**Recruitment and Retention**

**Ward(s)**: All

**Portfolios:** Councillor Ken Ferguson, Portfolio Holder for Internal Services

## 1.      Aim

1.1     The nature of work, the workforce and work relations are constantly being reshaped on an ongoing basis.  There is pressure from changing demographics of the workforce, technological advancement, globalisation, competition in recruitment and retention of talent, financial constraints, and overall expectations about the flexibility of work. In order to address these challenges and ensure Walsall Council has a workforce that is fit for purpose and ready to meet our immediate future and longer-term needs, we have developed a workforce strategy that aims to assist us to meet our future challenges, focusing on the following:

- Creating a positive and psychologically safe culture that encourages respect, trust, empathy, creativity, innovation and an engaged and supported workforce.
- Employer of choice, providing an inclusive working environment and attractive employment offer to support the recruitment and retention of our future workforce.
- Upskilling the workforce to meet future needs.
- Developing our future leaders.
- Promoting equitable career progression for all employees.
- Embracing digital technology to aid automation and streamlining.
- Providing a positive work-life balance and flexibility.
- Providing coaching or mentoring and regular feedback to aid development, improve performance and encourage employees to feel valued.

1.2     The benefits of a successful workforce strategy will result in improved customers and service users experience through service efficiency and quality performance.  We will ensure that the right people, skills and capabilities are in place through recruitment, selection, training and development.  We will have a motivated, high performing, empowered, engaged and diverse workforce who will actively contribute to making Walsall a great place to work and live. We will be an employer of choice, providing an inclusive working environment and attractive employment offer to attract and retain talent while improving wellbeing for all.  We will create a workforce to meet future demands, while supporting the

workforce through periods of change and equipping them with the opportunities to grow and develop.

1.3 With workforce costs making up over 21% of total council expenditure, the impact of our people is significant and a huge investment, that where nurtured and developed in a supportive and inclusive workplace will lead to creativity, innovation, continuous improvement and ultimately improved performance and service delivery for the residents of Walsall.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 Note the report contents, including the current workforce profile and future actions.

## 3. Report detail – know

3.1 We know that our workforce needs to be future fit, now and in the longer term and that in order to achieve this we need to design and continually develop a diverse and inclusive workforce that represents the Walsall Borough. Our people will be motivated, highly skilled and capable of excelling in our roles of the future and will be supported and developed to autonomously deliver the best outcomes for our residents.

**Where are we now – workforce profile (based on data as at 31 March 23)**

3.2 67.2% of the council's 3015 employees are female (compared to 51% of residents in the local population*) and 29.1% of this workforce work part time hours (i.e. less than 37 hours) – this is the lowest % of part time workers we have recorded and has been steadily falling from a high of 37% since 206/17 and 32.5% last year.

3.3 The ageing workforce nationally is demonstrated within in our workforce, with almost 1/3 of our workforce (32.2%) being aged 55+ and only 3.4% of our workforce being aged under 25.

3.4 Of the workforce who have declared their ethnicity 24.7% of these are from a Black, Asian or ethnic minority background (8.1% of the workforce have not declared), this compares to 28.6% of the local population*. The percentage of employees from a Black, Asian or ethnic minority background has steadily increased year on year over the last 6 years (from 19% in 2017).

3.5 16.9 % of our senior management roles are filled by employees from a Black, Asian or ethnic minority background, and this is an increase compared to 15.5% the previous year. 60% of our senior management roles are filled by females, a slight increase on last year (58.9%) but lower than our highest record of 64.1% in 2019.

3.6     Of the workforce who have declared disability information, 6.2% are self-classified disabled, this has increased year on year, up from 4.8% in 2017 and up from 5.6% last year (13.9% of the workforce have not declared) and compares to 9.4% of the local population*

3.7     The council do not currently have a gender pay gap, with the percentage difference in median pay for male and female employees standing at nil (0%), this is an extremely positive position in comparison to the national average gender pay gap which stands at 14.9%.

