Scope

The strategy applies to decisions that impact all people who work for Surrey Heath including direct employees, agency workers, consultants, casual workers, trainees, interns and volunteers.

The strategy will impact on the formation of policies, procedures and guidance relating to the management of the workforce and decisions relating to this. .

The Five Year Strategy

The Council's five-year strategy that runs as a golden thread throughout all the work we do. The priorities can be seen here:

https://www.surreyheath.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/Five%20Year%20Strategy%202022-2027%20Priorities%20and%20Targets_0.pdf

The five-year strategy commenced in 2022 and runs until 2027. The People Strategy therefore mirrors that timeframe and runs from adoption in 2023 until 2027. It will be annually reviewed and refreshed by the Employment Committee in September of each year which will include a refreshed annual plan based on the staff survey results.

Drivers for the People Strategy – the culture gap

The Council has worked hard to build a culture based upon its values (please see below) agreed in May 2022. The 2023 staff survey gave the following results:

- 99% of staff are proud of the work they do (+ 4%)
- 96% of staff are proud of the work the Council do (+ 10%)
- 99% of staff feel the Council gives good customer service (+ 5%)

- 94% of staff think their manager supports their learning and development (no change)
- 90% of staff can offer their ideas and suggestions for improvement (- 2%)
- 93% of staff feel good performance is encouraged in their team (+ 1%)

Evidence within the Peer Challenge Position Statement and the recent Annual Plan outcomes for 2022/23 indicates that the results delivered for the Council are good, that the Council works well with its partners, and that the evidence supports the statement that the Council is currently high performing and that staff are motivated, talented and work hard, giving substantial discretionary effort in many areas.

The Council's values were born out of an engagement exercise with our staff. The values that emerged from this exercise very much reflect the views of our people, expressing both the strengths they see as inherent in our workforce but also the clear expectations held as being most important for the future including for those joining the Council as new members of staff. At the heart of the Council's values is Learning. As an organisation committed to improvement, learning has a vital part to play on that improvement journey as well as every other aspect of this People Strategy.

In the staff survey, staff were asked what three words best describes the Council. The response to this is below:

Question from our staff survey: What three words would you use to describe Surrey Heath Borough Council (as a place to work)?

Words	Occurrence
Friendly	60
Supportive	28
Professional	17
Caring	16
Committed	16
Flexible	13
Welcoming	13
Customer Focused	12
Efficient	10
Hard Working	9
Approachable	8
Helpful	8

The evidence therefore currently suggests that in terms of culture, customer focus, results, teamwork and pride are thriving. All of this needs to be maintained, however innovation and becoming a learning organisation need to be better developed as this will impact on future Council performance if it is not addressed, given the pace of change.

The Vision

It is essential that the Council does not lose sight of or become complacent of the progress it has already achieved. To thrive over the next four years, the Council must have a culture that enables it to:

1. Attract, recruit and retain talented staff who have the attitude, values and skills necessary to deliver high quality Council services in Surrey Heath

2. Continue to drive up performance including through partnership working, efficient processes, strong project management, good governance, use of new technology, through learning and development, and developing a clear vision of the Council's delivery model and budget

3. Have a resilient workforce that can adapt to the new challenges, while embracing and innovating in response to future change

The detail of these three areas are laid out in the workstreams below.

The People Workstreams

Work Stream	Key areas
Attraction	Employer Brand and value proposition Benefits and values Learning and Career Development Agile working and the impact of travel Families and work Working Environment (including social connections to work and communication)
Performance	Empowering people to make decisions within the context of good governance Policies and processes Project delivery Performance Management Collaborative working Commercial Approach within a Caring Mindset
Resilience	Health and wellbeing support Motivation and engagement Fairness and Equality Succession Planning Change Readiness

Attraction

Employer Brand and Value Proposition

Considerable work has been done on our Corporate brand and this has improved our ability to attract people to the Council, particularly in relation to the documents supporting advertisements that lay out our stall as an employer, in particular documenting the employee value proposition.

This could be developed further through the following actions:

- Being clear about the social value the roles provide
- Delivering careers with a clear purpose and that have a positive impact on the community which is reflected in job descriptions, interviews and associated documents
- Reinforcing our commitment to people who work for us in terms of how they are valued, supported and given an opportunity to grow their knowledge and skills.

