

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Employment Committee
<b>Date:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
<b>Subject:</b>	Workforce Strategy update
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Will Tuckley: CEO MD Commissioner Ian O'Donnell: Executive Director of Corporate Resources
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Bal Toor: HR Director
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1: HRMI pack

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 The Workforce Strategy has been published since May 2025 and is now just over 6 months into delivery. The strategy covers a two-year trajectory and will be reviewed in May 2026, following the next annual staff survey (known as the Our People Poll). For this quarter notable areas of progress have been improving our relationship with schools to attract and recruit school leavers, alongside reducing the cost of our interims and improving culture. Against the backdrop of the current financial situation, CLT has introduced tighter recruitment controls and is asking all Executive Directors to seek appropriate savings or efficiencies.
- 1.2 To this end, the remainder of the financial year will see an increased focus in areas of organisational design and reduction on interim usage.
- 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.
- 1.4 With the next all staff survey going live in April 2026, a mini people poll was conducted in the Summer (with another taking place in January) which gave us insights on where we are improving or require additional effort. Whilst the response rate was around 50% of our staff cohort the results indicate a positive movement in responses feeling that CLT members were approachable and that staff were receiving feedback on how to improve. There was varied agreement in staff feeling they were well informed about what's going on in the Council, so further communication channels are being investigated. Finally, staff still felt like they belonged in their own teams however there was a stronger disagreement that teams across the Council worked well together.
- 1.5 HR is also asking Employment Committee to note that, following a restructure concluding in July 2025, the function has now recruited to key roles, allowing greater progress over the coming months.

## Recommendations:

- 1.3 The Committee is recommended to note progress in the delivery of the workforce strategy and approve continued focus on culture, organisational design and reducing our reliance on interims.

**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

As set out in the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027, any achievement in the council requires a high performing workforce who can operate within a positive culture. The Workforce Strategy is key to achieving this and the roadmap by which HR delivers its function and expects to be held to account. Monitoring the progress of deliverables set out in the strategy will enable this accountability and support the establishment of an organisation is regarded as an employer of choice.

### Background

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

We continue to provide tools to ensure managers can access the right data at the right time alongside the most up to date policies.

**Data cleansing** – whilst every employee's salary is reconciled to a budget, due to movers, internal promotions or leavers, we have focused this past month on reviewing positional structures in the employee record system, which has also been supported by providing training on how to keep their position data up to date.

**Data dashboards** – HR continues to produce 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 presentations have also included updating teams on how to complete their diversity data and cascading FAQs to build trust.

The impact of updated data at structural level ensures improved workforce planning as part of managing any proposed restructures.

**Tighter recruitment controls:** In early November 2025, CLT agreed all recruitment would be frozen, unless approved at a weekly control panel which takes place as part of CLT. Where recruitment proceeds to advert it is where:

- 1) income generating roles which fully cover the cost of the expenditure or wholly funded by ring fenced grants.
- 2) roles which are part of a restructure which generates financial savings.
- 3) the role is replacing an existing agency team with a permanent recruitment and delivers a cashable benefit over
- 4) where there is a clear statutory or otherwise essential requirement which would be jeopardised if the recruitment didn't go ahead
- 5) where we have failed to recruit externally and therefore seek interim positions  
*\*where recruitment has failed, the HR function continues to use LinkedIn and microsites.*

In our ambition to reduce both our cost and reliance on interims, HR has partnered with each ED area and supported reducing the cost of interims (i.e. via their Agency margin or standing the interim down. Details of this are tabled in the MI pack)

## **Apprenticeships**

We committed to increase apprenticeships by 50% (25 in March 2024). We currently have 53 active apprenticeships, with more signed up to start on courses in the New Year. Currently 54% of apprentices are Slough residents. Training costs associated with apprenticeships are met from the levy, with employment costs met from within existing Directorate budgets, so that the increase does not lead to a budget pressure for the Council.

With Apprenticeship Week falling in early February, we are planning a week of activities to celebrate graduating and existing apprentices and share learning and opportunities for staff who may be interested in completing an apprenticeship.