*Data Source: ONS Census 2021

**National context and the challenges**

3.8     The graph below from The Office for National Statistics, shows the change in job vacancies in recent years and how much more difficult it is for employers to recruit, and local government is not escaping this trend. The recruitment and retention challenges affect a wide range of job roles and specialisms and are compounded by the ageing work force and the complexities of managing multi-generational workforces.



Source: ONS
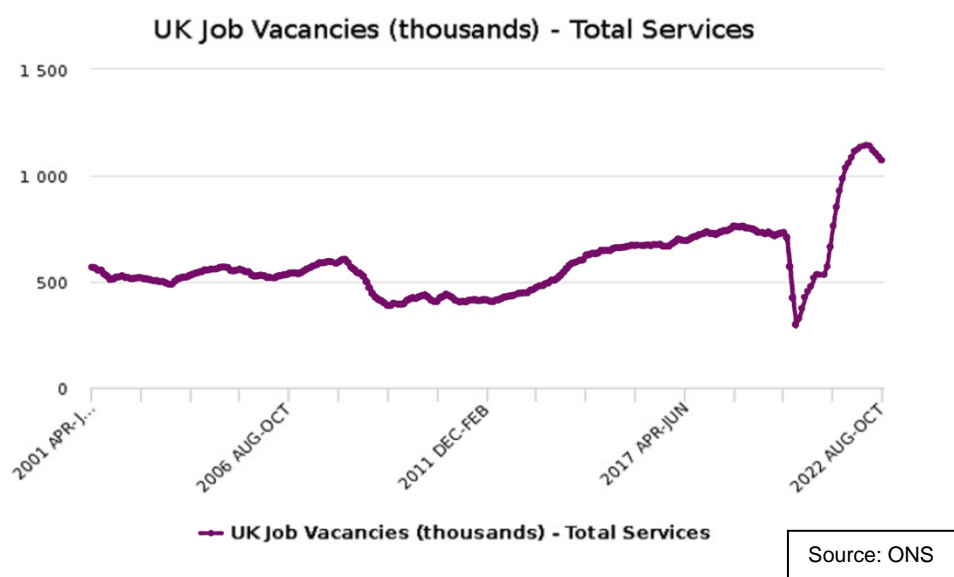
3.9     Almost half (47%) of employers have hard-to-fill vacancies, and these are most strongly felt in education (56%), transport and storage (55%), and the voluntary sector (53%). In response to ongoing recruitment and retention challenges, among employers with hard to fill vacancies, the top response has been to upskill more existing employees (41%) followed by advertising more jobs as flexible (35%) and by raising wages (29%) [CIPD Survey reported in 2022].

3.10    Our current recruitment and retention high risk areas include, children's and adult social work, specialist IT roles, public health, legal, finance, democratic services, psychologists, and part-time, front line traded employees (food preparation and cleaning).

3.11 79 employees across the council in a arrange of job roles currently receive either a market supplement or retention payment as a top up to their salary in order to address specific recruitment and retention challenges, including those in social work.

3.12 A recent Skills Gap Analysis has been conducted with over 60 members of the Senior Management Group (SMG) and this highlighted that all managers believe that they have gaps in skills within their current workforce, with several areas identifying that they have skills gaps in all the key areas. It is clear from responses that management skills are the greatest concern, followed by IT skills, as well as service specific skills and genetic softer skills.

3.13 During the Skills Gap Analysis 100% of SMG respondents identified that they are currently having difficulty recruiting certain skills, but commented it was not always appropriate to upskill existing employees and additional difficulties were encountered where there are National shortages of specific qualified workers.

3.14 Several changes were anticipated over the next 3 years, which will require current employees to upskill in some cases, using a longer-term planning model. Although the detail of many of the changes are unknown at the present time, but time and money will need to be provided to accommodate the changes in skills that will be needed. Identified changes include a focus on technology, collaboration and partnership, employee turnover and ageing workforce, transformation, legislation, external factors etc.

