

Workforce Strategy Update Report

Final Decision-Maker	Democracy and General Purposes Committee
Lead Head of Service	Bal Sandher, Head of HR Shared Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Bal Sandher, Head of HR Shared Services
Classification	Public
Wards affected	No wards

Executive Summary

The Council has had a Workforce Strategy since 2008 and this has been reviewed and developed as the priorities and environment have changed. The most recent version covers the period 2016 - 2020 and was agreed at the Policy and Resources Committee on 29 June 2016. As part of the approval the P&R Committee requested that the Employment Committee should receive progress updates twice per year. Following the Committee Structure Review undertaken by the Democracy Committee in the 2018/19 municipal year, the functions of the Employment Committee now fall under the Democracy and General Purposes Committee.

At Appendix 1 the report sets out the progress made against the action plan that supports the Workforce Strategy.

Purpose of Report

The report is for noting.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the progress of the actions set out in the Workforce Strategy be noted.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Democracy and General Purposes Committee	2 September 2020

Workforce Strategy Update Report

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The Workforce Strategy has an impact on all aspects of the corporate priorities.	Bal Sandher, Head of HR
Cross Cutting Objectives	The Workforce Strategy has an impact on all objectives.	Bal Sandher, Head of HR
Risk Management	The overarching risk is that if the council does not have a Workforce Strategy it may fail to put in place the appropriate resources to implement actions to deliver the priorities and outcomes for delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan .	Bal Sandher, Head of HR
Financial	Workforce costs are the single biggest area of expenditure for the Council, accounting for around half of the Council's total budget. The Workforce Strategy therefore has a financial impact, but this is costed within the normal annual budget. Specific initiatives described within this report are also funded from within existing budgets.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	The Workforce Strategy will have an impact on staff – this should be a positive impact as we work to ensure that there are improvements.	Bal Sandher, Head of HR
Legal	Although there may be specific actions arising out of the Strategy that require legal input, there is nothing identified in the plan overall that will have legal implications.	Keith Trowell, Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Privacy and Data Protection	No personal data is contained in the report.	Keith Trowell, Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Equalities	No impact identified because of this update report. As an employer the Council has a duty to fulfil under the Equality Act 2010. This is ongoing and is embedded in the processes to deliver the Work Force Strategy	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	No impact identified at this time	Bal Sandher, Head of HR

Crime and Disorder	No impact identified at this time	Bal Sandher, Head of HR
Procurement	No impact identified at this time	Bal Sandher, Head of HR

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The current Workforce Strategy covers the period 2016 – 2020. The work to review the strategy to create a new Workforce Strategy for 2021 onwards has not commenced due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, all our resources have been focused on dealing with the unprecedented emergency by ensuring the council has the guidance and support to help maintain service delivery in all parts of the Council. This report will highlight the work we have carried out to support the council during this crisis.

There has also been a level of uncertainty created by Covid-19 on the future direction of services, the way we work and our support to staff. We have started to review our work practices caused by Covid-19, this will help to identify future workforce requirements such as skills and competencies which will be needed to deliver new, different or improved services. For these reasons, it would be more appropriate to complete the refreshed strategy in 2021 as by then we will have a better idea of our future plans for the council and consequently needs and expectations for our workforce.

2.2 The current key themes of the Workforce Strategy are:

- Organisation culture and change;
- Resourcing;
- Development, and
- Reward.

2.3 There has been progress against all the themes, much of which is cross cutting and affects more than one theme.

2.4 Organisation culture and change

2.4.1 During 2020 we have conducted 3 all staff surveys. The first, In February was a regular survey focussed on experience of working for the council and staff engagement. Subsequently we have conducted two surveys to enable a good understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 in terms of well-being and a complementary survey concerning managers' experience of managing people and projects during the pandemic. A further survey is in progress concerning future working arrangements and this will inform future accommodation options.

2.4.2 In previous years, the Council has gathered feedback from staff through the Best Companies survey and Investors in People. In 2019 the Council decided to bring the survey in-house so that we could focus on the areas of most importance to us. The HR and Policy teams worked closely together

to design and conduct the survey. This was sent to all staff in February 2020 and was open for six weeks. 71% of staff completed the survey, the highest completion rate we have had for any recent survey.

