

# Workforce Strategy

2019 – 2022



# Introduction

The Workforce Strategy links to and supports the Council's strategic priorities by identifying what the workforce needs to look like and how it needs to operate to deliver outcomes for the residents of Swale.

The strategy sets out what we have achieved so far and what we need to do to ensure we meet the challenges in the future so that we have the **right** people, with the **right** skills, in the **right** place at the **right** level and at the **right** cost. This has been done by analysing the current workforce and then identifying future requirements, and skills competencies which are needed to deliver new, different or improved services.

The success of the council in achieving its objectives is highly dependent on the skills and commitment of our employees. We have developed our expectations of a 'Swale Manager' and behaviours they need to demonstrate to enable them to become strong leaders that are engaged with the workforce, set high expectations and drive continuous improvement.

The previous Workforce Strategy ran through to 2018 and this refresh builds on the learning from that, the changes incorporated in the Council's new Corporate Plan, and the developments in the operating context within which we work.

# Our Values and Behaviours

The Workforce Strategy plays a critical role in maintaining our culture and ensuring progressive, sustainable and a healthy working environment for our staff. Our values, competencies and behaviours are at the heart of this and **how** our staff do things is as important as **what** we do.

Values – we believe in:

- F**airness - being objective to balance the needs of all those in our community
- I**ntegrity - being open, honest and taking responsibility
- R**espect - embracing and valuing the diversity of others
- S**ervice - delivering high quality, cost effective public service
- T**rust - delivering on our promises to each other, customers and our partners

# Competencies & Behaviours

## Leadership at all levels

Creating a climate in which every one of us takes personal responsibility for doing a great job for Swale, and where staff are inspired, empowered and supported. It involves: understanding the vision for Swale and our personal contribution to that; wanting to get involved and being prepared to take personal responsibility; demonstrating a positive, confident and flexible attitude; behaving with integrity and being open and honest in our dealings with people.

Does not wait to be told to do something – uses their initiative.

Takes personal responsibility for getting the job done, is dependable.

Aware of own strengths and weaknesses and knows when to ask for help or refer to their manager.

## Performance

Focusing on the right outcomes for Swale and making them happen. It involves: focusing on what really matters and delivering priorities; comparing performance and communicating achievements; being creative in order to continuously improve service delivery and efficiency.

Understand what they are here to do and what their role is, and stays focused on delivering their priorities

Always delivers what they say they will; is realistic about what can be achieved and honest about what cannot be done.

Changes the way they work to improve the service.

## Ambition

Being aspirational, optimistic, and determined to improve Swale's future. It involves understanding the big picture and bringing in ideas from outside; thinking ahead and challenging the status quo; communicating success and pride in the area.

Demonstrates an optimistic, positive attitude by looking for ways to achieve rather than focusing on obstacles.

Reflects on experience, recognises what worked well and what could have been done better and learns from it.

Challenges the way things are done – asks “why do we do this?” to improve efficiency and customer service.

## Customer care

Knowing our customers and placing them at the heart of everything that we do. It involves: understanding the needs of customers and communities; making it a positive experience for them to do business with us; treating customers as we would wish to be treated.

Views Council services through the eyes of the customer and delivers a stress-free customer experience to everyone

Always tries to resolve customer queries at first contact; proactive about keeping the customer informed of progress until the matter is resolved.

Seeks feedback from customers about the service; makes suggestions for improvement.

## Team work

Working together to deliver the best outcomes for our community. It involves: understanding and respecting others' contributions and working collaboratively; contributing to a positive team spirit across the council; and communicating with commitment, sharing information, knowledge and learning.

Understands and acknowledges the contributions of other team members and treats all colleagues with respect and trust.

Consults colleagues to get best outcomes for customers; offers advice and support to colleagues if they need help.

Forward plans own work and things about who else might need to be involved.

Willing to help others, and share learning and best practice, across the whole Council.

