

Staff Strategy 2023 - 2027





**Message from the Leader of the Council,
Councillor Susan Juned and the Chief Executive,
David Buckland**



Our staff are the most important assets we have. This strategy has been developed in recognition of the huge challenges facing local government and our District. The resources available to the sector are increasingly limited however expectations about what we can deliver keep growing.

This strategy considers all aspects of the ambition to retain our current staff and attract new staff to the Council in becoming “an employer of choice”. It is acknowledged that the Council faces constraints on issues including pay, however, this is just one element of the package that comes from working with Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

We will be exploring new benefits the Council can provide staff and maintaining those which are already important to staff. We will extend the salary sacrifice scheme and will be increasing the resources that we have in investing in the skills and development of our staff.

The Council is in the process of developing the new Council Plan. We need to ensure that the Council is flexible to help deliver not just the challenges of today, but those we do not know yet for the future.

Background and Context

Stratford-on-Avon District Council is a large rural area, covering 977 square kilometres and the 2021 mid-year population estimate shows that we have 135,964 residents. We have one of the highest percentage growths in population in the country since the last Census, however, we also have a large number of residents who are above the age of retirement.

The Council has a diverse service portfolio, including customer services, regulatory functions, as well as support services.

The Council currently employs 316 staff (281.49 Full Time Equivalents). The majority of staff are employed at the Council's Headquarters, Elizabeth House. Following the COVID pandemic the Council has implemented a hybrid working policy which requires staff to be in the office for at least 40% of their working week.

The Council has an aging workforce, almost half of staff are over 50, this figure has increased from 35% in 2006. Succession planning therefore is an extremely important issue to the Council.

The Council has faced difficulty in recruiting to specialist roles across the whole of the Council services. The Council is not alone in these challenges and even when market forces supplements are applied the Council has still struggled to appoint. It is therefore clear that the Council needs to reconsider its approach and we see the value in growing our own as a strategy to fill some of these challenging areas.

The Council has a very committed and loyal workforce. Every two years the Council undertakes a survey of staff, the results from this exercise go towards making improvements in the way that we operate. The main findings from the last survey were as follows:

- Most of the staff believe that there are real opportunities at the Council to develop a long-term career,
- A very high level of agreement that managers make allowances for the demands of employees' home lives,
- 85% of staff agree that their line manager ensures that they have the skills needed to do their job,
- Staff are listened to with 89% of staff in agreement and Managers are approachable 91%,
- There are high levels of trust with senior managers, however, this has slipped recently,
- Just over six out of ten staff feel their views are listened to by the organisation,
- Only 51% of staff agreed they could get their job done within their contracted hours.

The Council has enormous potential, and this staff strategy will address a number of these underlying issues so that we continue to have a dedicated, skilled and well-motivated workforce.

OUR PEOPLE

WORKFORCE NUMBERS

Headcount 316
Full Time Equivalent 281.49

30.7% of our employees work part time



GENDER



Gender Breakdown
65.5% females
34.5% males

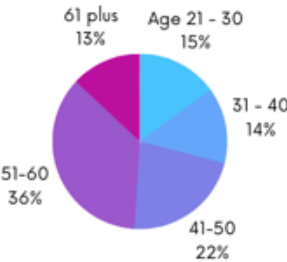
Gender Pay Gap* (median)
21.5%

(*The gender pay gap is an equality measure that shows the difference in average earnings between women and men)

AGE

- Employees aged 50 and over make up 49% of employees
- Our employees average age is 47
- We have no employees aged 20 or under

Age Profile



DISABILITY

13% of our employees have declared a disability

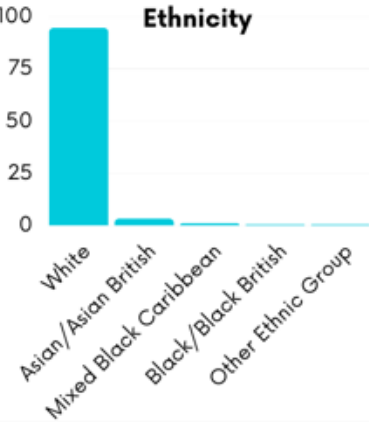
LENGTH OF SERVICE

31% of our employees have worked with us for more than 11 years

ETHNICITY

- Of those staff who told us their ethnic background, 5.52% of our employees are from a minority ethnic background
- 4.5% of the Stratford District population are from a minority ethnic background

Ethnicity



ALL DATA IS AS AT 1 SEPTEMBER 2023, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE GENDER PAY GAP WHICH IS NATIONALLY MEASURED AT 31 MARCH 2023.

Staff Strategy Vision

Our vision is to attract and retain a skilled, developed, diverse and engaged workforce who are committed to delivering excellent outcomes in an environment that is supportive, inclusive and fair.

We will be an employer of choice.

Our Values

Fit for our future

Our values

Integrity Trust Approachability Adaptability

We will live these values and ...