The results showed high levels of engagement from across the workforce, and high scores in the areas:

- Council objectives and values
- My work
- My team
- Wellbeing
- My Manager

Areas that scored lower and are highlighted for development are:

- Reward and recognition
- Engagement
- Learning and development
- Leadership

The results for each department have been shared with Heads of Service for discussion with staff in team meetings. Any actions identified from the meetings are being shared with HR to develop the corporate action plan for the council. Any team actions will remain in Service units to implement. In addition, we will also be introducing pulse surveys to establish progress against actions or particular issues. This will help to target hotspots and measure engagement on a regular basis.

2.4.3 The annual engagement plan for 2020-21 has been updated to reflect the different methods of communication that will be used to inform staff of important key messages. This has been particularly important during Covid-19 to ensure we are engaging with staff on a wide range of issues. Since May, we have introduced all staff webinars led by the Chief Executive to update staff on our response to Covid-19 which has included our first steps to recovery in terms of arrangements for a phased return to work at our offices and changes we have made to our buildings to ensure these are covid secure. We have also shared the corporate staff engagement results and recently a staff recognition webinar to say 'thank you' to all staff for working hard during these unprecedented times.

2.4.4 The current COVID-19 pandemic has meant that many staff have been required to work from home but for some this has been the first time they have worked remotely. For employees who have never worked from home before, this situation has presented several challenges from setting up an ergonomic, designated workspace to coping with the sudden loss of social interaction with colleagues. To understand the impact of the current working environment, we have carried out two staff wellbeing surveys to capture staff feedback on their experience of working remotely. Both surveys have provided a positive response as staff have reported that they feel connected to their teams, are supported by their manager, they are clear on the priorities and are able to work effectively at present. Some of the challenges faced by staff included social isolation, general anxiety, internet connections and childcare issues. The results of the surveys have

been presented to CLT and WLT and have been shared with staff in order to address some of the concerns from the survey.

In addition, we have also carried out a line manager survey to gather data on managers' experience of home working as well as managing teams remotely. The overall response to the survey has again been positive. There were similar concerns to the wellbeing survey of teams feeling isolated, IT/network problems and childcare issues. In addition, managers reported the difficulty of switching off while working from home and some found it difficult managing teams remotely. The data from the survey will help to support any changes to the way we work in the future.

2.4.5 In our response to Covid-19 pandemic we have developed and introduced guidance to support all staff during the crisis. This has included:

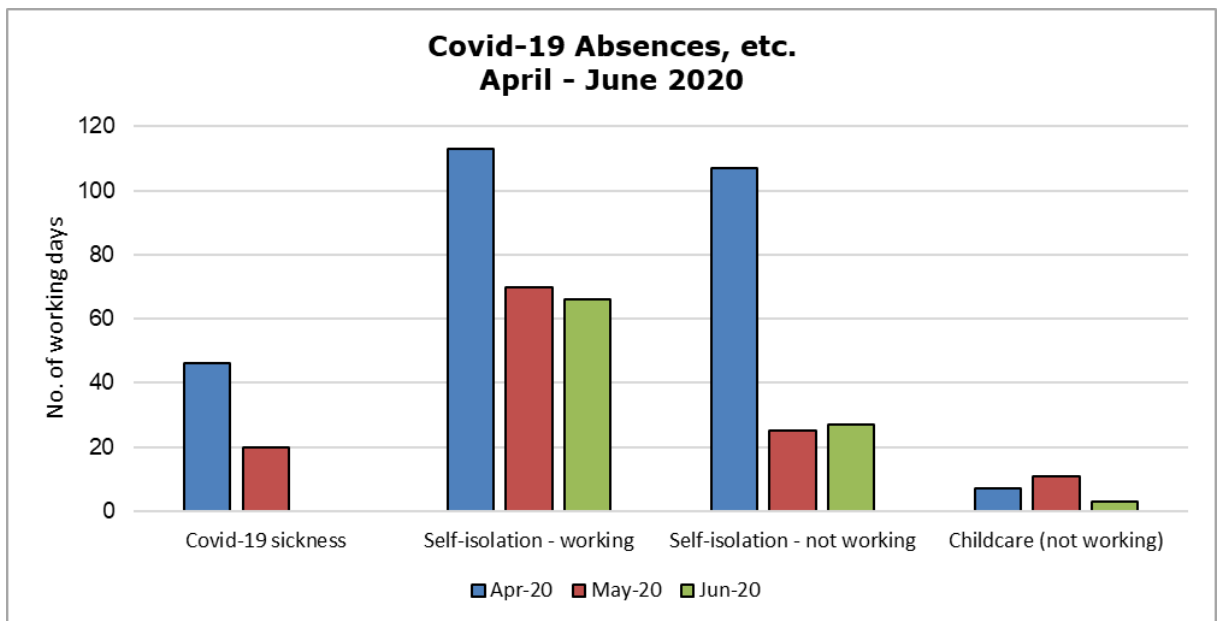
- Advice through FAQ's on a wide range of issues such as health and safety, risk assessments, returning to the office, managing childcare and support on wellbeing.
- Redeployment policy to allow staff to be redeployed in areas of emergency to support critical services.
- Guidance on key workers to allow staff to continue working in critical roles
- Updated annual leave policy to manage quarantine requirements on return from holidays
- Guidance for home workers from making sure workspaces are set up properly, through to achieving the right balance between work and home life, staying mentally fit, active and healthy.
- Guidance on the new rules for staff returning to the office as part of the welcome pack

