

Workforce Strategy 2024-2027

People, Even Better

Foreword by Portfolio Holder

Our workforce remains the cornerstone of our service delivery. As we navigate the complexities of a changing world, their role becomes increasingly pivotal. Aligned with our values, this strategy fosters engagement and collaboration, ensuring our employees feel valued and motivated.

Moreover, we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to delivery for our residents, the community, and the town, recognising our colleagues' unwavering dedication to community delivery. We recognise the imperative of doing more with less, and we are committed to finding innovative solutions that optimise efficiency and maximise impact.

Building on past successes, we prioritise collaboration and innovation to drive positive change. Informed by stakeholder input, our strategy focuses on key priorities to meet evolving community needs.

Remaining agile and responsive, we align with our corporate plan, working towards our vision of Making Stevenage Even Better.

We are immensely proud of our workforce and the exceptional dedication they demonstrate each day. Their hard work and commitment are central to our success, and we celebrate their contributions to making Stevenage a better place for all.

Executive Portfolio Holder (Resources and Transformation)

Foreword by Chief Executive Officer

As we embark on this new chapter, our workforce's role has never been more critical. The challenges we face, from financial constraints to evolving regulations, demand a collective effort underpinned by our shared values and a strong sense of purpose. This Workforce Strategy is not just a plan; it's a commitment to our employees, recognising their central role in delivering our corporate vision. Our goal is to ensure that every colleague feels valued, supported, and equipped to thrive in an environment that fosters innovation and resilience. Together, we will build on our successes, harness new opportunities, and continue to make Stevenage a place where everyone can flourish. I am proud of the dedication and passion that our team brings every day, and I am confident that, with this strategy, we will navigate the future with strength and unity.

Matt Partridge, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service

Foreword by Head of Human Resources

Our workforce is the heartbeat of our organisation, and their wellbeing and professional growth are at the forefront of our Workforce Strategy. In a world of constant change, it is essential that we remain agile, adapting our practices to meet the needs of both our employees and the community we serve. This strategy is a reflection of our commitment to nurturing a workplace where people feel engaged, included, and empowered. By focusing on key priorities such as talent retention, organisational development, and wellbeing, we aim to create an environment where everyone can succeed. Our approach is rooted in our core values and behaviours, and we will work collaboratively across all levels to ensure that these principles guide our actions. Together, we will create a culture that not only meets the challenges of today but also prepares us for the future.

Clare Davies and Kirsten Frew, Joint Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development

Executive Summary

Our workforce is pivotal in navigating the complexities of today's changing world. Aligned with our values, this strategy fosters engagement and collaboration, ensuring our employees feel valued and motivated.

Facing challenges in a tough financial climate, new regulations, and a competitive recruitment market, our new corporate plan, "Making Stevenage Even Better," represents a significant investment in the future. Recognising our workforce as our most valuable asset, this strategy aims to provide them with the necessary skills and resources while fostering a culture of cooperation and collaboration based on our core values.

Driven by values such as caring, straightforwardness, responsiveness, excellence, innovation, and teamwork, our approach guides everything we do, from delivering services to creating an inspiring workplace.

Feedback from quarterly staff pulse surveys informs our strategy, focusing on strengths and areas for improvement. The Workforce Strategy 2024-2027 emphasises five key priorities: Ways of Working, Attracting and Retaining the Best People, Engagement and Communication, Inclusion and Wellbeing, and Organisational Development.

Led by our Senior Leadership Team, but requiring engagement from all levels of management and staff, the strategy's success will be closely monitored and reported quarterly. An annual review will inform the development of an annual workforce plan, incorporating customer feedback, external factors, and continuous improvement efforts.

Addressing climate change, harnessing technology, and balancing the budget are cross-cutting themes essential to our workforce strategy. By integrating these themes, we drive sustainable growth and success, aligning our actions with our broader organisational goals.

Our Workforce Strategy sets a clear path for making even better, focusing on our workforce's development, engagement, and wellbeing. By embracing innovation, collaboration, and our core values, we will navigate challenges and achieve our vision for a thriving community.

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Background

The Council faces a multitude of challenges in the current environment, including a challenging financial climate in local government, new regulations, and a highly competitive recruitment market. Against this backdrop, our new corporate plan, "Making Stevenage Even Better," represents a crucial investment in the town and the council's future.

Recognising the importance of our workforce as our most valuable asset, we are committed to providing them with the necessary skills and resources while fostering a culture of cooperation and collaboration based on our core values of respect and integrity.