## **New Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Provider**

From Feb 1<sup>st</sup> we will move to our new Occupational Health (OH) and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider. Utilising the existing allocated budget, the new provider, Health Partners, will deliver tighter account management, greater flexibility, and an enhanced range of wellbeing resources for staff. This partnership strengthens our

commitment to employee health and wellbeing, ensuring managers and employees have access to responsive, high-quality support services that promote resilience and engagement across the workforce.

## Casework

Over recent months, we have seen an overall increase in HR casework across the organisation, including matters relating to performance, attendance, and employee relations. The increase is viewed as a positive indicator of cultural maturity. Employees are demonstrating confidence in organisational processes and feel psychologically safe to raise concerns, knowing that issues will be addressed fairly and transparently. This reflects progress towards a culture that values accountability, openness, and constructive dialogue.

To respond to this, HR is implementing a range of proactive interventions. These include targeted learning sessions for managers on applying people management policies effectively, and the development of a performance framework (Later in 2026) to support consistent and fair management practices. In addition, revised policies and accompanying guidance have been launched to clarify managerial responsibilities and ensure alignment with best practice and compliance requirements. These changes aim to strengthen leadership capability, promote early intervention, and create a more supportive environment for both employees and managers.

## Empowering our people

A key finding from our last annual staff survey was staff advocating better learning and development offers and meaningful 121s.

**Introducing a Talent and 360 tool:** Due to the significant improvements in staff usage of the End of year appraisal system (over 70% in April 2024 to over 90% in April 2025), HR has worked with the business to enhance the system to introduce a soft launch of a talent tool for all managers to use with their teams. The tool will be formally introduced (soft launch) in January 2026, with training for all staff to understand its usage and impact, ahead of official launch in March. This tool will be used in 2026/27 to allow learning and development requirements to be identified and support succession planning, but it has the potential to be used in future for talent management in connection with career progression.

We are also introducing a 360-review section for all Tiers 1-3 as part of their End of Year review, to support talent and learning discussions. For 26/27, we will allow leaders to select up to 5 staff (their manager, 1 colleague, 2 direct reports and 1 stakeholder). This will allow us to learn from the launch and tweak the system organisation wide for 27/28.

The additional data will be tabled for the first employment committee of 26/27, where we hope to focus on take up and higher-level insights that will support us in how we use the 26/27 learning and development budget.

**Line Manager development: LEAD Programme:** we partnered with Bucks Academy to deliver the LEAD programme. The four modules took line managers through Leading Self; Leading Others; Leading Teams and finally Leading Through Change. The current completion rate is shown below:

Total	Number of people	%
Number of managers at SBC	228	
Completed LEAD programme	140	61%
Completed 3 out of 4 modules	25	11%
Staff not completing any	29	13%

Further mop-up sessions will be taking place in the next quarter to capture any staff not completing and any new starters.

All learners felt accommodated and supported, with 65% selecting 100% satisfaction with the course with other being mostly satisfied or neutral. Only a very small proportion (8%) selected lower ratings or N/A. The data shows a consistently high level of inclusivity, learner engagement and overall satisfaction throughout the programme.

Comments about the modules reflected this overall satisfaction:

*“Very informative and helpful”*

*“An excellent session relevant for leadership development”*

*“Ikigai was a powerful concept as well as the discussion around our values.”*

*“I’m going to rethink my leadership plan to become more visionary.”*

*“Positive ending hope for the future.”*

### 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 continue to focus on our ability to recruit and onboard our people:

**Recruitment:** much of the last 3 quarters has been focused on improving our recruitment website, our presence on LinkedIn and reducing our reliance on Agencies to recruit senior staff (i.e. we recently recruited a Director of Adults and Heads of Service without the cost of a recruitment agency – in previous years, similar roles required the use of agencies which came at an additional cost). This past quarter we have focused on how we can work with our local community to increase the interest of young people in joining SBC.

