



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council



# Workforce Strategy

## 2021 - 2026

Working Together  
to Deliver Success



Respect



Innovate



Collaborate



Deliver

# Introduction

1. The year 2020, will be remembered for many years as the year a pandemic changed and touched everyone in both their working and personal lives and in many unexpected ways.
2. Working practices changed overnight, some were modernised for the better for many services and our workforce rose to the challenge of supporting both our community in their time of need as well as fellow colleagues.
3. Our already embedded culture of adapting to change was tested and became a greater focus, to ensure that we remained inclusive, worked together and delivered essential services in an unprecedented period of change and uncertainty. However, this period also offered opportunities and a positivity which can be harnessed and developed further to offer better future working practices.
4. Throughout 2020, our established connections locally and wider across the Tees Valley and North East were strengthened supporting our workforce to deliver quality services to our community. We also continue to develop positive relationships with other Government agencies, partners, volunteer groups, local businesses and charities. The pandemic also created new connections and partnerships which can be enhanced and developed further complimenting the workforce efforts to support our community.
5. In the winter of 2019/2020, the workforce engaged in focus groups to review the Core Values, share their views on the future working environment, the overall Council 'offer' and what it is like to work for the Council. These focus groups, alongside other programmes, have shaped this Workforce Strategy and the associated workforce plan. The former Workforce Strategy was due to be renewed in April 2020, however, this was held due to the COVID response taking priority.

## What is the Workforce Strategy?

6. The Workforce Strategy (WFS) links to and supports the Council's strategic priorities by identifying what the workforce needs to look like now and in the next five years.
7. Essentially, it is a strategy supported with a plan to make sure we have the right people, with the right talent and skills at a time when we need them to deliver our services. Balancing cost is also a key factor when looking to get the right workforce in place, and this is why it is important to try to forecast our future capacity requirements.
8. The WFS should not be a strategy that is written and placed on file once agreed, it should be a picture of the journey that we are taking as a workforce and be a live document that is reflective of our workforce's understanding of where we need to grow, develop and in some cases improve.

# The Workforce Plan

9. The strategy is supported by the Workforce Plan which sets out the activities that we are proposing to deliver alongside the required development of the workforce both in terms of their skills and behaviours. The activities are built around the following themes;
  - a. Good Leadership and Management
  - b. Skills and Behaviours (Competences) and Workforce Capacity
  - c. Recruitment and Retention
  - d. Pay, Reward and Recognition
  - e. Innovation and Creativity
  - f. Wellbeing and Engagement to Promote and Maintain a Safe and Healthy Workforce
  - g. Performance and Change
10. The plan will build on assessing where we are now and where we need to get to by 2025. It will take into account a wide range of service proposals which will be constantly refined and tailored to meet the needs of the service and our community.
11. Individual services should assess future workforce needs on a proactive basis to enable plans to be put in place to ensure we have the right people with the right skills to achieve the desired outcomes and objectives, all within the framework of our Core Values. This must be an ongoing activity as changes and opportunities are presented.

# Our Workforce

12. We currently employ in the region of 2000 people across the three service groups, and we welcome approximately 200 new starters per year to the Council. Our employees are fully committed to ensuring that they deliver quality services. The skillset of our employees crosses a vast range of administrative, technical managerial, specialist and practical roles.
13. Our workforce is made up of five generations including those born before 1946, the Silent Generation, those born between 1946 and 1964 who are known as the Baby Boomers, Generation X born between 1965 and 1980, the Millennials born between 1981 and 1996 and Generation Z born after 1997. We welcome the diversity that this range of life experience brings to the workplace.
14. We promote collaboration and celebrate the success of a diverse workforce, as we also encourage and support personal growth, work-life balance and wellbeing. We are an Age Positive employer, a Mindful Employer and a Disability Confident Employer.
15. 62% of our workforce is female. We are committed to monitoring our gender pay gap and providing a level playing field so both males and females can be recognised and supported to do their best. This is achieved with the right policies and structures in place to support our diverse and integrated workforce.
16. We aim to mainstream equality in line with all the nine protected characteristics and promote a positive attitude to all equality matters including those which we have prioritised at a local level, and aim to eliminate harassment, victimisation and discrimination in the workplace.