3.15 It is clear that an emphasis needs to be put on closing the current skills gaps, while also looking forward and working with Service Areas to anticipate future needs, so that areas can be proactive in providing development opportunities and designing their services with roles and future workforce at the forefront.

3.16 The outcomes from the Skills Gap Analysis are currently being mapped against the existing learning and development offer to help us ensure we are able to upskill those employees with the specific skills that are needed now and in the future. The Organisational Development (OD) team have taken the identified skills gaps collated during SMG earlier in the year and are cross-referencing with the current training offer, both self-paced online learning and the face-to-face learning sessions delivered by members of the team. Where gaps are evident, the team will either produce suitable training or find appropriate training that can be delivered to fill the skills gap, where demand is evident.

3.17 The Organisational Development and Workforce Strategies have been designed to reflect these known challenges, as well as other important information including our current workforce profile, employee survey results, the recent peer review challenge outcomes, the local and national context and external factors.

**Workforce Strategy Objectives**

Objective 1 – Welcoming, developing and advancing a diverse mix of individuals.

3.18 This objective focuses on the benefits that supporting equality, diversity and inclusion brings. Not only is it morally right, not only is it fair, but studies have shown that groups of people that are diverse in gender, race, disability, and age perform better together. A study by Josh Bersin and Deloitte found that inclusive companies are almost twice as likely to be considered 'innovation leaders' in their market.

3.19 The outcome we plan to achieve is a workforce that is representative of the Walsall Borough, inclusive of different backgrounds, heritages, genders, socioeconomic, disabilities and cultural diversity. Where everyone has equitable opportunities and there is a sense of safety and belonging that sees everyone feel like they are part of the Walsall Council team.

3.20 The specific actions identified with in the workforce strategy that will help us meet this objective are:

a) Develop digital solutions that improve current recruitment and selection insights to be provided to Executive Directorate Management teams (EDMTs) and Corporate Management Team (CMT) that will allow identification of patterns/trends in relation to the (none) appointment of people with protected characteristics that can be used to inform targeted actions (as required).
b) Improve the capturing and use of workplace profiling data for protected characteristics.
c) Improve availability exit data to include protected characteristics (where available) to be provided to EDMTs and CMT that will allow identification of patterns/trends in relation to the reasons for leaving that can be used to inform targeted actions (as required).
d) Increase our workforce equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) monitoring data by creating a safe and culturally sensitive environment where people feel safer to disclose personal characteristic information of their own volition through a range of positive interactions including the use of Equality Champions.
e) Develop further our Recruitment & Selection Policy in a number of areas in support of EDI, including a neurodiverse friendly interview process to promote inclusion rather than seeking to provide adjustments.
f) Develop a supportive framework for staff networks that provides a consistent approach across the organisation and feeds into the Workforce Equalities Board, with a variety of underrepresented groups within the workforce including LGBTQ+, ethnicity, disabilities including neurodiversity, and any other groups where a need is identified/supported.
g) Provide an escalation diagram for current policies and processes, for individual staff where they feel that they are not being listened to or are not receiving equitable opportunity.
h) Actively focus on encouraging applications from diverse backgrounds by using anonymised selection techniques (technology allowing), ensuring interview panels are diverse (wherever possible) and reviewing where employment opportunities are advertised.

i) Develop new EDI related employment policies including a Transgender Equality Policy and Neurodiversity Policy, ensuring adequate training is provided to people managers across the organisation.

j) As part of the marketing strategy, target areas of the community with the aim of increasing knowledge and awareness of our Council jobs of the future and actively promote our commitment to diversity and inclusion (using role models and case studies).

k) Further develop management training and resources to heighten awareness and provide activities for teams to build psychological safety, to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

l) Investigate the delivery of leadership programmes that encourage participation from underrepresented groups.

m) Review Dignity at Work and Grievance policies to ensure they are fit for purpose and that the workforce are aware of them and how to use them to resolve/address issues.

n) Monitor the impact of EDI training within the organisation and review the offer accordingly.

