

**To:** Audit and Governance Committee  
**Date:** 9 January 2020  
**Report of:** Head of Business Improvement  
**Title of Report:** Progress with the Recruitment and Retention Action Plan

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To report progress on the recruitment and retention action plan
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	An efficient and effective Council: our ambition is for a customer-focused organisation, delivering efficient, high quality services that meet people's needs.
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	None.
<b>Recommendations: That the Audit and Governance Committee:</b>	
1. <b>Note</b> the progress made on the recruitment and retention action plan	
2. <b>Note</b> the aims and objectives to be included in an updated Equalities Action Plan 2018/21	

<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1	Human Resources and Operational Development (HR & OD) Development Programme
Appendix 2	Equalities Action Plan
Appendix 3	Aims & objectives for inclusion in Equalities Action Plan 2018/21

## Introduction

- Oxford City Council is currently working toward delivering a number of actions and activities in relation to recruitment and retention, focusing on policies, practices and procedures collated under an umbrella term; Human Resources and Operational Development (HR&OD) Development programme, Appendix 1. This work is closely

aligned to the delivery of an Equalities Action Plan, Appendix 2. This report provides details on the progress that has been made.

2. The HR & OD Development Programme and the Equalities Action Plan have been informed by the 2018 Workforce Equality Report, (WER). Actions arising from the WER were agreed by the City Executive Board (now Cabinet) in 2018 in relation to key aspects of staff recruitment, retention and development, with the aim of enhancing the Council's employee offer and ensuring the organisation is well placed in the local, regional and national labour market.
3. The WER is a detailed analysis of the demography of the Council workforce, aligned where appropriate to comparative local and national statistics, and is published annually. The WER provides data on a rolling three year period to enable themes to be identified and actions amended or adjusted as necessary.
4. At the last meeting of Cabinet a series of new aims and objectives for the Equalities Action Plan 2018/21 and 2019 WER was approved for publication on the Council's web site.
5. The HR & OD Development Programme is divided into seven areas; Equalities Action Plan, Employer of Choice, Recognition and Reward, Supporting and Engaging Young People, Talent Management, Workforce Development and Agency and Consultancy. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for details of the work streams associated with each of the seven areas of the plan).

## **Background**

6. Prior to detailing progress against the various activities and actions it is important to set the context against which the HR&OD Development Programme and the Equalities Action Plan have been developed. It is also important to recognise that the work is regularly reviewed to ensure it reflects new and emerging themes and the changing landscape of employment.
7. Oxfordshire is buoyant in an economic sense, with relatively high levels of employment and strong inward investment. However the cost of housing is an issue in the Oxford area which, to a certain extent, limits the appeal of vacancies to those within a reasonable commuting distance. Only if the nature of the vacancy readily lends itself to a degree of home or remote working and/or the salary makes commuting a feasible proposition is it likely to attract candidates from further afield.
8. Unemployment is low in the Oxford area. As a result the Council is not unique in experiencing difficulties to recruit in some key professions and, typically, these are the same professions where there are skills shortages nationally or where higher rates of pay are offered by the private sector. Finally, the physical proximity to London is also a challenge from a recruitment perspective as many potential applicants are tempted to commute to the City for work.
9. Unlike some employers, such as NHS Trusts, there has been no notable impact on the Council's recruitment activity linked to Brexit, however this is being monitored and may change.
10. Finally the Housing and Growth Deal is a further factor that is likely to impact on both the retention of existing staff as well as the Council's ability to attract new talent, whether for permanent recruits and/or temporary staffing. There is already evidence of increasing demand locally for key professions in areas where we

already struggle to recruit, making the availability of talent scarcer and contributing to increasing salaries for such roles.