## What is our journey from 2020 to 2025?

17. We have been successful in recent years investing in the borough and the workforce. Over the last 5 years we have invested in managers giving them the skills to manage effectively on a day to day basis. We have given employees the ability to engage with all levels of the Council services and developed employee initiatives, which support the 'whole employee' to come to work in a healthy and safe environment. Key priorities have included wellbeing, communication and resilience of our workforce at every level, these will remain a high priority in all strands of the Workforce Plan in the next five years.
18. The Council is not cash rich but we have managed a balanced budget over two MTFP periods and have been particularly creative and transformational in our ideas, being risk aware and making balanced decisions including how we do business, when we do business and why we make the decisions that we do. These successes have been achieved and driven by a collaborative workforce.
19. The challenges for the next five years are to continue to grow, build on lessons learnt, alongside good management of resources. There are also key developments from recent times enabling us to grow further, including having a greater proportion of our workforce working agilely. Service Groups need to solve problems and challenges together and despite the continued uncertainty, we need to stay business focused, flexible, adaptive and innovative as one workforce. To do this we need an engaged, motivated and resilient workforce, that is customer focused. All these elements make-up and are inherent in the Council values.

# Our Values

20. Our values are not just words, they mean something to our employees, the meanings can be slightly varied but the sentiment is the same. The values are at the heart of what we do as a workforce. What is interesting is that the Values that were identified in 2012, were again validated by our employees and the trade unions to be still relevant and identifiable for the challenges that we face today.
21. The Values were explored at length in focus groups made up of a cross section of the workforce. The output from the engagement was interesting with an underlying consistency that the Values already identified, even if not exactly the same words, are still relevant.

The core values are therefore:



## Where are we going?

22. Throughout 2020 due to the pandemic, like other local Councils we have been challenged to make quick decisions and deliver on unexpected outcomes, in a backdrop of uncertainty, limited resources and guidance.
23. Our workforce has risen to this challenge and have proved that they are adaptable, resourceful and innovative. The future business model needs to continue to engage with the workforce at all levels, to ensure all employees have the opportunity to contribute to solve challenges and are part of the change management processes.
24. Many employees have changed their substantive roles, whether this is as a result of reallocation due to job roles or services not being viable, the day job had to change focus to deal with the pandemic priorities. Employees have stepped up, learnt new skills, worked with other services and formed valuable internal contacts, that would not have been made without the necessity to work collaboratively. It is important to remember that these new skills can benefit all services and this model of collaboration needs to continue.
25. Employees have been trusted and empowered during the pandemic to greater levels than before. From these new skill sets and learning, succession planning and talent management may need to be reviewed as we grow our own managers, senior managers and future leaders.

26. Agile working and new ways of working are a key driver and vision for the future workforce. Whilst not everyone can work from home, promotion of flexible working options can be reinforced for all staff (we offer the right to request flexible working to all employees from day one of employment) and we need to ensure that the new opportunities that have presented themselves are explored for services that were not formally there. Many office and support functions as well as some front line workers are likely to be able to enjoy a blended approach to the ways that they work with the community, partners, services users and their colleagues. Technology will be a key driver and aid the development of future working practices and the life of the workforce plan needs to develop as the technology offer grows.
27. Our finances continue to be challenged, despite being issued with Government grants to support the pandemic, these have not covered nor will they in the future, all the expenditure that we have incurred as a result of supporting essential services. The workforce has been equally challenged in terms of resilience and extra pressure, but all have coped amazingly.
28. The future of work now needs to not be reset to the former 'normal' but to a new pathway, which harnesses the new technologies and ways of working we have developed, started or can see opportunities for in the future. These need to be exploited for the benefit of the business alongside investing in the workforce to understand and use / undertake new ways of working, to be able to deliver a better and sometimes different offer to our residents. We also need to guide our residents through these changes and manage their expectations, that have also likely changed in the last year. The key is to attract talent going forward, retain good staff and invest in their future, aligning to the business needs.

## How the Workforce Strategy and Plan link to wider Council Strategies

29. It is easy to say that everything that we do leads to the bigger picture, and it is sometimes hard to believe, but it really does.
30. Like the story of the NASA janitor when President John F Kennedy visited their headquarters. The President asked the janitor carrying a broom 'what are you doing?' to which the janitor responded 'I am helping put a man on the moon'.
31. No employee in the Council is 'just a ...' there is a role for everyone with a job purpose that indirectly or directly supports the residents of Darlington and links with the strategic aims of the Council Plan – Delivering Success for Darlington.
32. Whether that be a Social Worker working directly with vulnerable families, a Trading Standards Officer ensuring that our businesses are inspected and residents are receiving fair and legitimate services and goods, a life guard at the Dolphin Centre protecting swimmers in the pool, a Street Scene Operative collecting refuse or fly tips ensuring we live in a clean safe environment, a Finance Assistant uploading invoices to ensure that our suppliers are paid, a Town Hall Assistant running our postal service to ensure that as a business we can receive and send mail. All these roles collectively support our community and deliver the strategic aims that have been identified in the Council Plan.