# Themes of the Workforce Strategy

The Workforce Strategy is a four year plan and sets out four key themes:

**Theme 1** Performance and Development

**Theme 2** Reward and Recognition

**Theme 3** Engagement and Wellbeing

**Theme 4** Workforce for the future

The themes have been identified through discussions with Strategic Management Team, Head of Services and managers to establish the future position of the organisation. These priorities will also help to support the delivery of the council's overall strategic aims, the expectations of our Swale Manager and will further embed our values, competencies and behaviours.

We have already made some significant achievements, so this strategy is not about starting from scratch but about building on our strengths. This work is underpinned by the drive to continuously improve.

## Theme 1

# Performance and Development

### Why this theme?



We provide or commission a number of services to our customers and residents meaning that our workforce is made up of a range of professions, skills and experience. It is therefore important that we develop confident, capable leaders and managers at all levels that perform in line with organisational values and behaviours to build teams in order to drive performance and deliver the Council's priorities.

The ability to lead and manage through challenges facing us over the next four years and more will be critical in maintaining a sustainable organisation. We need to ensure staff are clear on how we expect them to perform in their roles and managers are supported in addressing performance issues effectively in line with performance management processes.

## Where are we now?

Developing our current workforce is one way that we can ensure we are able to deliver what is needed for the future, although there may be times when we decide that we should either buy in the required skills or work with our partners to supply them.

We take a blended approach to learning and development and have promoted an awareness of learning styles throughout the organisation so that people can ensure they adapt their learning to gain best value from all opportunities. We implemented a new e-learning system in 2015 that offers the opportunity to be tailored to service requirements and this, along with formal learning, courses and project work opportunities all serve to promote development within the workforce.

In 2015 we changed the appraisal template for all staff and introduced the 'Developing Everyone' framework. This new format reinforces the need for career and succession planning at all levels. It also helps to identify the 'rising stars' in the organisation to encourage a more structured approach to supporting their development for the future. All staff have access to development but this group are offered a wider range of opportunities that will take them out of their immediate job role.

We have supported the development of coaching and action learning to encourage personal responsibility and to be solution focused in the outcomes. This is to ensure that employees are supported in their development and to improve working practices. The age profile of the workforce suggests that a large proportion of staff could retire within the next five to ten years potentially losing the skills, experience and knowledge of a large pool of staff across the Council and specifically in some key posts. This is a particular problem in areas where there are single post holders performing specialist roles.

## How will we get there?

In the current challenging environment it is really important that learning and development is focussed on areas that will achieve effective performance and delivery of priorities over the medium to long term.

All employees will be actively encouraged and supported to gain the knowledge, skills and qualifications to meet the needs of the Council. We have developed our expectations of what we expect of our 'Swale Manager' and this work will continue. Our employees need to have clarity about their role and responsibilities which provides them with a sense of being recognised and valued for what they contribute to the Council's overall success. We will ensure that employees are empowered to make and implement appropriate decisions for which they are accountable.

So that managers are further supported in their roles a range of management tools will be developed to assist them in managing performance in order to meet the organisational objectives by supporting employees to help them meet our expectations. This will require us to ensure that all our managers are equipped to have regular and honest dialogue about performance with employees to support them to improve and to ensure they have the skills to deliver their role.



The aim will be to further develop leaders and managers who will motivate and lead the organisation in challenging times. We will identify and nurture leaders of tomorrow to build, maintain and invest in a high performing leadership team which is able to drive the agenda forward. We will continue to develop teams to ensure they have the right behaviours and skills necessary to deliver services so that effective decision making, innovation and flexibility are encouraged and supported.

We also need to ensure that we develop an approach to succession planning to avoid the loss of knowledge and skills by identifying skills gaps to address known and future skill shortages. This will help to build the skills and capacity of the existing workforce and assist in planning for and managing turnover.

The council has a strong culture of managing performance through council priorities, service plans and individual objectives that are reviewed within an annual appraisal and mid-year review. This process has been in place for several years and we will need to ensure this still meets the business requirements of the council.

With the increase in technology advancement we also need to provide innovative ways for learning and development. Training has traditionally been provided in a class room format which can create difficulties in the level of commitment to attend training courses. We need to ensure our learning and development opportunities meets the needs of all our staff and that the training is flexible to enable learning to be carried out through a number of ways. This allows employees to change the time and/or location for their learning through the expansion of technology.

