

# PEOPLE STRATEGY

Folkestone & Hythe District Council

2021 – 2024



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# STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

The Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2030 'Creating Tomorrow Together' sets out the main strategic priorities over the coming years. There are four service ambitions within the plan underpinned by six guiding principles.



# TRANSFORMATION

The council has undergone a two year transformation programme to March 2021 and is now entering into continuous improvement to further embed the steps already taken to develop a council that is efficient and fit to serve its community and meet the aspirations of residents in the context of reduced resources.

Our operating model was established to improve service delivery, resilience and efficiency based on 12 design principles developed by staff and endorsed by Cabinet.



# PEOPLE PERSPECTIVE

Expectations continue to change (both in terms of our expectations of our people and their expectations of us) and as a result our focus remains on the behavioural competencies which has led to a framework based around our core values:

## **One Team**

- Engaging Communication
- Working Together

## **Customer First**

- Understanding Others
- Integrity & Ownership

## **Thinking Ahead**

- Reasoned Thinking
- Always Improving

## **Performance Counts**

- Making Time Count
- Constantly Building Skills
- Positive Mindset



Our leaders and managers role model and live these behaviours, inspiring and energising the council providing clear direction, purpose and support. Our style will be open and honest utilising coaching skills to give and receive valued feedback.

We want our people to feel supported, appreciated and valued beyond the transformation programme and stimulated by the opportunities that continuous improvement will bring. Our people are treated with respect and integrity and will be encouraged to maximise development opportunities that arise from the changes.

Ultimately, we continue to expect a shift in our culture, whereby working and thinking flexibly are our norm with people who are willing to learn new skills, able to contribute ideas, be innovative and influence decisions. We have become an organisation of technologically-enabled employees who welcome customer insight and use a test and learn approach to devise lean processes and approaches to our work.

# OUR APPROACH

The people strategy has been created to support the Council's corporate plan and to enable us to achieve and support the ethos of continuous improvement. We will continue to deliver excellent HR and OD services through our business partnering approach, whilst exploring opportunities that will further enhance the service to recognise the changing workplace. We will do this in a number of ways:

- Our approach will build a workforce that is fit for the future
- Our council will become one of the best places to work in the area and be recognised as one of the best not for profit organisations to work for in the UK
- Our behaviours-led culture will generate, encourage and reward flexibility and innovation
- Our culture of flexibility and innovation will develop with people who feel supported and who have the confidence to challenge why we do things and the ability to implement digital (and other appropriate) solutions to make us more efficient
- Our People Strategy will be delivered by the Human Resources & Organisational Development team in partnership with our leaders, managers and people

Our People Strategy will be set out within six main themes that are underpinned by our culture. A separate detailed implementation plan is being developed which will set out clear actions, timescales and measures of success.

Our people strategy is set out across 6 main themes that are underpinned by our culture. In recent years, we have embraced agile working with many staff already equipped to work away from the office, however during 2020 this took on a whole new meaning as the lockdown requirements following the Covid-19 pandemic meant a swift shift from many staff still travelling to the office every day to a culture that is very much focussed on staff working remotely from home and out in the district.

With the agreement in principle by Cabinet in January 2021 to consider relocating the civic offices by 2023/2024 it is essential that we continue to build a culture that embraces a more agile smarter style of working developing more flexibility around when and where staff work.

There are a number of benefits in developing an agile working environment including: improved productivity, improved work/life balance and increased staff motivation, greater resilience, lesser impact on the environment and reduced absence levels. We are also mindful of employee wellbeing and will create opportunities for face-to-face contact to support good mental health, strong relationships and creativity.

It is important to recognise that all the themes are interlinked and they should not be viewed in isolation.



# PEOPLE STRATEGY THEMES



# Culture

The six people strategy themes are all influenced by the changing culture of our council. Our aim is to create a continuous improvement culture which supports our employees to continuously reflect on practice, identify what went well, what improvements need to be made and take action in order to work smarter and strive to be the best.

