

People, Performance and Development Committee  
7 June 2022

**Talent Strategy**

**Purpose of the report:**

To introduce Members to the current Talent Strategy programmes of work across People and Change, specifically the future focused activity on Succession Planning and Early Careers.

This report is being brought to People, Performance and Development Committee because the Committee will ... according to the Scheme of Delegation. [[Complete by referring to Section 2, para. 6.12 of the Scheme of Delegation](#)].

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that:

- a. Members note the different programmes of work being explored to stimulate Early Careers opportunities and routes into the council.
- b. Members are aware of the subjects and timelines for implementation of Technical Level (T Level) placements, relevant to Surrey County Council.
- c. Members note the Work Experience and virtual work experience offer under development to support and share locally.

**Introduction:**

1. The programmes in this report are one part of SCC's employer response to the broader Talent and Skills Strategy work. People and Change are closely aligned with the

Director for Economic Growth and colleagues across the Health and Education sector to deliver this work, in partnership.

2. Currently, 13% of the council's workforce is under 30 and just 5% are under 25. Those age 20-24 are significantly less likely to be successful at recruitment. In the past 3 years young people have been hardest hit by the pandemic, they have not had access to the many pre-employment activities designed to build work confidence and capability such as volunteering and work experience. As such, they are less likely to succeed in traditional shortlisting, interview, and recruitment practices.
3. As a large local employer, the council is uniquely positioned to provide Early Careers employment schemes and opportunities which provide young people with the best chance of entering the workforce, in a meaningful way. To do this we need to redesign our recruitment practice and shift our hiring mindset to enable young people to succeed into roles with the council. We can do this by taking a more balanced approach to recruitment which enables us to hire the experience we need for today as well as provide opportunities for less experienced employees to learn and develop their trade with us over the coming years.
4. This paper sets out to introduce PPDC to the Early Careers and Succession Planning projects in progress within the People and Change service. These have been initiated to address some of the talent recruitment and development challenges the organisation currently has, specifically with bringing in young people and growing future organisation leadership.

### **Succession Planning**

5. Succession Planning is the process of identifying the critical positions the council requires for business continuity, identifying employees (pipelines) who have the potential and aspiration to do those roles and implementing specific developmental action plans for these individuals/ successor's 'readiness' to assume these positions. The outputs for the process are:
  - 5.1 Clarify the arrangements in place for emergency cover for critical roles
  - 5.2 Strategically identify and develop internal successors for key positions
  - 5.3 Provide council oversight of workforce risk
6. In the context of today's competitive external labour market, adopting Succession Planning is more important than ever before across Surrey County Council. It balances the organisation's focus and over reliance on external recruitment

towards the strategic seeding, growth, development and progression of internal talent, over time.

### **Critical Roles**

7. For the purposes of this project 'critical' roles which will be the subject of formal Succession Planning are defined as one or a combination of the following:

- 7.1 Statutory to the running of the council
- 7.2 Unique or hard to find skillset
- 7.3 High/ Extreme business impact
- 7.4 Hard to recruit/ low external talent pool

Included in the scope of this project are Executive Directors, Directors, Statutory roles such as Monitoring officer, Section 151 (part of the ED role) and Chief Fire Officer as well as other roles throughout the council to be defined. Succession Planning is not only focused on leadership levels.

### **Metrics**

8. Succession Planning encourages leaders and teams to take a longer-term view of talent development, over the next 5+ years and applies two successor pipeline measures. One is the measure of 'depth' to indicate the level of confidence in number of potential successors and the second is 'diversity' of the current successor pool. This second measure will enable leaders to design and implement positive action over the coming months and years, in place to support and develop under-represented talent providing them with the best opportunity to reach the most Senior levels of SCC.

### **Rolling out Succession Planning**

9. Since January 2022, Succession Planning is being piloted with the Corporate Leadership Team for each of the Executive Director roles. This will identify and develop future EDs and surface the risk profile and gaps where there are no current successors for CLT to take action to mitigate. The CLT pilot has reached the point of designing progression and development plans for identified successors and implementing these plans for their 'readiness', this will involve exploring development opportunities both inside SCC and with partners.
10. Next steps for the project are to implement Succession Planning for critical Director roles (July-October 2022) and then embed the methodology for use throughout the organisation as part of the regular performance and development approach.