## Theme 2

# Reward and Recognition



### Why this theme?

We need to ensure that our overall employment package is fair and equitable, affordable and offers competitive terms and conditions which are broadly comparable to others but enables us to be an employer of choice.

We want to be able to retain and recruit a diverse range of talented people. Reward and recognition is a fundamental part of this. Balancing the pay bill with fair and motivating reward is challenging in this climate and the foreseeable future. However, we recognise the need to be competitive to retain the best people.

### Where are we now?

We reviewed all benefits and rewards at the council and developed a Total Rewards package in 2016 which was promoted to all staff. This included benefits such as buying additional annual leave, an employee assistance programme, health and well-being activities, different types of flexible working options, free flu vaccinations and a range of development opportunities all located in one central place.

We have also recently introduced non-cash and cash award policies to enable managers to recognise and praise staff for exceptional performance. The annual ‘Swale Stars’ award ceremony is another way the Council celebrates success to recognise staff for their contribution and the value they have added to the organisation.

### **How will we get there?**

We will continue to develop the employment package we offer so that it is attractive, enabling us to retain existing staff and attract new staff. This means continuing to monitor the salary scales to ensure that they remain competitive and within our current policy. We will also work towards personal total reward benefit statements so that employees can clearly understand the value of their employment package.

We will continue to use market supplements in skill shortage areas so that we can recruit and retain, enhance our use of flexible working as one of the most valued parts of the employment package, and developing new benefits within our budgets. All this is set against a backdrop of constrained resources and the need to be creative and really understand what our staff value most.

Rewards are not only related to financial benefits. We will also continually review the range of benefits available to staff and implement new ones to improve the rewards and benefits package. We need to develop the Council’s approach to recognition and establish ways of integrating praise and support into the culture by ensuring we recognise the positive contribution of our staff in a timely manner.

The Developing Everyone framework has helped to identify our high level performers in the organisation. We need review and create opportunities for our talented staff as well as other employees to further develop and motivate our staff. This will include opportunities such as secondments, project work and development of career grades to recognise the limited opportunities to move up in the organisation as well as the value staff add to the council. We will also facilitate effective partnership and collaboration working across organisations and remove barriers to allow networking opportunities for staff to support their learning and create a culture of continuous improvement.

## **Theme 3**

# Engagement and Wellbeing



### **Why this theme?**

The engagement of our workforce is essential to creating a culture of accountability, growth and connection. All of our employees need to understand their personal contribution and how they directly affect service outcomes. We have a strong and positive employee relations and engagement culture which is essential to ensure employees feel well informed, involved and can access a variety of ways to feed in views.

Staff wellbeing is also integral part of our culture and will be continue to be actively managed. We need to make sure our staff stay as healthy as possible and are motivated and engaged to deliver the best every day.

## **Where are we now?**

The Council's approach to wellbeing and engagement has been an area of significant focus over the last few years. Staff surveys to test the levels of staff engagement have been carried out regularly at the council. This has resulted in achieving Gold level in the Investors in People (IiP) assessment and an increase in the engagement score for the Best Companies survey. The Council was listed in the Top 100 in the Not For Profit sector by the Sunday Times.

The All Staff briefings led by the Chief Executive were introduced to increase engagement with staff and to provide an opportunity to remind staff of the priorities that we are all working towards and update them on the progress of various projects. This has become an important part of reinforcing our culture and values.

As part of monitoring the workforce we also use the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress at Work survey on the alternate years to the Best Companies survey, this measure has been consistently positive across the organisation as a whole and in any particular departments where the results may have given cause for concern an action plan is put in place for improvement.

Over the last few years there has been an increase in sickness absence attributed to mental health issues. In recognition of this and with the aim of reducing mental health related absence, the Council has signed the 'Time to Change Pledge' in October 2017. The aim of the campaign is to remove the stigma around mental health and our pledge is to encourage everyone who works at the Council to feel they can be open about their mental health, and ask for support if they need it. This has also resulted in a group of staff volunteering to become a Time to Change Champions. In addition, wwe have recently trained a group of staff as Mental Health First Aiders. The role of a Mental Health First Aider in the workplace is to be a point of contact for an employee who is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress.