33. Every employee needs development and is entitled to a voice within the Council. Our policies and procedures ensure this, they are fit for the business and are non-discriminatory. Our local offer and employee benefits will continue to be inclusive, supportive and competitive. As a Council we want to remain a 'good' employer where employees continue to be proud to work for us, advocating the Council as a good employer.
34. As we move through the next five years, the Digital Darlington Programme, which is largely a customer facing strategy, will challenge some of the internal services that currently work on limited digital platforms. We need to continue to identify efficiencies in a considered and phased approach, taking our community on the journey. Alongside this will be the workforce that will be required to make changes too, as we continue to work more digitally and efficiently where appropriate.
35. Managers need to learn and develop their skills as they adapt to different connectivity, productivity and engagement techniques as part of managing multiple teams in different locations. Work should be seen as an activity not a work location, as we begin a journey of greater flexibility and more agile working options for a larger proportion of our workforce.
36. Many teams need to be more technically agile with a greater virtual and online presence. This will be a new skill set for some and technology should not be a hindrance, good communication, good management and engagement are still essential.
37. Training and development of our workforce will be a challenge in terms of format as more employees work virtually. Training is moving more online for many but the offer still needs to be engaging and designed to be practical and maintain relevance, many face to face training offers will need to be redesigned. This offers opportunities for a more creative solution which can reach more of our workforce in a timely manner.

## Measures of Success and Monitoring

38. There will be numerous ways of measuring the success of the Workforce Strategy and Workforce Plan. It will include monitoring the overall culture and mood of the workforce / Council, service plans, individual outputs of employees, as agreed in their Performance Development Reviews (PDR), the competencies and behaviours that are demonstrated and everyday dynamic decision making.
39. We want a culture which is inclusive that supports the strategies and objectives that we aim to achieve. This will be measured by workforce engagement and from resident's feedback on our services.
40. The measuring and monitoring of key performance indicators are also a good barometer of our workforce performance and play an active part in the success of the workforce strategy. Monitoring of staff turnover, sickness absence management and completion of PDRs all contribute to the measurement of the Workforce Plan's outcome deliverables.

## Good Leadership and Management

### **We will continue our good practice and prioritise actions in respect of;**

- a. Managers leading by example and upholding the values and positive culture through the review of management structures to respond to changing pressures .
- b. Provide clear direction and remind managers of our leadership and culture and expected competencies and behaviours.
- c. Continue to ensure that we equip our managers with the right skills, practical advice and train and develop them, allowing them to create environments which enable them to be effective in their roles.
- d. Managers demonstrating compassionate leadership and management where appropriate and ensure that informal processes are adopted as soon as possible to avoid formal interventions and ensuring that employee concerns are managed timely.
- e. Maintaining effective employee relations in a climate where managers and leaders are able to motivate and engage with employees effectively.
- f. Using a range of employee communication that is timely, engages and informs staff of issues affecting them personally, the services they work for and relevant wider Council and community issues.
- g. Benchmark our management and leadership culture with bi-annual employee surveys.
- h. Develop a suite of e-learning packages to compliment other forms of training for managers.
- i. Ensure that managers are equipped with the skills to be digitally agile and work effectively, ensuring they connect with their teams, when working in a remote environment.
- j. Strive to ensure that HR policies are clear, consistent and fit for purpose.
- k. Enhance the digital information and data management offer for managers so team information is more readily available via Resource Link and other management tools, which will assist in the management of team members.
- l. Equip managers and teams with the skills to deliver good services that are customer focused and responsive.

### **We then anticipate outcomes such as;**

- a. Leadership skills will be clearly demonstrated consistently.
- b. Potential future leaders and managers are identified, and talent can be developed accordingly.
- c. Employee survey results and exit surveys evidence that employees feel empowered, valued and proud to work for Darlington as a result of good management and engagement.
- d. Fewer formal performance management / capability and disciplinary processes are implemented.
- e. Change is managed in a positive and proactive manner; evidenced by survey results and manager / employee and trade union feedback.
- f. HR policies evolve and respond to legislative changes and best practice to meet business and service needs.
- g. Good feedback from internal and external customers / service users that services are responsive, communicate well and offer a quality customer service.