11. An analysis of staff home post codes indicates that some 84% of employees live in the Oxfordshire area and 37% of those live within the OX1, OX2, OX3 and OX4 postcode areas. (16% of staff live outside the 'OX' postcode area).
12. The Council employs some 700 staff, with a pay bill of £ 33 m. It is relatively unique in so far that it has retained most of its services 'in-house' through the creation of Oxford Direct Services as a wholly-owned subsidiary (i.e. as a separate employer).
13. The Council's workforce is 59% female and 41% male. Within the female workforce 64% work on a full-time basis, compared to 88% males. The workforce age profile is such that 38% of staff are over age 50. Staff turnover is approximately 11.7% per annum, which is broadly comparable to other public sector organisations.
14. As an employer the Council offers flexible working arrangements to enable staff to achieve a suitable 'work/life' balance, as well as providing a wide range of employee benefits including providing financial assistance (in approved cases) towards relocation costs. An employee assistance programme is also available to staff, which offers support and counselling to employees on a wide range of personal issues including health and wellbeing and financial issues.

The following sections are presented to align with the headings of the HR & OD Development Programme.

#### Equalities Action Plan

15. A concerted effort has been made by the HR team to promote the need and value of staff keeping their personal data up to date on the Council people management data base. Whilst not a legal obligation, the more accurate workforce data the council has will result in a greater level of reflective actions. Despite both a communications campaign and requesting managers to promote data recording, the actual levels of declaration of protected characteristics data has not increased significantly, although it is higher than in 2016. The HR team continue to encourage greater levels of data input during the 'on boarding' stage for new starters, and a major update to the Council HR data recording system in the autumn will be used to further promote updating by employees of their personal data.
16. Mandatory training has been provided to all staff and managers between January and March 2019, with the aims of raising awareness about current diversity issues. The training provided can be summarised as follows: -
  - a) An e-learning programme on unconscious bias rolled out to all staff
  - b) 'Face to face' training provided to line managers covering: creating an inclusive environment; being a role model for diversity; and, understanding unconscious bias in decision making

Further training opportunities will be identified in the next financial year.

17. In addition, a programme of recruitment training is delivered by the HR team to both new managers, as well as colleagues requiring a 'refresher' in the Council's recruitment processes (i.e. for line managers who do not recruit on a regular basis), which reinforces the messaging and learning delivered through the mandatory training detailed above.

18. Quarterly meetings are held with all Service Heads to discuss the specific demographics of their service area, as well as opportunities for developing a more diverse, representative workforce either through 'day to day' recruitment and/or through planned organisational changes to reflect changing service requirements.
19. At an operational level all vacancies are reviewed by the HR Business Partner team with the recruiting manager to consider: the essential/desirable requirements in the person specification for the role, with particular focus on the level of qualifications required vis-à-vis equivalent experience; the content of the job description; and associated job advert and advertising methods, to ensure that these are as inclusive as possible to ensure that the vacancy attracts a diverse group of applicants. Different approaches to filling a post are also reviewed, such as entry-level career paths for more hard to fill posts where a 'grow our own' approach may be more appropriate. Examples of the positive impact of such interventions are the recruitment scheme for the Diversity and Inclusion Manager (Community Services) and the Trainee Solicitor (Law and Governance) both of which were offered to high quality applicants from a BAME group.
20. Advert copy for recruitment campaigns has been reviewed to promote the Council's commitment to increasing the representation of under-represented groups as well as offering support at application and interview stage for targeted roles, with the aim of improving the applicant success rate for under-represented groups.
21. A wide-ranging review of the Council's recruitment processes and procedures is being progressed with the aim of improving the 'applicant experience' as well as widening the potential 'pool' of applicants for vacancies advertised by the Council. This process includes: simplifying the application process and clarifying roles and responsibilities (internally facing aspects); revamping the Council's recruitment web page; exploring the use of social media; simplifying the current on-line application form; introducing a CV application route; reviewing all information provided to applicants; creating more 'applicant friendly' template letters and notifications; and, developing an improved on-boarding and induction process.
22. The improvements across the recruitment process have resulted in an increase in the percentage of job applications from BAME candidates from 20.07% at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 to 29.73% at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. This has translated to an increase in the percentage of new starters from BAME candidates to 18.03% at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 compared to 7.96% the previous year. Staff leavers from BAME groups also increased in the year to 13.6% compared to 7.95% in the previous year.
23. A revised exit interview process was rolled out in December 2018 with the aim of gaining greater insight on reasons for staff leaving the council, which is currently around 10% per annum. The revised process is based on an invitation to a meeting with a member of the HR team, rather than the relevant line manager. The new process has resulted in a significant increase in the uptake levels of exit interviews (circa 55% of staff leavers, from less than 30%), as well as improving the qualitative data 'captured' through the process, in particular about the 'reason' for leaving (primarily around career progression and development opportunities for the majority of leavers). This data will be used to develop improvements and interventions going forwards, as well as provide feedback to the relevant service area(s) concerned.
24. Officers facilitated a CV writing workshop to a group of Asian women at Rosehill Community Centre earlier this year, with the aim of encouraging and supporting them into work. This workshop helped to promote greater level of understanding between the Council and the Asian group, as well as providing a route to engage a