2.5 Resourcing

2.5.1 One of the changes we made to our HR and Payroll system, iTrent was in relation to recording absence caused by Covid-19. It was essential that the council was able to have up to date absence information reported accurately for employees that had been impacted by Covid-19 which was reported separately to normal sickness.

The absence reports were reviewed daily at the start of the pandemic by the senior management team and this has continued on a regular basis. The information has enabled the council to have a better understanding of staff that are either sick due to Covid-19, self-isolating/shielding and unable to work from home including childcare issues as well as information on staff that are self-isolating but are able to work from home due to Covid-19.

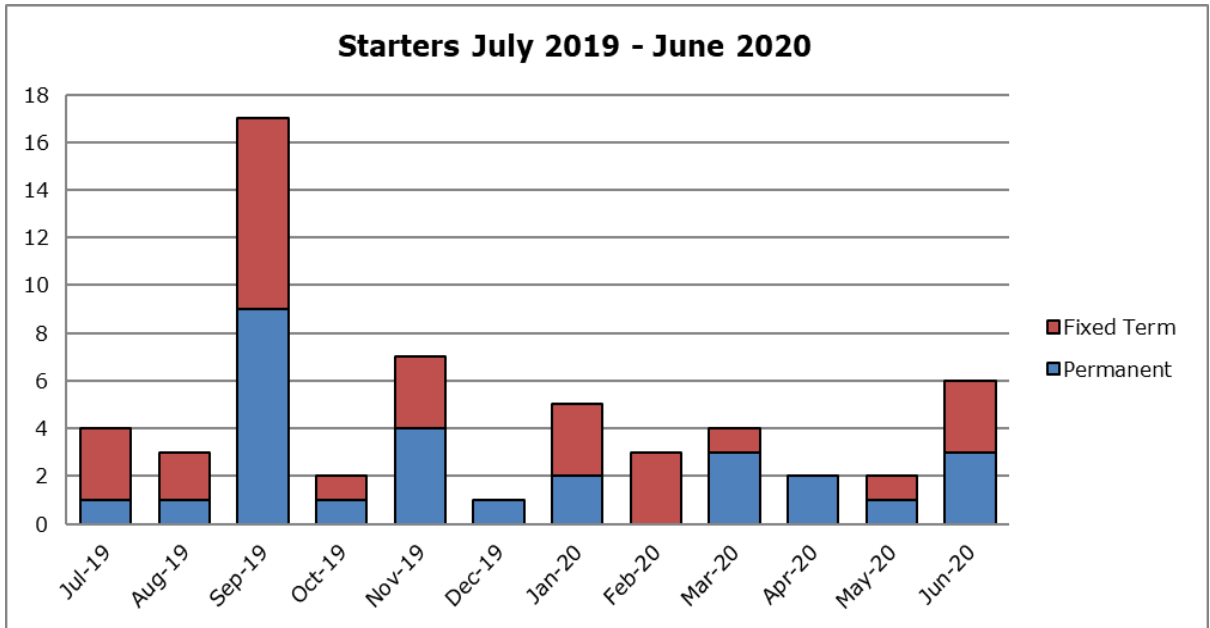
The number of working days lost or spent in self-isolation for Covid-19 has been low. The table below outlines the absences caused by Covid-19 during April to June 2020:



