Report To:	Employment Committe
Date:	8th September 2025
Subject:	Workforce Strategy update
Chief Officer:	Will Tuckley: CEO MD Commissioner
Contact Officer:	Bal Toor: HR Director
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	NO
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Recruitment website, key skills and Career Pathways snippets
	Appendix 2: HRMI pack

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 The Workforce Strategy was published to all staff on May 14th, 2025, after extensive all staff consultation. The strategy covers a two-year trajectory and will be reviewed annually to ensure HR supports the business by focusing on and investing in, the right areas. The information in this paper sets out our progress under the four priorities as set out in the strategy. Notable areas of progress have been made in areas of recruitment, learning and development, policy development alongside culture. However, we continue to retain an over reliance on interim staff coupled with a low rolling turnover rate of permanent staff, which requires some focus on supporting the business with their workforce planning.

1.2 To this end, the remainder of the year will see an increased focus in areas of organisational design and development.

1.3 This paper also incorporates the routine HRMI pack we present to Employment Committee each quarter, tracking key areas of HR, which underpin and evidence the progress of the workforce strategy.

Recommendations:

The Committee is recommended to note progress of the workforce strategy and approved continued focus on culture, organisational design and recruitment.

Reason: This paper is updated on a quarterly basis and assures the Committee on how HR maintains a targeted approach when supporting its workforce to thrive.

Commissioner Review

"Commissioners welcome progress on the workforce strategy as it is a key strategy for the recovery and ongoing sustainability of the Council. We look forward to seeing further progress as more of the strategy is implemented."

2. Report

Introductory paragraph

2.1.   The Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 sets out our purpose, our approach and our strategic priorities; to achieve any of these, we require a high performing workforce who can operate within a positive culture. The Workforce Strategy and its four priorities, provides the business with a clear direction of what our people can expect from their HR function and what the organisation offers them to support a thriving culture. Monitoring the progress of deliverables set out in the strategy is key to ensuring Slough Borough Council has optimum employee engagement and the organisation is regarded as an employer of choice.

Background

The Workforce Strategy was published on May 14th, 2025, after an extensive all staff consultation. It focuses on areas which responds directly to feedback received from our staff, via the annual staff survey and LGA peer review (November 2024). It is a two-year document that will be reviewed each April, to ensure deliverables remain right for our workforce and the culture we aim to create.

The strategy is underpinned by four priorities.

1. **Getting the basics right**: focusing on ensuring our staff have access to timely and accurate data to discuss people priorities in an evidence-based way
2. **Empowering our people**: ensuring people have the tools and space to hold meaningful 1:1s, EOYR, with career pathways for all
3. **Fostering a healthy and inclusive environment**: renewed focus on supporting active travel, diversity and inclusion throughout the employee lifecycle, whilst establishing a culture of 'speak up'
4. **Building a positive and transformative culture**: creating a culture of belonging for all staff; recognising and celebrating diversity and bringing us together to volunteer, whilst broadening our connection with schools to over work experience or placements.

Progress against priorities

Getting the basics right

Key to our managers being able to lead and empower their teams is to ensure they have the tools to do the job. This includes ensuring they can understand their workforce by accessing relevant data sets and HR tools and policies in line with best practice.

- **Data cleansing** – working with Finance colleagues has supported the cleanse of our employee position management and reconciled this to budgets. This allows managers to understand their structures against expenditure and support them in understanding the impact of any recruitment (both interim and perm). HR will now focus on ensuring all line managers are supported in intensive bite size learning to ensure they are able to download and understand the data. Key to this will include those who interact with hiring managers most frequently i.e. HR recruitment consultants and HRBPs being fluent in the data sets for each ED area.

- **Data dashboards** – HR now produces key workforce metrics for each ED area. These are presented by the HRBP/Head of HR, each month to ensure people priorities are being tabled and discussed at each delivery team.

The benefits to managers of having this revised data available to them, has been key to ensuring they are able to project their recruitment requirements and funding of roles at the weekly HR Expenditure Control Panel. With the recent announcements on tighter spending within ED areas, this data will be used for both Star Chambers and workforce planning.

For the next People Committee, HR will be presenting impact of better data, as part of organisational design activity across business areas, with notable emphasis on reducing reliance on interims.

