

Report of the Head of Human Resources

Workforce Development Plan and Attendance Management

Summary

1. This report provides a summary of:
 - a) an update on the key achievements, challenges, and next steps within the workforce development plan (WFP) for members to be appraised and assured that the workforce is supported to undertake the key challenges ahead, and
 - b) an overview of the attendance rates and management across the workforce.
2. The Committee are requested to note the contents of this report and consider whether there are any aspects that Members wish to explore and offer a level of scrutiny on that fall within the remit of the Committee.

Workforce Development Plan

3. The Workforce Plan (WFP) attached at **Annex 1** and Workforce Themes (**Annex 2**) were created in April 2023, and have recently been updated to include a specific Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion theme to reflect the increased focus and work in this area and to align these activities to the council's core commitments and Council Plan.
4. The plan is renewed annually, and reviewed by Corporate Management Team quarterly. The plan will be renewed again in May 2024, and a key focus of the updated will be to ensure that activities support the workforce in light of the forthcoming budget proposals and the future changing shape of the workforce and the change processes that employees are facing. Corporate Management Team are the leaders and accountable for the Workforce Strategy and the Workforce Plan.

5. Progress of the WFP to date is summarised in brief in **Annex 1**, and good progress has been made on all areas.
6. Following the launch of the Council plan, sessions were held with Leading Together (Senior Heads of Service) and employees to embed the strategy and align it to our financial position, whilst ensuring we provided reassuring messages.

Workforce Strategy and Action Plan Links with 4 Core Commitments – ‘EACH’

7. **Equalities:** We continue to support staff equalities networks, and these are growing in popularity and recognition with the introduction of the sole parent network, and the potential reintroduction of the climate change network. The network groups terms of reference are under consultation with corporate equalities group. Recent themes promoted in staff communications include black history month and domestic abuse awareness. Preparations are also underway to complete the corporate equalities review against the Equalities Framework for Local Government (EFLG) framework.
8. **Affordability:** Significant work has been completed in relation to pay and reward practices, including the implementation of the annual pay award agreed in November. The Foundation Living Wage increase to £12ph was announced recently which the Council will implement from 1st April 2024. A review of increments throughout the grades is due to commence. Updates to HR policies and guidance around travel and subsistence allowances and relocation have recently been agreed to add further clarity for employees on claiming processes. Staff cost of living sessions have run and sessions have been well received.
9. **Climate:** Ongoing working environment improvements and ways of working via the Working as One (Wa1) programme progress. Ongoing emphasis on the need to ensure appropriate risks within workplace are assessed and acted upon. A premises risk assessment workshop was held in October which was well received and further sessions are planned in the future in addition to risk assessment master classes.
10. **Health and Wellbeing:** The new Occupational Health service continues to be embedded following implementation in July 2023. Use of the Employee Assistance Programme service supports our workforce and there appears to be a good awareness of the service across the council, as calls have been received from all directorates. A new

wellbeing app was launched in December and a monthly employee wellbeing newsletter continues to signpost staff to topical issues and support. The health and wellbeing of our workforce will be assessed in a staff survey planned for January. There is a communications campaign relating to health and safety with the slogan, 'Work safely; go home safely' with six themes planned as part of the launch, the campaigns will be launched bi monthly to reach all levels of the workforce – the first theme will be Manual Handling.

11. Corporate attention has focused on employee induction, a new employee induction guide was launched in September along with a revamped corporate welcome event both have been well received by new starters to enable them to settle into the council quickly and easily reinforcing the employer brand, values and expectations.
12. Corporate focus is also reinforcing the financial challenges ahead and preparing the workforce for change with key communications associated with support available, the cost control measures that are essential as well as ensuring that we promote and instil confidence that we continue to be 'open for business' and a good employer. There will be many changes ahead in the coming 12 months and the key will be to ensure that the employee journey is realistic, supportive and there is appropriate awareness and action throughout the levels of the workforce to know the seriousness of the challenge ahead. In some cases business as usual activities and support may need to be reviewed to support the savings plan delivery required. This will be reflected in numerous support services including from the Human Resources team.

Directorate specific actions

13. In Adults York Health and Care Partnership hosted its first Recruitment, Careers and Volunteering Event in West Offices on 4th November and provided an opportunity to showcase the health and care employment opportunities from over 20 employers, voluntary services and education providers within the York area including the council. Following which we have appointed to some of our vacancies in adults. We were also able to signpost visitors to other roles in the Council, apprenticeships, and work experience.
14. Additional HR Workshops for Managers are being planned in the new year. The workshops will cover topics including attendance and

employee wellbeing, resourcing, performance, pay and reward and workforce change.