## Skills and Behaviours (Competences) and Workforce Capacity

### **We will continue our good practice and prioritise actions in respect of;**

- a. Consistent use of the PDR framework ensuring it is followed and is meaningful, offering support and development where required.
- b. Appropriate use and promotion of Apprenticeships, Work Experience, Secondments etc. to meet workforce capacity issues.
- c. Continue to manage agency workers and volunteers to ensure that they are quality ambassadors for the Council and meet the needs of services at the right time.
- d. Reformat job descriptions to complement the performance development review framework, assist with effective recruitment and embed behaviours into the recruitment process.
- e. Identification of quality development opportunities to enhance and address skills and capacity issues, including exploring partner and community-based opportunities.
- f. Allow managers to understand and implement limitations to services, for example to have the ability to say 'no' and challenge pressure that is excessive or not conducive to future delivery or sustainable.
- g. Ensure that employees are aware of the Values and competency framework and that these are understood by all and embedded into all processes.
- h. Ensure Values are known and reflected in day to day behaviours.

### **We then anticipate outcomes such as;**

- a. Learning and skills development are delivered to maximise provision in the most effective way.
- b. Outcomes from learning and development activities are clearly linked to priorities and demonstrated to add specific value.
- c. Individual performance is demonstrably improved through development of skills.
- d. Individual development aspirations are improved through the opportunities provided. This may mean identifying opportunities or experiencing other working environments.

## Recruitment, Retention and Career Development

### **We will continue our good practice and prioritise actions in respect of;**

- a. Ensure the shape and size of the organisation is fit for purpose, sustainable for projected needs and flexible enough to be responsive to change.
- b. Tight vacancy control and ER/VR requests considering succession planning and talent management.
- c. Offer managers appropriate support in designing structures to meet the needs of services.
- d. Robust Redeployment and Redundancy selection process with appropriate support for all managers and employees.
- e. Help staff leave the organisation with dignity, fairness and integrity.
- f. Monitoring exit surveys and exit interview information to ensure appropriate consideration is given to any suggested areas of improvement.
- g. Ensure the right policies and procedures are in place to balance retention with the need to recruit people with new skills and expertise.
- h. Ensure our approach to recruitment and retention encourages and nurtures talent, either through direct employment or other delivery models and recognises customer expectations.
- i. Promote and embed flexible working / agile working practices across the Council to support different styles of work and help attract the widest possible range of people.
- j. Optimise the transactional recruitment process.
- k. Ensure that our employer brand is continually improved as part of recruitment and retention activities.

### **We then anticipate outcomes such as:**

- a. Recruitment processes which are timely and effective and meet the needs of individual services.
- b. Attracting a greater number of quality candidates with the appropriate skills and experience to quickly meet service requirements and expectations.
- c. Greater opportunities for home grown talent in the organisation from future investments in Apprenticeships.
- d. Employees leaving the organisation proud of their achievements and consider Darlington a good place to work for their future careers too.
- e. Employees are keen to strive to develop themselves.
- f. Reduced turnover in key skills areas.

## Pay, Reward and Recognition

### **We will continue our good practice and prioritise actions in respect of;**

- a. Offering an affordable all-round package of Terms and Conditions of employment and keep Terms and Conditions under regular review in line with MTFP.
- b. Fair means of assessing job grades via the agreed Job Evaluation schemes and pay policy.
- c. Use of market supplements and market retentions, where justified and subject to regular review.
- d. Ensure that our policies and practices are legally compliant and up to date with best practice.
- e. Ensure that managers get to know their team members and use emotional intelligence to motivate and recognise employees' strengths on an individual basis.
- f. All employees should have a good foundation to do their best when they start their day's work.
- g. Maximise further non cost employee benefits i.e. salary sacrifice schemes etc.
- h. Reviews of benefits / terms such as flexi-time scheme and agile/flexible working options which may be less favourable than other neighbouring Council's and are key to attracting employees to Darlington roles.
- i. Communicate total reward package to ensure employees fully understand what it contains.
- j. Embed the timely use of PDRs, 1:1's that include "thank you" into our culture and ensure that this is not lost when working virtually.
- k. All employees to act as ambassadors of services in times of financial pressures, dispelling 'myths' and communicating the services that are on offer in a quality and consistent manner.
- l. Elected members continue to demonstrate/ encourage public support for the workforce.

