

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. 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 January 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.	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.

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

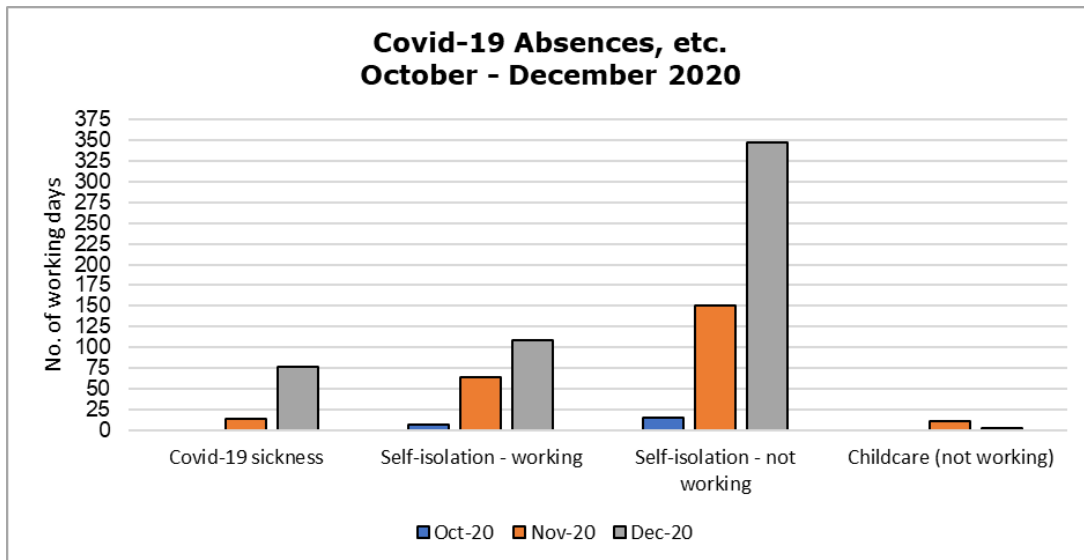
2.4.1 During 2020 we conducted a survey to understand the views of staff regarding future working arrangements. The results of the survey indicated staff would prefer to work more flexibly in the future with a mix of office and home working. The results were also discussed with each Head of Service to understand the changes that they envisaged on future working for their teams. Both sets of findings confirmed that the office accommodation will need to change so that there is more collaborative space for teams to work together and fewer permanent desks. The information from Heads of Service and staff is being used to design the office space to ensure this is cost effective and used efficiently by the workforce. This work is also being used to inform the review of office accommodation which is being carried out in light of the end of our current lease on Maidstone House in October 2023.

- 2.4.2 In February 2020, a staff engagement survey created by the council was sent to all staff. The results of the survey produced high levels of engagement in a number of areas but there were some lower scored areas such as engagement and leadership. A pulse survey has been designed to assess these areas and to establish progress in engagement and leadership.
- 2.4.3 The planned events outlined in the annual engagement plan for 2020-21 have continued to ensure the council communicates key messages to staff. This has been particularly important during Covid-19 to ensure we are engaging with staff on a wide range of issues as well as supporting their wellbeing. These will continue while the majority of our staff are working from home.
- 2.4.4 The next One Council will be held in the next few weeks. This will be held virtually and will reflect on all the work we have done in relation to our priorities. The event will also include the annual STRIVE awards to recognise staff achievements during the year.
- 2.4.5 In our continued response to Covid-19 pandemic, we developed further guidance for staff in relation to the Government's national lockdown restrictions. The guidance outlined responsibilities under health and safety, advice around home/office working and managing childcare while working from home. We also communicated the importance of taking annual leave during the current holiday leave year and the rules around carrying leave into future leave years.

2.5 Resourcing

- 2.5.1 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.

