DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE	27 July 2021

Workforce Strategy Update Report

Final Decision-Maker	Democracy and General Purposes Committee
Lead Head of Service	Stephen McGinnes, MKS Director
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. 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	27 July 2021

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.	Corporate Governance, MKLS
Privacy and Data Protection	No personal data is contained in the report.	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

Biodiversity and Climate Change	The work to address the culture change programme will support the action 9.1 of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan: Provide briefings and training for Councillors and Officers on climate change and biodiversity to create a culture change and ensure climate change and biodiversity are integrated into decision making.	Transformation Team Leader

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The current key themes of the Workforce Strategy are:

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

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

2.2 **Organisation culture and change**

2.2.1 The outbreak of Covid-19 has required the council to review the way we work and deliver our services. Our recent experience of staff working more flexibly has demonstrated the opportunities this has created for services and staff. In order to build on these opportunities for greater flexibility, we have developed guidance for managers by providing a framework that has expanded the number of options to work more flexibly for staff across the council as well as ensuring services are being delivered to our customers in a productive, efficient and responsive way.

2.2.2 The changing working practices caused by Covid-19 has also required the council to consider the workforce culture for the future. The council wants to ensure that the organisational culture has the capacity to deliver high performing services through effective Leadership & Management and to embrace innovation/creativity as well as new ways of working. The work we have started in creating a more agile way of working will also require identifying a culture change programme to support the new ways of working project.

The outcome of this project will help the council to achieve the following:

- A leadership culture that aligns with the Council's vision and values - improved level of trust and transparency at leadership levels by encouraging and creating trust-related behaviours for all management/supervisor roles. Realistic workload expectations will need to be established to ensure staff remain productive to meet the objectives of the council.

- Culture that values creativity and innovation - employees having clear understanding and opportunities are created for creativity and innovation, while providing sufficient time to complete work duties.

- Make decisions at the appropriate level - employees having a clear understanding of decisions that fall within the boundaries of their roles in order to empower staff and increase efficiency.

- Culture that accepts reasonable risk-taking - create autonomy within boundaries based upon level of risk, allowing employees to make decisions and take responsibility.

- Leadership behaviours/competencies align with the desired culture - managers skills are developed through training to demonstrate the desired values, behaviour and competencies that meet the culture of the organisation.

- Employees have the right blend of skills and knowledge - employees are developed to undertake their current role to a high standard in order to respond to future business needs. Managers possess the core skills to be effective managers and leaders are exposed to cutting edge thinking and have the skills, behaviours and capacity to lead the organisation through change.

2.2.3 As part of improving our engagement strategy with staff, we have introduced a new engagement group made up from staff across the council to share their thoughts, ideas and concerns to understand what they would like to see as part of the engagement agenda.

The aims and objectives of the Engagement Group is to:

- provide opportunities for the group to set the 'agenda' for engagement moving forward
- listen, understand and implement their ideas and concerns to ensure that people feel valued and are 'part' of the Council
- have the voice of the Engagement Group heard by taking part at Wider Leadership Team meetings

We held our first meeting with the Engagement Group in June which resulted in a useful discussion on the council's engagement survey and provided further suggestions for improvements.

2.2.4 The One Council event was held virtually on the 3 March 2021. The event provided an update on the priorities that we have all been working towards and update on the progress of various projects. The annual staff awards also took place to recognise the great contribution our team members have made to achieving the council's objectives and delivering great services to the public during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.3 Resourcing

2.3.1 The council absence rates are closely monitored on a monthly and quarterly basis. The number of days lost due to sickness absence are considerably lower as the current absence rate per FTE for the year July 2020 to June 2021 was 4.76 days, down from 7.57 days per FTE in the previous year.