The need to review structures to make long term reductions in budget will continue to impact on the Council's workforce. This can introduce a lot of uncertainty for staff and anxieties when they worry about the impact of these changes and cause stress related sickness. To address this we have developed training on resilience for staff and managers to support them in identifying ways to re-engineer working methods to cut out unnecessary activities and reduce workloads. We have also produced a change toolkit for managers to use when they are in the position of making changes so that these are done in the most caring way possible.

## **How will we get there?**

Managers have a critical role in ensuring employees are engaged through regular dialogue to enable staff to feel motivated and to facilitate their active engagement with the Council. We will continue to monitor employee engagement through the Best Company survey. The results of the survey will help to set out targets for any improvements to ensure we strengthen our focus on communication and engagement, opportunities for staff to get involved in shaping the council and improving the overall health and wellbeing of our staff. In addition, new approach to internal communications

which actively encourages and supports employee engagement will be critical going forward.

Minimising the impact of poor health and absence on services and investing in the health and wellbeing of our employees and further reducing levels of sickness absence is a priority for the Council. This will require managers to foster working relationships and environments that promote employee wellbeing and resilience and pro-actively prevent and manage absence. We will continue to develop a comprehensive approach to health and wellbeing, including an entire week of activity organised to promote health initiatives such as relaxation, massage, healthy eating and exercise activities. We also continue to promote wellbeing events linked to national themes on a regular basis. All these initiatives are designed to involve people, give them a greater awareness of health and wellbeing and create a greater sense of engagement with the organisation. We have developed our Mental Health First Aider and Resilience training for staff and managers and this will be continued to be rolled out at the council. The Resilience training has been designed as a direct response to the fact that mental illness has been our highest causes of sickness absence for the last few years. The programme aims to put a more positive focus onto resilience rather than stress and is a combination of the science of stress, mindfulness and other coping mechanisms as well as overall wellbeing.

A new site on the council's Intranet page is being created to enable staff to access the full range of information on mental health and wellbeing. The site will include topics such as mental wellbeing, fitness and healthy living. The page will also provide a series of resources from organisations such as Time to Change, Mental Health First Aider England and links to other sites in order to support managers and staff to have open conversations around mental health, effectively self-manage their own mental wellbeing and seek further support and advice around mental health.

## Theme 4

# Workforce for the Future

### Why this theme?



The next four years and beyond will be challenging for the Council, we will need to make difficult decisions, improve services and ensure effectiveness. Our workforce is central to our success and is fundamental to developing an organisation that is fit for the future.

One of our clear strategies for change in the way we deliver

services to the public is to encourage more 'self-service' through on-line rather than face to face interaction. We will need to provide training for our own staff so that they have up to date skills in the way they deliver their jobs to our customers.

## Where are we now?

The Council faces challenges similar to other Local Authorities. Many of these demands are known but some are not yet fully realised and others will emerge as the future unfolds.

We continue to face financial challenges and increasing demand for more and better services from an ever growing population and communities who expect the highest quality of services. Changes in legislation and removal of revenue support grant has required the council to review the way services are being delivered to our customers. In some services this has resulted in a decrease in front line staff and an increase in on-line facilities. In other services, there has been an increase in customer demands resulting from external changes. As demand for services increase and resources are restricted we need to provide best value for money – better services at lower cost; doing more with less; doing things differently, more efficiently and more effectively.

The Council is also facing pressure and competition to recruit and retain staff in some professions and technical/skilled posts, particularly in hard to recruit areas such as Planning, Building Control and Legal. We have continued to ensure our jobs are competitive within the market through using appealing adverts and processes to attract people to work for us.

## How will we get there?

The growing financial pressures on the Council's budget, particularly the wage bill, will require the Council to think creatively and imaginatively about how it increases the productivity of the workforce. This will include doing things differently, more effectively and efficiently and adopting different service delivery models or through working in partnership with our communities and other organisations.