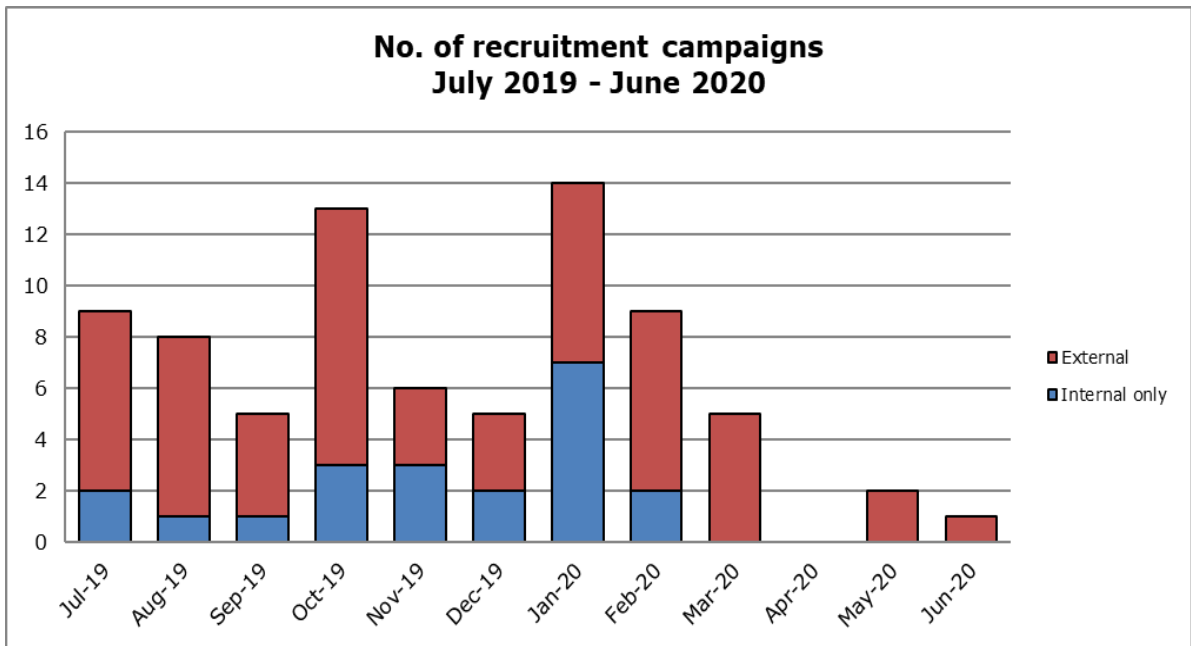
In the period April to June 2020, 9 people were absent with Covid-19, 13 people were working whilst self-isolating, 9 people were self-isolating and not working, and 2 people had spells of not working due to childcare.

- 2.5.2 We continue to work with the 5 students from Grow 19 College that helps students learn functional and life skills. The students all have additional needs and are aged from 19-25. This has been a successful project for the council and a positive experience for the students from the Grow 19 College which has been recognised at the One Council event in January by the team receiving an STRIVE award.
- 2.5.3 During the period from July 2019 to June 2020, the HR team has supported managers in recruiting 56 new staff at the council. This has included permanent and fixed term contracts to various positions at the council. In addition, there were 39 staff on permanent contracts that left the organisation over this period.

The Council's turnover during the year July 2019 to June 2020 was 7.28%. According to a Local Government Workforce Survey report dated June 2019, the average turnover has been reported as 13.4%. The Council's turnover is therefore generally below that of other local authorities.



The number of recruitment campaigns completed during the same period has been 77; this includes internal and external recruitment. Since the beginning of April, the number of recruitment campaigns has fallen due to the impact of Covid-19.