Throughout our people strategy we will actively support this cultural shift by ensuring we:

- promote a culture of accountability and collaborative team working by developing and supporting cross-organisational project teams
- actively engage and empower staff to act within a collaborative culture which encourages innovation and creativity
- review our core values to ensure they still fit with our new ways of working
- help our people to understand our values and behaviours and the expectations and responsibilities contained within them
- promote a test and learn, agile, iterative culture where staff are encouraged to learn from their mistakes, be adaptable and to learn new skills
- encourage an environment of mutual trust, transparent decision making underpinned by values-led leadership
- build on our constructive employee relations climate with trade unions and staff representatives within a clear and progressive policy framework
- review our internal policies and procedures to remove any unnecessary bureaucracy and encourage flexible / agile working practices for our service areas, providing managers with the discretion they need to manage their people with minimal intervention from HR
- Explore opportunities to develop an HR system to support smarter working

# Smarter Agile & Flexible Working

Ensuring that within the rapidly changing world of work we are identifying and implementing the most appropriate organisational structures and working practices to meet demands.

## Where are we now?

The council has shifted away from a traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical structure which led to service area silos to a flatter, more empowered operating model, incorporating flexibility wherever possible. All of our office-based staff are able to work effectively and flexibly from home.

## What will we do in the future?

- Develop a modern and agile workforce with diverse and digital-focussed skill sets
- Play a key role in the development of plans for a new Customer Access Point and relocation of civic offices, leading on the changes that will directly affect our people (year 1)
- Empower employees to make appropriate decisions and deliver excellent services, using better technology to increase flexibility and efficiency
- Identify and implement posts that can be primarily agile or homeworking (using this USP to attract a wider pool of talent) (year 1)
- Promote flexible working across the wider workforce (year 1)
- Develop a new agile / smarter working policy to promote flexibility in when and where staff work in the future (year 1)
- Review our policies and procedures to make sure they recognise the need for agile / smarter working practices with appropriate document management controls (years 1-2)
- Encourage our management team to role model our operating model and smarter working arrangements, challenging behaviours that are not in line with our values

- Develop structures, policies and a culture that supports the council's Carbon Action Plan and greater efficiencies through reducing commuting and work related travel (longer term)
- Develop flexible career pathways and support development programmes & opportunities to support our people develop their careers with us
- Design jobs to reflect the benefits and impact of our digital investment and that enable people to apply their skills, knowledge and behaviours to the best effect
- Continue to develop flexible, generic job descriptions supported by role families (years 1-2)
- Support the further development of our technology with training & development programmes that enable and encourage working in a flatter hierarchy
- Create greater resilience through developing flexibility into how we deploy our people (years 1-2)



# Employee Engagement & Wellbeing

Engaging our people is key to enabling effective two-way communications and supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff

## Where are we now?

In 2019, our employer net promoter score shifted from -36 (in 2018) to -8 (a vast improvement given that most organisations are pleased with a score of 0). We have further built on rising engagement levels by undertaking a Best Companies Pulse survey (in 2020) and developing and implementing an improvement plan in response to survey results. The Pulse Survey indicated that, as a council, we had 'very good' engagement levels, with some areas that scored 'outstanding' and a handful of teams with 'world-class' levels of engagement. In March 2021 we undertook the full Best Companies Survey and were advised in May 2021 that we had been awarded '2 stars' for outstanding employee engagement and had been placed 4th on the Not for Profit Best Companies in the UK and 57th on the Best Companies to work for in the South East. By looking at the research-based 8 factors of employee engagement that Best Companies use we are able to use our 2021 survey results to design and deliver highly targeted interventions to continue to improve employee engagement and all the benefits that brings – better customer service, lower sickness absence, happier employees and greater innovation.

In addition, the staff recognition scheme continues to be supported and reflects our behaviours plus our reward scheme, F&H Rewards, continues to be developed. We know from our survey results that our staff are proud to work here, feel supported and recognised and feel able to speak up.

We have a range of Health and Wellbeing initiatives for our people, ranging from traditional but important benefits such as an Employee Assistance Programme as well as developing more innovative and pro-active "virtual kitchens" and forums. Our management development programme has wellbeing as a constant theme and our flexible working culture has supported the work / life balance of our people.