small section of the community for the *Everyone Matters* programme detailed above.

25. Recruitment roadshows were held in local community centres in May and June 2018, with further events in February and October 2019. These events provide information to attendees on the range of opportunities within the Council and, where appropriate, provide face-to-face support to attendees on applying for current vacancies with the Council. Further events are planned in 2020.
26. Appendix 2 provides an update on the Equalities Action Plan agreed in November 2018.

### Employer of Choice

27. An 'employee proposition statement' has been developed for use as part of the recruitment related activity, as set out in paragraph 20 above, which will be used to showcase why job applicants should apply for the Council's vacancies. A new recruitment web site is in the process of being developed which will include video-based 'stories' from staff describing why they came to work for the Council, the benefits of our flexible working policies, etc. Social media channels are also being explored in order to reach a broader labour market demographic than would otherwise be reached through web site based recruitment alone.

### Recognition and Reward

28. Work is progressing on analysing the Council's employment package relative to that of its competitors, with particular emphasis on 'hard to fill' roles in areas such as planning, building control and ICT. This data will be used to inform the forthcoming pay negotiations for a new pay deal operative from April 2021.

### Supporting and Engaging with Young People

29. It is recognised that there is limited awareness amongst the 16 to 18 age group of the wide range of career opportunities within the Council. As part of a plan to develop more effective engagement with this age group, a structured approach to work experience placements has been implemented in partnership with Oxford Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP). Two 'pilot' programmes were delivered in July and October involving 6 students in total, four from the BAME communities in Oxford. This programme has enabled the Council to engage directly with young people from Oxford, as well as provide a positive experience of working with the Council. Following the success of this pilot a similar programme is scheduled for the summer of 2020. Over time it is hope that this programme will help to raise the profile of the Council amongst this key group of future workers.
30. Research has been conducted to establish which schools in the city have the highest population of BAME students, to enable more targeted recruitment roadshows and other school engagement opportunities. This data will be used in planning 'outreach' activity and, if approved, apprenticeship opportunities for the 2020 cohort.
31. Apprenticeship Cohorts – The Council is currently committed to providing funding for a biennial apprenticeship cohort. This has been successfully running since 2012. The next cohort is due in September 2020 and the approach to the level of qualifications offered will be reviewed to consider workforce planning activity and adopting positive action in the recruitment process. The current apprenticeship

cohort 2018 – 2020 consists of 11 apprentices of which 25% are from a BAME background.

### Talent Management

32. A Talent Management Framework was developed and agreed at CMT in 2018, however the current approach to internal positive action as described below has taken precedence.
33. Career Development discussions are encouraged through the appraisal process and limited one to one coaching is available. The apprenticeship levy fund is being used to support 15 employees to gain career qualifications. The Council also provides an in-house delivered ILM level 3 management development programme accessible to all.
34. Service areas are provided with funding to support career development opportunities.