The most common reasons for sickness are shown in the chart below:

**Top 15 Sickness Absence Reasons July 2020 - June 2021**
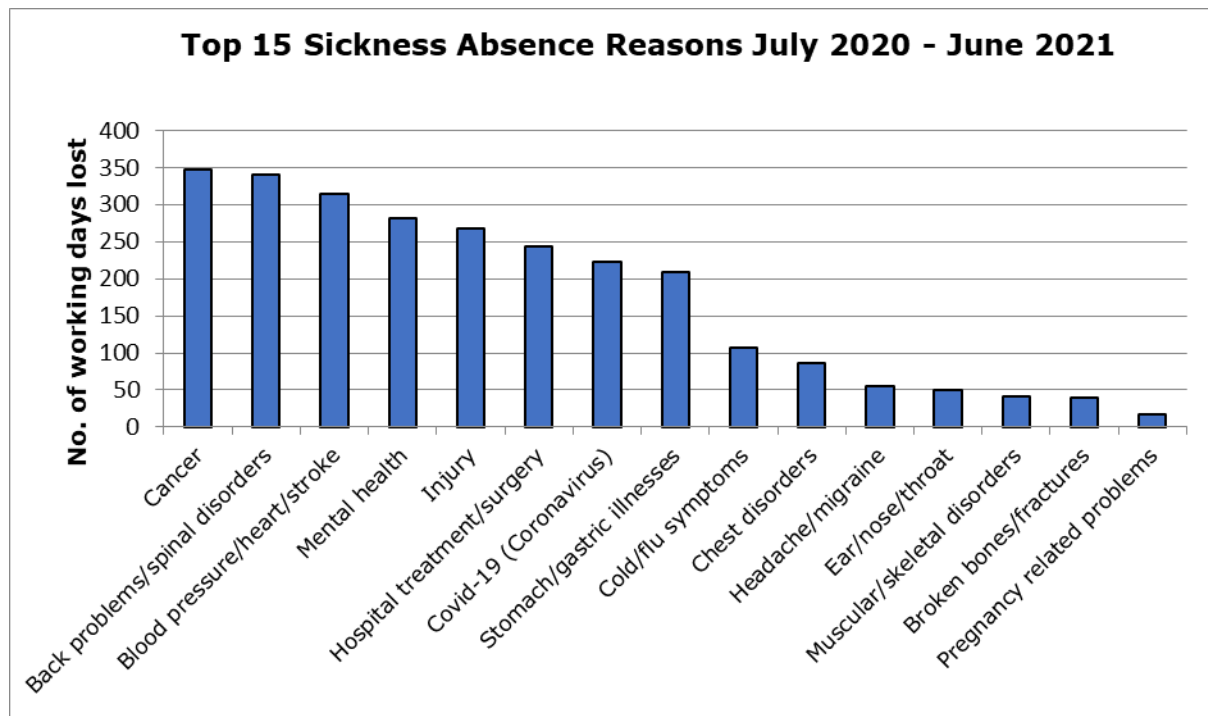
Cancer was the main reason for sickness absence in 2020/21 with 348 working days lost, closely followed by back problems at 340 working days lost. During July 2019 to June 2020, mental health was the main reason for sickness absence with a total of 871 days lost, due mainly to anxiety and stress. Working days lost due to mental health problems has seen a dramatic fall over the past year.

2.3.2 During the period from July 2020 to June 2021, the HR team has supported managers in recruiting 34 new staff at the council. This has included permanent and fixed term contracts to various positions at the council. In addition, there were 37 staff on permanent contracts and 17 staff on fixed term contracts that left the organisation over this period.

The Council's turnover during the year July 2020 to June 2021 was 7.05%. According to figures published by the Local Government Association in March 2021, the average turnover has been reported as 13.4%, but this figure, although the most recently available, does pre-date the pandemic.