- **Improved HR policies** – in line with our update in April 2025, HR continues to review its HR policies, reducing the register of policies to a top 10 and replacing other outdated policies with tools/guidance. This quarter we will be seeking Employment Committees approval to the amendments to the Sickness policy and Organisational change policy.
- **Sickness**: this policy has been revised to support employees and managers to separate how we manage short-term absences vs long-term. Triggers now accommodate a rolling 12 months, and medical suspension is now included in the policy; to include reference to medical redeployment, supported by a defined process. This policy will now be clearer to understand and support staff back into the workplace.
- **Org Change**: The revision of this policy will strengthen our processes for redeployment, matching staff to roles, because of any organisational changes. This should support us in allocating suitable alternative roles to redeployees and reducing risk of redundancies. The policy now ensures employees with a fixed-term contracts are included, and we have strengthened the consultation process to be more inclusive.

These policies will be published following approval from Employment Committee and supplemented with 'teach ins' by HRBPs and HR case officers to ensure understanding is embedded across the business. The impact of changes to the sickness policy should see an improvement in our understanding of staff sickness (where the current policy allows an employee to decline the request to provide the reason for their short-term sickness).

Empowering our people

A key finding from our annual staff survey has been a clear request from staff to ensure they hold meaningful end of year reviews with their managers and regular 1:1s, which support career development.

End of year appraisals and 1:1s: Further to the feedback from staff (during the 2024 annual appraisal cycle), HR has revised its online tool to capture additional functionality, ensuring staff can comment on their objectives both from a performance, diversity and values perspective. This supports the opportunity to discuss achievements and learning. The completion rate for EOYR for 24/25 was over 90% with a 10% random sampling indicating a good use of the online form.

We continue to advocate the use of the 1:1 form, to ensure both managers and staff can keep accurate records of monthly check ins and monitor progress against objectives. The

current usage of the system to record 1:1s varies per ED area. To support this transition (from holding 1:1s using paper, emails or other tools), HR sends a weekly pack of information to ED areas, to support their understanding of which manager is not accessing the system. This is designed to encourage awareness and support EDs to cascade reminders.

Over Quarter 3 of 25/26, HR is building a 360 and talent tool for all line managers to 'opt into' using and testing; we will report on this usage in Q4 and utilise the learning to embed the tool and its usage as mandatory for 26/27.

Line Manager development: LEAD Programme: further to a successful discovery phase of Q4 in 24/25, we have relaunched our line manager development programme. This programme focuses on leading self, team and others through change and holding confident conversations (in relation to tackling performance). 55% of line managers have attended at least 1-4 modules since launching in June 2025. The impact of this programme will be realised throughout 25/26, with staff reporting positively in the staff survey re: how they feel they are led through change.

Fostering a healthy and inclusive environment in which we work

It is our priority to ensure we create a positive and inclusive throughout our employee lifecycle. Therefore, we have prioritised the review of how we recruit and onboard our staff.

Recruitment – improving our website and assessing key skills: Recruitment has traditionally always focused on a job description and person specification in the role advert. HR has developed a set of 'key skills' set out in Appendix 1, which it is asking all hiring managers to consider and select from when advertising a role. These skills will be tested throughout the application process, to ensure we value attributes outside of experience and qualifications, when hiring candidates. The concept is being trialled in August and will go live in September 2025. In tandem to this development, the recruitment pages on our internet have been updated with an improved layout, up to date videos, links to hints and tips, that support our residents to find employment.

In September 2025 we also welcome two LGA graduates, one who will rotate each ED area and one dedicated to housing. This is our discovery phase, both for us as an employer and for our graduates. Utilising their feedback, which will be sought each quarter, we hope to design a graduate programme across each ED area.

Onboarding – ensuring we capitalise on the first 100days: Whilst we have improved our induction day, by ensuring we balance governance updates with cultural insights, in November 2024, we introduced a welcome letter and onboarding survey. The onboarding survey has been completed by 85% of new starters and new starters have praised the recruitment process with overall positive sentiments on how they were able to access the right technology to get started in role.

We continue to focus on increasing employee engagement, through the introduction of a mental health training offer for existing staff, who can then volunteer to support the wellbeing of our staff if/when required. We are working with ACAS to train staff to also support in mediation, to support in resolving disputes locally rather than enter into a formal process. This training will be designed and delivered for Q3 and impact should be realised over Q4 into 26/27, via reduced case work and staff reporting on better wellbeing whilst at work.

