



People, Performance and Development Committee
7 April 2025

Career Development Update

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Purpose of the report:

The purpose of this report is to update the committee on the progress of the Career Development programme which has taken place for all employees of Surrey County Council (SCC) over the last 12 months, as well as planned future activity to support the careers and development of our employees.

This report is being brought to the People, Performance and Development Committee under its delegated powers in accordance with Section 2, para 6.13(g) of the Constitution:

“Consider strategic workforce planning.”

Recommendations

It is recommended that the committee notes the activities undertaken and planned.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Annually, we see approximately 1,100 staff members leave SCC through voluntary turnover, with our current turnover rate at 9.7% of the workforce. This has reduced from a turnover rate of 12% in October 2023 (when the programme of activity began). Whilst this is low currently compared to the average turnover rate in the public sector of 14.6%, it does impact on recruitment and service delivery. Exit surveys highlight a lack of opportunities and promotions as key reasons for leaving, with leavers desiring more career progression.

- 1.2 Further insights from our quarterly Pulse Surveys indicated that as at January 2024 only 50% of survey respondents felt there were sufficient opportunities for career development. This is lower than other areas on the survey which is why we focussed so much activity here. The interventions we have undertaken so far and their impact are highlighted in section 2 of this report.
- 1.3 Internal focus groups, conducted late in 2023 with current employees, underscored the need for greater visibility, fairness, and transparency in recruitment processes, ensuring that opportunities are accessible to all. Only 26% of participants felt there were adequate career development options available.
- 1.4 In response to these findings, the Career Development Programme aims to support all colleagues throughout their career journeys. The programme seeks to attract a diverse and inclusive workforce that feels valued, developed, and supported and enables the organisation to grow and retain high performing employees.
- 1.5 By fostering an environment where employees speak positively about the council and recommend it as a great place to work, we aim to reduce the number of staff leaving for better opportunities elsewhere. This will be even more crucial in the next two years during a period of significant change arising from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), so that the new unitary councils are staffed with experienced, high performing and talented employees.
- 1.6 The programme also focuses on retaining a diverse workforce, ensuring that no one is left behind.

2. Activity undertaken so far

- 2.1 Significant strides made in career development include the Career Development Portal, consolidating all necessary activities and information for easy access in Our Surrey (the council's intranet for staff).
- 2.2 We have introduced weekly "Spotlights on Career Development," which showcase various beneficial activities to all employees. These briefs have proven to generate more traffic and interest than other communication methods.
- 2.3 We have revised our recruitment controls and practices to ensure that all job openings are advertised internally first, unless there is good evidence to show that the skills or qualifications required for a role are not available amongst our existing workforce. This enables existing employees to have access to a range of career development opportunities where they might otherwise have left to seek them elsewhere.
- 2.4 To support our Early Careers Network, we have organised specific events aimed at empowering the future generation.

- 2.5 We have established a network of career development advocates within the directorates who act as a two-way conduit for employees, promoting central HR activities and relaying feedback from their areas. This initiative has already led to the creation of two development programmes which have been piloted and added to our core curriculum.
- 2.6 Furthermore, we have strengthened relationships with our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) networks by hosting specific showcase events to raise awareness of available support and opportunities within SCC.
- 2.7 We have procured a new learning management system with enhanced accessibility and user-friendly functionality, bringing learning closer to our employees.
- 2.8 Lastly, we have developed a Career Development Toolkit to assist managers and employees in navigating career options and development. This toolkit emphasises the importance of investing in our people, leading to higher-skilled staff, greater engagement and motivation, and improved individual and team performance.
- 2.9 Early indications are that our delivery is making its mark on the organisation:
- 2.9.1 Since launch 7 months ago we have already seen over 10,000 visits to our Career Development portal and by over 3,500 unique users (employees).
 - 2.9.2 Our Pulse Survey question on career development has seen a 10% improvement since January 2024.
 - 2.9.3 Representation of disabled and ethnically diverse employees has increased from 10.8% and 4.8% respectively, to 10.9% and 8.8%.
 - 2.9.4 Overall retention of staff has increased as we see our attrition figures decline from 12% when we started the programme, to our current position of 9.7%.
- 2.10 There is more to do on retention as we link our Performance Conversations cycle to ensure we are retaining the right mix of employees; retaining key talent and high performers, and any potential underperformers are managed and leave as appropriate. The Performance Improvement Policy has been streamlined to ensure that any issues of underperformance are dealt with swiftly and fairly.
- 2.11 We are approaching the end of our first full Performance Conversation cycle with ratings for employees (improving, achieving or thriving) based on delivery of their objectives and demonstration of The Surrey Way behaviours. The People and Change service will be undertaking an analysis of ratings to ensure that their application has been fair and appropriately evidenced by managers.