Starters July 2020 - June 2021
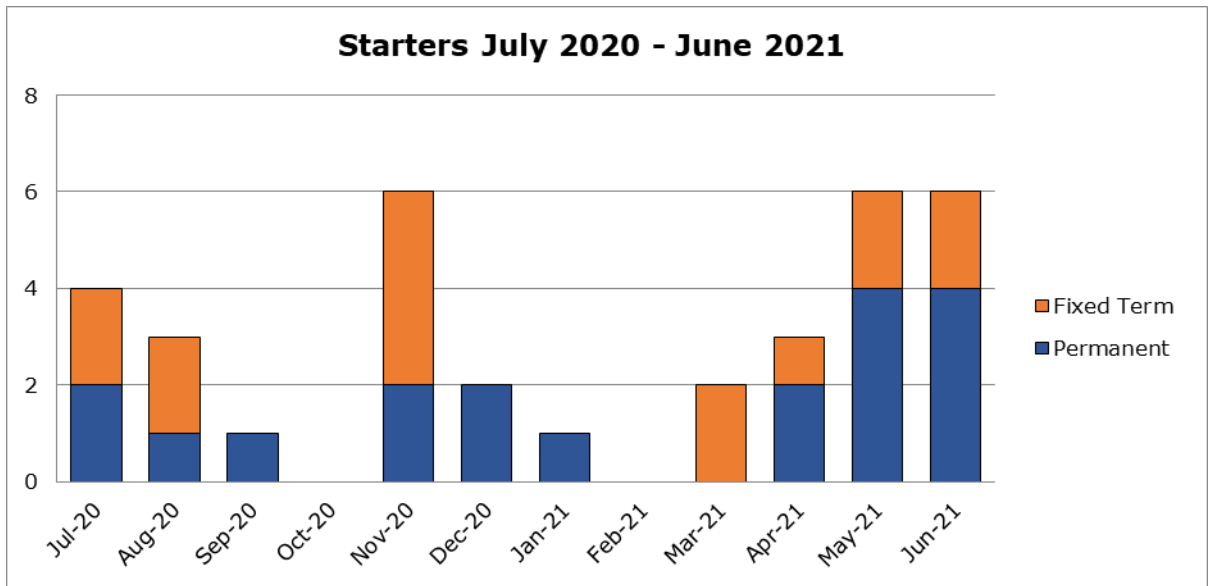
The number of recruitment campaigns completed during July 2020 to June 2021 has been 65 and includes both internal and external recruitment. The number of recruitment campaigns has returned to pre-pandemic levels following an initial significant fall at the start.

No. of recruitment campaigns July 2020 - June 2021
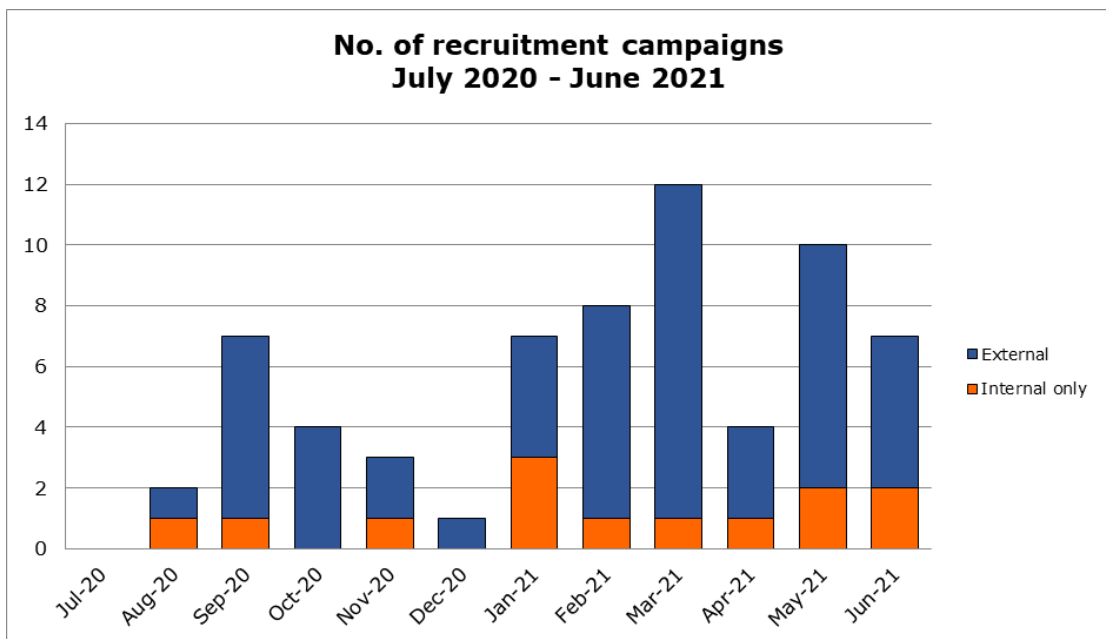
2.4 Development

