



People Strategy

Our journey to employer of choice: grow connect
empower

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Final	Kate Hardy / Zoe Ormerod	28 January 2025	Updated content, action plan and shorter timescale to take account of local government reorganisation.
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Introduction

New Forest District Council's Corporate Plan and Transformation Strategy commit to the development of a People Strategy to outline how we attract, retain, and grow talent. The strategy provides the direction towards achieving our ambition as an 'employer of choice' and to guide the organisation in:

- how we engage our people, ensuring that every member of our team feels part of the organisation and feels valued for the contribution they make to the community and our organisational goals.
- investing in our people to ensure we have the skills we need to deliver the changes we must make and the work that makes a difference to our community,
- creating the conditions to enable change through our values, behaviours, and culture.

We know that when our people are at their best, we are most able to achieve our strategic aims. This strategy is a proactive framework, to create enhanced commitment, engagement and motivation, plan for future workforce requirements, and build capacity and competence to deliver for our communities today and in the future.

The likely changes arising from the local government white paper mean that the focus on our people is more important than ever. Through this strategy we will support our employees during significant change and position them with the right skills and behaviours to embrace future opportunities.

A three-phase approach has been taken to creating this strategy: Discover; Design; Deliver. The process of discovery and design has taken place over an 18-month period from the design of the corporate plan and transformation strategy, with new evidence and staff feedback brought together to create an engaging and ambitious plan for our people.

Our three-phase approach

Discover

The 'discovery' phase of the strategy development consisted of a period of evidence collection both internally and externally, from information already available as well as the collection of new evidence, for example from staff feedback. A comprehensive report describes the evidence in detail and the key findings have been extracted and summarised in the **Key Findings** section.

Design

Several key themes and principles emerged from the evidence collected in the discovery phase. These key themes alongside informal research on best practice through networks, people strategies from other similar organisations, webinars, and existing informal knowledge of best practice and experience of what has worked in ours and other organisations have also informed the design of the strategy.

The design process has been iterative, with initial themes and principles presented to a number of staff groups to test out the ideas and gauge reactions and understanding. Feedback supported the design of a simpler, snappier concept that is more accessible and understandable to all. Words that resonated for people were elevated and a visual representation created, to make it more memorable.

The strategy aims to take us on a journey to be an Employer of Choice through the themes of grow, connect and empower, recognising there need to be strong roots (or foundations) in place, and our culture must be centred on our values of learning, empathy, ambition and fairness.

Deliver

An **action plan** to deliver the outcomes in the strategy, aligned to the themes of grow, connect and empower has been designed with flexibility in mind, with implementation in two phases of establishing foundations and building our capabilities. An outline delivery plan is included in this document, with more detailed project plans to be created for the evolving organisational needs.

The delivery of the strategy will have a strong **governance** structure in place, aligned to the transformation programme, to ensure work is completed, unblock any challenges, maintain communication with key stakeholders, monitor outputs and measure success. Measuring the success of a people strategy is complex and there are many interdependent factors. The list of measures used in the delivery plan is extensive and reflects the complexity involved, with the combination creating an overall picture. The individual measures provide opportunity to address issues at a more granular level.

Key Findings

A summary of the key challenges faced, identified from the national and local context, are described below and set out what the people strategy must address. It is appropriate to first highlight the areas where New Forest District Council is already doing well, to ensure we recognise and build on existing good practice and strengths.

What we're doing well

Corporate plan. There is very good awareness and understanding of the corporate plan and the three pillars of place, people and prosperity. This understanding of the vision and purpose of the organisation provides clear direction and an excellent foundation for the people strategy.

Wellbeing support. Health and wellbeing support is appreciated and many have benefited from support when off sick, returning to work, with mental health concerns and from reasonable adjustments when needed.

Teams. Cohesion within small teams is clear, staff feel very connected within their teams and value colleague support.

Line management support. There are a number of excellent line managers across the organisation and those teams with good line manager support clearly benefit. The brief bites sessions support managers to learn best practice. Informal resolution of issues is high when supported by the HR team.

Recruitment. Significant improvements have been made in recruitment in the last 12 months. New employees recently going through the recruitment process are providing high praise for the warmth of the staff, the overall process, and the information provided, specifically the new application packs.

Early careers. A steadily growing number of apprentices and graduate trainees have been recruited and developed across our organisation. The individuals in these roles are usually successful and often stay.

Existing staff. The people who work for us are committed to the organisation and the community it serves and want to do the best job possible. They thrive on being experts in their areas, whilst also showing a keen appetite for change to make things better for the organisation and the community.