### **Culture Shift**

11. For Succession Planning to be inclusive and successful strong performance and talent leadership practice is essential. Regular performance conversations between individuals and their line manager with a talent and career focus will embed Succession Planning and are the vehicle to objectively identifying high performers who have the ambition to lead the organisation in the future.
12. For Succession Planning to be perceived positively and inclusively this talent/ career conversation must happen at least twice a year with all employees, regardless of their position on or off the Succession Plan, to develop their potential and career at SCC.

### **Early Careers pathways – Routes into SCC**

13. Under 30s are three times more likely to be unemployed than other age groups and at Surrey County Council they are underrepresented making up just 13% of employees. Surrey County Council also has an ageing workforce which carries the risk of losing much of its skills and experience in a short period of time. An extremely tight labour market is making it difficult to attract and retain new talent, with some vacancies particularly hard to fill, therefore alternative routes into the organisation are being explored as outlined below.

#### **T-Levels**

14. T-Levels (Technical Levels) are an alternative to A levels and apprenticeships for 16–19-year-olds. They are two-year programmes, equivalent to 3 A levels, which focus on vocational skills. T Level students spend 80% of their course at college, gaining skills that employers need. The other 20% is a meaningful industry placement of at least 45 days, usually during their second year, where they put these skills into action in the workplace.
15. There are three colleges around Surrey currently offering T levels which may be relevant to the work of the council, topics include:
- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 15.1 | Digital                                       |
| 15.2 | Health  |
| 15.3 | Design, Surveying & Planning for Construction |
| 15.4 | Building Services Engineering                 |
| 15.5 | Education & Childcare                         |
| 15.6 | Science                                       |

A further two colleges, including East Surrey, will be introducing T Levels in September 2022.

Placements will be required for students from early 2023 onwards, initially in the Digital and Health sectors. SCC has been working with the Local Government Association (LGA)

since early March 2022 to explore and design our T level placements offer, through a package of LGA support available for local authorities.

### **Sector-based Work Academies**

16. Sector based work academy programmes (SWAPS) are a DWP initiative designed to help those receiving unemployment benefits to apply for jobs in a new sector. They include pre-employment training and work experience placements of up to six weeks and a guaranteed job interview throughout which participants continue to receive unemployment benefits. SWAPS have the potential to reskill those who were disproportionately displaced by the pandemic with regards to employment.
17. People and Change are working with Jobcentre Plus to scope the opportunities for piloting SWAPs in some of the sectors/ industries where we have the most workforce and skills risk such as Environment and Digital.

### **Work Experience/ placements**

18. Work experience and placements were impacted by Covid-19 during which they were ceased due to lockdown, enforced home working and the emergency responses required at the time. Since then, a significant shift to agile and remote working means that for many services, work experience placements cannot be managed in the way they were previously.
19. Work is currently underway to explore new ways of offering face to face work experience and how this can be targeted at those most in need. In addition, to meet wider demand, a virtual work experience offer is being developed in conjunction with Youth Employment UK for use by schools and colleges across the county to introduce them to the varied and meaningful careers Surrey County Council could offer to local young people.

### **Apprenticeships**

20. In 2017, when the Apprenticeship Levy and associated targets was introduced, the SCC model of apprenticeships reacted to the recruitment market of the day and focused on introducing high-volume, low-cost apprentices to meet the public sector targets (2.3% of staff on an apprenticeship) and maximising the opportunities the 0.3% of our pay bill provided for training. While this approach is still valuable to SCC and provides opportunities for young people to gain experience and training, apprenticeships have the unique potential to support the local economy and grow talent in many other ways.