Objective 2 – Attract and recruit skilled, flexible and motivated individuals no and in the future.

3.21 This objective focuses on the identification of current skills gaps and hard to recruit to positions, finding new and innovative solutions to recruiting the talented people we need now and in the future.  This is crucial as we see an aging population within the current workforce. There will also be a need to predict the skills needed in the future to ensure skills gaps do not materialize and impact on the day-to-day business of the Council. The Walsall offer will be reflective of the expectations of the workforce, creating desirable roles and an attractive employment offer.

3.22 The outcome we plan to achieve is the recruitment of a workforce that hold the necessary qualifications and/or experience to perform their role, who consistently go above and beyond in the performance of their duties, providing an outstanding customer experience.  Proactive in the identification of skills that will be required in the future and ensuring that employee training is provided, or external individuals are recruited in a timely way.

3.23 The specific actions identified with in the workforce strategy that will help us meet this objective are:

a) Investigate the possibility of an employee referral programme, where employees are asked to recommend suitable candidates for vacant roles.

b) Review and consider other in-house promotional activities including work experience schemes, graduate schemes, and reviewing apprenticeship uptake.

c) Diversify outreach strategies, partnering with educational establishments and attendance at planned recruitment events delivered by service area managers and promoting existing employee attendance (to promote and share experiences).

d) Review current partnership working and investigate further opportunities for the benefit of recruitment.

e) Investigate the use of social media for the promotion of vacancies, expanding the range of audiences exposed to job vacancy advertisements and to share positive employment experiences.

f) Identify and implement an annual skills gap analysis process, to assist in identifying current and future skills gaps, as well as risks for each service area. Linking skills development required to the Learning & Development (L&D) offer.

g) Investigate the potential development of a skills academy for difficult to recruit posts.

h) Introduce a Continuous Performance Management process that concentrates on quality conversations regarding skills development, PLATE behaviours and career progression and is linked to succession planning for the team.

i) Promote informal learning, understanding lived experiences, shadowing, coaching, and mentoring by providing training on the 70:20:10 learning model to people managers to encourage personal development and progression of employees.

j) Creation of career pathways in key service areas and across the Council, to provide a transparent route for employees, so they know the specific requirements for progression.

k) Improve leavers guidance for managers to effectively capture and retain the knowledge of employee's who leave the organisation.

l) Ensure that the 'Disability Confident Employer' status is retained.

m) Marketing and promotion of the council, as an employer of choice.

n) Review the Recruitment & Selection Policy to support the provision of simple and effective processes.

Objective 3 – Maximise retention by being a good employer.

3.24 This objective focuses on the retention of knowledgeable, talented, and committed staff to the organisation by ensuring that they feel valued, recognised, and rewarded for the work that they do. By reducing the number of leavers, knowledge will be retained, and recruitment costs reduced. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, the cost to hire new employees has grown by 34% since 2009.

3.25 The outcome we plan to achieve is that the majority of the workforce is positive when discussing their employment, which is shown in improving employee survey results. When employee's leave the organisation, it is as a result of progressing their career rather than dissatisfaction with their manager, the culture, inadequate salary, lack of recognition or limited career advancement.

3.26 The specific actions identified with in the workforce strategy that will help us meet this objective are:

a) Actively monitor and manage our cultural aims, by engaging, trusting, empowering, and supporting all employees to deliver and we will demonstrate our values, through our words and our actions.