Benefits and Values

People attending staff focus groups were asked which benefits were regarded as very important, somewhat important or not important to them personally.   This highlights the relative importance of high-quality line management, the opportunity to work flexibly (including agile working) and access to personal and professional development, sitting alongside financial benefits such as salary, pension and free parking. The findings from these can be seen below:

Benefits Table

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not important
Pay			

Salary	17	2	
Pension	16	4	
Leave			
Annual	14	5	1
Maternity	3	4	8
Paternity	3	3	6
Flexi Time	7	5	3
TOIL	6	2	6
Christmas	13	3	
Career Development			
Post Entry Training	8	1	6
Apprenticeship	1	3	10
Personal development courses	10	3	1
Professional development courses	10	3	2
Professional memberships fees paid for	5	3	3
Health Benefits			
Westfield Health	4	8	5
Places for Leisure membership discount	1	6	6
Eye Care Voucher (Specsavers)	6	3	7
Flu Shot (Boots)	5	3	7
Employee Assistance Program	4	7	3
Team			
How I'm managed	13	3	
Line manager	19	1	
Team Members	12	2	
Executive team	8	5	1
Culture			
Values	8	6	
Public service	7	5	1
Working from home	14	2	
Flexibility	15	1	
Green Commute Initiative			
Cycle to work scheme		3	14
Perks			
Camberley Theatre staff discount		7	8
Free staff parking	16	2	1

My Staff Shop	2	6	7
CSSC Membership		7	9
Vodaphone offers		3	13
Collectively Camberley - Industry Insider Card		6	10

It is essential that to meet the vision, the Council remains innovative, attractive and competitive in its workforce benefits offering.

Learning and Career Development

The staff survey indicates that providing the skills and knowledge to perform the current job role is well catered for (97% agree that they have the skills and development to do their current job).

Whilst 94% of people feel that their manager supports their learning and development, only 88% of people feel that they are supported or have the opportunity to develop either in their current role or their future career.

It will be essential as part of our approach to attraction and retention, particularly to those early in their careers, to have demonstrable career development pathways including ultimately into specialist or leadership roles. This will be particularly important as traditional career pathways change due to technological advances. As part of the annual plan and associated Learning and Development (L&D) budget each year there will therefore be the following options:

- Internships
- Graduate scheme
- Apprenticeships
- Work Experience
- Career support offered to local schools and colleges
- Youth Council
- Coaching and mentoring

- Management and Leadership development (particularly to develop future leaders at all levels)
- Women managers programme
- Developing skills and career development options for those who are already established in their careers
- Continued Professional Development throughout the career span

Career development pathways should also be built across the term of the strategy that relate to local government business critical roles such as Planning, Building Control, Finance, ICT, Property, Environmental Health, Housing, and Family Support etc.

It should be noted that this does represent a risk to the Council in itself because we are a relatively small employer and therefore it is likely we could develop someone into a position that they must leave to reach their potential. However, the benefit of having a person for a defined period in which they develop brings substantial benefits to the Council.

Agile working and the impact of travel

Work is now regarded as an activity rather than a place that is travelled to. Green initiatives are attractive to employees and future employees and support the five year strategy and ambition to become a net zero organisation by 2030 and a net zero borough by 2050.

This will mean that agile working will become more embedded for many organisations and there will need to be a clear recruitment, retention, performance and finance business case required to justify retuning to longer commutes.

Agile working is very popular as a benefit with 97% of staff agreeing that agile working is very or somewhat important to them. 91% of people feel that it helps

them to manage their attendance at work which provides performance and productivity support as well as support from a climate perspective to reduce commuting. Agile working also broadens our reach as an employer to people living further away (but it also means that our own staff have more choice about potential future employers).

Camberley Town Centre has comparatively poor travel links which minimises the attraction of an office environment. It is essential to keep the Council attractive as an employer that it continues to offer the most flexibility and agility it can in terms of hours and location of work while still meeting core business needs.