21. Fast forward to today, post covid, and the external recruitment context has changed to become employee driven, highly competitive with even more demand on certain industries and skills. The same model of providing entry level, fixed term jobs without clear progression into a chosen career is less attractive externally and the social mobility gap is only growing. Current SCC data shows that there are over 300 existing SCC staff undertaking an apprenticeship qualification in a wide range of industries however, there are just 40 apprentice recruits in the past 12 months and no current live apprentice vacancies/opportunities.
22. Apprenticeships are viewed by Central Government and the Social Mobility Commission as having the unique potential, where deployed effectively, to support social mobility and there are several ways they could create opportunities for talent attraction and growth, such as:
- 22.1 Create much needed career prospects for talented local young people who, due to their background or situation, have limited options (No One Left Behind).
  - 22.2 Strategically generating the feed and flow of talent into and through the organisation, especially in industries where there is high demand and a shortage of skills (Green, Digital, Analytics, Social Care).
  - 22.3 Provide an attractive variety of career opportunities for young, ambitious talent who may want to do a degree whilst working, as an alternative to university (pre-graduate).
23. In early 2022, The People and Change team undertook a desk-based exercise to analyse current live SCC job vacancies. At the time, it was identified that over three quarters of the roles being advertised could have been recruited as an apprentice role either entry level or higher up the organisation. There are now over 600 apprenticeship qualifications available for us to deploy ranging from Digital to Social Care, at all levels of career.
24. The People and Change team are currently designing a new Model for the deployment of apprenticeships across the council which creates meaningful Early Career pathways into SCC and supports the ambition to create opportunities for local young people into employment. A pilot to explore and refine this model will launch in the Corporate Resources Directorate in early July 2022.

## **Culture Shift**

25. To successfully implement new routes into the organisation which attract diverse new talent, SCC requires a shift in culture to embrace recruitment practices that hire for the future as well as fill immediate skills gaps. This will require time and investment in resource in each directorate to enable a forward-thinking and strategic plan for recruitment. For culture shift this will need to become embedded in the day to day way all services and teams operate.

### **Conclusions:**

26. In Conclusion, the focus of the Talent Strategy work for 2022/23 is on developing Early Careers routes and pathways into SCC and implementing Succession Planning for Business-critical roles. Both areas of focus are designed to take a more future focused approach to recruiting and growing talent for the future.

27. This report has been written to introduce and inform PPDC of the programmes of work and the focus. The People and Change team will keep the Committee updated as the work progresses over the coming months.

### **Financial and value for money implications**

28. There will be costs associated with these programmes of work. These are being explored and established through the project planning. It is expected proposed costs will include additional resource to provide progression and development support for Early Careers employees, funding and investment in our current fixed term apprentices and investment in those identified through succession planning for 'readiness' to assume future roles. It is expected that much of the funding needed to seed projects may be offset through reduced reliance on external recruitment costs in the future.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

29. The Equalities Impact Assessment is currently under consideration and if required will form part of the next update to PPDC.

### **Risk Management Implications**

30. If new routes into the organisation are not created, there is a risk that the organisation does not recruit and retain sufficient future talent to operate effectively. To mitigate this risk a range of strategies are being explored, bearing in mind that not all might be suitable for all services, and that Government schemes may close and/or change in the future.

31. If no action is taken to restore a work experience offer there is a risk of reputational damage to SCC amongst schools, colleges, and young people, who could view the Council as not

supporting its young residents. To mitigate this risk the virtual work experience will be openly available to all Surrey education providers and at no cost to those taking part.

32. If no action is taken to improve the apprenticeship model, there is a risk that SCC continues to have unfilled vacancies in certain services and those services are unable to fulfil their responsibilities to Surrey residents. There is also a likelihood that apprentices on fixed term contracts and low salaries leave the organisation taking the skills and qualifications SCC has invested in, to other employers. Mitigation of this risk can be achieved by implementing a model for apprenticeships which leads to permanent roles with the council which are competitive with other employers.

#### **Next steps:**

People and Change will return with progress on the Talent Strategy projects to the committee in 6 months and at that time will suggest ways in which Members can advocate and support the work for the benefit of residents and Surrey communities.

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#### **Sources/background papers:**

- All background papers used in the writing of the report (eg previous reports/minutes, letters, legislation), should be listed, as required by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.
- A copy of any background papers which have not previously been published should be supplied to Democratic Services with your draft report.

#### **Glossary of Acronyms:**

- T Levels – Technical Levels
- SWAPS – Sector Based Work Academies