b) Engage workforce with the employee survey and in-between with focus groups to have continual feedback regarding how employees are feeling.
c) Review and then actively promote the employee benefits offer and introduce a total rewards statement.
d) Develop robust data on sickness attrition and reasons for leaving, to be provided to EDMTs and CMT and Service Areas to follow up specific actions with support from Human Resources / Organisational Development (HR/OD) as required.
e) Review the onboarding programme, developing an employee onboarding programme and a separate manager onboarding programme that sets expectations of a manager within Walsall Council.
f) Develop a cross-organisational buddy/mentor programme for new starters, so employees are making links in other service areas.
g) Create a new customer focused Ways of Working Policy and refresh the Right to Request Flexible Working Policy.
h) Scope out a pay and grading structure project, and present options for agreement with CMT.
i) Review the provision of support provided for employee's applying for progression opportunities within the council, specifically 121 coaching and workshop activities.
j) Consider different ways that managers can recognise employees and roll-out a method of recognition, such as Viva Insights.
k) Roll-out of Connected Working across an increased number of teams to improve the management capabilities of all people managers and develop a learning culture within teams.
l) L&D to focus on current skills gaps identified in the report and work with Service Areas to target areas of development.
m) An annual skills gap analysis to be undertaken, to determine L&D priorities for specific Service Areas and teams.
n) Develop a talent strategy and promote.
o) Improving and promoting the health and wellbeing offer.
p) Consult with employees to identify preferred ways of celebrating success.

**What has been delivered so far?**

3.27 Over the last 12 months, many actions that form part of and support the Organisational Development and Workforce Strategies have been progressed including the implementation of the new HR/OD restructure (July 2023). The new structure has dedicated operational and strategic functions and introduces a brand-new OD function, which has included the appointment of a dedicated Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Senior OD Advisor (Nov 2023), a Head of OD role, currently filled on an interim basis and an OB Business Partner (currently being recruited to, Nov 2023).

3.28 On 02 November the recruitment team will be go living with a brand-new recruitment module (OCR), after a number of months working on system configuration, set up and testing. As well as providing an improved and more user-friendly experience to potential candidates and internal customers the new recruitment system, as part of one source will provide improved management

information, in particular EDI monitoring in general but also as part of the selection and recruitment journey. A further EDI benefit will be the new functionality of anonymised selection by removing identifiable attributes from application forms when managers are shortlisting. The new system will also make it easier for us to reach a wider pool of candidates through wider access to social media advertising.

3.29 A new electronic exit questionnaire has been made available, which can be anonymous, and which also captures EDI monitoring data, so we can capture better information on leavers, their reason for leaving and any protected characteristics, as well as automation of the collated results for analysis and future action.

3.30 We have launched a new Workforce Equalities Board (WEB) as a subgroup of Corporate Equalities Group (CEG), that provides a safe space for issues to be raised, improves communication with the employee networks and proactively delivers EDI initiatives.  This includes a relaunch of and support for our equality champions and the creation of a framework to improve the consistency, communication and number of employee networks for underrepresented groups.

3.31 An external EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) staff forums consultant has been commissioned through the Workforce Equalities Group to assist with a 'Staff networks development day' that was held on 11/10/23.  Members of the current EDI staff networks were invited to take part in the development day where staff forums were discussed in detail.  Feedback and learning from the event are currently being compiled, with a view to go out to the wider workforce to gain their views about the staff networks they would like to see and be involved in.

3.32 A number of internal Equality Champion taster events have been timetabled over the recent weeks and 20 staff to date have completed an expression of interest form to undertake the Equality Champions training in November.  As the name suggest, these will be key staff that will champion EDI across the organisation and be points of contact for the workforce that have concerns or require support.
Work is also underway to develop a process for raising informal EDI issues that a member of the workforce needs help with and can be dealt with informally. Therefore, reducing the chances of the issue developing into something more formal.

3.33 The HR strategic team have delivered reviews of a number of EDI related policies identified through the workforce strategy, including the Code of Conduct, the Confidential Reporting Policy, Family Friendly Policy, Menopause Policy and the Leave and Time Off Policy (2022/23). In September 2023 we also launched a brand-new Ways of Working Policy and refreshed our Right to Request Flexible Working Policy. In addition, the team have drafted 2 brand new policies that are due for consultation (Nov 2023), a Transgender and Non-binary Equality Policy and a Neurodiversity Policy. Further policies currently

under review (2024 launch) in support of this agenda are the Dignity at Work and Grievance Policies and the Recruitment & Selection Policy.