## What will we do in the future?

- Build on the outcomes from the Times Top 100 Best Companies (Not for Profit) survey (years 1-2)
- Review and develop internal and external services available to staff to support their mental health and wellbeing (year 1)
- Work towards the government backed Mental Health At Work Commitment standards (longer term)
- Explore the opportunity to become a 'mindful employer' (longer term)
- Introduce an internal mental health first aid support network (years 1-2)
- Include mental health awareness as part of the corporate training programme (<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>) (years 1—2)
- Support employees' financial health through the provision of appropriate advice and benefits on our rewards platform (years 1-2)
- Continue to review and develop the staff benefits package in order to provide attractive features that help people feel valued
- Develop a scheme to allow employees to purchase additional annual leave (longer term)
- Promote coaching as a means to contribute to wellbeing in supporting people to achieve work/life balance, address loss of confidence and adjust to changing circumstances
- Refresh our approach to corporate and team inductions to welcome new employees including induction videos available before starting employment, accessible induction booklets and a new starter forum (year 1)
- Explore the opportunities within iTrent to further enhance our onboarding processes (years 1-2)
- Reiterate our commitment to developing strong working relationships with our recognised trade unions by signing new facilities agreements (years 1-2)
- Monitor the effectiveness of our volunteering policy and identify opportunities for volunteering that can be promoted across the council (years 1-2)
- Build on our flexible working culture to create greater options and opportunities for enhance work / life balance for our people
- Support managers to continue making FHDC a fun place to work where innovation is encouraged and collaboration with others becomes the norm

- Promote a healthy workplace and support our people to achieve a work-life balance that takes account of individual circumstances and life choices
- Recognise and value engagement and celebrate successes & achievements wherever found
- Ensure meaningful effective communications and more direct engagement with our staff on matters that affect them
- Continue to work in partnership with our trade unions and staff representatives to develop and evolve our approaches to staff engagement
- Continue to develop our reward and recognition offer for our people and teams to recognise exemplary behaviours
- Enable more social events to encourage & facilitate a vibrant culture
- Maintain open and honest dialogue with staff, seeking views, ideas and commentary and keeping them informed via a range of engagement surveys and pulse checks using the most appropriate channels

# Recruitment and retention

Attracting, recruiting and retaining the best people is key to the future of the council and we will therefore develop creative approaches to attracting and retaining talented and capable people across all of our service areas.

## Where are we now?

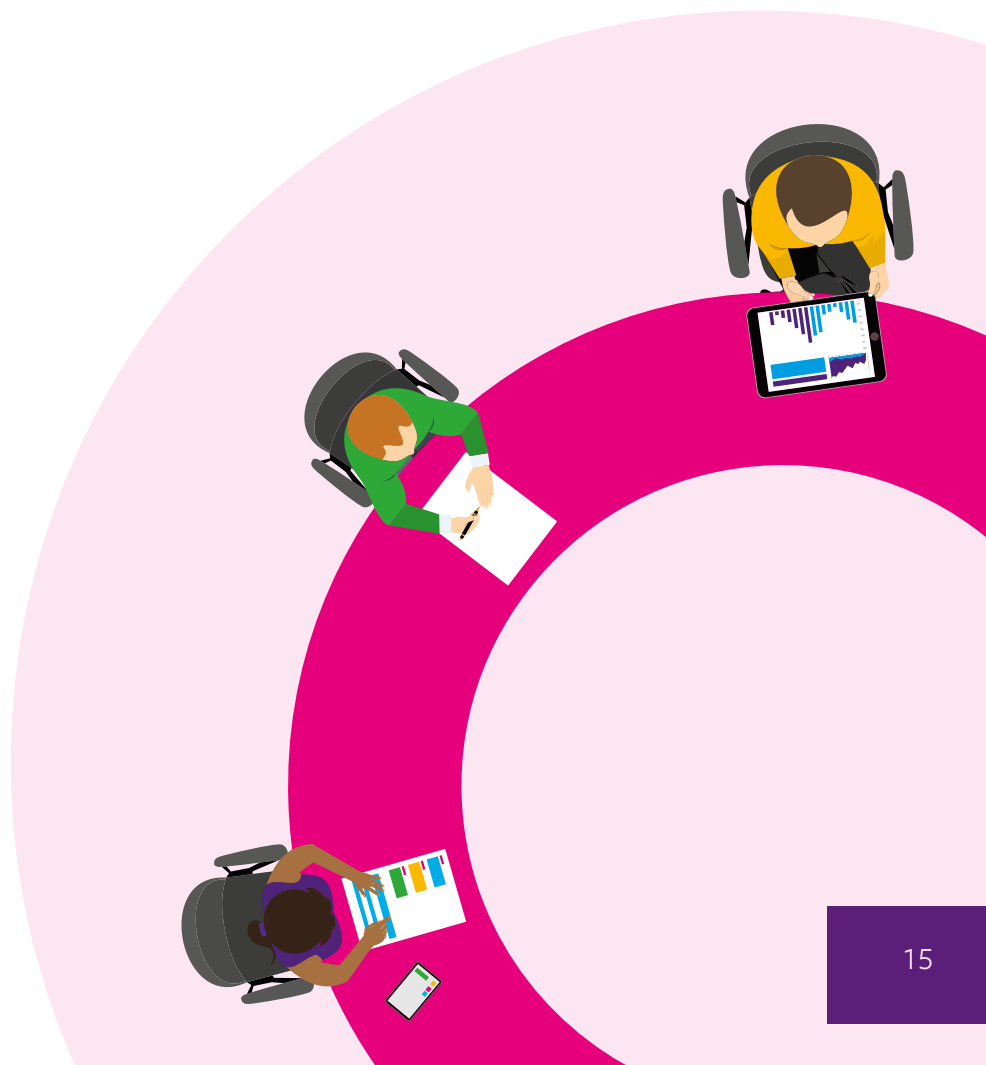
The council has previously used traditional recruitment and selection approaches with an ad hoc approach to using social media and a lack of engaging internet presence to attract applicants. Since the pandemic however we have moved to virtual interviewing in the vast majority of instances and in addition moved to a more competency based approach to interviews which will further develop over time. In recent years we have encouraged internal secondments above external recruitment which has led to a relatively low level of turnover (8.54% voluntary turnover in 2019/20).