Organisational design is a core enabler for organisational success and we need to ensure we have the structures in place to deliver departmental objectives and achieve efficiencies. This will require supporting the delivery of ongoing change management activities.

We need to ensure that:

- our employees are given the skills they need to competently do their jobs both now and in the future; and
- our systems and working practices support employees to achieve a healthy balance between delivering service needs and meeting their personal commitments.

Staff providing frontline services will also need to ensure they have the skills to deliver services on a digital basis. Encouraging the use of modern technologies will help to embed a culture of smarter working which will generate efficiencies and savings and improve access to services and customers satisfaction and bring benefits for employees. This will require employees to think and work differently by developing a change in mind set to support them in challenges they face in the way services are being delivered.

We will need to consider how the Council can meet the recruitment and retention challenges for particular professional roles through a mixture of approaches which

promote the Council as an employer of choice. This will include new and innovative ways of promoting job opportunities and ‘growing our own’ talent through a professional development scheme that is linked to Colleges and Universities to address skill shortage areas. In addition, investing in our apprentices by providing learning and development opportunities will help to attract new employees and develop a wider workforce in key skill areas.

With the potential move in the next few years to relocate to a smaller office, the Council will need to ensure that our working practices are flexible enough to meet the changes in the way we work. We will need to build and develop a flexible and mobile workforce that have the skills and tools to deliver their role effectively, now and in the future, ensuring delivery of continuous improved outcomes for local people. This will enable our employees to work smarter and manage workloads more effectively, reduce travel time, enable remote working and improve work life balance with positive outcomes for employee wellbeing, service delivery and achievement of the Council’s objectives.

# Workforce Strategy 2019–2022 - Action Plan

## Theme 1 – Performance and Development

Action	Outcome	Led by	Time scale
Develop and implement training and toolkits for managers to enable them to be skilled in delivering their role	Managers and leaders demonstrate behaviours of the 'Swale Manager' Managers effectively address performance issues and support staff to improve performance Increase in skills and capacity of staff	HR Manager Line Managers	2019
Develop new framework for existing and new leaders of the future	New leaders are skilled to deliver their roles Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers	Head of HR L&D Manager	2019
Skills mapping to close skill gaps through succession planning	Informed and improved workforce, succession and knowledge management planning	L&D Manager HR Manager	2019/20
Develop coaching opportunities to support managers and staff in their development	Improvement in the development and performance of staff through a culture of coaching	L&D Manager	2020
Develop appraisal process to create regular one-to-one review and feedback conversation that measures performance on outputs.	Effective and efficient appraisal system in place. Communication between manager and employee are improved Increase performance levels and improvements in appraisal completion	Head of HR L&D Manager	2019/20
Induction process is reviewed and streamlined	Smooth transition to the council and receive all relevant information as part of the new starter process	HR Manager	2019/20
Create a managers induction and training programme for all new managers	New managers are clear on the expectations as a manager at the council and have the skills and tools to deliver their role	HR Manager L&D Manager	2020/21
Review options for online learning by providing opportunities for virtual training as well as classroom training	Flexibility in choosing time and location for the learning and meets different learning styles of staff	Head of HR L&D Manager	2021/22

## Theme 2 – Reward and Recognition

Action	Outcome	Led by	Time scale
Review and implement new rewards and benefits to further enhance the benefits package	Employees feel valued for their contribution	Head of HR HR Manager	On-going
Promote the benefits package to all staff	Employees have an understanding of rewards and benefits available through the council	HR Manager	2019
Develop Total Rewards benefits statement	Employees feel they are fairly rewarded	Head of HR	2019
Maintain competitive employment package to attract and retain staff	Employees feel they are fairly rewarded Internal pool of staff that can be deployed to meet demands as required.	Head of HR	2020/21
Explore opportunities for our high level performers	Improved retention of talented employees through enhanced development opportunities	L&D Manager HR Manager	2019/20
Develop ways to increase staff recognition to ensure individual and team performance are celebrated and publicised	Employee contribution and achievement is recognised	L&D Manager HR Manager	2020/21
Support services to develop appropriate career grade structures for succession planning	Employees are provided with opportunities to progress within their current professions	Head of HR	On-going
Improve opportunities for secondments internally and with our partner organisations	Employees are provided with opportunities to progress within their current professions	HR Manager	2020/21
Develop networking opportunities across the partnership for staff in different professions	Increase levels of learning and innovation	Head of HR	2020/21