The minimum policy requirement to spend one day per week in the office is supported by a significant majority of staff with 69% of staff feeling it is about right but 22% feeling it is too low. Only 5% feel it is too high. The refresh of the flexible working policy needs to consider how best to offer collaborative time to workers depending on the nature of their job and service, whilst still providing the flexibility that is so popular.

Families and Work

The workforce of Surrey Heath is aging. Currently 53.5% of our staff are aged over 45. The average age of the workforce is 45.2 years old. This means that within the next 15 years, the Council will see a considerable portion of their talent retire. In order to mitigate this risk, it is essential that the Council attracts younger staff and enables older staff to stay in work as long as possible. To stand out from other employers, the following options are available:

1. To support those with caring responsibilities in a much more visible way.
2. To offer greater flexibility to employees.
3. To encourage local government careers by emphasizing the social value of work, engaging with younger people in a meaningful way and providing clear career development

External research indicates that:

- 75% of carers in employment worry about continuing to juggle work and care (Carers UK, State of Caring 2022).
- On average, 600 people a day leave work to care (Carers UK. Juggling Work and Care).
- One in three NHS staff provide unpaid care (NHS staff survey, 2021).
- Between 2010 and 2020, more than 1.9 million people in paid employment became unpaid carers every year (Petrillo and Bennett, 2022).

The improvement journey has started with new Family Friendly Policies which have brought the Council in line with other employers which we will seek to continue to improve. The Council has also recently published a menopause policy and has options such as flexible retirement to help older workers stay in work. More however needs to be done to have a resilient workforce that provides the widest possible span of age and experience.

It is recognised that caring costs impact on staff financial wellbeing and that this is an important consideration in reward and benefit strategies. A new Carers Policy is in development which will include reference to kinship care, take into account recent changes in the law (Carer's Leave Act 2023) and it is recommended that to attract and retain talent this is an essential part of the People Strategy Plan and potentially an area of test within future staff surveys.

Specific attention needs to focus on the needs of older workers and to ensure that as workers age, work remains an attractive option for as long as possible. Flexible working should be offered as an option/consideration from day one of work and prominently displayed in advertising for all roles.

 Areas that have not yet been considered to improve support for families are fertility and miscarriage support. According to the Miscarriage Association

(2021) more than one in five pregnancies end in miscarriage, probably around a quarter of a million in the UK each year. Fertility issues affect 1 in 7 couples and this is increasing. The total fertility rate fell from 1.94 in 2010 to 1.55 in 2021, according to data from the Office of National Statistics birth registration statistics. This trend is common in European countries and affects all women regardless of social class or education level. Surrey Heath's birthrate declined by 10% (which amounts to 100 births) between 2011 and 2021.

The laws relating to Neonatal Care have changed. From April 2025, parents whose child(ren) is in neonatal care will have the right to an additional 12 weeks of pay and leave. This will change our family friendly policy and as a family friendly employer the policy change could happen prior to the legal requirement to change.

These are areas that impact on large sections of the workforce and should be covered by policy. Focussing on issues such as this may also attract and retain workers.

Working Environment
(including social connection to work/staff communications)

The concept of work/life balance is changing particularly in office-based culture where working from home for at least part of the working week is highly prized and regarded in many sectors as 'the new normal'. The boundaries between work and life outside work have blurred. The recognition that work provides more than financial reward has also changed with the appreciation since the pandemic of the important social part that work plays in many people's lives and the health benefits working brings. People who have started working for Surrey Heath Borough Council need to be able to form strong connections with the values and culture of the organisation and with their colleagues. This also helps support collaborative working across different Council services and the shared commitment to

corporate outcomes. This will need to be achieved alongside clear and robust professional standards and governance.

Staff survey results in this area were:

- I feel a strong connection to my team (92%)
- I feel a strong connection to the Council (80% up from 68%)
- I feel the office environment is welcoming (80%)
- The office moves have improved my working environment (52%)

In terms of staff communications, the use of the new staff employee engagement platform has seen social as well as work related posts and encourages cross Council communication. It builds connections and knowledge of people and work outside immediate teams. 82.6% of people regard it as 'effective or very effective' as a method of communication, an increase of 46.9% in just over a year and has directly contributed to the improvements seen above. However, feedback from the Peer Challenge and the staff survey indicate that the office space changes have not been as successful and this will be an area of investment and work to ensure that they are regarded as a more welcoming and collaborative environment to work, in line with our objectives.