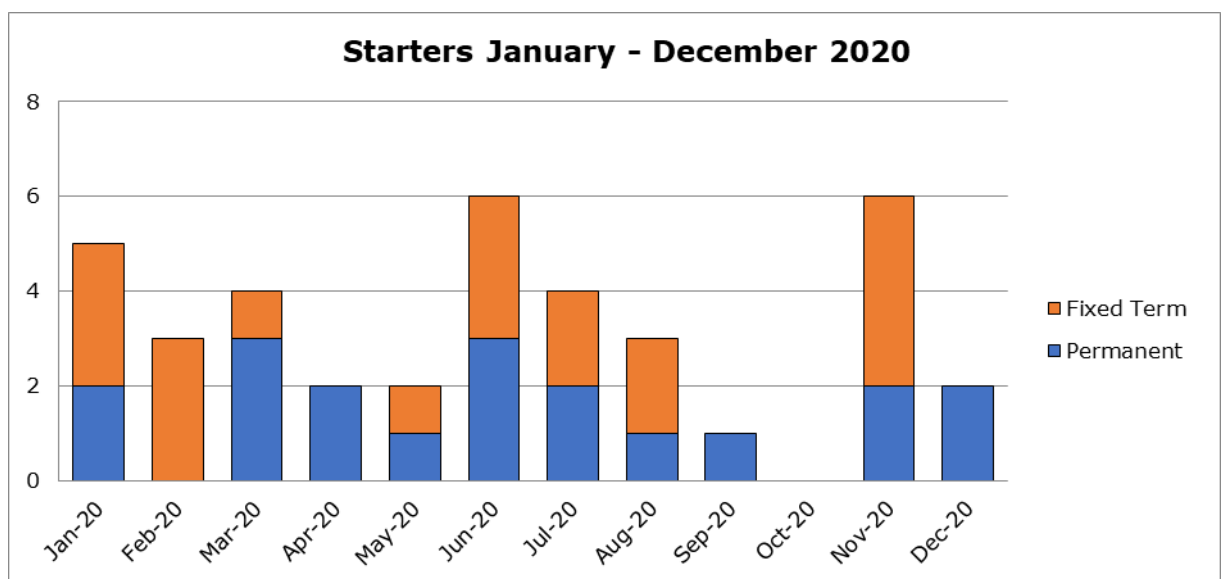
In relation to the previous report on the number of working days lost or spent in self-isolation for Covid-19, we have seen a significant increase in numbers. The table below outlines the absences caused by Covid-19 during October to December 2020:



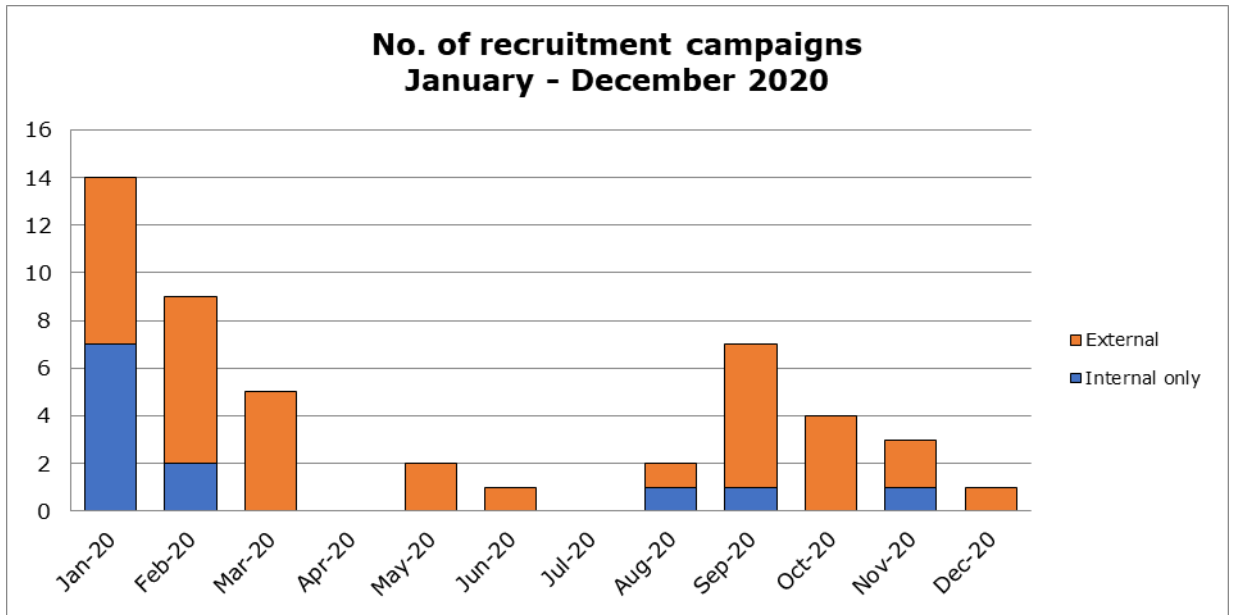
In the period October to December 2020, 14 people were absent with Covid-19, 26 people were working whilst self-isolating, 43 people were self-isolating and not working, and 2 people had spells of not working due to childcare. However, this has not caused a major impact in terms of service delivery.

2.5.2 During the period from January to December 2020, the HR team has supported managers in recruiting 38 new staff at the council. This has included permanent and fixed term contracts to various positions at the council. In addition, there were 32 staff on permanent contracts that left the organisation over this period.