Building a positive and transformative culture

We remain committed to diversifying our workforce with a employees from a variety of backgrounds, to include an improved relationship with local schools and universities. We have increased our apprenticeships by 5 in Q1 and are trialling one university placement. The feedback from our university placement is that the experience they are gaining is invaluable and as a Slough resident, they have an improved understanding of how the Council services the needs of residents.

Our introduction of key skills in recruitment is mirrored in the development of a Career pathway offer to all employees. This scheme is mapped to the LGA grades and supports staff to understand what learning they can access within their first 18 months. Once launched in September, a video explaining the career pathways will also be placed on our recruitment pages as part of our employee value proposition; thus supporting how we address our risk around failure to attract talent (see Appendix 1).

Finally, as part of our drive to create a positive culture, we are updating our employee recognition scheme with Thank you cards. Sourced from a local printer, these cards will be ways for managers and peers to recognise/praise positive contributions by their teams. The cards have been designed to celebrate 'excellence, expertise or improvements and the quarterly recognition scheme also being revised to recognise staff more formally.

Key matters for committee to consider are:

- The plan is set out over 2 year and therefore some deliverables span multiple months, therefore impact of initiatives may not be realised for 2 or more quarters.
- There has recently been a Mini people poll to test staff sentiments on progress since the last staff survey, results of which will be presented at the next Employment Committee.
- Due to a recent HR restructure, some deliverables in the workforce strategy require a lead, therefore with the recruitment/onboarding of key roles in HR, taking place throughout September, it is anticipated to see greater progress for the next Committee.
- Recruitment: permanent / interim mix – we recognise the need for a blend of permanent and interim staff at SBC however the committee is asked to note the progress on reducing our reliance on interims through the decreasing numbers as set out in slide 4.
- Market supplements and honorariums – following the annual review of market supplements, we have seen a decrease in the number applied.
- Leavers and exit interviews – exit interviews remain relatively low in number, making it harder to create meaningful trends at this stage. Although we have seen a small increase and the focus on culture and pay remains a contributing factor to people leaving SBC.
- Sickness – the Council's sickness absence is above the LGA average per employee. The deep dive on sickness on slides 12-17 in Appendix 2 illustrate the top three directorates where we see increased long term sickness. For RHE we recognise levels of sickness are based on the nature of the work are linked to length of sickness. We have improved our sickness policy and will deliver deep dives to all line managers on policy updates, to ensure sickness is better managed.

Additional points for discussion are:

- Does the committee support the investment of a revised staff recognition scheme focusing on celebrating how staff deliver excellence, expertise and improvements to residents? Are there any further categories they would like us to consider?
- Does the committee support the tools to support residents in finding employment? It is anticipated; HR will begin to feature at local employment fairs from October 2025
- Is the committee supportive of the sickness policy distinguishing short term vs, longer term absences, as part of an increased role in line managers supporting employees back into the workplace?

Link to Statutory Equality Objectives

The council uses a robust and comprehensive set of employment data to inform its workforce strategy and management practice.

As part of meeting its statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty, the council has developed and published 6 equality objectives. There are 2 objectives that are specifically related to the workforce:

Objective 4: The council uses a robust and comprehensive set of employment data to inform its workforce strategy and management practice, as well as benchmarking and sharing best practice

Objective 5: The council actively ensures that the profile of its workforce (including the profile of major commissioned services) reflects the community it serves/local labour market.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 *Financial implications*

3.1.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendation to note the report.

3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 The effect of the Public Sector Equality Duty under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 is noted below.

The reporting of equality data and taking any necessary action based on this data supports an approach which should also guard against any employment claims under the Equality Act.

3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 Currently the Corporate Risk register details a risk regarding our 'Failure to Attract, Retain & Engage with Our People', the Workforce Strategy supports HR focus on workforce and cultural initiatives to address this in a more detailed and transparent way.

3.4 *Environmental implications*

None

3.5   Equality implications

3.5.1 The council is committed to being an inclusive employer and meeting its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and in particular, s.149, the Public Sector Equality Duty. Monitoring of workforce profiles and other key workforce metrics by equality groups, within regular management information reports, is the foundation of this analysis. A key issue remains the incomplete diversity declarations, but work continues to support our workforce to declare their protected information or state 'prefer not to say' to further drive HR initiatives that are designed to improve culture.

3.6   Workforce implications:

3.6.1 This information is vital to the Council's Corporate Leadership Team an update on progress is presented at a monthly CLT, allowing for a discussion on whether deliverables remain right for the desired culture.

4.   Background Papers

None