Staff Representatives support staff through employment relationships and are a key method of engaging with and receiving feedback from staff. They are an invaluable support service for both staff and the employment and an essential part of our people approach.

There is a Sports and Social Committee which has dwindled in membership over the pandemic. A new model to empower staff to develop social connections needs to be put into place so that staff continue to build social as well as work networks.

People thinking about working for Surrey Heath as well as existing officers will have a growing expectation to see a positive, welcoming office environment where

officers feel a sense of ownership and control (reflecting their ability to control their at-home work environment). This is a developing work stream impacted by external and internal research. Areas for consideration therefore need to include:

- Space within the office to encourage welcoming collaborative and cross team working as well as a flexible space that can adapt quickly in response to work needs, and is an attractive social space for rest breaks
- Continued development of face to face team meetings, training opportunities and all staff briefings which include social time
- The development of informal as well as formal networking opportunities
- Guidance, training and policy to support professional boundaries particularly using social media platforms and personal contact
- Particular care and awareness around the use and power of informal communication styles, dress and approach
- Continued encouragement to engage through the intranet and to develop social as well as work related posts
- A refreshed approach to empower staff to deliver sports and social activities
- Extended consultation and involvement of officers on matters relating to the office environment
- Continuing to build on the improved induction approach to settle staff into their roles within the Council in the most welcoming, effective and efficient way

Performance

Empowering people to make decisions

Currently 92% of officers feel they are empowered to do their job. As part of good governance, Councils need to have clear schemes of delegation and appropriate decision-making levels. It is an essential element of strong Council performance that officers and Councillors are clear on who decision makers/project managers in any particular instance are and that the

officer/Councillor relationship in setting direction and then implementing decisions is well known. The Council needs to aim for an appropriate level of risk management whilst reducing process and bureaucracy that impacts even low risk decision making.

This is a careful balance directly impacting on Council performance and officer workload. It is a particularly important area if demand increases as we expect it to do.

Policies and process

Good governance is supported by policies and people processes which need to be:

- Aligned to the delivery of the People Strategy
- Easy to access, understand and apply
- Fair and internally consistent with other related policies
- Include the rationale (either within the policy or in associated training)
- Protect the Council from risk
- Developed in close collaboration with the staff so that there is a sense of ownership

The role of the HR team in people policy development is to identify innovation trends and patterns in policy and process development as well as legal changes and ensure that feedback from staff, staff representatives and Councillors is taken on board. There must be the balance between the need for policy (where an action pathway must be taken) and the need for guidance (where an action pathway is recommended). This is an essential consideration when agreeing to policy and process developments as guidance allows great autonomy, empowerment and diversity of outcomes, but can lead to challenge if perceived as unfairly applied.

There is a need to continue to streamline process and develop innovative policy that meets the above criteria. The policy programme is on the Employment Committee forward workplan and will continue to be reviewed over the period of this strategy.

Performance Management

The Peer Challenge feedback supported the Surrey Heath Council assertion that this is a high performing Council. The staff survey also supports this with 82% of people understanding how they contribute to the Council's five year strategy (an increase of 6%). There appears however to be a gap in the understand about how Councillors and Officers work together to achieve Council objectives (only 52% of people understand how Councillors contribute positively to the success of the Council). 93% of people feel that good performance is encouraged within their team and 99% are proud of the work they do. 87% of people have regular 1:1s and team meetings which is an essential communications and performance tool.

In terms of team performance, each service brings updates to senior officers on an annual basis commenting on team Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), performance and delivery.

Individual performance objectives are set and monitoring through the appraisal process, carried out annually and linked directly to the annual plan so that objectives flow directly from the agreed strategic focus of the Council through senior leaders to officers. These are checked for progress in mid-term appraisals. Appraisals give individuals and their managers the opportunity to discuss wellbeing and equalities issues as well as career development and performance against objectives. They are an essential tool in the focus of officers on the delivery of agreed Council priorities.