Our previous Workforce Strategy (2020-23) was developed rapidly in response to evolving circumstances, particularly during the global pandemic. Notable achievements include the implementation of hybrid working policies, innovative recruitment platforms, and initiatives aimed at enhancing staff well-being and diversity.

As we move forward, it is essential that our Workforce Strategy remains aligned with our corporate plan and adapts to address the challenges. We continue to engage with key stakeholders, to ensure that our strategy addresses these critical issues. Moreover, in the face of a highly competitive recruitment market, we are committed to finding innovative solutions to attract and retain talent, essential for delivering on our ambitious plans for Stevenage.

In this ever-evolving landscape, our commitment to our workforce's well-being and professional growth remains unwavering. Together, guided by our shared values and determination, we will navigate these challenges and work towards making Stevenage a better place for all.

Strategic Context

The landscape of work has undergone significant evolution in recent years, particularly accelerated by the global pandemic. Prospective employees now prioritise work-life balance more than ever, necessitating a clear understanding and promotion of what makes us an attractive employer. It's crucial to align our recruitment efforts with the skills and behaviours that resonate with our values.

As a Council, we are committed to undergoing significant transformation to achieve our strategic goals. It's essential to consider various strategic influences in developing our Workforce Strategy, as these factors are interconnected and have far-reaching implications.

Balancing the Budget: The financial landscape in local government remains uncertain, posing challenges in terms of revenue and capital availability across both the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the General Fund. This challenge is exacerbated by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Our corporate plan outlines four key areas of focus to ensure ongoing budgetary balance.

Responding to New Requirements: Anticipated changes in service delivery encompass a wide range of factors, including climate change, new housing regulations, and performance reporting by the Office for Local Government. We have embraced a holistic vision centred on achieving net-zero emissions by 2030, not only for our organisation but also for our businesses and residents. Our workforce and ways of working will play a crucial role in realising this vision.

Regeneration and Transformation: The vision for town centre regeneration includes the establishment of a new public sector hub. This development will inevitably bring about changes in our ways of working, necessitating careful consideration as we design our future work practices. Furthermore, the integration of digital technologies will be pivotal in transforming service delivery, highlighting the importance of preparing and equipping our workforce for the evolving landscape.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the way we work, offering new opportunities to enhance efficiency, innovation, and service delivery. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into our operations, it's essential that our workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge to harness its potential. This includes not only technical proficiency but also the ability to adapt to changing roles and responsibilities. By embracing AI, we can streamline processes, improve decision-making, and free up our employees to focus on more complex, value-added tasks, ultimately driving better outcomes for our community.

In summary, our strategic context underscores the need for agility and preparedness in response to changing dynamics, ensuring that our Workforce Strategy is aligned with our organisational goals and values.

Our Values

We care passionately about our town and are committed to making a real difference to the lives of all our residents now, and into the future.

Our approach is driven by our values. These guide and inform everything we do; delivering our services, making Stevenage a great place to live, working with our partners, and ensuring our Council is an inspiring place for our staff to work.



Caring

As a Council we will:

- Actively and respectfully listening to people in order to understand them and their views
- Vary our behaviour to help those we are working with
- Present information clearly and in a way that people understand
- Respect the views of others and consider the impact of our words and actions
- Value diversity and treat everyone with dignity and respect

Straightforward

As a Council we will:

- Reduce bureaucracy
- Work smarter and in a more agile way
- Contribute to the development of simplified and straightforward processes and procedures
- Identify and eliminating time consuming or wasteful practices
- Think creatively about how tasks can be best achieved
- Contribute to the identification of processes that may generate efficiency savings
- Embrace technology where this supports increased productivity

Responsive

As a Council we will:

- Remain courteous, helpful and professional in our dealings with our customers
- Demonstrate an understanding of who our customers are and why they matter
- Do what we say we'll do. Explain clearly what service can be delivered and be committed to seeing things through
- Seek and act on customer opinion and feedback

Excellent

As a Council we will:

- Strive to deliver our services to the highest possible standards
- Be open to feedback from others so that we can improve our performance
- Make the best use of our personal strengths and acknowledging our development needs
- Take responsibility for our own learning
- Apply both skill and knowledge to our work
- Learn from both positive and negative experiences

Innovative

As a Council we will:

- Seek and suggest new ways of doing things to improve service, value for money and performance
- Be open to new ideas and suggestions
- Take responsibility for finding solutions and better ways of working
- Actively seek solutions to problems and see things through
- Carefully consider any risks attached to proposed solutions
- Encourage others to contribute ideas and to work with us to find solutions

One Team

As a Council we will:

- Actively contribute to team goals
- Respect and value the contributions of others
- Cooperate with other teams to provide excellent services
- Share knowledge, experience and achievements with the team
- Accept compromises in order to achieve shared aims

Our values are the foundation of everything we do, guiding our actions and decisions as an organization. They define how we interact with each other, our residents, and the wider community. To bring these values to life, we have developed a comprehensive Competency Framework focused on behaviours that align with our core principles. This framework serves as a blueprint for the skills and attitudes we expect from all employees, ensuring that our workforce not only meets the technical

requirements of their roles but also embodies the values that are crucial to our success.

The Competency Framework emphasises key behaviours such as collaboration, adaptable to change, and delivering at pace, which are essential for creating a positive and productive work environment. By fostering these behaviours, we aim to build a culture where everyone feels empowered to contribute their best, driving the organization forward and delivering exceptional service to our community.

To learn more about our Competency Framework and how it supports our values, please click [here](#)

Our workforce today

During 2023 we directly employed an average of 641 people on a range of employment contracts including full-time, part-time, job share, term time and fixed term.

There are several staff-led equalities working groups that represent different groups within our workforce: Women's Network, Diversity and Inclusion Network, Mental Health and Wellbeing Group. These groups play an important part in unlocking the potential of our diverse workforce and in helping to support staff to overcome challenges.

Age

According to the 2021 Census, the average (median) age of Stevenage residents has increased by one year since the 2011 census, from 37 to 38 years of age.

52.9% of our borough population are aged over 35 years old, while 78.8% of our workforce are aged 35 and over.

9.6% of our borough population are aged between 15-24 years old, while 3.4% of our workforce are aged under 24 years old.

Disability

6.8% of Stevenage Borough Council staff have declared a disability on our HR system. Compared with 17.2% of the borough are self-declared as disabled

Gender

53.7% of Stevenage Borough Council staff are female and 46.3% are male.

At a senior leadership level 31.25% are female and 68.75% are male.

Ethnicity

16.35% of Stevenage Borough Council staff are from backgrounds that are not White British, compared to 17.2% of our borough population..

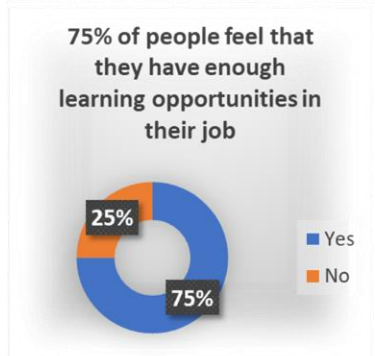
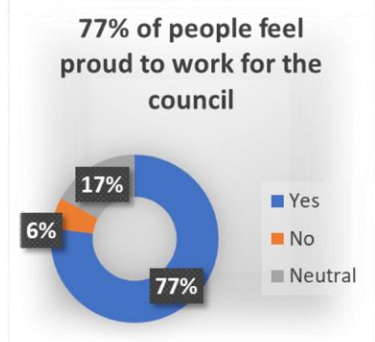
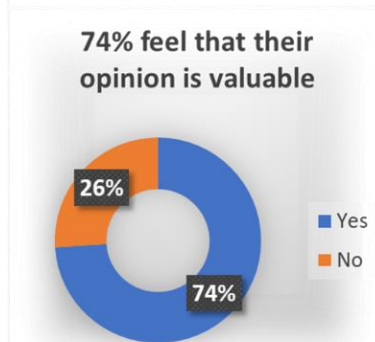
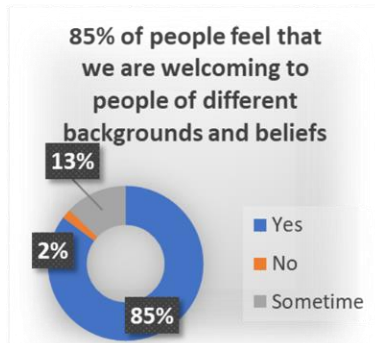
Pay Gap Analysis

A mean gender pay gap of 3.73% as at March 2023, which shows an improving trend and compares favourably with the national average of 7.7%.