2.5.4 All employers with a salary cost of over £3 million per annum must pay an apprenticeship levy of 0.5% of their monthly pay bill. In addition, we are required to have 2.3% of the workforce on apprenticeships as an average from period 01/04/2017 to 31/03/2021. For Maidstone Borough Council this equates to approximately 14 apprentices a year on average.

An apprentice can be a newly appointed member of staff, employed into an apprentice post, or can be an existing member of staff undertaking an apprenticeship qualification. We currently have 6 apprentices within the Council. We also have 8 staff studying for a qualification through this route. This will support the Council in meeting the public sector targets of 2.3% of the workforce undertaking an apprenticeship programme.

2.6 Development

2.6.1 At the start of lockdown, the Learning & Development team introduced webinars into the training schedule to support staff with their wellbeing and working from home and provide guidance to managers on managing remote teams. Over the last 5 months, further sessions have been developed and delivered to all staff based on feedback received. In addition, the team has also introduced virtual breakroom sessions on a range of topics and weekly quizzes to allow staff to network with others and provide some fun during a time of uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

As well as providing information and guidance to staff, the webinars have also enabled the Council to continue to demonstrate its commitment to employee wellbeing, and provided support to those who fed back through the wellbeing surveys that they were feeling socially isolated. In addition to being able to attend the live webinars and participating, a recorded version has also been saved and is available to staff to view anytime. We have received positive feedback from staff that have attended the webinars and a summary of the feedback has been included in Appendix 2, including a list of webinars that have been delivered since April 2020.

Wellbeing maintenance calls have been made available to the front-line staff making up the COVID Community Response team. These calls are facilitated by Mid-Kent Mind and are weekly 15-minute calls from a Wellbeing Worker to get guidance and support on an individual basis of need.

2.6.3 In the latter part of 2019 we ran a pilot with teams from Commissioning and Business Improvement, and the Street Scene team within the Environment and Public Realm Service Unit, to trial a fresh approach to performance review and planning which enables staff and their managers to have more regular and effective 1:1s. After a successful pilot, the Council has decided to go ahead with changing its approach to performance management by putting more focus on regular conversations and less reliance on the bi-annual reviews of Appraisal and Mid-Year Review. The new approach will require all employees to have a monthly Check-in with their manager, discussing progress on objectives, development needs, wellbeing, and career aspirations. The check-in, objectives and the actions agreed will be captured on Clear Review software which is designed for this purpose and easy to use. The roll out will begin across the Council in September, with an expectation that all staff will be using it by the end of 2020.

2.6.4 At the start of the 2019/2020 year there was £126,740 available in the training budget for allocation. The central training budget was allocated £44k to provide training to staff in areas such as Health & Safety,

Safeguarding, IT, Management and Leadership and Personal Effectiveness. The rest was allocated out to those Service Units who access the central budget (several Mid Kent Services have their own budget and don't access the central pot) based on headcount. Some service areas added additional budget taking the total training budget to £136,720 and total expenditure was £138,374, resulting in a small overspend of £1654.

For the 2020/2021 year, the training budget has been reduced by 35% to £84.7k. This reflects in part disruption to training and development provided through traditional face to face events for a substantial part of the year and substitution of remote learning and development events. It also reflects the need to carefully manage resources given the significant impact of COVID-19 on the council's finances ie increased spending to support the community and diminished income. The central training budget has been allocated £22k to meet the costs of essential training only (health and safety and safeguarding) and training where contracts are already in place. The L&D team will continue to deliver training internally in some key areas. The remaining amount has been allocated to Service Units based on headcount and will enable training, including for qualifications, to continue.

- 2.6.5 A project to introduce a digital employee onboarding platform commenced late 2019 and work has continued throughout 2020. The current employee induction programme relies on managers following and completing a paper-based induction guidance document and holding face to face meetings with a member of the HR team. Given the recent move to homeworking, there is a need for a more digital induction process that enables both the manager and the new starter to manage the onboarding process.

The paper induction checklist has been replaced with a website that the new employee will be able to access before they join the council. The site includes:

- Welcome to Maidstone
- Our responsibilities
- Political leadership
- One council
- Next steps in your new role
- Your 1st day, 1st week, 1st month, 1st 6 months at the council.