Challenges

Recruitment and retention

There are national recruitment and retention issues in local government, with skills shortages in specific areas such as planning and environmental health. These challenges are reflected in the new forest area and across the South East too. With an average age of 48, our workforce is ageing and we have many staff who are moving towards retirement. This ageing workforce reflects a national picture. Worryingly (although the national picture is not dissimilar) 28% of new starters left within 12 months of joining us as an employee. Alongside this, local government is not widely seen as an attractive sector to work in, and nationally the 'Make a Difference, Work for your Local Council' campaign aims to inspire individuals to explore career opportunities in local government that have a direct and lasting impact on the lives of local residents, capitalising on the growing trend for people to seek work that contributes to society. The Devolution White Paper requiring local government reorganisation may impact on our ability to attract and retain talent.

Despite the pay and terms of conditions of employment being determined by the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services, our pay terms remain different than the nationally agreed pay scales and may create additional challenges in recruitment and retention.

Diversity and inclusion

Our staff tell us that we are inclusive. Our workforce data tells us that we lack diversity. Whilst we are attracting increasingly more diverse applicants (diversity of age and ethnicity), these appear to not pull through to hires. It is therefore unclear whether we are truly inclusive to more diverse colleagues.

Our male to female ratio is similar to the majority of local government organisations and our gender pay gap is low. However, there are significant differences in the ratio of men and women in middle management, with fewer women entering into those leadership roles.

4% of our staff have declared a long-term condition or disability. When compared to 16.1% of New Forest residents, and 17.8% in England and Wales, this indicates either low disclosure rates or lower than average numbers of staff employed who have a disability or long term condition.

Learning and careers

The apprenticeship levy is a key source of funding which can be used to support career development and this pot could be utilised more fully. Skills England will take over responsibility for the levy in 2025 and it is expected there will be significant changes in how this levy can be used which could enable us to offer new learning and career opportunities.

Many staff cite better prospects of career progression as a key reason for leaving, and this is reflected in the recent staff survey where only 31% agreed that they saw a career path for them in the organisation. In addition, other benefits and opportunities for training and development showed room for improvement. Our average training spend per employee in 2023-4 was £314. Although this is an important figure, there are many other opportunities to learn and develop, away from traditional paid courses and exploration of how we identify and support these opportunities will be important.

Feedback shows inconsistency in personal development opportunities with 72% completion of performance reviews as well as anecdotal feedback that performance review templates needed modernising and focusing on conversations.

Culture

For people who have worked in our organisation for a longer period, there is some legacy culture that is challenging, where some can feel fearful of making mistakes and therefore feel unable to make decisions, often deferring them upwards, which comes from a previous approach of centralised control. This has now changed positively with a new chief executive, and will take time and demonstrable examples to continue to change towards a more open and innovative organisation.

There have been some concerns raised around unacceptable behaviour and inappropriate language being used, and the feedback from the staff survey indicated that 40% of respondents were not confident that if they reported poor behaviour, it would be dealt with appropriately.

In seeing the first waves of transformational change, there is evidence to suggest that resilience and readiness for change is low, despite there being appetite for change. This is perhaps a result of limited experience of change for many staff who have worked in our organisation for a number of years.

Leadership and management

As described in the areas we are doing well in, we have some excellent managers, however, this is not a consistent view, with variable management practices taking place across the organisation, with a lack of clear expectations of managers.

Leadership development opportunities introduced in 2023/4 have been well received. It is important that leadership development isn't seen as a one off and there are new and ongoing opportunities to develop existing and future leaders, as there is more work to be done to develop the leadership capabilities of the future. One example is the feedback that there is a lack of accountability and autonomy, where 28% of respondents in the staff survey felt people were not held to account. It is a key leadership role to support appropriate accountability, decision making and autonomy.

Communication

There is much evidence and knowledge that there is a culture of silo working within the organisation, with examples of people working in the same office for many years having never met each other. There is a lack of open and collaborative working, with potential for projects and work to happen without key stakeholders involved. This seems to stem from a reluctance to being open and sharing expertise and information with others and is a challenge which can come from close knit small teams who can sometimes become introspective. There are limited opportunities for different groups of people to get together around a common interest or topic.