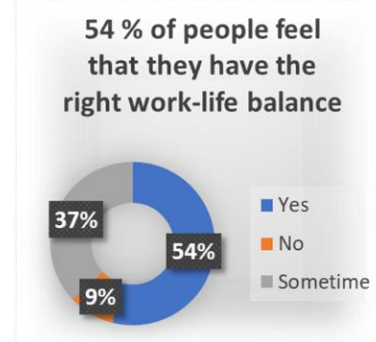
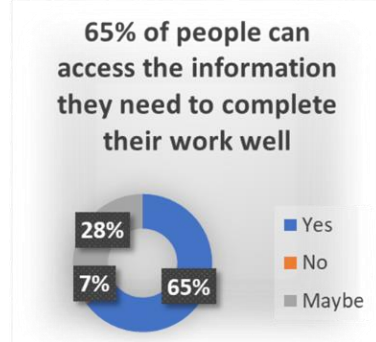
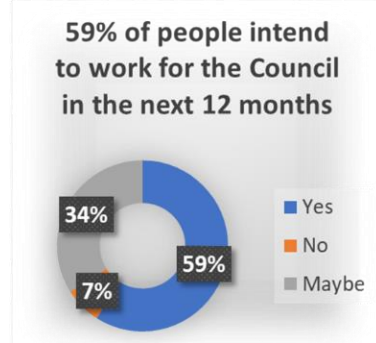
Workforce Insights

Since 2020 we have moved away from the bi-annual all staff survey, to shorter and more frequent (quarterly) staff pulse surveys. The feedback from these surveys has been used to inform this strategy and future surveys feedback will also form part of our measures of success.

Areas of strength



Areas for further improvement



Our Priorities

The Workforce Strategy 2024-2027 is fundamental to achieving the council's goals over the next three years. It recognises that our employees are central to realising the five key objectives outlined in the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan 2024-27.

- Transforming Our Town
- More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes
- Thriving Neighbourhoods
- Tackling Climate Change
- Balancing the Budget

This strategy revolves around three core themes:

Advancing Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Promoting Health & Wellbeing

Embracing Technology & Innovation

To achieve these goals, our strategy will focus on five key priorities:

1. Ways of working
2. Attracting and retaining the best people
3. Engagement and Communication
4. Inclusion and Wellbeing
5. Organisational Development

This strategy is for everyone across the council. It reminds us that although we have a wide range of roles and deliver a remarkably diverse range of services to our residents and community, we are all committed to creating a great place to work.

We will equip our workforce to meet the needs of our communities now and in the future. **We will have the right people, with the right skills, connected to our communities and working together for Stevenage.**

1. Ways of Working

Our strategic aim is centred on the continuous evolution of our ways of working, recognising the diverse nature of services we provide. We are committed to harnessing technology, implementing best practices, and ensuring that our approaches are aligned with our organisational objectives, including our ambitions regarding climate change and the establishment of the new public sector hub.

Integral to this aim is the cultivation of a culture of hybrid working, empowering our staff to autonomously manage their workload and contribute to the ongoing evolution of our organisation. This involves transitioning away from traditional office spaces to embrace more flexible and collaborative work environments, effective performance management in the hybrid world and with the goal of being "hub ready" by the end of this strategy period.

Furthermore, we are dedicated to ensuring that our operational policies and processes support our climate change ambitions and are sustainable in the long term. This entails leveraging technology applications to enhance productivity and collaboration across our services, alongside the implementation of digital solutions for tasks such as overtime and callout claims.

Additionally, we prioritise the upskilling of our managers to effectively lead in a hybrid working environment, equipping them with the necessary tools and resources to support their teams. Moreover, we actively support the implementation and development of our SDS (Service Delivery System) workforce to align with the rollout of new digital systems, thereby enhancing our operational capabilities and supporting our organisational goals.

Strategic Aim	Strategic Objectives	Key measures of success
<p>Developing and evolving our ways of working, recognising the diverse nature of services, harnessing technology, and ensuring consistent best practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure our ways of working support the reduction in physical office space and be "hub ready" by the end of the strategy. • To ensure our ways of working, policies and processes support our climate change ambitions and are sustainable. • To ensure technology deployed to the workforce supports increased productivity and collaboration across services. • Ensure full utilisation of technology applications in the back-office delivery of services. • Upskill managers with the tools to lead effectively in a hybrid working environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to develop our people as much as the technology. • Improved staff satisfaction for work life balance in staff pulse survey • Improved score on staff survey for knowledge of using technology that is