### Workforce Development

35. Learning and Development continue to be a key part of the employee offer and the Council continues to support a comprehensive corporate training schedule delivered by an in-house training officer. The schedule seeks to develop staff to reflect improving performance through building confidence, self-awareness and capability. This also includes a highly successful in-house fully accredited ILM level 3 management programme.
36. In addition to the current development opportunities offered to managers, either through the ILM scheme or apprenticeship levy, the Council is scoping out a management and leadership development programme for employees from under-represented groups at various levels as an internally focused Positive Action programme, with equalities in service delivery and engaging with communities at its core. The approach is to develop a future Oxford City Council leader and manager, an inclusive leader who understands equalities needs within the local community and has the mind-set and skills to deliver accessible responsive services. This programme will need to be progressed through normal procurement channels and funded through the existing budget provision. However if the costs of this programme, once identified, cannot be supported by existing budget provision for 2020/21, the priorities for learning and development spend will need to be re-evaluated.
37. Performance management has been enhanced through the introduction of an on-line appraisal process, Actus, which reflects the old paper based system but improves efficiency and effectiveness. The requirement to have bi-monthly appraisal meetings continues to attract positive comment from our liP assessments.
38. An Equality, Diversity and Inclusion week of activity, '*Everyone Matters*', was held in June this year for council staff. The aims of the programme were to:
  - a) Enable better insight and understanding of Oxford and its communities, along with current diversity and inclusion issues.
  - b) Act as a catalyst for cultural change seeking to facilitate changed behaviours, encourage people to try new ways of working and develop tools, mechanism or practices which build a sense of ownership of the equalities agenda.

- c) Create an environment and culture that is inclusive, by encouraging a commitment to equalities and a curiosity about understanding better equality, diversity and inclusion both internally and externally.
39. The week was very successful in terms of outcomes, with positive feedback received from both delegates as well as training providers. 360 staff attended across the course of the week with over half making a personal commitment to change. A survey of participants after the event indicated a notable increase in delegates' knowledge and understanding of areas of Council policies and procedures; increased awareness of how they can contribute to the diversity agenda; and a significant increase in perception and understanding of the Council's commitment to equality. Another key outcome from the week was the identification of a group of colleagues who were interested in becoming an 'equalities ambassador', championing and promoting greater equalities and support the development of a more inclusive culture at service area level
40. Technical Level (T- level) apprenticeships are being introduced in September 2020. A requirement of the full-time training programme is the completion of a minimum three month placement with an employer to gain practical skills and embed their learning. This placement is recognised as training and within this programme at any point during the placement a suitable candidate could transfer into a work based apprenticeship as a full-time employee. The Council is currently reviewing how to integrate and maximise this opportunity by both promoting the Council as an employer to BAME communities through placements as well as identifying potential entry point recruitment routes into the Council, which could incorporate a T-level placement programme.
41. As part of the Learning and Development programme a comprehensive mental wellbeing programme, 'Thriving at Work' has been developed and being rolled out across the organisation. Following an initial focus on communication all staff were asked to complete an awareness training programme on mental health whilst managers were additionally provided with a ½ day training course which considered how to support people in the organisation with their mental health. The Council has funded the accreditation of four officers as Mental Health First Aid, (MHFA) instructors, enabling them to deliver accredited MHFA course to staff in the organisation. The Council currently has 36 accredited MHFA Aiders and an active Mental Wellbeing cohort delivering ad-hoc initiatives aimed at promoting positive mental wellbeing in the workplace such as; Tea & Talk sessions. Whilst it is too early to assess the impact of this initiative in terms of absence reduction it is clear that there continues to be a need with evidence provided through the absence types, with anxiety, stress and depression continuing to be the highest type of absence and the Employee Assistance Programme having mental health as the number one contact reason. The mental health first aiders have had 48 contacts since April. (Further Mental Health First Aid training is scheduled for January 2020 and a further Managing Mental Health Workshop, aimed at line managers, is currently being designed for delivery in the New Year).
42. As a result of the work detailed above the Council was asked to provide a case study for the mental health charity MIND, which has been published on the MJ website.
43. The way the Council manages Health & Safety has been developed over the last three years and the governance structure is now more robust and challenging whilst also encouraging the ownership of day to day health and safety procedures

to managers and teams rather than corporately. Health and safety performance is now more visible through an on-line portal and enables accurate data to be monitored and reported through the governance structure. To support this the Council is developing a training programme which combines health and safety procedures and processes with behavioural skills needed to enable them to be implemented as day to day activity.

