DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE	26 January 2022

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 Policy and Resources 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	26 January 2022

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	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer

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 There have been a number of initiatives that we have implemented to support the work we started on culture change caused by the changing working practices due to Covid-19. To further support the work on culture change, consultants from RedQuadrant have been appointed and will be working with us on this project. In December, the project kick-off meeting for the Culture Change Project took place with RedQuadrant. The work will consist of three streams of activity. The first stream focuses on leading culture change with culture specialists working with our Wider Leadership Team. The outcomes of this work will result in our leader's role modelling the desired behaviours and ensuring symbols of culture reflect and enable the desired culture. The second stream brings together representation of the whole system to enable us to capture and share many of the changes that have already happened due to Covid which we want to encourage and sustain. The third stream, is focussed on identifying, recognising and building upon those people and interventions that are already positively impacting our culture and ensuring that we celebrate and encourage others to participate. Over the next six months we will be supported by RedQuadrant to ensure the positive impacts of this work which will set us up with new ways of working and interactions that will support our on-going cultural success.

2.2.2 The senior structure of the council is also being reviewed and proposals on a new design is currently being explored. The changes in the senior level structure will ensure the Council can deliver the Strategic Plan in terms of our priorities which includes work on affordable housing, town centre strategy and spatial planning. The proposals will also include

development opportunities for our senior staff to ensure job enrichment for post holders.

2.2.3 The engagement group that was set up earlier in the year and made up from staff across the council have been meeting up regularly to discuss and action new ways of improving employee engagement. The representatives on the group take ideas back to their teams to consider and bring their feedback to the next group meeting. We are shortly launching "Let's talk……" a virtual opportunity to get together with work colleagues for an informal catch-up. The first session took place in December and was "Let's talk...Christmas". The Group are also setting up One Service sessions, which will be quarterly online webinars run by different services to share their knowledge with other people. The first One Service in the new year will be led by the IT Team and will be on keeping people cyber secure (both at home as well as in the workplace).

2.2.4 The annual STRIVE awards normally take place as part of the One Council event that is held in February. The staff Engagement Group are currently discussing with their teams thoughts for this year's STRIVE Awards, which was explored in the meeting held in December to agree how the event will run during this year.

2.2.5 The staff Engagement Survey was carried out 2 years ago. Another engagement survey will go out to all staff to complete in January 2022. The survey will be the same as that run 2 years ago designed and delivered internally by our Policy Team. The results of the survey will be communicated to everyone and action planning based on the outcomes of the survey will be carried out by Wider Leadership Team and the Maidstone Engagement Group.

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 continue to remain low; the absence rate per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for the year January to December 2021 was 6.75 days.

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

Top 20 Sickness Absence Reasons January - December 2021

No. of working days lost
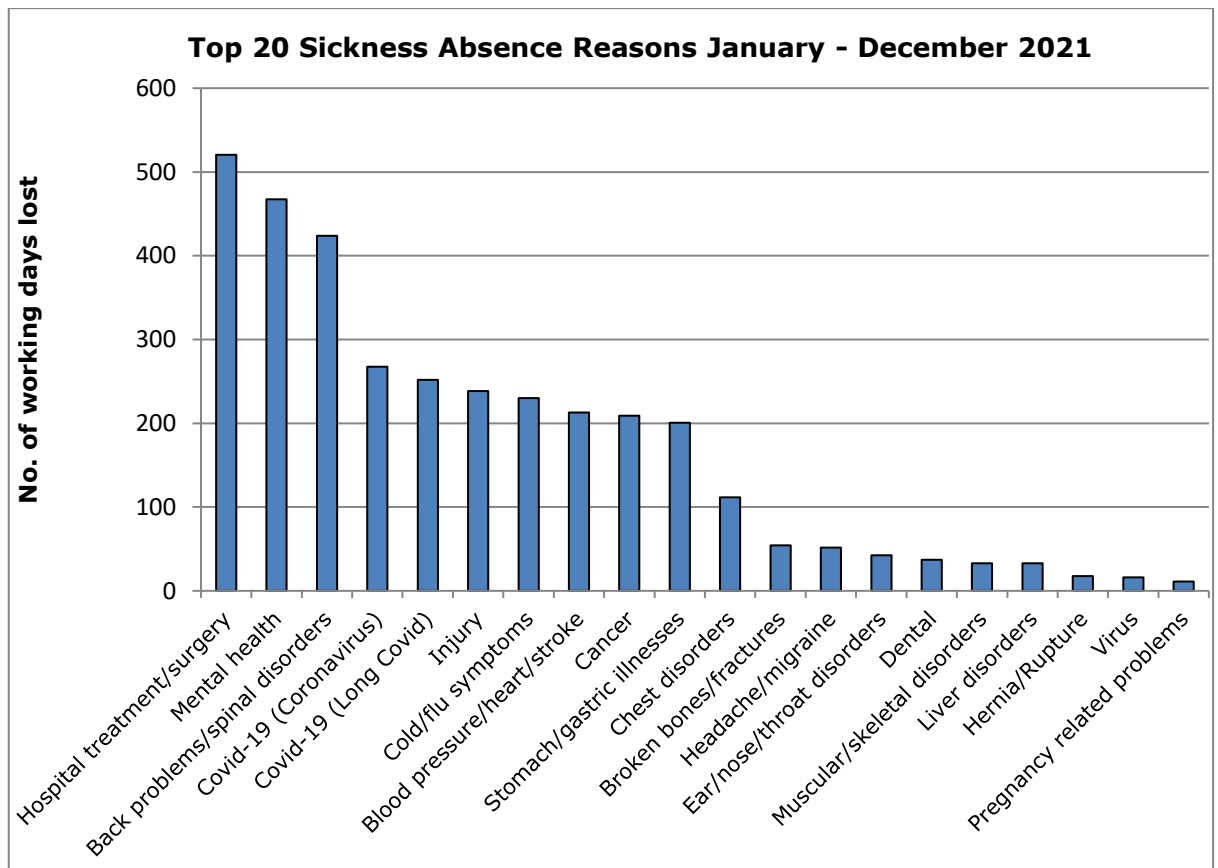
Hospital treatment/surgery was the main reason for sickness absence in 2021 with 520.4 working days lost, followed by mental health problems at 467.49 working days lost, and back problems/spinal disorders at 423.93 working days lost. During 2019/2020, mental health was the main reason for sickness absence with a total of 871 days lost, however figures have substantially fallen during 2021/22.