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rollout digital solution for overtime and callout claims• Support the implementation and development of the SDS workforce to align with the rollout of the new digital systems.	relevant to job role.
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2. Attracting and retaining the best people

Our strategic objective is to cultivate and maintain a diverse, skilled, and dedicated workforce whose values align with those of SBC, while simultaneously enhancing the overall diversity of our council. To achieve this, we will place a heightened emphasis on the following key initiatives:

Strategic Aim	Strategic Objectives	Key measures of success
<p>Attract, recruit, and retain a diverse, skilled, and committed workforce whose values align with SBC, whilst increasing the diversity of the organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the council is positioned as a champion for the commitments set out in the Stevenage Works Skills Frameworks with respects to our internal workforce and linked to the focus on Public Sector services • Develop a model for future apprenticeship posts and support offer, joining up with Stevenage Works • Identify digital process to confirm right to work to create a streamlined pre-employment process. • Develop a digital onboarding process to provide an excellent new starter experience. • Engage with key internal and external partners delivering skills provision, guidance and support including Hertfordshire Futures through Generation Stevenage events and the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal as well as broader skills focused activities such as our ambitious and groundbreaking programme focused on the development of STEM skills in underserved communities in partnership with Mission44. • New Starters are effectively inducted and given a welcome reflective of our organisation. • Develop a new work experience programme for local students, working in partnership with local schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of apprentices. • Workforce stability is >85% • Time to recruit is <45 days. • Monitor abandoned application rate on e-recruitment platform. • 80% of new starters are satisfied they have been effectively inducted. Measured through new starter surveys. • 80% of employees would recommend SBC as a place to work – staff survey.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our people recommend SBC as a great place to work. • Enhance our employer brand through developing enhanced advertising offer, maximising use of social media and sharing colleague’s experiences of working at SBC, including hybrid working. 	
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By prioritising these initiatives and enhancing our focus on being an attractive employer, we will strengthen our workforce strategy, attract top-tier talent, and foster a culture of excellence and innovation within the council.

3. Engagement and Communication

Strategic Objective: Our primary focus is to foster a culture of engagement and empowerment within our workforce, ensuring that every employee feels valued, heard, and connected to the council’s ambitions and purpose. In this era of hybrid work models, it’s imperative that we prioritise the well-being and engagement of our staff.

Strategic Aim	Strategic Objectives	Key measures of success
Strengthen employee engagement by valuing and listening to staff, empowering them to positively influence change and recognise the contributions that our staff make.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continually engage with and actively listen to all staff acting on their feedback to bring about positive change with quarterly staff pulse surveys. • Update the organisational Change Policy, ensuring a comprehensive package to support staff through change. • Work in partnership with our staff networks and trade union to continue to develop and evolve our approach to staff engagement and communication. • Celebrate the success of our workforce, both at an individual and organisational level, recognising how all staff contribute to and enhance the overall our success. • To support the Council Climate Change Agenda by taking forward a programme of workforce related actions • Greater use of the intranet as a communication platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive feedback from the staff survey • Staff having regular REAL conversations – staff survey. • Increase in nominations for staff awards.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visibility of Senior Officer and Member Leadership in the form of staff communications 	
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Through these strategic initiatives, we will cultivate a highly engaged and empowered workforce, driving organisational success and resilience in an ever-evolving landscape.

4. Inclusion and Wellbeing

Our Strategic Goal: We aim to nurture a workplace known for its inclusivity, inspiration, diversity, innovation, ambition, and fulfilment. Our objective is to create a culture which is agile and flexible, enabling us to navigate change confidently and effectively. Essential to this goal is prioritising the wellbeing of our staff, ensuring they thrive in a positive work environment that fosters happiness, motivation, value, and a healthy work-life balance.

Strategic Aim	Strategic Objectives	Key measures of success
Strengthen a workplace that is inclusive, inspiring, diverse, innovative, ambitious, and fulfilling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a culture that promotes employee health and wellbeing, with a comprehensive annual programme of wellbeing activity. • Actively support mental health in the workplace, encouraging staff to share their personal experiences to continue to the conversation and recognising the link between work and personal life. • An annual calendar of events to celebrate a range of religious festivals and other events, valuing diversity. • Increase the diversity of staff in senior roles • Introduce Ethnicity Pay Gap reporting. • Reaffirm our commitment to Equal Pay • Encourage staff to renew and update their self-declared personal details on MyView • Renew our Disability Confident Scheme accreditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sickness levels are below the agreed target. • 80% of staff value the health and wellbeing offer at SBC (pulse survey) • Gender Pay Gap – continues to be monitored and positive action to reduce taken where ever possible. • Introduction of an Ethnicity Pay Gap

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rollout Dementia friendly staff training programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff from all backgrounds continue to feel valued remains high (pulse survey) Improved score for work-life balance (pulse survey)
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In summary, our strategy for inclusion and wellbeing goes beyond compliance—it's about creating a workplace where every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best. By prioritising wellbeing, promoting diversity and inclusion, and enhancing employee engagement, we are laying the groundwork for a truly inclusive and fulfilling work environment.