3.34 Our apprenticeship scheme continues to grow year on year and currently (Oct 2023) we have 326 employees completing an apprenticeship with a 98% rate for retaining new apprentice recruits post apprenticeship. Our recent apprenticeship recruitment campaign was so successful, Children's Services have increased the number of social work placements to 9 by converting a number of currently unfilled vacancies. In addition, we have also just launched our brand-new supported internship programme for those aged 16-24 with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

3.35 As part of the West Midlands Regional Workforce Strategy we launched a new and improved temporary worker managed service provision in October 2023 which will support the Council's Workforce Strategy and will assist us with not only attracting quality and quantity of candidates but also focuses on the longer-term goal of a reduced temporary workforce and increased temporary to permanent conversion.

3.36 Earlier in the year we launched a pilot development programme called 'Accelerating Diverse Talent', which was a development course specifically targeting at those from Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority Backgrounds. This was viewed by attendees as a positive and with feedback from the sessions we are currently reviewing this offer, with the hope of further extending and widening the offer across all underrepresented groups.

3.37 The 'Connected Working' offer has been successfully implemented within and across a number of services with positive feedback and proven results, including specific sessions on psychological safety rolled out in a number of areas including Clean and Green.

3.38 The extent of recent progress made against our workforce strategy, in particular developments in support of our Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda was recognised in the recent revisit of the peer challenge review, who specifically highlighted EDI as an area where progress has already been evident.

**What is our focus for the next 6-12 months?**

3.39 Fill all the outstanding vacancies within the HR/OD function to complete the implemented restructure.

3.40 Deliver and launch the final versions of the following strategies/policies:

- External Workforce Strategy
- Transgender and Non-binary Equality Policy
- Neurodiversity Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Grievance Policies
- Recruitment & Selection Policy

3.41 Projects will also commence on a number of reviews we have committed to:

- An improved employee benefits offer to help attract and retain employees.
- A fit for purpose pay and grading structure.
- An improved and consolidated health and well-being offer.

3.42 There are a number of projects underway within OD to further develop and improve processes and activities already in place. These include the following:

- Reviewing what and how the corporate induction programme is delivered, to place a greater emphasis on the induction of managers.
- Reviewing the Leadership and Management training offer to ensure training is available for all levels of managers or aspiring managers regardless of level or experience and ensuring that we are at the forefront of L&M development.
- Putting a greater emphasis on 'growing our own talent' through the provision of career development support for individuals who want to or are applying for progression opportunities and looking at career pathways within the Council.
- The development of an OD SharePoint site that the workforce can access easily and within 2 clicks find what they are looking for in terms of support, resources and learning opportunities. Organisational Development - Home (sharepoint.com)

3.43 As a result of feedback regarding the current Annual Performance Conversation (APC), a small pilot project has been conducted, using Continuous Performance Management (CPM) methodology. Feedback has been received by the participants and a report written which will go through the Enabling Communication and Culture Proud workstream. The expectation is that these pieces of work and projects will result in positive changes and outcomes as identified and will benefit the whole workforce with changes being implemented within the next 6 months.

**4**. *Financial information*

N/A

*5.* *Reducing Inequalities*

Detailed in the main body of the report and the supporting documents.

**6.** **Decide**

Report is for note and updating members. No decision required.

**7.** **Respond**

The workforce strategy will comprise of a number of actions in support of its delivery and depending on the complexity and decision-making requirements of each, these will be reported up through Corporate Management Team to Personnel Committee as necessary for comment or approval as applicable. The actions will be progressed through the Human Resources and Organisational Development workplan under the governance of the Enabling Culture & Communications Proud Workstream.


**8.** **Review**

The workforce strategy is a 3-year strategic plan (2023-2026) that will be reviewed and updated as necessary on an ongoing basis.


**Background papers**

Organisational Development - OD Strategy document
Workforce Strategy
Employment Monitoring Report Corporate 2022/23
Apprenticeship Update October 2023


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