2.4.1 In October 2020, our contract for the HR & Payroll system, iTrent was renewed which involved the move of our HR system from on-premise servers to cloud-hosted environment. This work had to be done within a very short period to avoid disruption to the payroll systems for Swale, Maidstone and Dartford councils. The migration team were set with an ambitious challenge of completing the design, test, build and delivery within thirteen weeks. This was achieved and the April payroll was successfully

completed via the hosted environment. The move to the hosted platform has also provided additional advancements to the system as we now have access to manager dashboards, organisational charts, e-signatures for documents we want staff to read and sign electronically and the ability to access the HR system through smart phones which will further support agile working.

2.4.2   The Learning & Development team have continued to provide a programme of webinars to support staff with their wellbeing, adjusting to working from home and to provide guidance to managers on managing remote teams. From April 2020 to July 2021, we developed 33 different webinars, delivered across 92 sessions, with 2666 attendees (many employees attend more than one session).   These sessions receive positive feedback and will continue to be delivered along with the now monthly staff quiz.

2.4.3   The majority of the training plan for 2020-2021 was delivered. There were a couple of programmes that were unable to be run online, but all the other proposed training was delivered virtually to staff.

2.4.4   The training plan for 2021-2022 focuses on providing a full programme of training and support to managers and frontline staff. Through focus groups we were able to identify the priority training needs for managers which will support them as we all adapt to agile ways of working. The pandemic has also required many frontline staff to manage and support difficult conversations with residents. In order to support frontline staff with these conversations, training will be provided to address issues that relate to mental health or wellbeing. In addition, we will be rolling out to half the workforce refresher training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, with the other half attending next year. The usual programme of Health and Safety training and Safeguarding training will be available, and the HR Team continue to deliver training in areas such as Managing Change, Recruitment and Selection, Resilient Teams for Managers and Team Facilitation Skills.

2.4.5   Check-in, the Council's new approach to performance development, has been rolled out by service area across the Council. All employees are required to have a monthly Check-in with their manager, discussing progress on objectives, development needs, wellbeing, and career aspirations. The check-in, objectives and actions agreed is captured on Clear Review software which is designed for this purpose and easy to use.

2.4.6   The Council has 7 apprentices employed within the Council, and a further 7 existing employees studying for professional qualifications as part of an apprenticeship scheme. This enables the council to use the apprenticeship levy to meet the cost of professional training for staff and ensures we will continue to meet the public sector requirement of having 2.3% of the workforce as apprentices.

2.5   Reward

2.5.1 The annual Wellbeing week took place between 8 February and 12 February 2021. This was our first virtual wellbeing week as we were unable to hold events in the office due to Covid. A number of events were organised that focussed on wellbeing, mental health and team building activities. We also

arranged Wellbeing Packs to be delivered for the Depot staff as we were aware they would have limited/no internet access to participate in any of the on-line events. Staff feedback 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.

2.5.2　There have been a number of benefits that have been promoted as well as wellbeing events organised over the last few months. These have included:

- informing staff of National Work life Week that focused on work life balance
- raising awareness men's health by providing a 'virtual' health check and encouraging staff to take part in the Movember campaign
- promoting the council's Tusker Car benefit as well as all other benefits available through the employee benefits portal
- raising awareness of alcohol misuse for the Dry January campaign
- reminding staff of the employee assistance program for advice and support on a number of issues

In addition, HR Surgeries have continued to be organised for staff to provide the opportunity to contact a member of the HR team for advice and support on a confidential basis.

2.6　The Workforce Strategy sets out the key themes and 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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, Managers 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.

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 July 2021

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