## What will we do in the future?

- Review and update the recruitment and selection processes to reflect a modern flexible organisation, enabling the selection and retention of talented people with the right attitudes and skills that align with our digital strategy and customer strategy ambitions (year 1)
- Build our employer brand to reflect the organisation we are aiming to become
- Develop a range of selection and development methods which link to our values and behaviours as well as assessing knowledge, skills and experience (years 1-2)
- Continue to simplify transactional processes within the recruitment and selection activities (year 1)



- Establish effective and impactful on-boarding processes to welcome new employees that reflect our modern way of working (years 1-2)
- Consider opportunities to promote council careers in local schools, colleges and universities
- Review our strategic approach to apprenticeships and explore opportunities for ‘career trials’ where young people can undertake rotational posts across a number of teams (longer term)
- Continue to investigate and develop digital and remote recruitment and selection methods (years 1-2)
- Design innovative ways to recruit traditionally ‘hard to fill’ roles in conjunction with area specialists, including identifying development pathways
- Create flexibility within our pay and reward mechanisms to become more attractive and competitive in our recruitment
- Develop the capability of our recruiting managers (year 1)
- Develop clear succession plans for professional and strategic progression (year 1)
- Continue to develop and promote our approaches to agile smarter working
- Identify secondments as potential development opportunities, both inside and outside of the council, to aid retention of our people



# Learning and development

The core strength of the council is in our people and therefore training, developing and supporting our people is absolutely crucial.

## Where are we now?

There is currently a comprehensive offer to all our people via e-learning, technical and soft skills sessions, targeted management development with formal ILM and City & Guilds qualifications plus managers and aspiring managers studying the ILM L3 Diploma for Managers.

## What will we do in the future?

- Recognise the changing skill requirements and develop people to meet the changing needs of our authority
- Ensure our people are best placed to take advantage of the career progression opportunities that arise
- Support employees with a development programme that reflects the behavioural framework and supports the corporate plan priorities (years 1-2)
- Investigate a 360-degree assessment process / system to support individual development (years 1-2)
- 360-degree assessments to be undertaken by all managers (longer term)
- Increase the number of e-learning and remote learning opportunities whilst retaining a balance of face to face learning opportunities once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted (years 1-2)
- Help and support staff to understand the choices they can make to reduce carbon usage and use more sustainable options in order to support the council's Carbon Action Plan by providing appropriate training (longer term)
- Encourage our leaders to attend action learning sets to support their coaching and problem-solving skills, as well as create peer support networks.

