



# People Strategy



Our journey to employer of choice



Connect · Grow · Empower



**Strong roots**

# Foreword



**Cllr Jill Cleary**  
Leader of the Council



**Kate Ryan**  
Chief Executive

As part of the council's ongoing transformation programme, 'Future New Forest, transforming tomorrow together', we are committed to being an employer of choice. A fundamental part of this is developing and delivering a people strategy that outlines how we attract, retain, and grow our talent, giving us direction to deliver for our employees as well as for our community.

The strategy is based on a wealth of evidence from a wide range of sources: from data and feedback from our current workforce; to external reviews and best practice from both within and outside local government. We aim to be agile to enable us to react to current trends and be fit for future changes.

Underpinning the strategy is the development of our positive work culture, through our LEAF values, with a new behaviours framework to show how we live our values and foster a strong sense of belonging at work.

Our journey to employer of choice: Grow Connect, Empower, is represented visually as a tree with people at the heart, where we start with strong roots, build on these through the branches of Grow, Connect, and Empower, culminating in our LEAF culture which flows through all we do.

Our strategy document describes our strong roots and branches with why they are important, what we do well, what we aim to

achieve and how each will be measured and reviewed. These will continually evolve as new opportunities and challenges emerge.

We firmly believe that having the best staff, who are well-supported, is key to delivering the best outcomes for our residents.

We are committed to developing our people to be fit for the future, and this strategy enables us to achieve this in a context of significant change, as well as deliver our corporate plan priorities for the communities we serve.



# The purpose of our people strategy

Our Corporate Plan and Transformation Strategy commit to the development of a people strategy to outline how we attract, retain, and grow talent.

The people strategy provides the direction to guide the organisation in how we:

- engage our people
- invest in our people
- create the conditions to enable change

## **Engaging our people**

It is important that every member of our team feels part of the organisation and feels valued for the contribution they make to the community and our corporate plan objectives.

## **Investing in our people**

This is about ensuring we have the skills we need to deliver the changes we must enable and the work that makes a difference to our community.

## **Creating the conditions to enable change**

Continuously applying our values, behaviours, and culture.

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.

We know that when our people are at their best, we will be best placed to meet our strategic aims.

It is a proactive framework, to enable enhanced commitment, engagement and motivation, plan for future workforce requirements, build capacity and competence to deliver current and future requirements for our communities.

# How our people strategy sits within our council

Our people strategy aligns with our overarching corporate plan and fits with the 'people and capabilities' theme in our transformation strategy.

The people strategy links closely to the other themes within the transformation strategy; 'customer and digital', 'assets and accommodation', and 'finances & delivery' ensuring all our colleagues are working towards shared goals, with clear expectations and the resources they need to succeed.



Read our corporate plan at:

[link to document](#)



Read our transformation strategy at:

[link to document](#)

# The process of creating our people strategy



1

## Discovery

During this phase, we collected data, research, and feedback. Our sources included:

- our corporate and HR peer reviews
- staff feedback, including leadership team, staff groups, and staff survey
- our corporate plan, transformation plan, and LEAF values
- external sources and best practice



2

## Design

At this phase, we developed initial themes and principles using our findings from stage 1 with the inclusion of our corporate values.

Through an iterative process, the initial themes and principles were presented to multiple staff groups to gain insight into their understandings and reactions.

Feedback supported the design of a simpler and concise concept that is more accessible and understandable to all.



3

## Delivery

Using the core themes of grow, connect, and empower, a 2-year action plan has been created.

We will ensure outputs are monitored, communication with key stakeholders is maintained, and progress and successes are measured.

# What we're doing well as a council

## Staff support

When asked, our staff say we care about their wellbeing, they have positive relationships with their managers, and that they enjoy working in our organisation. We know that there is strong cohesion within small teams and many agree that they help and support each other.

## Early careers

We have been growing our early career roles to develop new skills in some of our hard to recruit areas. At the launch of this strategy we had the highest ever number of apprenticeships and our first graduate trainees across our services.

## Commitment to our purpose

Our staff have a good awareness and understanding of the corporate plan and values and a strong sense that their work makes a difference to the organisation and community.

## Recruitment

New employees are providing positive feedback on the overall recruitment process, the warmth of the staff, and the information provided, specifically our improved application packs.



We actively collaborate with local learning providers to build relationships with young talent and promote ourselves as a key local employer.

This includes attending careers fairs and supporting apprenticeships, providing students with insight into council roles and career paths.

In 2024, we were recognised as Brockenhurst College's "Employer of the Year" recognising our commitment to developing our brand and networks.