### Agency and Consultancy

44. In addition to working with service areas on wider workforce planning issues the HR department monitors and provides data to Service Heads on the usage of agency and consultancy workers. As noted in paragraphs 9 and 26 above there are a number of service areas where there is shortage of talent in the permanent labour market and, as a result, the Council has relatively high usage of agency and/or consultancy workers. The Council is also in the process of scoping the 'specification of requirement' for a new agency worker contract, which will be the subject of a procurement exercise in 2020.

### **New activities approved by Cabinet**

45. As indicated in the introduction above, Cabinet recently approved a number of additional areas of activities for the period 2018 to 2021. These are detailed at Appendix 3 below, and will be incorporated into a revised Equalities Action Plan in due course.

### **Financial Implications**

46. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **Legal Issues**

47. The Workforce Equality Report referred to in this report has been prepared in compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

48. Positive Action is one of the Government's range of measures aimed at tackling discrimination in the workplace under the Equality Act 2010. It can be used in two areas: encouragement in training and recruitment and promotion. To adopt positive action approaches the Council must ensure it can provide evidence of the 'gap' it is trying to resolve and that the approach is reasonable.

<b>Report author</b>	Helen Bishop
Job title	Head of Business Improvement
Service area or department	Business Improvement
Telephone	01865 255232
e-mail	<a href="mailto:hbishop@oxford.gov.uk">hbishop@oxford.gov.uk</a>

<b>Background Papers:</b> None
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## APPENDIX 1

### HR & OD Development Programme



## APPENDIX 3

### Aims & objectives for inclusion in Equalities Action Plan 2018/21

Aims and objectives	Actions
Increase representation of BAME employees in the workforce and by 1.5% per annum.	<p>Communicate the case for this percentage and why this is a priority to gain commitment and buy in building on the success of equalities week.</p> <p>Equalities ambassadors to analyse learning to date and any further ideas to improve positive action</p> <p>All actions to other aims weighted to focus on achievement of this target.</p>
<p>Increase representation of BAME at all management levels</p> <p>Increase representation of women at management levels where less than 50% representation</p>	<p>Positive action programme to train future managers and leaders, with places on the programme weighted to include staff from a BAME group and women and colleagues with other protected characteristics.</p> <p>This programme will need to be progressed through normal procurement channels.</p>
Recruitment practices that reduce unconscious bias and increase representation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consistent monitoring and application of competence based recruitment that focuses on successful behaviours required, rather than background or certain experience that may exclude under represented applicants.</li> <li>2. Promotion of roles in schools and community with high percentage of BAME, building on 2019 work and research.</li> <li>3. Target all new management roles to reach out to more under represented applicants especially, BAME and women applicants.</li> </ol>
Pipeline of trained and skilled diverse recruits through apprentice and graduate training schemes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review biennial apprentice cohort (Sept2020) to increase number from BAME and disability groups</li> <li>2. Adopt the T Level apprentice scheme to address areas such as planning to improve pipeline of planners from City and from BAME backgrounds.</li> <li>3. Graduate training scheme for future officers with at least two graduates from BAME background.</li> <li>4. Promote the use the apprenticeship levy funds for underrepresented groups.</li> <li>5. Review learning and development budgets with an equality impact assessment to identify further scope for positive action.</li> </ol>
An inclusive workplace culture that encourages innovation and delivery of accessible services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand from exit interviews, equalities ambassadors and community work the barriers to applying for and remaining in council employment and develop and an action plan to improve further.</li> <li>2. When embedded use the management development programme action learning projects to drive a proactive culture that improves service accessibility and diverse team work, as foundations of innovation.</li> </ol>
Network of ambassadors who have the skills and tools to promote, improve and support equalities improvement in services and workplace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree lead for developing and supporting network.</li> <li>2. Invite interested individuals who expressed an interest in becoming equalities champions.</li> <li>3. Train and provide guidance, including facilities to meet regularly as a network, with access to senior leaders to help empower and improve equalities.</li> <li>4. Communicate and recognise positive work by ambassadors at launch and on a six monthly basis to keep momentum.</li> </ol>