- Integrity**
 - Do the 'right thing'
 - Learn from mistakes
 - Be considerate
 - Be accountable
- Trust**
 - Be fair and honest
 - Develop trusting relationships
 - Treat people with respect
- Approachability**
 - Be accessible
 - Always try to help
 - Show empathy
- Adaptability**
 - Have a 'can-do' approach
 - Endeavour to find the best solutions
 - "Get stuff done"
 - Have a flexible attitude

...to support our aim to be a district which provides a better quality of life for all who live, work or visit

How we Developed the Strategy

The key priorities for the Strategy have been developed following a series of focus groups with new and long-serving staff at all levels of the organisation, both managers and officers. We also ran two all staff surveys. Views were also sought from Unison, our recognised trade union, and councillors sitting on both the Employment Committee and the Joint Negotiating and Consultation Group (JCNG). The Council workforce demographic and metrics have also been analysed to provide a helpful insight.

Our Key Priorities

Recognising not every issue can be tackled immediately, we have identified the key areas where we think we can have the biggest positive impact.

The areas which will be the focus of our work will be:

- Culture
- Workforce Planning and Resourcing
- Staff Development
- Rewards and Recognition
- Staff Health and Wellbeing
- Staff Engagement
- Working Environment

This Strategy will outline the key objectives and actions, with further detail included in an associated Action Plan.

Our Key Areas



CULTURE

Objective: To ensure that we maintain a positive and professional culture and working environment where staff feel that they can be confident in themselves at work, be valued for their contribution and feel a sense of belonging.

Our culture is the foundation of the Council and drives how our people interact with each other and how they feel about the working environment. We know that Stratford-on-Avon DC is a very supportive employer, and we want to build upon this. Once working for the Council, the culture can have a big impact on the decisions staff make to stay working with us. In our last staff survey three-quarters of staff told us that they feel proud to work for the Council. Focus groups told us that the culture is *“happy, supportive, with a family atmosphere and approachable management”*.

We hold a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and want to take further steps to demonstrate this to both our existing and potential staff.

Although our culture is strong, we need to work hard to maintain the trust that staff have in the Council and continue to encourage feedback from staff about how we can continually improve.

We also recognise that our managers and leaders have a big role to play in setting the tone and the culture of the Council, and we will pro-actively ensure that anyone who is responsible for staff understands the importance.

What we will do:

- Review the Terms of Reference and re-launch the Respect Champions Group.
- Maintain existing accreditation, such as Disability Confident status.
- Consider appropriate accreditation from other respected external bodies.
- Review the Single Equality Scheme, ensuring that we embed equality, diversity and inclusion into everything we do as a workforce and for our communities.
- Commit to continuing to engage with staff through a staff survey at least every two years.

Workforce Planning and Resourcing

Objective: To attract and retain a diverse range of people with great skills, experiences and attitude.

Across all sectors the marketplace for recruiting and retaining people is becoming increasingly difficult with a high level of competition. Our research shows that in the last year it has been difficult to attract applicants across all professions and levels of the Council. We need to think creatively to ensure we can attract the best people to work with us, and to recognise that continuing with traditional recruitment methods is not giving us what we need.

Prior to the pandemic, the Council's 'unique selling point' (USP) was our offer of 'flexible working'; this has now become the norm within many work places. In addition, our workforce demographic is aging, and we need to pro-actively ensure that we challenge our traditional recruitment methods to ensure that we can attract and retain a new generation of local government officers. Focus groups identified that what makes the Council stand out from other employers is our welcoming, supportive and open culture, and we need to capture this in our branding and advertising.

What we will do:

- Develop 'employer branding' to ensure that all advertising is reflective of our culture with a cohesive and clear offer.
- Review recruitment methods to ensure we are reaching candidates from all ages and backgrounds.
- Review our selection methods to ensure that we can test a range of skills and behaviours to get a great fit for the Council.
- Implement a framework for managing agency workers and use them appropriately alongside our permanent and fixed term workforce.
- Be innovative in our approach to organisational design.

Staff Development

Objective: To provide an appropriate range of development opportunities at all levels, improving opportunities for progression and succession planning.

Offering appropriate training and development opportunities both to potential and existing employees ensures that we can attract motivated people and retain them, harnessing their strengths for the benefit of our residents. Our history of supporting development is good, but we need to continue to review, reflect and re-focus on what we need going forward. We now expect more of our middle and senior managers than ever before and must ensure that we provide a broad range of development opportunities to ensure that they can support and manage their teams. The expectations on the Council are growing and we need to ensure that staff have the range of skills available to meet new challenges.

Focus groups told us that opportunities to progress can be limited even though an employee might be very motivated to stay with the Council to develop their career. We have also identified that the opportunities for school, college or university leavers are very limited as we don't have a corporate apprenticeship or trainee scheme.