The current appraisal system follows best practice by concentrating on the quality of the conversation between the line manager and employee rather than on the

need to allocate an overall score, produce evidence or complete lengthy forms. However, the Peer Review identified that there is not a coherent talent management strategy or succession plan based on appraisals across the Council (although individual service managers know about the performance and capability of all of the people in their services).

Recommendations and future work plan will therefore include a need to have moderated talent conversations across Services with an associated plan to grow talented people appropriately through mentoring, opportunities for cross service projects providing access to new knowledge, stills and work perspectives etc.

Quality assurance framework options are being considered as part of the short term plan which may see a need to adjust performance principles, objectives and KPIs in some areas.

Part of the vision and the values is to be a learning organisation in which review, benchmarking and evaluation of work is an essential part of the delivery journey. The current culture of the Council is to deliver results at pace. This means that the opportunity to learn from the work done is sometimes missed. It would greatly improve annual plan reviews to build in review and evaluation models and to ask when a piece of work is delivered, what made it successful (or not) and what lessons have been learned from the project. This would improve the ability of the Council to learn, adapt and innovate. The concept that 'we learn from what we do' would be useful, as would refreshed appraisal/1:1 training that asks positive non critical questions about what went well, what was more challenging, what could be improved, what others could learn from.

Collaborative Working

It is essential that as the Council budget continues to be constrained, opportunities are sought to increase income, improve efficiencies, reduce

duplication of effort and achieve economies of scale. There are already partnership models with Runnymede in relation to Community Services and Family Support, and Building Control, Joint Waste Services with three other Councils in the management of waste contracts and growing relationships with partners relating to delivery of services through the third sector. A positive relationship with the NHS is supported through the sharing of officers and there is a partnership relating to the provision of learning and development (Surrey Learn).

The ability to build collaborative working across partners has the potential to support career development and succession planning as well as develop future income and savings streams.

Senior Officers have recently reviewed the Community of Practice model that exists in a number of leading employers and agreed to explore its use internally. There are examples of its use by partner agencies in Surrey Heath such as the NHS one for HR practitioners, and there is considerable learning to be taken from this.

There are opportunities to build communities across partners as well as internally and this should be reviewed as they may offer opportunities for more formal collaborative relationships.

Commercial Approach within a Caring Mindset

There is a need to strengthen the integration of the strong public service ethos and values of a caring and compassionate Council where there is an opportunity to make a positive difference in the community with the commercial realities facing local government in the current financial climate.

This includes a greater focus on effective financial management, management of contracts and shared services, project delivery, preparation of business cases,

promotional campaigns to increase take up, and proposals to increase income to name a few.

The Council have made a start on this and it is a good indicator that 'efficient' has been recognised as something the Council is on the 2023 survey (the word did not appear on the 2021 survey at all).

This skill is developing within the Council and must continue to be encouraged. There is excellent commercial talent within the Council particularly in the Investment and Property team and cross learning and mentoring would be useful particularly across the wider management team.

Resilience

Health and Wellbeing Support

The most recent benchmarking results indicate that the Council have one of the lowest sickness records in the County (3.2 days lost per FTE employee over a rolling 12-month period). This is considered to be the result of an excellent flexible and agile working offering coupled with a positive working environment. The Council must however be wary of issues surrounding presenteeism and managers must be careful to continue to check on workers' health and wellbeing proactively, particularly those working mainly at home.

The main reason for sickness continues to be anxiety, stress and depression with fatigue as the second reason. It is therefore an essential part of the workplan to continue to focus on mental health.

There is a network of mental health first aiders and a space on our internal communications site that all staff can access relating to health and wellbeing. All managers must attend mandatory training on managing attendance and mental health for managers.

All staff can access the Employee Assistance Programme available 24/7. They can also refer to Access to Work (for help and support for those living with a disability) and Able Futures (for help and support for those living with mental health issues).

We are currently investigating the MIND Mental Health at Work commitment to provide standards to commit to when supporting mental health in the workplace. We have also just published the menopause policy to help people at that phase in their lives as we recognise the impact it can have.

This will continue to be an active part of the workplan going forward so we can keep up to date on trends and patterns in sickness and will be monitored by senior officers and Councillors in the Workforce Profile that accompanies this strategy.