Although much information is available somewhere, there is a lack of easy to access information, guidance, reports that people need, as well as a lack of consistent messaging across the workforce by appropriate methods, for example the over reliance on e-mail to send messages to all staff, when a percentage of staff don't have any access to e-mails or ForestNet. It is unclear whether these messages get through at all to those people, so there is a need to create engaging and relevant communications which reach all staff. A perception of 'them and us' between the main office at Appletree Court and the depot bases is perhaps an example of the impact of this communication approach.

Employer of choice

Identifying what makes people choose to work for an organisation is complex and unique to individuals, based on personal motivations and values. Using the evidence and research collected in the discovery phase, we have defined our concept of being an employer of choice and therefore the outcomes we are aiming for through this people strategy.

To be considered as an employer of choice, we:

- attract and retain the best people.
- learn and develop in our roles and our careers, performing to our best ability.
- are recognised and rewarded for the contributions we make.
- have the confidence to put forward ideas, try out new concepts and take actions within clear boundaries and expectations.
- work together with our colleagues across the organisation, partners and community.
- include everyone and encourage a strong sense of belonging.
- know how our work makes a difference to the community we serve.
- are open, sharing our experiences, and learning from each other.
- fairly and consistently apply our processes and practices.

Our journey to employer of choice

Employer of Choice: grow connect empower

Our people strategy provides the direction needed, to take our organisation on a journey towards our ambition to be an Employer of Choice.

This work is important to our people and it is vital to ensure our approach is recognised and understood by everyone.

Our strategy of 'Employer of choice: grow connect empower' is presented as a metaphor based on the roots, branches and green leaves of a tree, and is relevant to the New Forest, the area we serve. We believe a strong visual framework will allow more people to connect to the strategy in a meaningful way to support our journey and enable existing staff and potential recruits to see how we are transforming our offer for people.



The branches of grow, connect and empower, capture the focus of our work, recognising there also need to be strong roots (or foundations) in place. Our culture, the way we do things which enable us to achieve our desired outcomes, must be centred on our values of learning, empathy, ambition and fairness.

Each of these elements are described in more detail below.

Grow

We believe that everyone should have opportunities to grow. We will all be able to learn, develop and contribute to our organisation in ways wider than our core roles and see career opportunities that excite us.

We will ensure everyone has access to protected time for learning and development activities, support people to move internally where relevant, and provide open access to a menu of learning activities, including core transferable skills, as well as offer targeted development for specific groups. This will include ongoing leadership and management development offers, ways for people to obtain skills fit for the future, and building personal development plans to support this, with regular and meaningful development conversations.

Our learning and development offer includes early career or entry opportunities, professional qualifications where appropriate and continuing professional development at all career stages.

We will identify future skills needs, opportunities for sharing of knowledge and best practice and support for people to move forward in their careers. We know that some people will move on during this period of significant change, and we aim to support people to leave well, with a positive experience and skills to benefit the New Forest and wider community going forward.

Connect

Whilst recognising individual, team and role differences, it's important to us that we are all connected. No matter where we work or our job role, we will feel part of a team, have opportunities to get involved, feedback our thoughts and ideas, and find out about what's happening in the organisation and in the wider geography.

We must be transparent in our approach, ensuring everyone has access the information and advice they need to do their job and to spark their interests.

To do this, we will enhance our engagement and internal communication methods across the organisation, promoting our successes, collaborating internally and externally, and generally find ways to better connect.

We will support both functional and matrix teams to connect and develop together through focused activities, and create more opportunity for individuals to connect with others who they affiliate with, by increasing our staff networks and peer support. This could include young people, those in early careers, people living with disabilities, women in leadership, and/or the global majority.

We will look outward and align our activities with local government partner organisations where it makes sense to, better connecting with our members, other partners and community too. We will enhance our reputation as a great employer as well as an ambitious and effective organisation through our connections with partners and the public. Our focus on putting customers at the heart of all we do will require us to be more proactive and engaging and our staff will be supported to develop these skills.

Empower

People will be supported to make the decisions, undertake the learning, and test out the things that truly matter to them and are appropriate, giving people autonomy over their work. We want people to want to come to work, know they are doing meaningful work, and have a clear purpose. All our staff will feel safe, both physically and psychologically, and therefore able to bring their best selves to work.

Through our 'grow' branch, our programme of transformational learning opportunities will empower people to use digital technology, manage change effectively, focus on customers and take an active role in reversing climate change. Making more use of digital technology with enhanced access and skills to enable automated decision making where relevant, will empower people to focus on those interactions and decisions which are complex and sensitive and where humanity is key. We will also continue to review our processes to ensure we complete our work in the most effective and efficient ways.