**Launching core skills:** In November we launched our new 8 Key Skills - a unified set of core skills to help both candidates and managers understand exactly what we're looking for when interviewing at SBC.

- Acting Inclusively & Living Our Values
- Building Capabilities
- Communicating & Influencing
- Delivering Excellence
- Driving Innovation
- Leadership
- Seeing the Bigger Picture
- Working Together

These are incorporated into all interviews being carried out with the hiring manager selecting 3 of the 8 key skills that best align with the role.

Information regarding the skills is available to candidates, to allow them to better understand what's important to SBC when hiring. These are signposted within our job adverts with a link to allow the candidate to access further information easily. As well as a new webpage on our recruitment site being created - [How we recruit | Slough Borough Council](#)

The council's intranet, Insite, has also been updated to provide hiring managers with all the knowledge they need to implement the core skills throughout the recruitment process. In addition, we have created questions banks for each skill, aligned with grade, to support managers. As well as providing 3 options per grade, this also includes "what good looks like". In Q4 we aim to focus on introducing a recruitment policy to ensure further best practice is introduced into the organisation i.e. around interviews and support diverse candidates.

**Attracting our local community:** in addition to revising our website to be more helpful to local candidates, we continue to partner Learning to Work, partnering SEGRO and our local schools to host more business insight days to children.

## Activity to Date

### School Engagement and Careers Inspiration

Date	School	Year Group	Activity	Purpose & Outcomes
18 November 2025	Langley Grammar School	Year 11	Speed Networking Careers Event	Delivered careers insight session focused on working at Slough Borough Council. Explained the role of local government, highlighted career pathways across multiple council departments, and promoted apprenticeship and early career opportunities. Students engaged in Q&A around job roles, qualifications, and routes into public sector employment.
27 November 2025	Herschel School	Year 9	SEGRO Year 9 School Challenge	Supported students undertaking a real-world regeneration and business design challenge based on the former O2 HQ site in the Slough Trading Estate. Provided guidance on employability skills, teamwork, and problem-solving. Students presented ideas to panel, and a winner was decided from the school to go to the Grand Final.
2 December 2025	Eden Girls' School	Year 9	SEGRO Year 9 School Challenge	As above – supported student teams designing a future-ready business and community space, with emphasis on sustainability, innovation and local employment opportunities. Students presented ideas to panel, and a winner was decided from the school to go to the Grand Final.
11 December 2025	SEGRO PLC Head Office	Year 9 (Finalists)	SEGRO School Challenge Final – Judge & Mentor	Acted as a judge and mentor during the final stage of the competition. Provided direct mentorship to Wexham School, supporting students to refine and present their winning proposal to six other participating schools and industry representatives.

Future efforts are focusing on children who are in schools where there is higher than average proportion of students eligible for free school meals. Our intention is to raise aspirations and awareness of careers within a local authority setting.

Date	School	Focus
7 May 2026	Baylis Court School	Workplace Visit & Careers Insight
17 June 2026	Langley Academy	Workplace Visit & Careers Insight
15 July 2026	Lynch Hill School	Workplace Visit & Careers Insight

In 2026 we are also partnering Slough Children’s First to develop a targeted employability support offer for young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Proposed Activity	Description	Intended Impact
Monthly “World of Work” Workshops	Sessions covering job searching, understanding local labour markets, CV writing, application forms, and interview preparation	Improve employability skills, confidence and readiness for work
Practical Employability Support	Hands-on guidance tailored to vulnerable young people	Reduce barriers to employment and training
Early Intervention Engagement	Targeted support before statutory leaving age	Prevent disengagement and reduce NEET figures

**Introducing blind sifting:** To ensure our recruitment is fair and inclusive we have introduced both unbiased recruitment and CV redaction features within our ATS platform, TALOS. We now remove names, DOB and names of educational institutions on all applications and CVs for shortlisting. These features ensure a more unbiased recruitment process when shortlisting for interview stage.