Motivation & Engagement

The Council has an engaged and positive workforce and this needs to be maintained. Our staff survey in 2023 had a 72% response rate and showed an improving picture particularly:

- I am empowered to carry out my job (92% strongly agree/agree)
- I am proud to work for the Council (96% strongly agree/agree)
- The Council values me and my work (81% strongly agree/agree)
- The Council is a good place to work (91% strongly agree/agree)
- My line manager trusts me to do a good job (97% strongly agree/agree)
- My line manager encourages me at work (93% strongly agree/agree)
- I have the opportunity to learn and develop in my role (88% strongly agree/agree)

As a result of the staff survey, there is an engagement plan to act on feedback. This plan forms a key part of the action plan relating to this strategy and will be regularly reviewed by the Work Force for the Future Board.

Surveys will continue to run regularly during the period of this strategy and the associated staff survey action plan will be refreshed. Quarterly updates are provided to staff who are invited to focus groups on key areas of the plan to fully involve them in the implementation of any actions.

There will be a continuing focus on leadership training with programmes for senior and wider management teams to ensure that skills continue to develop.

Fairness and Equality

The business case (as well as the ethical case) for talent management from under-represented groups is clearly demonstrable particularly in a difficult employment market.

The fairness and equality offering is therefore central to the Council's culture, attraction and retention approach. We aspire to be an excellent employer to work for, treating people fairly and actively seeking to remove barriers to people who are disadvantaged within the workplace. We are a disability confident employer and we are working to improve our offering to veterans and their families. We ask questions about fairness and equalities in our staff survey and our appraisals to check that we are meeting staff need we act on that feedback.

The 2023 staff survey included the following results:

- I believe that the organisation treats staff fairly (83% strongly agree/agree)
- Policies and procedures promote fairness and equality across the Council (87% strongly agree/agree)

- When I see unacceptable behaviour I am able to speak up (90% strongly agree/agree)
- If I had an issue with equality or diversity I would be able to speak up (93% strongly agree/agree)

There are a small number of people at work who do not have a positive experience and as an employer, we need them to be able to come forward and trust us to address their issues (as well as proactively support change towards the removal of issues). This has formed part of the staff survey action plan which will form part of the recommendations and work plan relating to this strategy.

There is a separate equalities strategy and work plan currently under development that will be closely linked to this and will be reviewed on an annual basis. This is an area of continuous improvement and a key priority.

Succession Planning

As a smaller Council there is low resilience in technical/specialist officer roles and the Council is particularly vulnerable to performance gaps when people leave and before new officers can be recruited and fully performing (assuming this is possible in a difficult employment market facing significant skills shortages).

This is exacerbated when those who are talented and have developed in their career do not have an appropriate role to go to due to the size of the Council and the availability of jobs.

These challenges become more significant in higher pay scales and so this links with the need to provide continued professional development throughout the whole of the career span. Whilst this risk cannot be wholly mitigated, there are options to encourage talented officers to develop more cross service understanding through the provision of:

- Career development into business-critical technical specialisms
- A talent programme with cross service working
- Increases in the number of 'development' roles offered giving a step into new careers
- Conversations across services relating to available talent
- Ring fenced development time for business-critical specialisms
- Internal 'lunch and learns' on business-critical specialisms to attract people to them. This will particularly support cross service working and building relationships to make internal process more effective.

This will form part of the recommendations and workplan moving forwards.

Change Readiness

The major changes to the way the Council works within the next four years are:

- The removal of up to 10% of our current Council budget through the delivery of changed ways of working, innovation and commercialisation in services
- Increased demand and expectations of residents and staff during a cost-of-living crisis
- The introduction of AI technology which will reduce the need for transactional working and less complex problem solving but will increase the need for highly skilled knowledge workers who can identify errors or false assumptions within automated processes. This will lead to a fundamental change in the skills base required.
- Changes to the national policy landscape as a result of the 2024 general election and the 2023 changes in administration locally
- Retains older workers whilst becoming more attractive to younger workers in a difficult and competitive employment market
- Responding to a climate emergency that will see extreme weather events, changes to social behaviour including a desire for more localism, less

commuting and a broader availability of jobs due to mainly home working and legal changes directly impacting on Council services

- The need to work with others outside the Council and achieve economies of scale
- The need to recognise that resourcing requirements may be better resolved through cross service working than trying to resolve them within service or team

Research indicates that the most influential change agents in any organisation are line managers. Therefore, recruitment and training of line managers must include this and more senior officers need to be able to be make a compelling and engaging case for change.