Support and development of our various 'champions' networks are key to empowering those who are most engaged to make the impact that is important to them, enhancing their roles in the organisation.

We will enable people to feel empowered to find their own learning and solutions which will help unlock individual potential and maximise performance. This will be supported through access to coaching, mentoring and peer learning.

Strong roots

Our roots are centred on our values which flow through the branches of our organisation and create the culture we are aiming for.

With employees as our most important asset, all employees should feel this is the best place for them to work. To achieve this, we must have clear processes and expectations which are applied fairly and consistently, providing the stability that holds up the organisation.

Our behaviours framework, once developed, will set out the expectations for how we all want to be treated and treat others at work, as well as ensure a customer and community focus across all of our work, and create the conditions for effective change management.

We must also review the language and approaches in our critical workforce and other policies and procedures, to create a safe environment for people to be able to join us and thrive.

Our recognition scheme will seek out and celebrate individual and team contributions aligned to our values and organisational aims.

We proactively support wellbeing and resilience, with effective and compassionate support when people most need it, knowing that this approach pays back in effort and contributions at other times.

Culture

Culture describes how we go about our day-to-day work, the elements that you can't see, the norms, beliefs, systems and rules that influence our behaviour at work.

Our LEAF values are strong and recognisable, and coupled with our ambition for strong roots, growth, connection, and empowerment, these describe the influences we want people to listen to and the culture we want to see throughout our organisation.

We will embark on a culture development programme to thread our values through everything we do and put us on the front foot in readiness for local government reorganisation. Culture change is not a quick fix, it takes time and energy, and we are committed to the journey.

The overall picture that our measures provide, will be used to assess the impact of our cultural change programme which runs through all the deliverables featured under the themes of grow, connect, empower, and strong roots. We will also assess whether staff would recommend our organisation as a place to work as a key benchmark internally and against similar organisations.

Delivery plan

Our delivery plan is broken down by our themes of grow, connect, empower and strong roots, each of which has two parts to the timeline: establishing foundations (year 1); and building our capabilities (year 2).

Strong Roots

Theme	Purpose	Activity	Year 1				Year 2			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
strong roots	Fit for future	Improve transactional HR processes, including recruitment and internal job moves. Create more guidance and information to support people to self serve to reduce HR contacts for highest volume enquiries.	Review	Review	Amend	Amend				
strong roots	Culture and behaviours	Develop and launch a behaviours framework and tools to support implementation, including develop and launch a refreshed staff recognition scheme aligned to our values and behaviours.	develop	launch	embed	embed	BAU	BAU	BAU	BAU
strong roots	Fit for future	Develop an organisational change management approach and toolkit to include tools, templates, guidance.	develop	develop and launch	embed	embed				
strong roots	Fit for future	Research and create staff personas to support targeted interventions across all aspects of the people strategy, e.g. internal comms, learning opportunities, ways to connect, wellbeing.								
strong roots	Fit for future	Establish core transformation competencies and create learning opportunities to upskill where needed. May include self awareness, managing change, customer service, systems thinking, co-production.	research	develop framework	launch learning	learning	learning	learning		

Theme	Purpose	Activity	Year 1				Year 2			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
strong roots	Culture and behaviours Learning and development	Create leadership and management competency framework and develop learning opportunities to support leaders and managers to reflect upon and achieve competencies and bring our values and behaviours to life.			develop	develop and launch	learning	learning	learning	learning
strong roots	Fit for future	Identify and review key people policies where essential to reflect employment law and organisational changes.	Review and plan	review and update key policies as per plan						
strong roots	Fit for future	Improve workforce data quality and create service dashboards to support baseline measurement and empowerment of managers, as well as be devolution ready.	develop	develop	develop	develop	implement	implement	implement	implement

Grow

Theme	Purpose	Activity	Year 1				Year 2				
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
grow	Learning and development	Review and develop mandatory course matrix by staff groups.									
grow	Recruitment and retention. Learning and Development	Continue to utilise, and enhance coordination and management for successful apprenticeships and other development opportunities for existing staff, new recruits and hard to fill roles. E.g. young authority of the year, DCN management programme, projects.									
grow	Learning and development	Review and update appraisals and 1:1 processes to include behaviours framework and better support personal development planning, allowing for a flexible approach as we navigate change. To include clear guidance, training, and recording expectations.			review and plan	implement	implement				