The new process will be tested before we launch the onboarding programme to new staff from September. The changes to induction will help to support the current and future working arrangements.

2.7 Reward

- 2.7.1 In April 2020, the council implemented the real Living Wage which is independently calculated by the Living Wage Foundation. The real Living Wage is higher than the government's minimum, or National Living Wage, and is an independently calculated hourly rate of pay that is based on the actual cost of living. The changes to the current pay grade structure was agreed as part of the annual pay negotiations with the trade unions. Moving to the real Living Wage has provided a significant increase to the lowest paid

by matching them to the hourly rate of £9.30 per hour (increase of 7% to the lowest pay grade).

- 2.7.2 Several benefits have been promoted as well as wellbeing events organised over the last few months. Information on National Carers Week was shared in June with staff. Many staff were having to manage caring for elderly relatives, other family relatives or friends and neighbours during the Covid 19 pandemic. The advice, support and guidance that has been provided has been beneficial to staff. In addition, every month, as part of our actions to protect mental health and resilience we make staff aware of the Action for Happiness calendar. The calendars are full of actions to help create a happier and kinder world. We also promoted and continue to promote the Action for Happiness 10-day free online coaching programme which has been designed to help staff cope better. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought challenges for employees' mental health due to isolation at home or trying to live with the new restrictions.
- 2.7.3 The annual Wellbeing week took place in February 2020. Several events were organised across the council at different sites to promote the importance of being healthy and active. This also included working with Maidstone Leisure Centre who provided staff the opportunity to use their facilities free of charge for 1 week. Staff feedback on the wellbeing week was very positive about the events offered and delivered during the week. The aim of the week is to raise awareness on wellbeing by arranging opportunities for staff to get involved in activities that will improve their fitness, mental health and their overall wellbeing.
- 2.7.4 We have also supported staff through the challenges of Covid-19 and launched a 21-day self-care challenge with Sodexo, our staff benefits partner. An experienced lifestyle coach helped to run the programme aimed at motivating employees during isolation. Those that signed up were given a list of examples of things they may wish to temporarily cut out of their life and to replace these with more positive things. The programme was also interactive as staff were given the option to share their challenge on social media and ask any questions during a Q&A session.
- 2.7.5 Our Occupational health provider delivered five specially developed webinars aimed at supporting staff through the Covid-19 pandemic. The council's Employee Assistance Programme provider also put together information for staff on how to safely isolate and deal with loneliness. The webinar advised on how to minimise the spread of the virus and provided other helpful tips on managing their own health during isolation.
- 2.7.6 The current cycle to work scheme has been updated by increasing the spend limit up to £2,000 to enable staff to purchase an electric bike with the cost spread over a period of time to make payments more convenient. The tax-free scheme allows staff to consider a healthier, more sustainable way of travelling to work. The scheme has also been made available to Members and can be used throughout the year.

- 2.6.7 We have introduced webinars on the Councils rewards and benefit schemes for staff. The webinars have allowed staff to obtain a better understanding of their full employment package with the council as this includes all rewards/benefits received by staff as well as other benefits that are available to them as an employee of the council.
- 2.8 The Workforce Strategy sets out the key themes for the period 2016-2020, there is an associated action plan that has been updated on a regular basis to ensure the council continues to develop. The action plan is at Appendix I.
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3 AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress to date and agree that work continues on the current action plan. Members could substitute alternative actions or add to the existing ones.
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4 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is for the Committee to note the developments and support the on-going work.
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5 RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.
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6 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 The Workforce Strategy was developed with input from the managers in the organisation and discussed with both the trade unions and Staff Forum.
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7 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Developments based on the Workforce Strategy are regularly communicated to managers and staff through the council's newsletter, Team Talk activities, consultation with trade unions, Staff Forum and by email.
- 7.2 Actions within the Workforce Strategy are regularly reviewed by the Wider Leadership Team and twice a year by the Committee.
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8 REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Workforce Plan 2016-2020 Progress September 2020
 - Appendix 2: Webinar feedback
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9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Workforce Strategy

https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/164653/MBC-Workforce-Strategy-2016-to-2020-final-002.pdf