15. Training commenced in September 2023 for culture and behavioural support sessions for adult social care to align the service to CYC values and behaviours framework. This programme is due to conclude in March 2024.
16. In Children's services, work continues to develop CYC's practice model, this model will enable the directorate to describe collective values and principles that drive the way in which we want to work with children and families. It will also describe the purposeful outcomes we are wanting to achieve for children and inform future workforce training.
17. We have partnered with Research in Practice who have designed the Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD). This is a short survey (max 15 mins) and an online workbook designed for use across the whole social work and broader social care profession. It is completely anonymous and the data we will receive is at the organisational level. The findings will help leaders and senior managers implement organisation-wide improvements.
18. A series of "Meet your Team" sessions have been delivered to staff within Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, these were available to all staff with line management responsibility. The sessions provided an opportunity to introduce key contacts in support services including colleagues from Finance, Health and Safety, Business Intelligence and Payroll.
19. At Hazel Court work is being done to support line managers to further developing their people management and coaching skills; this has included policy sessions, targeted employee relations guidance, support around interviews and general recruitment. A 121 meeting template has also been developed which incorporates the Council values and is being trialled with supervisors and their frontline staff in Environmental Services to try to increase employee engagement (employee survey feedback) as well as encouraging more individual, regular and meaningful communications with employees.
20. To help improve digital skills, employees have been offered development opportunities through York Learning, to build confidence in using Microsoft applications for office staff and basic online skills for frontline staff. The lessons are taking place in employees own time but

are taking place on site a Hazel Court to be more accessible. Feedback has been very positive, and more training has since been added due to the encouraging uptake.

Attendance Management

21. Workforce resilience and wellbeing are key themes of the workforce plan and strategy to maintain a skilled and capable workforce to be able to deliver services to our community. Well-being takes the widest form of health including health and safety, risk assessments, supporting employees in all aspects of work from induction, everyday working, engagement and communication, positive leadership and good management. All these components add to providing a safe and supportive working environment.
22. The Council seeks to maximise attendance at work, but it is recognised that employees will from time to time be unable to perform their work duties due to sickness. We seek to minimise absence due to sickness through early intervention, employee support and through the promotion of health, safety and wellbeing initiatives.
23. Attendance management for the workforce is reported through the Council's absence line. This process has been in place for several years and in July 2023, a new contract was signed following a tendering process and a joint service was procured for the Council's occupational health and one day absence line providing a complete service allowing for efficiencies between reporting of initial absence and access to occupational health services.
24. During the pandemic period: 2020 to 2022, the Council saw high absence rates and these followed the same trend as many employers both in the public and other sectors. Sickness absence figures are now starting to fall. Rates have not returned back to pre-pandemic rates in the Council, when the rate was 9 days per FTE, but progress is being made. At the Quarter 2 position (1st October to 31st December 2023), the average days sickness was 11.3 days per FTE, this is a reduction from 13 days per FTE based on the same quarter in 2022.

	Q2 2022	Q2 2023	Trend
Headcount	2523	2023	Decrease
FTE	2113	2186	Increase
Average Days Sickness	13.0 days	11.3 days	Decrease

25. The Council does have several employees who are on long term sickness with terminal illness, for these employees we explore ill health retirement options but employee absence continues to be part of the absence figures, this may in some cases distort absence figures in some directorates. The following is the average days sickness per FTE based on a rolling 12 month period.

Directorate	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 to Q2
City of York Council (exc.	9	12	11.9	11.3
Benchmark – CIPD (All Sectors)	5.8	N/A	7.8	N/A
Benchmark – CIPD (Public)	8	N/A	10.6	N/A

26. In September 2023 the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) presented a benchmark figure for absence as part of their Health and Wellbeing at Work report, this report was paused during COVID. Across all working sectors, the CIPD quoted an average level of employee absence of 7.8 days per employee and the highest level of absence reported for over a decade. The report acknowledges significant differences in the way in which absence is reported so comparisons like for like are very difficult. For the public sector the average absence is quoted as 10.6 days, the Council average sits at 11.3 days only slightly higher, this is a reduction from 13 days reported in Q2 in 2022. Discussions with other regional Yorkshire and Humber Councils confirms that City of York are comparable in terms of sickness absence trends; figures are higher in social care, days absent are steady after the pandemic recovery period and absence rates tend to reduce in Q4.
27. In terms of reasons for absence the CIPD report mentions, minor illness, muscular skeletal and stress / mental health as the most common reasons for absence. This mirrors the Council’s absence reasons which at November 2023 were Stress, Muscular skeletal and Other Reason (minor illnesses).
28. The Local Government Association (LGA) has published that they propose to set up a benchmarking survey on key workforce statistics for Councils and it is understood that this will include absence; this will not however, dictate how sickness is calculated so there will continue to be variances so direct comparisons will be difficult.