### **We then anticipate outcomes such as:**

- a. Employees understand the totality of their employment package.
- b. Quality contributions by services or individuals is recognised and are appreciated.
- c. Approach to total reward is refreshed and up to date.
- d. The total employment bill is sustainable and fair given the financial climate.
- e. That the approach to pay and reward is fair and transparent.
- f. Any new service delivery models protect the Council's commitment to fair Terms and conditions and working practices.

## Innovation and Creativity

### **We will continue our good practice and prioritise actions in respect of;**

- a. Encouraging employees to participate in new ideas and suggestions both for their own work area and wider Council service issues.
- b. Ensure managers encourage suggestions and innovative working as part of 1-2-1's, team meetings etc. and escalate / cascade as appropriate to others.
- c. Ensure that managers follow up on suggestions made and empower employees to implement where feasible and where there is capacity to do so.
- d. Ensure that ICT and different methods of working are maximised for resource efficiency and potential.
- e. Develop an enhanced digital experience via MyHR for all employees.

### **We then anticipate outcomes such as:**

- a. Smarter ways of working implemented as a result of suggestions from employees.
- b. Managers share best practice based on ideas and suggestions.
- c. Employees feel that their ideas contribute to the Council as a whole rather than just their service / role. Monitored through employee surveys and general day to day management.
- d. Creative and agile ways of working are established, partnership working taken to a new level.
- e. We have a culture of reviewing everything we do and how we do it. Our employees and partners welcome review processes.

## Wellbeing and Engagement to Promote and Maintain a Safe and Healthy Workforce

### **We will continue our good practice and prioritise actions in respect of;**

- a. Implementing an effective Health and Safety Policy and ensuring robust safety management systems and practices are adopted and embedded by managers and employees.
- b. Promoting a positive Health and Safety culture
- c. Embedding appropriate and effective risk assessments.
- d. Continuing our wellbeing focus to ensure employees are aware of their own health, take care of themselves and are aware of services available to assist them to do this.
- e. Supportive environment in respect of a zero tolerance of bullying and harassment.
- f. Promotion and support of flexible working practices where possible.
- g. Continue to support managers to manage absence.
- h. Continue to challenge culture which is not consistent with the values of the Council and reinforce respect and inclusion.
- i. Ensure that as we embed new ways of working that these maintain health, safety and wellbeing as a high priority.

### **We then anticipate outcomes such as:**

- a. A healthy workforce (measured by number of days lost through sickness absence and referrals to Occupational Health).
- b. Reduced lost time in accidents at work.
- c. A culture and proactive commitment to report and act on health and safety issues and potential risks via the near miss reporting process.
- d. Employees' satisfaction with work/life balance.
- e. Confidence in the Council's commitment to equality of opportunity.
- f. Employee awareness of flexible working arrangements to assist both the Council and them.
- g. A more resilient workforce, measured through employee surveys.
- h. Equality and diversity training is progressing for all staff / agency workers and there is a greater understanding of equalities issues which in turn may change some behaviours and give confidence to employees to challenge some inappropriate behaviours or practices.

## Performance and Change

### **We will continue our good practice and prioritise actions in respect of;**

- a. Effective and timely planned communication of changes.
- b. Ensure managers are equipped with appropriate information to cascade to team members to offer reassurance of change processes and support available.
- c. Allow managers to manage change on an individual basis for employees to ensure that they are supported and feel valued throughout change processes.
- d. Ensure managers manage performance issues in a timely and effective manner and provide appropriate support.
- e. Develop Management skills to create resilience by ensuring change is communicated and managed effectively but also acknowledging that change does not have to happen overnight and small / simple changes can have a big impact.
- f. Ensuring Managers acknowledge people may get stressed and deal with it using the Stress Policy and Risk Assessments.
- g. Build on the workforce profile and supporting data to ensure we can proactively manage our own talent and mitigate against loss of capability through turnover, retirements, new delivery models etc.

### **We then anticipate outcomes such as:**

- a. Employees understand the Council's ambitions as well as their own priorities and know what they need to do to achieve them through effective use of supervisory and 1:1 sessions, team meetings, PDR's and other opportunities to engage with the changes being considered or implemented.
- b. Changes are communicated well and employees understand how they might be affected and how to progress.
- c. Employee survey results show that there are a good variety of opportunities to communicate ideas, suggestions and concerns regarding change and these are dealt with in a positive manner.
- d. Customer and resident satisfaction with services is fair with the introduction of new or alternative delivery models.





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