2.3.2 During the period from January to December 2021 the HR team has supported managers in recruiting 60 new staff at the council. This has included permanent and fixed term contracts to various positions at the council. In addition, there were 48 staff on permanent contracts and 12 staff on fixed term contracts that left the organisation over this period.

The Council's turnover during the year January to December 2021 was 9.25%. According to figures published by the Local Government Association in March 2021, the average turnover has been reported as 13.4%. However, the data is based on figures during 2019/20 which is before the pandemic.

Starters January - December 2021
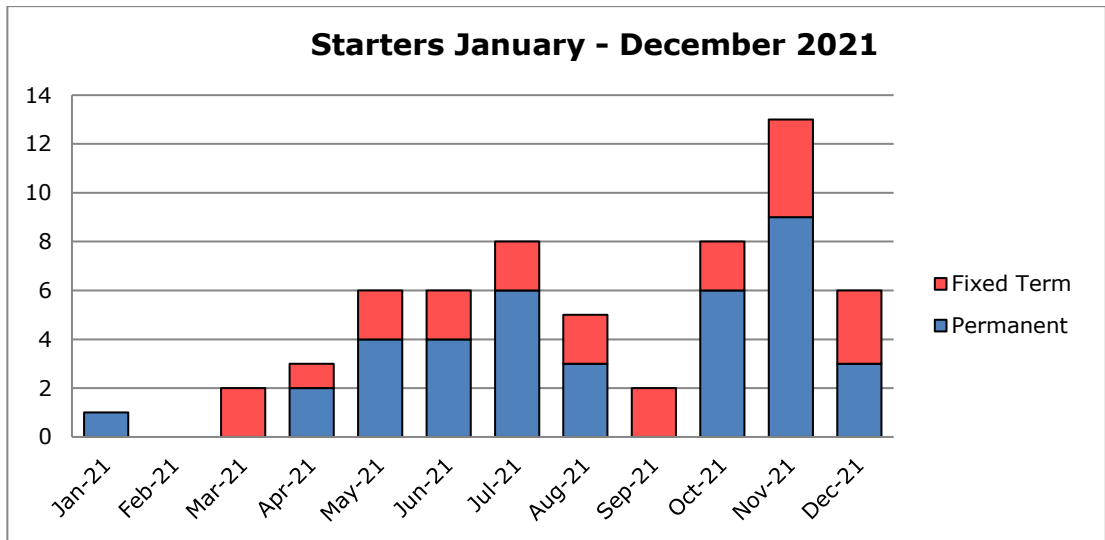
A total of 111 recruitment campaigns were carried out during January to December 2021 and includes both internal and external recruitment. The number of recruitment campaigns has risen significantly and has more than doubled since 2020 when a total of 48 campaigns were carried out.

