

SUBJECT: PEOPLE STRATEGY

MEETING: CABINET

DATE: 5 June 2024

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval of a new People Strategy, which is one of a suite of enabling strategies that sit underneath the Community and Corporate Plan to ensure that the authority's resources are aligned with the delivery of its purpose.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the People Strategy and objectives.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the associated action plan and task the responsible Cabinet member and Chief Officer with keeping this under continual review, updating in response to new challenges and opportunities.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Community and Corporate Plan established a clear purpose for Monmouthshire to be a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life. This strategy is underpinned by a series of enabling strategies including the Finance Strategy and Asset Management Strategy and Plan. Together these ensure that all of the council's assets and resources are aligned behind its purpose.
- 3.2 The People Strategy creates the framework for us to support and develop our colleagues so that everyone's contribution can be maximised. The strategy highlights the opportunities and challenges we face. It also describes the things that need to be in place for our colleagues to thrive and succeed.
- 3.3 Monmouthshire is an attractive place to live and work which has a positive effect on our ability to recruit and retain good people. We're a values-based organisation with a loyal, dedicated and hard-working team delivering the things they were employed to do. The authority benefitted from early adoption of agile working approaches and digital technology which gave us an advantage in the recruitment market. However, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of these approaches by others meaning they are now commonplace. We no longer stand out as we once did, and need to work hard to ensure we remain an employer of choice in a competitive employment market.

- 3.4 The nature of the workplace and the workforce is changing across the UK and globally. Younger workers are less likely to remain with an employer for life, with more people having portfolio careers. They are not as focused on final salaries and are more likely to job-hop to increase their earnings. We do not currently have the opportunities in place in all areas to ensure we can develop people for the long-term, although there are notable exceptions such as Social Care and Health which has benefitted from the Social Care Workforce Development Grant.
- 3.5 We have increased the size of our workforce over the past ten years, but our payroll costs are decreasing in real terms as a result of below inflation pay increases. In key areas staffing is being afforded by grants for specific projects. This creates a risk that we are increasingly dependent on unsecure and short-term funding and therefore more vulnerable if grants were to be removed. This also creates challenges for some colleagues who find themselves employed on a series of short-term contracts denying them the stability they are seeking.
- 3.6 We need to better understand the challenges and opportunities afforded by automation and generative artificial intelligence. These brings significant potential to improve productivity with research showing that this can bring about greater equality in earnings in some professions. However, we are also aware that it can result in the reinforcement of historical biases. It should be used to complement the compassion, empathy and problem-solving skills of our colleagues with the decisions that affect peoples' lives being made by colleagues rather than computers.
- 3.7 During the development of the strategy we've been talking to teams about the things they need to succeed in the workplace. These range from autonomy and a clear purpose which recur frequently in academic research through to better access to online learning. The strategy sets out more detail on these things. What was evident through these conversations was the passion colleagues had for Monmouthshire.
- 3.8 All of this has informed the development of a series of objectives focused on our culture, capacity, capability and the contribution. These are shown under six themes:
- Involved and Informed – A clear purpose, supported by an enabling culture where colleagues have the information they need, and are empowered to make a difference to the people we serve.
 - Diverse and Inclusive – A workforce with a diverse range of experiences, skills and backgrounds where people can be themselves.
 - Learning and Developing – People can access the training they need to do their job and the development opportunities to take the next step in their career.
 - Recruiting and Retaining – We are an employer of choice, attracting talent from a wide range of industries with career pathways that enable us to retain the best people.
 - Health and Well-being – People have access to the resources to manage their own well-being and can access tiered support to help them back to work if they experience sickness related absence.
 - Innovative and creative – People have the mindset, skills and support needed to develop and implement the solutions, including the use of technology, to the biggest challenges facing the council and the communities it serves.

- 3.8 These objectives will be delivered through an action plan which is attached as an appendix. These include:
- Launch a new e-recruitment system to improve process efficiency and the recruitment and onboarding experience for recruiting managers, applicants and new employees.
 - Pilot and roll-out a new appraisal scheme so that we can ensure clear alignment between the work of our colleagues and the priorities of the council – and use this to develop a training needs analysis.
 - Launch the new e-learning system to ensure staff can access the training they need to do their current role and the development opportunities they need to take their career to the next level while improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our back-office processes.
 - Build on our recently attained Disability Confident Employer status to ensure we attract and retain a diversity of talent and reduce the disability pay gap.
 - Continue to develop and promote our well-being offer and staff benefits package.
 - Support staff to take action to reduce their carbon footprint – both in the workplace, at home and while travelling.
 - Improve our use and analysis of workforce data.
- The actions will continually evolve in response to feedback and emerging best practice.
- 3.9 The People Strategy will achieve nothing if it remains a series of pixels on a screen. Our colleagues need to live and breathe it. It will be communicated in a variety of bite-size chunks appropriate to the location and audience. If we are successful, we would expect to be able to see this in a number of key metrics including increased job applications and reduced sickness absence.
- 3.10 Our people are our most important asset. They are the means by which we achieve almost everything we do in our communities. If we get this right, then we will create and sustain the conditions and culture in which they thrive and succeed.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 The impact assessment has highlighted the potential for the People Strategy to have a positive impact on groups possessing protected characteristics. For example, by committing to narrowing the gender pay gap and building on our recently achieved status as a Disability Confident Employer. However, there is more work needing to be done to tackle the legacy of the structural inequalities prevalent in society. We will continue to learn and develop our action plan in response.
- 4.2 The evaluation identified that the strategy has the potential to have a positive effect on safeguarding, corporate parenting and the Welsh language.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

At a headline level the options were to produce a strategy or not produce a strategy. Not producing a strategy would introduce a risk that we were not able to get the best from our workforce.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

There will be an annual progress report, underpinned by a series of metrics which will be published more frequently as part of our day-to-day operational management. They include:

- Turnover
- Number of jobs that need to be readvertised
- Sickness absence
- Gender and disability pay gaps
- Employee satisfaction

7. REASONS:

7.1 To ensure that the authority's resources are aligned with the delivery of its purpose.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 The strategy itself does not require any resource commitments above those already in place. However, people are arguable our biggest single resource with payroll costs of around £100M. We have choices about *what* the people in our employment do – that it set by the community and Corporate Plan, as well as legislation and political direction. Of equal importance is *how* they do it. Not making effective use of this resource carries significant opportunity cost in terms of the capacity, capability and contribution made by our workforce.

9. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet
Strategic Leadership Team
Chair of Governance and Audit Committee
Joint Advisory Group
Groups of local authority staff

The strategy has been shaped following engagement with a number of staff groups. This has led to several changes and additions. For example, additions to the 'what people tell us they need' section, as well as adjustments to the objectives themselves.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

11. AUTHOR:

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12. CONTACT DETAILS:

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