3. Activity currently in development

3.1 **Revitalising Internal Work Shadowing Programme:** Enhancing in-house development and fostering better communication between directorates.

3.2 **Creating a Digital Access Portal:** Improving awareness and access to coaching, mentoring, and mental health support for all participants.

3.3 **Introducing Job-Sharing Programmes:** Breaking the glass ceiling and maximising potential for reduced-hours employees.

3.4 **Expanding Learning & Development Showcase Events:** Building on the success of our EDI network events, open to all employees.

3.5 Continued communication campaigns

3.5.1 Part of our success has been evidenced by the popularity of articles in the weekly Top Lines briefs emails. We have seen record visits to promoted sites and record sign ups to activities directly attributable to these briefings. We will continue therefore to use this as a vehicle for key information.

3.5.2 Initial focus groups had only 26% of employees telling us they think there are career development opportunities here at Surrey.

3.5.2.1 In the 12 months to January 2025, we have seen 1,143 employees take up new positions internally as a direct result of our internal recruitment and selection campaigns.

3.5.2.2 We will shortly be advertising and promoting this fact to help shift the perception that opportunities do not exist when the evidence shows they are there.

3.5.2.3 This will help reinforce the fact Surrey is a great place to work and with even greater opportunities on the horizon for employees as we move through LGR.

3.6 Transition into mainstream activity

3.6.1 This programme was initially supported by transformation funding which financed additional resources to 'kick start' the activity through seconding employees to the programme.

3.6.2 The project has gained significant momentum and traction and has now been transferred wholly into our Learning & Development team as part of our business-as-usual activity.

4. Apprenticeship Activity

- 4.1 Our Apprenticeship activity is progressing well. Continual communications campaigns help employees and managers see the many benefits in undertaking apprenticeships for professional qualifications and to aid greater skills development and succession planning, all whilst learning and growing on the job.
- 4.2 We are operating a Career Starter Apprenticeship programme for education leavers aged 16-23, currently with 16 participants. This programme aims to:
- Assist with recruiting employees under 30 and developing them for future roles.
 - Provide fair treatment and support to entry-level apprentices, enhancing their experience and integrating them into our future workforce.
- 4.3 Our levy spend in 2024 was £1.67m with £zero being returned to central government, which is a huge accolade and testimony to the combined work of the central team and managers across the council.
- 4.4 There is still money in our levy account, as detailed in the financial implications section. We are on track to spend this without returning funds to central government.
- 4.5 We have 315 apprentices in various programmes, including 122 new enrolments in 2024. This equates to a planned spend of £1,305,698 over the next 12 months. Efforts to promote our apprenticeship offerings continue.
- 4.6 We can transfer a portion of our levy fund to local businesses lacking their own funds, aiding small business skills development at zero training cost. In 2024, we transferred £164,756 to 29 local businesses. We partner with Business Surrey to promote this initiative through webinars and other means, with criteria in place to align transfers with Surrey's priorities.
- 4.7 There is a separately maintained levy fund for SCC education settings only, such as maintained schools, nurseries and early years learning centres. This fund is currently underspent with £409,529 having been returned to central government during 2024.
- 4.8 Despite this, there was still £235,556 spent in education settings in Surrey in past 12 months.
- 4.9 Schools regularly inform us they find the government's requirement to meet the 20% "off-the-job" hours difficult to support given the nature of their work, which prevents them from signing up as much as they would like.
- 4.10 We are working with all our schools contacts to promote the benefits of apprenticeships for skills development and career development. For example, there is a new Teacher Apprenticeship programme which bypasses the current PGCE route and is open to school staff such as teaching assistants who may not have requisite qualifications for a PGCE.