# What challenges we need to address

## Engagement and collaboration

**The challenge:** connection between individuals and teams, access to information, and the ability for corporate communications to reach all parts of the organisation is limited in some areas, holding back our people from sharing information, ideas and best practice, and learning from each other.

## Skills

**The challenge:** national recruitment issues, an ageing workforce, fast moving technology, and skills gaps in some professional areas, mean we must grow and develop both our new and existing staff.

## Learning and careers

**The challenge:** opportunities for career progression and a lack of clear personal development opportunities and career pathways are a particular challenge presented by our staff survey feedback.

## Management practices

**The challenge:** a lack of clear expectations of managers has led to variable practices across the organisation, with an additional need to further develop our leaders and managers to face the challenges of change over the next few years.



# Defining what employer of choice means to us

Using the evidence collected in the discovery phase, we have defined our concept of being an employer of choice.

To us this means we will:

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



Our corporate values are already established. Collectively known as 'LEAF', our values underpin the culture and behaviours we are aiming for, to achieve our commitment to becoming an employer of choice.

**Learning**

**Empathy**

**Ambition**

**Fairness**

# Our journey to employer of choice

This journey will be led by our 4 themes,  
and they are:

**Strong roots**

**Grow**

**Connect**

**Empower**



# The 4 themes:

## 1. Strong roots

### 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. We will achieve this through clear processes and expectations which are applied fairly and consistently, by proactively supporting wellbeing and resilience, by promoting our behaviours framework which sets out the expectations for how we all want to be treated and treat others at work, and by recognising and celebrating when individuals and teams align with our values.



# Spotlight: Strong roots

Meet 4 of our colleagues who have shared how they recognise themselves or their work in our values.



## Learning

**Andy Rowe, waste & recycling supervisor:**

"I am embracing all learning opportunities. Since joining the Waste & Recycling team, I have moved from Refuse Loader through to HGV Driver, then Senior Chargehand and I have just been successful in a promotion to Supervisor. Without the learning opportunities both formal and on the job I would not have been able to reach this potential".



## Empathy

**Christina Morgan, housing allocations officer:**

"In my role I feel empathy is essential, many people have had difficult and complicated lives and, as a result of this, can be difficult to engage with or have difficulties understanding the processes we need to go through in order to re-house them.

I make sure I take time to be patient and listen to people when they talk which enables me to get a better understanding of them and their situation. I am always mindful that I do my job every day, but the person I am dealing with, is going through the process of being housed potentially for the first time and does not know what to expect".



## Ambition

**Kasia Lewis, homelessness prevention officer:**

"I still feel there is more to give and achieve in my role. I am keen to take on more responsibility and I feel well supported by my managers to expand my role and responsibilities. I believe NFDC are an employer that nurtures ambition and provides support to move and change within the organisation."



## Fairness

**Phil Thompson, environmental health officer:**

"The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme helps our residents choose where to eat out or shop for good food by giving them clear information about a business's hygiene standards. As a national standard, businesses and customers alike can have confidence in its openness and fairness".

# The 4 themes:

## 2. Grow

### Grow

We believe that everyone should have the opportunities to develop, with protected time for learning and development activities for current and future skills needs.

This will include core transferable skills as well as targeted development, early career opportunities, qualifications and continuing professional development at all career stages.

We will create positive learning experiences to benefit our people and the wider community.



# Spotlight: Grow



Here's Ned, who joined us as an apprentice in 2022, he has now completed his Accounting Level 3 apprenticeship and has been successful in securing a further training contract to complete the Level 4. Ned said "Completing my level 3 AAT apprenticeship has allowed me to gain a professional qualification whilst also working alternate weeks for the Sundry Income Team and the Service Accountancy Team." He continues, "Upon completion of my level 3 apprenticeship, I have taken up the Junior Finance Assistant role and I am now working towards my level 4 AAT qualification. Overall, I have grown in confidence throughout my time at New Forest District Council and enjoy the varied job role having the opportunity to work for two separate departments".

Pam and Ned's line managers both agree that they are developing into important members of the team, helping to ensure our services are delivered in a professional and timely way. They have the time and opportunity to learn and develop, but they also bring new ideas and learning back to help evolve how both teams move forward.



Meet Pam Zuva, currently undertaking a degree apprenticeship with us in Environmental Health. Pam is mid-way in year two, and loving the development opportunity with us. She was key to the NFDC stand at the New Forest Show, helping educate visitors on food safety with her new knowledge. Pam said "It was an honour to share my newly acquired knowledge and instil awareness of the importance of food hygiene." She continues, "The simple practical activity of identifying hazards in the fridge enabled me to encourage the children and their guardians to reconsider how this could positively impact their health. The activity became popular at the NFDC stand and I am grateful to have contributed to our community in such a meaningful way".