What we will do:

- Develop an apprenticeship scheme ensuring full use of the apprenticeship levy.
- Make the best use of the apprenticeship levy for existing/internal staff development.
- Review the appraisal scheme.
- Ensure adequate resources for the post entry training scheme (professional training).
- Refresh our internal mentoring scheme and promote the regional coaching and mentoring pool.
- Consider how career graded posts and pathways can be used and developed as a best practice standard.
- Commission leadership and management development interventions to ensure that all managers and aspiring managers have the skills to pro-actively manage and develop their teams.
- Ensure all staff are aware of the development opportunities open to them.

Rewards and Recognition

Objective: To maximise the total rewards package to ensure a valuable offer that will aid with recruitment and retention of staff.

The Council is part of the national collective pay bargaining arrangement and is committed to maintaining this position as part of the local government family. We also operate a job evaluation scheme to ensure equal pay across our job roles. Whilst we therefore have limited opportunity to enhance pay, we are able to look at enhancing other financial and non-financial rewards. We already have a good range of benefits, but these would benefit from being reviewed with a view to enhancing them where we can. Given the staff will have different personal positions we want to ensure that the benefits on offer are motivational for all.

What we will do:

- Develop a 'total rewards' offer which provides a broad range of financial and non-financial rewards to aid attraction and retention.
- Retain and extend our current salary sacrifice offer.
- Review the existing BUPA Health Expenses scheme.
- Seek to maximise the additional benefits which could be offered to staff.

Staff Health and Wellbeing

Objective: To encourage a culture where health and wellbeing of staff is actively supported.

The Council have a history of supporting its staff with health and wellbeing, from a pro-active occupational health service to BUPA health expenses, and 24/7 counselling and a flexi time scheme. We recognise that since the pandemic, sickness absence has increased to above pre-pandemic levels and in particular the number of staff absent for mental health reasons is increasing. We also recognise that 49% of our workforce is over the age of 50 and so may have increased health needs. We are committed to providing a good range of support for staff who may have health and wellbeing needs. It is also recognised that with 65.5% of our workforce being female, the impact of perimenopause and menopause should not be under-estimated. We will seek to pro-actively support employees either going through this themselves or supporting someone else who is going through this perimenopause or menopause.

What we will do:

- Review the Terms of Reference and re-launch the Wellbeing Champions Group.
- Review the Terms of Reference and re-launch the Mental Health First Aiders.
- Review the benefits which support health and wellbeing.
- Review of the Attendance at Work Procedure.
- Review of the Occupational Health provision.
- Introduce a corporate approach to supporting colleagues going through or supporting someone else going through perimenopause and menopause.
- Commit to the ongoing counselling service available to all staff across the Council.
- Deliver a broad range of events and learning opportunities for staff to support health and wellbeing in a wide variety of areas.

Staff Engagement

Objective: To ensure that staff feel part of the Council, ensuring two-way communication and opportunities to contribute views to decisions that affect them.

We recognise that the Staff Strategy is something that must be owned by the whole Council, and not simply a Human Resources document. Therefore, we will set up a Staff Steering Group with representation from across the Council to work together to guide the implementation of the Staff Strategy.

Staff Surveys have shown that we are improving how we communicate and engagement with staff, and we want to continue to develop this further. In addition, regular opportunities for staff to share their views will continue with Chief Executive Staff Briefings and the staff suggestion/comments box.

We have a very good relationship with Unison, our recognised trade union, but we acknowledge that a large proportion of our workplace are not Unison members. With that in mind we will explore the potential for a staff group to add even more value to the conversations we have with Unison.

What we will do:

- Set up a Staff Steering Group to assist in the implementation of the Staff Strategy
- Explore the potential for a 'staff consultation group' that would support the consultation already undertaken with our recognised trade union, Unison.
- Continue to ensure that staff are well informed about the broad issues that the Council is facing, using the Staff Briefings, Service Managers Forum and Management Team Core Briefs.
- Review the accessibility of staff information.

Working Environment

Objective: To ensure that the working environment meets the expectations of staff in being a modern and professional office.

The Council has occupied Elizabeth House since 1985, and significant investment has been made in the building over the years. As we embrace hybrid working the area that the Council will need to occupy is expected to reduce, however, when staff attend the office, this needs to be a positive and productive experience. Several changes to the open plan area have already taken place including decorating, replacement 'daylight' lighting and lockers for staff.

The Council will maintain and enhance the existing offices and invest in facilities which will improve this experience.

What we will do:

- Ensure that the office space remains a high standard and that equipment for staff is up to date and fit for purpose.
- Develop an outside space for staff to enjoy on rest breaks.
- Invest in improvements to the third-floor staff lounge.
- Continue to provide free hot drinks machines for staff and visitors.

Staff Strategy Action Plan

An operational Action Plan will accompany the Staff Strategy which will set out in detail the projects to be undertaken. This action plan will be a live document which can evolve as needs or priorities change.

How Will We Monitor the Strategy

The Staff Strategy Action Plan will be monitored quarterly by Management Team, and JCNG and Employment Committee twice yearly.