- 4.11 There is also a psychology 'top-up' available to qualified teachers to enable them to become Education Psychologists. This is a further opportunity to promote skills development and career development both for us as a council and for schools, which we will also be promoting.
- 4.12 We will be helping overcome some of the other barriers schools face to signing up by explaining the different ways existing school activity can contribute to off the job learning, such as INSET days, after-school training meetings, relevant research, lunch and learn sessions, role playing and simulation exercises.
- 4.13 Showcases at school network events in May 2025 are planned as well as individually within schools to promote the benefits and help overcome any negative perceptions of apprenticeships.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The Career Development Programme has made substantial progress in addressing the career development needs of our employees.
- 5.2 The initiatives undertaken have already shown positive impacts on retention and engagement.
- 5.3 Moving forward, it is crucial to continue building on these successes by implementing the activities currently in development and maintaining open communication with all employees.
- 5.4 By doing so, we can ensure Surrey County Council remains a desirable place to work, with ample opportunities for career growth and development. This will be crucial as we move into a period of significant change arising from LGR and enable us to retain high performing, highly skilled employees who will transfer into the unitary councils in 2027.
- 5.5 The Committee's endorsement and recommendations will be vital in sustaining this momentum and achieving our long-term goals.

Implications

6. Financial and value for money implications

- 6.1 All activities have been funded from existing budgets, using resources and skills within People and Change and across the council.
- 6.2 Apprenticeship programmes are funded through a government levy. All companies with a pay bill in excess of £3m are charged 0.5% of this pay bill each month with the money transferred to a specific Apprenticeship levy fund. currently this equates to approximately £150,000 per month in Surrey County Council.

- 6.3 We then have 2 years in which to spend this money, which can only be used on apprenticeship development programmes; it cannot be used to fund salaries of apprentices.
- 6.4 Any money not used within 2 years is collected by central government. The levy is a way of paying for the development of new and existing employees to grow and to develop our workforce.
- 6.5 Apprenticeship programmes are paid for monthly. 80% of the cost is spread out over the duration of the programme (currently approximately £130,000 per month), with a final balloon payment of 20% on completion of the programme.
- 6.6 Our current available funds are £2.7m.
- 6.7 We did not return any money to central government in 2024 and plans exist to continue this position in the future.
- 6.8 We are already committed to spend £1.3m over the next 12 months and we are continually promoting the benefits and signing up new people to programmes.

7. Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 7.1 No negative implications. Extensive work with our EDI Networks, including running showcase events and tailored development programmes, has already helped to increase retention among disabled and ethnically diverse colleagues.

8. Risk Management Implications

- 8.1 Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (D&LGR) has the potential to unsettle employees and we may see voluntary turnover increase with more colleagues leaving.
- 8.2 The apprenticeship levy pot may change shape as we move into unitary positions; we are currently exploring with the Local Government Association (LGA) how the levy will be transferred to the new unitary councils.
- 8.3 There may be resistance to people wanting to start apprenticeships as D&LGR work ramps up which may potentially increase the amount returned to central government. We will mitigate this by explaining to any concerned colleagues that apprenticeships are fully portable and can be taken across to any company.
- 8.4 The new unitary councils will need to agree their future apprenticeship strategy. However in the meantime, we remain committed to utilising SCC apprenticeship levy for development of our employees. All apprenticeships will follow the employee into the new organisation.
- 8.5 The work we are undertaking around career development is even more important as we create a compelling place to work for colleagues where opportunities for development exist. This will enhance our attraction and

retention strategies, showcasing the unique opportunity to shape the future of local government in Surrey.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 The report is for noting and there are no additional legal implications arising.

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