Skills to deliver the workforce vision

Council workers, particularly those in management positions, will need to be flexible, agile change agents with the ability to clearly prioritise. The culture of the Council will need to encourage curiosity, innovation, persistence and excellent communications. Officers will need to embrace and encourage in others the process of personal and professional growth to promote the need for innovation, learning and professional curiosity.

To deliver the five-year strategy and to achieve our people objectives, the Council must be able to attract or grow the below skills into the workforce. AI will change the traditional local government skill set and it will be essential to show that we are aware of this and respond to it.

- Change agility (adaptability and flexibility in particular)
- Technological innovation interest and aptitude
- Systems thinking (to develop clean and efficient processes)
- Social skills to build team cohesion and collaboration
- Project Management

- Customer Focus and Service
- Coaching others
- Communication skills including stakeholder management, presentation and negotiating and influencing
- Social conscience and awareness – the development of emotional intelligence
- Curiosity in new initiatives coupled with evidence-based research skills to demonstrate the business case for change
- Resolution focused complex problem solving
- Evidence based decision making
- Developing a commercial mindset
- Developing political astuteness – understanding the dynamics of organisational politics and the ability to navigate these effectively
- Governance skills including risk, financial, procurement and contract management for non-finance officers
- Understanding and application of the environmental impact of climate change so that net zero can be included in everyday business
- The application of excellent practice in equalities, making decisions in a fair and transparent way and being open to scrutiny
- Attention to detail particularly the ability to identify errors relating to AI and technology

These skills are regarded as essential for members of the wider management team, and highly encouraged across all levels of the Council. It is recommended that they are reflected in job descriptions, competencies, leadership programmes, interviews and career pathway development programmes.

There will also be emerging technical skills which the Council will need to attract for example urban planning, community engagement, property management etc.

People Analytics and Governance

Analysing the workforce needed over the next four years to identify trends, patterns and skills will be essential to ensure that this strategy is successfully implemented.

Therefore, the following governance products and processes are in place:

1. An annual review of the strategy together with a refreshed workplan will be discussed at the Joint Staff Consultative Group and then will follow on to Employment Committee each September.
2. In March each year the Workforce Profile will be discussed at Joint Staff Consultative Group and on to the Employment Committee as a midterm review which will include key performance metrics on recruitment, vacancies, turnover, sickness, skills and training completions.

We will aim to benchmark our findings with other Councils and employers locally and nationally using the LGA to support us and better identify our status as an employer of choice.

Recommendations

1. The People Strategy is adopted to support the emerging vision and the corporate strategy
2. The People Strategy is consulted on with staff representatives and through the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and the Employment Committee. A prioritised workplan is developed to support the corporate strategy and annual plan
3. The Council undertakes a workforce skills audit to help inform future learning and development priorities for staff
4. The workplan incorporates the Staff Survey Action Plan
5. The workplan is monitored by a monthly board chaired by the Head of HR, Performance and Communications

6. The strategy and workplan are reviewed annually by officers, the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and the Employment Committee

Next Steps

1. Consult with Staff Representatives
2. Develop the first annual workplan
3. Write the Workforce Profile accompanying the Strategy
4. Go through the formal governance process

Annex 1: Political, Economic, Social, Technological and Environmental Analysis (PESTE)

Political:

- The Council has changed administration almost in entirety since May/June elections. This has meant new direction particularly on community engagement and empowerment.
- A short term plan has been agreed and is in implementation. It is anticipated that the future annual plan will be adjusted to reflect the current priorities of the current administration whilst still taking into account the original consultation data findings.
- There will be an election in 2024 and this may change the direction of the Government and lead to different priorities

Economic

Local Government nationally is experiencing a need to review and focus on their budgetary position. Surrey Heath is fortunate that is in the good financial position of having reserves, however the primary Council focus is on the delivery of a sustainable budget.