## Theme 3 – Engagement and Wellbeing

Action	Outcome	Led by	Time scale
<p>To strengthen employee engagement through regular communication and feedback</p> <p>All staff briefings Team talks delivered by managers Employee engagement surveys carried out every 2 years</p>	Increase levels of employee engagement	CEO Head of HR L&D Manager	On-going
'Listening days' to be led by CEO and the Leader on a quarterly basis	Staff feel more engaged and have the opportunity to provide ideas and suggestions	CEO Leader	2019/20
Develop internal communication tools and create an engagement plan incorporating actions from the employee engagement survey	Staff feel more engaged with the council and understand and contribute to organisational priorities	Head of HR Communications team	2019/20
Senior leadership team to attend local meetings and create opportunities for job swap	Senior leadership more visible in the organisation Senior leaders feel more approachable to staff	CLT	2019/20
<p>Continue roll out of Resilience Training to managers and staff</p> <p>Increase awareness of Mental Health First Aiders and Time to Change Champions</p>	<p>To recognise and manage symptoms of mental illness and to sign post staff for further support</p> <p>Reduce levels of mental illness</p> <p>Understanding of the role and responsibilities of a Mental Health First Aider and Time to Change Champion in the workplace</p>	L&D Manager HR Manager	On-going
Work with external organisations to develop proactive health and wellbeing initiatives	Increase understanding and knowledge of health and wellbeing	HR Manager	2020/21
<p>Review sickness policy and provide regular training on sickness absence</p> <p>Create template documents for managers to manage sickness absence</p>	Improved management of absence and reduced levels of sickness	HR Manager	2019/20

Develop Health and Wellbeing Intranet site to support staff with mental health and healthy lifestyle information	Resilient and healthy workforce where staff are supported and valued	L&D Officer	2019
Improve management skills in change management	Staff are supported to cope positively with change	HR Manager	On-going
Review the occupational health and EAP contracts	Provides high quality advice and support to staff and managers Reduces levels in sickness absence	HR Manager	2019/20

## Theme 4 – Workforce for the Future

Action	Outcome	Led by	Time scale
<p>Review recruitment and selection processes to ensure candidates appointed have the right behaviour and skills</p> <p>Review and tender recruitment advertising contract</p>	<p>Staffs appointed are able to meet the competencies and expectations of their jobs.</p> <p>Advertising contract provides best value in terms of advice on publishing and advertising costs</p>	Head of HR HR Manager	2019/20
Develop short recruitment workshops on key skill areas	Managers have the skills in recruitment and selection of candidates	HR Manager	2019/20
Create a job page on the Council website with information on the council, the role and benefits available	Council is presented in the best light to attract good candidates	Head of HR	2019
Meet the criteria of Disability Confident status	Removing barriers in the way we recruit, attract and retain disabled workers	HR Manager	2019
Explore options for building links with Colleges and Universities	Developing our own talent in skill shortage areas	Head of HR	2019/20
Review the current apprentice scheme to ensure it meets business needs for the future	Developing the apprentice scheme to attract new talent	L&D Manager	On-going
Develop training plan to ensure staff have the skills to meet future service delivery needs	No gaps in service delivery Staff have skills to meet the changes in technology to re-shape services	L&D Manager	2020/21
Develop opportunities for innovation through new learning opportunities and new methodologies to support thinking and action	Change in mind-set of employees to overcome challenges in their roles	Head of HR L&D Manager	2020/21
Develop more flexible and innovative ways of working with emerging technology and flexible working methods	Employees effectively deliver their roles through flexible and mobile working	Head of HR HR Manager	2021/22