- Develop career pathways to enable long-term development, progression and succession planning
- Review, evaluate and refresh our approach to leadership and management programmes ensuring they reflect our values and behaviours
- Develop the management capabilities of our leaders and managers
- Develop a pool of coaches and mentors to nurture talent and support performance (years 1-2)
- Support the sharing of knowledge and ideas through cross-functional teams (years 1-2)
- Ensure that our people have access to training that enables them to meet the expected standards in their roles by identifying learning needs gaps (years 1-2)
- Continue to introduce and embed the behavioural framework (years 1-2)
- Explore and implement options that align with the apprenticeship levy which will enable us to sponsor people through formal qualifications
- Identify suitable entry points and develop our approach to apprentices and trainees to ensure that we identify and develop talent at an early stage, maximising the use of the apprenticeship levy
- Provide our people with appropriate learning and development opportunities encompassing commercial awareness, innovation, digital awareness, procurement, commissioning of services and partnership working
- Produce an annual learning and development offer that outlines the opportunities available to our people to support them in the personal and professional development
- Produce an annual training plan that reflects our corporate priorities
- Review the central and departmental training budgets to ensure appropriate budget allocation
- Provide appropriate training and development opportunities for our elected members and identify opportunities for co-training with officers which reflect the service ambitions and guiding principles of our Corporate Plan (longer term)

# Performance

With an ambitious corporate plan and its associated priorities, ensuring our people are driven to perform to the best of their abilities will be key to our organisational success with high performing teams.

## Where are we now?

We have had a traditional approach to appraisals which are not valued by some managers and their teams; in addition, the culture of feedback varies between service areas. Some service areas are naturally very target and metric led which provides clear information relating to performance. Over the last 18 months the focus shifted towards behavioural assessments to support our transformation programme and now looking forwards the intention is to provide managers with the skills to bring appraisals and behavioural reviews together into 1-2-1 discussions and annual performance reviews which will focus on outputs.

## What will we do in the future?

- Ensure performance management including the competency framework is embedded throughout the council (years 1-2)
- Build capability for manager confidence and competence in developing staff and managing performance in line with our behavioural framework and the need for an agile and technologically-minded workforce (years 1-2)
- Continue to develop the behavioural framework based on agile / smarter working and the council's values (years 1-2)
- Develop our performance management culture, process and systems that meets the needs of a modern, flexible and agile workforce and promotes regular high performance in line with our values and behavioural framework by encouraging regular developmental and performance conversations focussed on outcomes

- Drive a high performance team culture in which individual development and career aspirations are supported and aligned to our behaviours
- Ensure that our approach to appraisal, reward, recognition and promotion is fair, transparent, accessible and understood by all
- Develop a contemporary performance management framework, integrating our behaviours, which recognises high performers and also provides challenge and support

# Reward and recognition

Attracting, recruiting and retaining the best people is key to the future of the council and in order to both recruit and retain we must therefore ensure that we have the mechanisms in place to recognise and reward our people appropriately

## Where are we now?

Incremental progression through the pay grade is automatic with sporadic use of honorarium, acting up payments and market supplements. Many roles have not been formally evaluated for a number of years. The recognition scheme has forged a clear link to the corporate values. However there is a perception that our annual leave and some salaries are not competitive enough to match private sector companies or other local authorities

## What will we do in the future?

- Develop a new pay and reward document that centralises all relevant information in one easily accessible place (year 1)
- Align our pay and reward offer, promoting it to current staff and ensuring it is a key part of our approach to recruitment and retention (year 1)
- Develop a strategic approach to succession planning in order to identify and develop our leaders of the future (years 1-2)
- Clear development pathways identified for staff with the capability to move into a people management role for the first time (years 1-2)
- Embed our approach to recognition, including the new Employee of the Year Award (years 1-2)
- Ensure our remuneration strategies recognise performance and rewards positive behaviours
- Develop our approach to reward and recognition to ensure that it is flexible and fair but supports the council's strategic aims whilst rewarding the highest performers

- Align our recognition scheme with the behaviours in order to recognise our people who demonstrate exemplary behaviours and values in their work (years 1-2)
- Continually review and enhance the range of flexible benefits available to our people
- Enhance our approach to job evaluation system with detailed local conventions (year 1)





# REVIEW OF THE PEOPLE STRATEGY

The People Strategy will be reviewed annually by the Chief HR Officer in conjunction with the Director of Corporate Services and the Chief Executive. Progress against agreed actions will also be reviewed quarterly at meetings of the Continuous Improvement Board.