It is unlikely further funding will come into local government however demand continues to increase. This has led to the base budget review and it is anticipated that across the period of this strategy further reviews will be needed. The medium to long term financial position for the Council and its subsequent ability to deliver services is the primary challenge and this will remain across the period of this strategy. There will need to be changes in the way we work in terms of cost up until 2027.

Social

The 2021census data indicates that Surrey Heath is changing as a society particularly in the following ways:

- The borough population is increasing in age
- The working population of the borough is slightly decreasing
- Approx 1/10 of the borough population was born outside the EU
- 7.5% of the borough population identify as non UK
- 8.9% of the borough identify as Asian and this population has grown since 2011
- Although the borough has low levels of people identifying from non-white ethnicities, this is growing
- 24,406 people in Surrey Heath are economically inactive (of these 69% are retired, the rest are looking after family or living with a disability)
- 25% of homes are rental (a small increase) This includes 9.6% of housing as socially rented
- 1.25% of people identify as a different gender from their birth gender (either trans, non-binary or other)
- 2.05% identified as LGBTQ+
- 2519 of our residents previously served in the armed forces
- 25% of households live with at least one person living with a disability and perceptions of health have seen little change since 2011
- 7.5% of residents provide unpaid care for another person

The way people work is rapidly changing particularly in relation to flexibility in the workplace in terms of hours, location and need for employee driven choice. Work is regarded as an activity rather than a place and the concept of 'going to work' is in flux. This will be particularly marked between those who had the majority of their career prior to the pandemic and those who have started their career since 2020. This will continue to change.

In addition recent social change has seen the following trends and patterns:

- Focus and increased fear relating to the cost of living which impact on staff as much as they impact on society as a whole.
- Changes in the sense of social cohesion and how social connections are made and sustained
- Changes to health and in particular the prevalence of chronic conditions such as mental health, obesity and other conditions impacting on our communities and our employees
- The desire to live in a more localised way accessing services within active travel routes
- Housing standards need to improve in areas such as fire safety, mould and damp as well as environmental improvements (see below) which requires investment and good asset management.

The cost of living crisis is impacting on the Borough and on the people who work for the Council. In Surrey Heath, on average 7% of people cannot regularly afford their household bills and this rises to 24% of people in more socially deprived areas. This is likely to increase as fixed rate mortgage agreements end and will impact particularly those who earn between £30 - £40k as these people are less likely to be able to access additional benefits to support them.

There has been an increase in demand across public sector services and within the Council, particularly in supporting homelessness, revenues and benefits, housing advice and support and community development.

Technical

- There is an increasing use of social media platforms to give feedback and interact with Councillors and officers
- The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is perceived as likely to change the way we work over the next 5-10 years

- There is a growing expectation of 24/7 response from customers available on any device.
- Customers want to be able to use self-service for straight forward issues, talk to a person relating to more complex issues and to have a 'one stop shop' that achieves resolution quickly and without more than one contact. Choice of contact method is important.
- The population is increasing in technical skills however there are still pockets of society (particularly older people) who may find accessing technology much harder
- Most services are likely to see increasing digitalisation and a drive to self service

The introduction of AI will particularly impact on how people work and it is expected that transactional administration will be entirely delivered through technology within the period of this strategy.

Environmental

- There are changing Government strategies towards the removal and recycling of waste.
- The Council has a target to reach net zero by 2030 (and as a borough to reach net zero by 2050). This is a key priority for the Council and must be taken account of within this strategy document.
- The weight of scientific research supports that there is an increasing need to focus on the climate emergency. This will affect not only the services provided by the Council but is likely to impact on funding received and the way staff work.
- The impact of extreme weather events and the need to respond to those such as heath fires, flooding, drought, storms and the impact this has on community services (and the ability of staff to respond).
- The increase in UK tourism (which is predicted to continue in the event that traditional destinations lose appeal due to extreme heat).

- As the borough population increases, so does income relating to the environment.
- The impact of the environment on housing and planning models and design. Housing will need to be cheap, sustainable but also built to cope with the pressures of the environment and to conserve energy with a move towards green construction.

All of the above will impact on the priorities of the Council which will become harder over the strategy period and the skills needed to balance these priorities up to and beyond 2027.