Connect

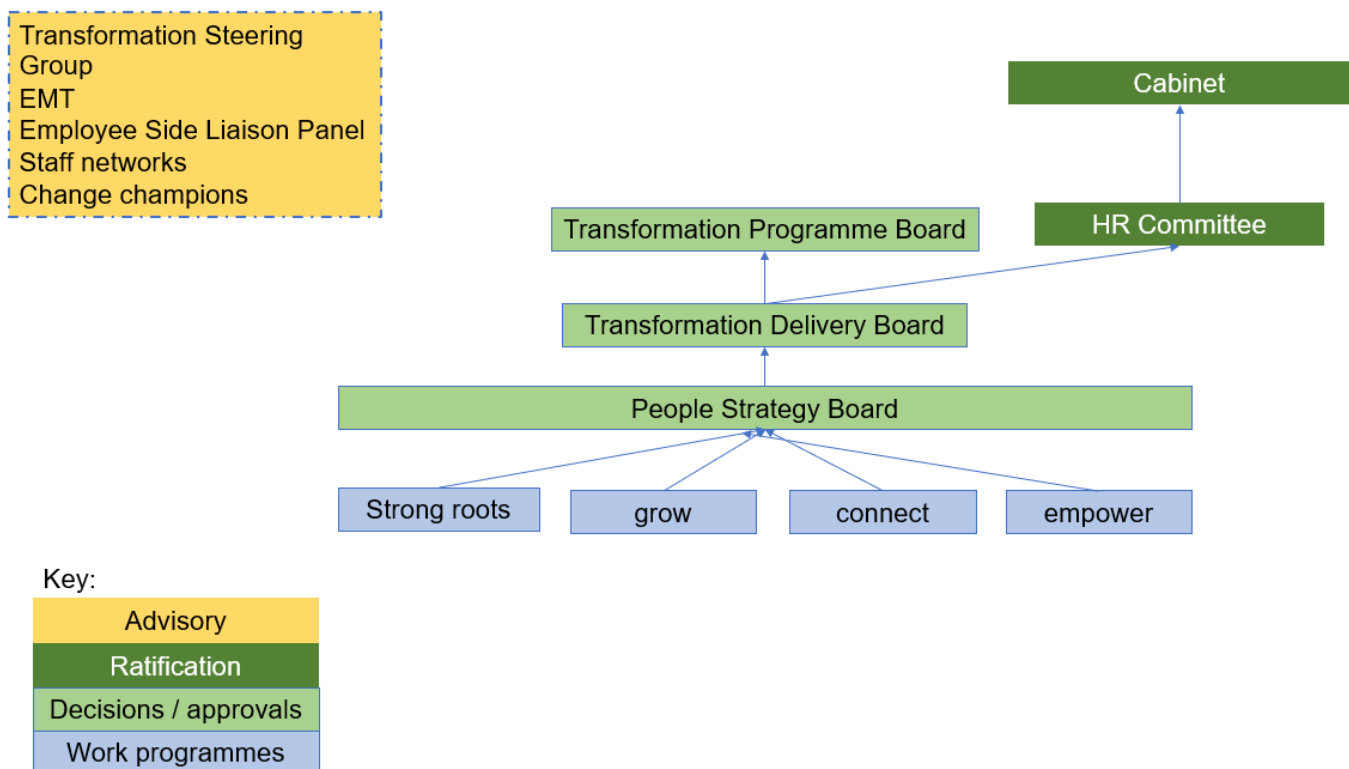
Theme	Purpose	Activity	Year 1				Year 2			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
connect	Engagement and Communications	Review, enhance and measure internal communication and engagement channels, media, purpose and messaging. To include content creation (corporate presentations, written briefings etc), a clear plan of campaigns which run aligned to the people strategy, with appropriate staff surveys to test engagement and identify new actions. To include a regular campaign to raise awareness of wellbeing resources.	Review	Review	launch new approach					
connect	Engagement and Communications	Enhance staff intranet with accessible and engaging content.		Design approach	Content review and creation with services	Content review and creation with services	Content review and creation with services	Content review and creation with services		
Connect	Engagement and Communications Culture and behaviours	Create new and develop existing peer forums / staff networks / learning circles / collaboration cafes (both diversity and role related).								