5. Organisational Development

Our Strategic Goal: We are committed to cultivating a forward-thinking and collaborative workforce, where individuals are supported in fulfilling their roles, and leaders are equipped to empower and engage the workforce in embracing future ways of working to ensure effective delivery of services for our residents and customers.

Strategic Aim	Strategic Objectives	Key measures of success
Create and maintain a forward-thinking, collaborative workforce where individuals are supported to fulfil their roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define a leadership vision for 4th tier and procure leadership programme accredited under the levy, including leading in a hybrid world and transformation. Ensure we get best value from our Apprenticeship Levy and 'growing our own'. Foster a culture that recognises the importance of eLearning. Identify apprenticeship learning opportunities to invest in training for the Housing staff to ensure that the requirements of the forthcoming RSH qualification standard is fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds are being effectively used from the apprentice levy with zero funds wasted due to expired time limits. Measured by an annual review of Apprenticeships. 80% completion rate of mandatory e-learning measure by quarterly

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop and empower leaders to support staff effectively through change and foster engagement with the Transformation programme. • Effective workforce planning, considering succession planning and identify hard to fill roles. 	<p>reporting to Corporate Governance Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff pulse survey feedback remains positive for learning opportunities.
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In summary, our focus on organisational development is aimed at creating a workforce that is agile, resilient, and well-equipped to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the future. By investing in leadership excellence, anticipating future skill needs, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, we are laying the groundwork for sustainable growth and success in a rapidly changing environment.

It is crucial that we identify and prioritise three cross-cutting themes: addressing climate change, harnessing technology, and balancing the budget. These themes will serve as guiding principles across all aspects of our workforce strategy, ensuring that our actions and initiatives are aligned with our broader organisational goals. By recognising and integrating these themes into our strategy, we can effectively navigate challenges and capitalise on opportunities to drive sustainable growth and success.

Climate Change

As part of our commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, we will integrate workforce-related actions into our Council Climate Change Agenda. By engaging our employees in environmentally conscious practices and initiatives, we will contribute to our broader sustainability goals while fostering a sense of collective purpose and responsibility.

Balancing the Budget

Balancing the budget is crucial for Stevenage Borough Council's workforce strategy because it directly impacts the council's ability to invest in its employees and provide necessary resources for their development and well-being. A balanced budget ensures stability within the organisation, which is essential for attracting and retaining talent. It allows the council to allocate funds for training, professional development opportunities, and employee benefits, fostering a supportive and conducive work environment. Moreover, financial stability enables the council to offer competitive salaries and rewards, enhancing its attractiveness as an employer and

promoting employee satisfaction and retention. Therefore, aligning workforce strategy with budgetary considerations is vital for sustaining a high-performing workforce and achieving organisational objectives effectively.

Utilising Technology

In our quest for organisational advancement, we recognise technology's pivotal role in our workforce strategy. It serves as a driver for innovation, operational efficiency, and sustainable growth. Our investments in technology unlock improvements across our organisation, but their full potential relies on equipping our workforce with essential skills. Through continuous training and a culture of innovation, we empower employees to thrive in a digital-first environment. By aligning technology investments with workforce development, we drive organisational excellence and deliver exceptional services, achieving our collective goals.

Reporting and Governance

The Workforce Strategy outlines our strategic aims, objectives, and success measures, which will be closely monitored and reported quarterly over the next three years. While HR will lead this initiative, it requires active engagement and commitment from all levels of management and staff to realise its full potential. To ensure effective governance, the Workforce Strategy will undergo an annual review led by HR in collaboration with relevant services, incorporating customer feedback, external factors, organisational priorities, and continuous improvement efforts. This process will inform the development of an annual workforce plan, drawing insights from Business Unit Workforce Plans and ensuring alignment with broader organisational goals and strategies.