The Council's turnover during the year January to December 2020 was 5.99%. 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 significantly lower than other local authorities.



The number of recruitment campaigns completed during January to December 2020 has been 48 and includes both internal and external recruitment. The number of recruitment campaigns has fallen since the beginning of April due to the impact of Covid-19.



2.5.3 The council also commenced a tender process for its recruitment advertising services during 2020. The contract has been awarded to TMP who have worked with a number of local authorities including Kent County Council. The new contract will allow the council to make savings where possible on recruitment advertising and obtain advice on innovative recruitment solutions for some of our hard to recruit jobs at the council.

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 to provide guidance to managers on managing remote teams. From August to November 2020, we have created 14 different webinars and delivered 21 webinar sessions to staff. These sessions continue to receive positive feedback and will continue to be delivered along with the now monthly staff quiz.

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.

2.6.2 Check-in, the Council's new approach to performance development, is being rolled out by service area across the Council. The new approach puts more focus on regular conversations and less reliance on the bi-annual reviews of Appraisal and Mid-Year Review. The new approach requires 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 actions agreed is captured on Clear Review software which is designed for this purpose and easy to use. The roll out began in September 2020 and is expected to be completed by February 2021.

- 2.6.3 For the 2020/2021 year, the training budget was 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. It also reflects the need to carefully manage resources given the significant impact of COVID-19 on the council's finances i.e. 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 remaining amount has been allocated to Service Units based on headcount and will enable training, including for qualifications, to continue.

The HR Team have continued to deliver training in areas such as Managing Change, Recruitment and Selection, Resilient Teams for Managers and Team Facilitation Skills. These are programmes that the team would usually deliver in the training room, but for this year they have been re-developed to be delivered online in order to ensure our usual training offering can continue.

- 2.6.4 In September 2020, we launched our digital employee onboarding platform. The new induction process enables both the manager and the new starter to manage the onboarding process online without the need to use paper-based forms. In addition, we have also developed a manager digital employee induction platform to replace the paper-based induction form for new managers.

Within the on-line employee induction section on the website an additional section has been created that allows new managers to access key information for their roles before they join the council.

The section includes information on:

- Corporate and Service Planning
- The Councils Committee Processes
- Risk Management procedures and policies
- Business Continuity planning, procedures and policies
- Freedom of Information
- Support for staff
- Management development framework

The new process will be tested and launched to new managers in January.

These changes will also help to support the current and future working arrangements.

In addition, a new agency workers induction has been developed. This will guide managers to ensure temporary staff have been provided with mandatory safety guidance including key information relating to the council.

2.7 Reward

2.7.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that we are unable to travel to our normal workplaces and a number of services have therefore found innovative ways to ensure their services can still be delivered remotely by making better use of technology and therefore reducing the need for staff travel using their own cars. Based on what we have learnt from the pandemic, there will be a reduced requirement for staff to travel to work in the future as there will be more options for staff to work flexibly. For these reasons, a review on car travel allowances, which form part of the reward package has been carried out. This will require a change in the policy for car travel allowances to reflect the new ways of working as well as meeting the council's Green agenda.

2.7.2 In September 2020, the council launched the Payroll Giving scheme, also known as Give As You Earn (CAF). This scheme is a tax-effective and easy way to donate to any UK charity through monthly salary or as a one-off payment. This new benefit has been promoted to all staff across the council.

2.7.3 As a thank you to all staff and to acknowledge their efforts in our response to Covid-19, we provided an additional 1 days leave for staff to take by 31st January 2021. This was communicated in the all staff webinar in October where it was recognised that it had been challenging year for many staff and that the council was grateful for all their hard work and commitment over this period.

2.7.4 There have been a number of benefits that have been promoted as well as wellbeing events organised over the last few months. In September, staff were reminded of the Tusker salary sacrifice car benefit offered by the council. We also communicated to staff about World Suicide Prevention Day, with helpful advice and guidance on supporting those of concern.

We also organised Flu Vaccination Clinics at Maidstone House and the Depot for staff across the Council. There were 3 clinics organised in October and November for staff to attend for their vaccine.

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

2.7.5 The next annual Wellbeing week has been arranged to take place between 8 - 12 February 2021. The events organised will be held virtually and will include a mix of wellbeing events and speakers. The aim of the week is to promote the importance of being healthy and to raise awareness on overall

wellbeing. This is especially important during this new lockdown period where some staff are struggling with home schooling as well as working to deliver their roles.

- 2.8 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.
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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 January 2021
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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