Empower

Theme	Purpose	Activity	Year 1				Year 2				
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
empower	Fit for future Learning and development	Implement a 'Digital Skills for All' programme.	plan	plan	Implement						
empower	Engagement and Communications Learning and Development	Create a learning hub. To include a menu of opportunities, detailed guidance for staff on learning and development opportunities and process to access and record.									
empower	Learning and development Culture and behaviours	Provide coaching, mentoring, buddy and shadowing opportunities. To include training in coaching and mentoring, guidance for buddying and shadowing, a hub of information on sharepoint to show opportunities available and contact details.									
empower	Learning and development	Develop a menu of targeted learning opportunities for different staff groups, for example a people managers essentials programme for first line chargehands and supervisors. Learning needs to be identified via skills audits and identification of staff personas.	Dependent on need. People management for chargehands and supervisors required Year 1, Q1								

Monitoring and governance

It is critical that the programme of work in support of our journey to create strong roots, grow, connect, and empower, is monitored, measured and governed appropriately. This strategy forms an important part of the Future New Forest transformation programme and will align with the governance structures already defined as the diagram shows below.



A full programme plan, and individual project plans will be developed and maintained to keep track of actions, and create accountability. The People Strategy Board will meet monthly and report to transformation delivery and programme boards as required, with reports to HR Committee ad hoc as and when ratification is required for specific initiatives or changes.

Measuring our ambition to be an employer of choice

A set of measures will be collected annually to review progress year on year towards our ambition to become employer of choice, against each outcome. The Local Government ‘employee engagement index’ (LGEEI) is a set of core questions that will enable us to benchmark ourselves against other similar organisations in the sector and are included within these measures.

Outcome	Key Measures
Are included and have a strong sense of belonging.	% of staff would recommend the council as a great place to work
	% staff satisfied with the amount of information they receive about what is going on at the council
	% staff receive the information they need to do their job well
	% staff feel well informed about things that affect them at work
	% staff agree they have the freedom to work in a way which suits them
	% staff believe the council has sufficient wellbeing support in place for staff
	% staff agree they can strike the right balance between work and home life
	% staff feel well supported by their line manager
	% of staff subjected to bullying and harassment at work
	% of working time lost due to sickness absence
	% of staff agree the Council is open minded, accepting of differences, and everyone is made to feel included
	% of staff agree they can be themselves at work
	% of staff feel treated with fairness and respect at work
Are open, sharing our experiences, and learning from each other.	% staff feel confident to freely share any work issues with their colleagues/team.
	% staff response to staff survey
	% staff agree that any suggestions or comments they make are listened to
	% staff who agree that if they have any problems or concerns, they feel able to discuss them with their line manager / supervisor
	% of staff confident that any reported inappropriate behaviour by colleagues whilst at work, would be dealt with appropriately
	% of staff agree that the leadership team have a good understanding of the challenges staff face
	% of staff agree that in their team, mistakes are seen as learning opportunities
	Analytics of sharepoint usage
Are recognised and rewarded for the contributions we make.	% staff agree that their manager gives them regular feedback on performance
	% staff agree they are praised and recognised for good work
	% staff feel valued and rewarded fairly for the work they do

Outcome	Key Measures
Attract and retain the best people.	% turnover
	Agency use
	Diversity of our workforce (gender, age, ethnicity, disability)
	% of staff who leave within 12 months
	Number of workplace issues / employee relations cases (to include conduct, capability, grievance, disciplinary)
	Gender pay gap (and Race, Disability pay gap if feasible)
	% vacancies filled first time
	Diversity of job applicants
	Number of job applications per campaign
Have the confidence to put forward ideas, try out new concepts and take actions within clear boundaries and expectations.	% of managers agree they are empowered to manage resources to deliver their target outcomes.
	% staff feel able to contribute to improvements in their area of work
	% staff encouraged to try new tasks to develop and improve
	% staff feel able to approach the leadership team if needed
	% staff agree they clearly understand what is expected of them
	% of staff feel trusted to do their work in the way they think is best
	% staff agree that all employees are held accountable for their personal performance and contribution
Learn and develop in our roles and our careers, performing to our best ability.	% of staff with a personal development plan in place
	% who agree they have had the training and development needed to perform current duties
	% staff agree there are training and development opportunities to support them to achieve their ambitions / progress their career
	Number of apprenticeships and other early career placements
	Average learning / development activity per head
	Training spend per head
	% of roles filled by internal candidates
	% completion of mandatory training
	% staff agree they have the skills and equipment to do their jobs
Work together with our colleagues across the Council, partners and community.	% staff feel that in their team, they help and support each other
	% staff agree that their manager / supervisor encourages them to work collaboratively with other colleagues and departments to achieve own / organisational objectives
	% staff feel that they work well across teams on shared objectives
	% staff who agree that we put our community and service users at the heart of what we do
	% of staff who believe their work makes a difference to the organisation / community
	% of staff who agree that we deliver a great service to residents and the community