# The 4 themes:

## 3. Connect

### Connect

Whilst recognising individual, team and role differences, it's important 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, find out about what's happening in the organisation and in the wider geography, and have access to the information and advice we need to do our jobs well.

We will enhance engagement across the organisation, promoting our successes, collaborating internally and externally with all stakeholders, increasing our staff networks and peer support, and generally find ways to better connect in an open and transparent way.

Colleagues out on one of our regular wellbeing walks





# Spotlight: Connect

We celebrated with over 50 colleagues who have worked here for 20 years or more; our longest serving colleague having 44 years of service! We have a brilliant mix of long serving employees as well as those who have joined us more recently with their external experience to bring to the mix.



# The 4 themes:

## 4. Empower

### Empower

People will be supported to make decisions, test out new ideas, and find their own learning and solutions. We want people to feel empowered, have autonomy and enjoy their work, therefore bringing their best selves to work, unlocking individual potential and maximising performance.

With appropriate training we will make better use of digital technology to ensure we complete our work in the most effective and efficient ways. We will support and develop our various 'champions' networks as well as providing access to coaching, mentoring and peer learning.



Here's Sophie presenting at the Young Authority of the Year competition, an empowering opportunity to develop and showcase her skills, as well as network with others. Sophie has recently been promoted to a Service Manager role in our Housing service.

# Spotlight: Empower



Amy joined us as our new fire safety manager in 2024, and has just started a level 4 Fire Safety two-year apprenticeship to help her develop further in this field and ensure we're on top of our game in terms of looking after our residents' safety. Amy says,

"Developing my skills means I am confident that I have the skills and knowledge to undertake my role effectively now, but also I feel empowered to lead my team effectively and be ahead of the curve with industry changes".



Julie, part of our homeless support team as an accommodation support worker, explains she feels supported by her colleagues and empowered in her role, which involves supporting our most complex and challenging tenants to maintain their tenancies, as well as encouraging them that their lives can change and that they can, at the end of their journey, secure permanent accommodation. Julie says,

"In our homelessness team, I work with a great bunch of people and we are all here at the end of the phone to listen to each other when needed. I have the opportunity to shape my role, supported by my managers when I have an idea and can see this through to implementation".



Stewart, our senior streetscene supervisor oversees a wide range of matters, from the operational leadership of the wide ranging seven-day streetscene service, to researching and project managing related building developments. Stewart is also an incident liaison officer in emergency planning and a mental health first aider.

Stewart feels empowered to use his extensive skills and knowledge as well strong stakeholder contacts built up over his career to confidently take on new and innovative projects that make a real difference to our community. Stewart says,

"As part of our building development activities I have worked with local charities to deliver 'changing places' (specialised toilet and changing facilities for people with severe disabilities) in key locations across the district. I feel proud that disabled individuals and their families now have access to the New Forest".

# How will we deliver this strategy

Our delivery plan is focused on creating the most impact possible over two years, establishing foundations in year one and building on these in year two to increase our capabilities.

We are committed to delivering a far-reaching action plan over the two year period under the themes of strong roots, grow, connect, and empower, aligned to our purpose of engaging and investing in our people and creating the conditions for change.

Our delivery plan includes development of new ideas and review and improvement of existing activities, all of which will be embedded into our day-to-day work to ensure the benefits are sustained long term. We are committed to learning and remaining flexible, meaning we can adapt our plan as needed in this changing environment.



# Our delivery plan

## Strong roots

Improve recruitment and other HR processes.

Create a behaviours framework aligned to our LEAF values.

Develop a toolkit of resources to support change management.

Identify different audiences across our teams to enable tailored communications, training, and other opportunities.

Identify and develop core skills across the organisation.

Create a leadership and management competency framework and establish learning opportunities to support high performance.

Review and amend key people policies.

Improve quality and usability of our workforce data.

## Grow

Review and clarify mandatory training requirements.

Enhance opportunities for career development including apprenticeships and other opportunities for new and existing staff.

Review and improve personal development processes.

## Connect

Review and improve internal communications and enhance employee engagement.

Enhance our staff intranet.

Create new and support existing peer networks.

## Empower

Implement a programme to develop 'digital skills for all'.

Create a learning hub.

Grow opportunities for coaching, mentoring, buddying and shadowing.

Develop targeted learning opportunities based on need of different staff audiences.