No. of recruitment campaigns January - December 2021
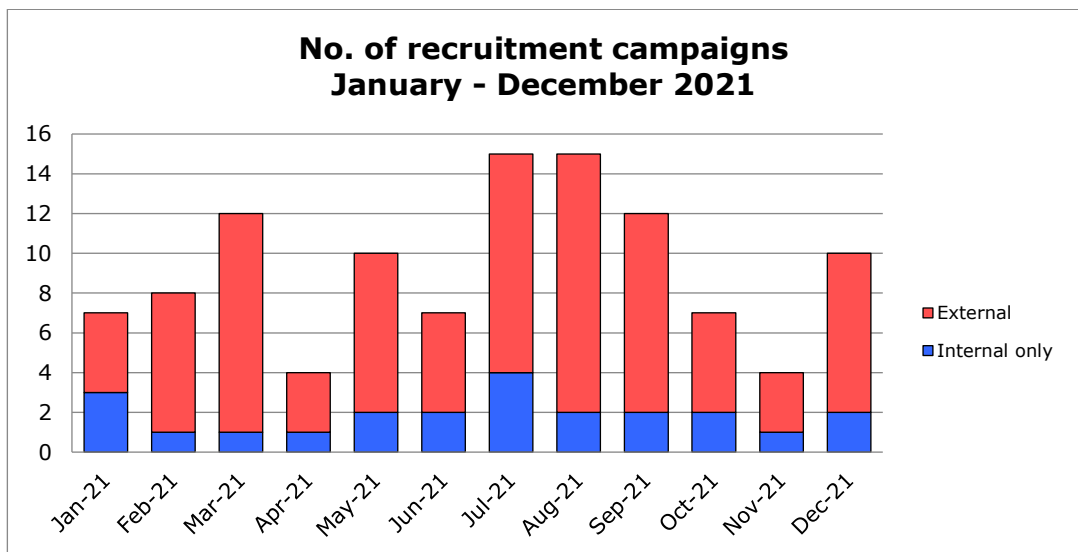
2.3.3 We are currently in the process of recruiting to the Mid Kent Services Director and two Head of Service roles (Head of Mid Kent Audit and Head of Finance). These are critical appointments for the council and we will need to ensure the candidates with the right level of skills and experience are appointed to the posts in order to take the organisation forward.

2.3.4 In November 2018 the council was awarded with the Disability Confident Committed certificate. The Council has been successful in its renewal to Disability Confident status and gained the Committed certificate for a further 3 years. Disability Confident provides

employers with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to attract, recruit, retain and develop disabled people in the workplace.

2.4   Development

2.4.1 There has been further advancements to our HR & Payroll system (iTrent) that we have implemented to allow managers to obtain information for their staff through the system. Manager dashboards are now available in the system which is a powerful tool that provides graphical representations of staff absence, learning and recruitment data.   This allows managers to access key information easily from one place and help managers to make informed decisions about their service. We have also introduced organisational charts for staff to view from the system and used e-signatures for our new Hybrid Policy that allowed staff to read and sign the document electronically.

2.4.2 The training plan for 2021-2022 has been agreed and 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. New programmes have been run on managing hybrid teams, supporting people through change, and leading with self-compassion. Workshops are being delivered in the office and on-line. We are currently in the process of giving managers access to a web-resource called My SmartPath; this is an online resource with animations, videos, articles, quizzes, expert interviews, etc all with practical ideas for managers to get access to quick help and support on key areas of managing people.

2.4.3 The Learning & Development team have continued to provide a programme of training for all staff. So far in the 2021/2022 year, 45 training events have been delivered to staff. This has been a range of online and in-person training covering the full range of programmes in the Training Plan. From January to the end of March 2022, there are a further 36 events available to staff to attend.

2.4.4 The pandemic has also required many frontline staff to manage and support difficult conversations with residents. To support frontline staff with these conversations, training is being offered to address issues that relate to mental health, safeguarding and wellbeing. 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 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.

2.4.6 We regularly review our policies to ensure the council complies with current employment law and ACAS guidelines. There are also a number of policies that have been created jointly with Swale and Maidstone Councils. In order to ensure these are up to date, a Joint Policy Group was created with representation from Maidstone Managers, Swale Managers, Health & Safety Officers and Trade Union representatives.

Policies relating to Disciplinary, Capability, Grievance and Attendance Management were amended to reflect improved practices and a new policy on Hybrid Working was created to replace the Home Working Policy in consultation with the group. The new policy supports the changes to working practices and recognises that a shift to a more flexible style of working can bring a number of benefits to the delivery of our services.

As part of the Hybrid Working policy launch, staff were invited to attend webinars and a separate manager webinar was also created for training and guidance. An intranet toolkit is being developed which will hold all the relevant information regarding Hybrid Working.

2.5 Reward

2.5.1 The council has commissioned a salary benchmark survey that will be conducted by Korn Ferry (previously known as Hay) to analyse our current pay practice at role level against similar posts for public and not for profit (south east) and Industrial and Service Sector markets sector. The Council's Pay Policy is to pay at the median level and the pay review will help us to identify any changes in the external market that may impact on pay grades as well as remaining competitive in the job market.

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:

- World Menopause Day on 18th October. Staff were invited to attend a webinar to help raise awareness of the menopause and the support options available to them.
- Flu vaccine clinics were organised in the council offices and the Depot to ensure all staff that expressed an interest were able to have the jab.
- Cycle to work scheme and Tusker car scheme have both been promoted with a number of staff signing up to the schemes
- World Mental Health day in October was promoted to raise awareness on mental health and to highlight the council resources and support available on our eLearning system, support from the Mental Health First Aiders and webinars on areas such as wellbeing and anxiety.
- Our Employee Assistance Provider, Care First held weekly short lunchtime webinars on a variety of health topics

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. These are always busy with staff contacting the HR Advisor to ask questions on policies, benefits and contractual issues.

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 Progress January 2022

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