29. We are currently preparing for the next employee survey, which will be launched at the end of January. The survey will include a focus on wellbeing and this can be reported accordingly alongside absence reasons.
30. In the current climate of ongoing cost control measures in the workplace, cost of living pressures in employees personal lives, as no-one is immune to the increased cost of living, this can take a toll on personal resilience. Measures are in place to support employees however, it is common in times of uncertainty, with conversations of redundancies and reduced services, that some employees will find the situation stressful. Conversely to this position it is also important that employees do not try to work excessive hours to cover for absent employees or vacant roles or use presenteeism or leavism as techniques to manage increased workloads; wellbeing, support, engagement and good communication are paramount to continue to deliver services effectively. Managers are equipped with tools to assist employees and deal with absence in a sensitive and supportive manner whilst providing a robust standard of expectations, this will be reinforced at all levels of the organisation.

Consultation

31. Specific projects within the Workforce Plan are consulted on as appropriate, there is ongoing dialogue with trade unions regarding workforce profile (including absence management), projects and any issues; both from a health, wellbeing and safety perspective and employee relations. Corporate management team members ensure that there is visible leadership and the that themes of the workforce plan are embedded and part of individual service plans and work plans as appropriate.

Implications

32. The following implications are presented for consideration;
 - Financial** : costs associated with the implementation of any aspects of the Workforce plan will be considered on an ongoing basis and be fed through Corporate management team and will be mindful of the current financial challenges.
 - Human Resources (HR)**: The WFS and WFP plan fits with the HR Service plan and is key to developing and ensuring that the Council has a workforce fit to deliver all its priorities.
 - Legal**: The Director of Governance and legal team will provide any legal challenges associated with the individual actions associated with the strategy and plan

Procurement: The head of procurement and team will provide any procurement support associated with any contracts required by the HR department and WFP.

Health and Wellbeing: The Director of Public Health and team will be contacted where there are any actions that require public health intervention and consideration.

Environment and Climate action: There are no known environment and climate implications.

Affordability: The Director of Customer and Communities will be contacted where there are any actions that required intervention and consideration.

Equalities and Human Rights: any aspects of the WFS and WFP that requires equality impact assessments will be considered on individual basis as part of the project planning process.

Risk Management

33. There are no known risk implications associated with the recommendations in this report, however, it is acknowledged that the savings and financial implications ahead do have risks for employee relations, but these will be managed through good communication, engagement with recognised trade unions and ensuring managers and employees are aware of the journey and support available.

Wards Impacted

34. No Ward(s) are directly impacted by decisions in the workforce development plan or absence management statistics.

Recommendations

35. Corporate Services, Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee Members are asked to:

- a. Note the workforce plan and themes and associated updates

Reason: For members to be assured that the workforce is supported to undertake the key challenges ahead and consider if there are any aspects of the workforce plan that they wish to ask questions on or seek further information on from a scrutiny perspective

- b. Note the overview of attendance rates and management across the workforce.

Reason: For members to be assured that the workforce is supported from a well being perspective in order to minimise absence and allow members as they wish to ask questions on or seek further information on absence information from a scrutiny perspective

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Wards Affected: All None

Background Papers:

Report of the Customer and Corporate Services Management Committee
Review of the Organisational Development Plan – 14th March 2022
<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s157548/OD%20Plan%20Report.pdf>

Annexes

Annex 1 – Workforce Development Plan
Annex 2 – Workforce Development Plan Themes

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this report and attached annexes

CMT – Corporate Management Team
CCNC – Corporate Consultative Negotiation Committee
COO – Chief Operating Officer
DCNC – Departmental Consultative Negotiating Committee
DoPH – Director of Public Health
EAP – Employee Assistance Programme
EDI – Equalities Diversity and Inclusion
EFLG - Equalities Framework for Local Government
ER – Employee Relations

HR – Human Resources
HHR&OD – Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
ICT – Information Communication Technology
JH&HS – Joint Health and Safety Committee
LGA – Local Government Association
OD – Organisational Development
PDR – Performance Development Review
M365 – Microsoft 365
SWORD - Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic
Was1 – Working as One
WFP - Workforce Development Plan
WO – West Offices
WWY – Work with York