**Onboarding – ensuring we capitalise on the first 100 days:** our staff induction remains a highlight for all new starters – the recent new starters’ survey indicates:

- 86% are very satisfied or satisfied with the overall recruitment process
- 81% are very satisfied or satisfied with tools for job
- 64% were very satisfied or satisfied with the welcome letter
- 75% satisfied or very satisfied with their first day (information provided, support, buddy etc)

There is scope to improve the pace at which things happen from paperwork before joining to being set up on key systems and having equipment ready.

<b>Building a positive and transformative culture</b>
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We are committed to creating a culture of psychological safety where staff feel able to speak up. To this end we have partnered with ACAS to support the training of 36 staff as Mental Health/MH Contacts, Speak Up ambassadors and mediators. MH Contacts will be available for colleagues who may be experiencing problems and are looking for support from someone outside of their usual line management structure. This is not by giving advice but by listening, understanding and signposting.

The Speak Up ambassadors will be more aligned to a difficult workplace situation colleagues may find themselves in and can provide support and assistance to work through this in a positive way.

Mediators will be involved in situations where there is a potential conflict that needs an outside party to try and reach a resolution. This is to try and prevent grievances or any other HR employee relations issues.

All three of these training opportunities are open across the council and are welcoming volunteers from across the ED areas.

The training takes place in Jan-Feb 2026 so the impact of these volunteers may not be identifiable until Q2 of 26/27.

Our focus on ensuring staff complete their mandatory training continues.

In Q3 there was improvement in most areas for most courses *\*please note training refresher deadlines are coming around, which will see some decreases in completion.*

<b>Completion stats for December 2025 (+/- the difference from September 2025)</b>	Total no. of staff	Display Screen Equipment	Intro to Health and Safety	Information Security Awareness	Prevent	Equality in the Workplace	Whistleblowing with Confidence	Joint Safeguarding Awareness
Chief Executive	335	54	85	69	78	75	69	86
Law and Governance	93	19	23	20	23	21	20	23
Public Health and Public Protection	250	57	70	55	70	69	64	74
Corporate Resources	259	162	204	169	187	186	172	216
Children Services	24	144	167	166	145	142	139	182
Adults Services	82	108	171	140	150	159	144	202
Regeneration, Housing and Environment	400	217	294	260	203	286	167	309

Currently L&D are working to support staff to complete their mandatory training. This includes activities such as:

1. Drop-in sessions at locations including OH, Britwell Community Centre, the Curve & Chalvey hub.
2. Weekly online Teams support sessions.
3. Working with non-office-based teams to deliver analogue versions of the training during team meetings/inset days etc.

Finally, as part of our drive to create a positive culture, at the last committee we updated on the introduction of Thank You cards for more timely and regular opportunities for staff

recognition. For the final quarter of 25/26, we are introducing categories to the way in which we hold our FAB awards

**Brilliant Leader** – An individual who offers the leadership and guidance that inspires others to deliver excellence.

**Innovative Thinker** – A colleague who is passionate about constant improvement and seeks out creative ways to introduce new ways to how we all work and find solutions.

**Outstanding Apprentice** - An apprentice who has excelled in their role and demonstrates a positive attitude to learning, collaboration and reflection. They are an ambassador for apprenticeships and provide a shining example for future apprentices.

**Resident Champion** – Someone who goes the extra mile to meet the needs of our residents and communities and consistently demonstrates our values to be responsive and empowering.

**Unsung Hero** – That person who is always looking to grow themselves, expand their skill set and take on new challenges to enhance their contribution to their services and work towards achieving our corporate plan.

Nominations can be received from colleagues, Members, residents and partners and will be taken through a panel to ensure alignment with values and ensure transparency and fairness.

#### **Key matters for committee to consider and discuss 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.
- Whilst sickness stands out as being the main reason for HR Case work, we have seen an increase in grievances, signalling staff have increased confidence in HR and feel safe to speak up.
- 121 completion rates recorded on Cornerstone remains low however mandatory training has increased now averaging at 67% completion rate.

#### **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 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