

Tendring
District Council



**Tendring District
Council
People Strategy
2024-2029**

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People Strategy 2024 to 2029

This People Strategy sets out the Council's aims for the support and development of its staff for the next five years. It complements the agreed and published Corporate Plan covering 2024-2028.

Context

Tendring District Council (TDC) has an increasingly complex workforce made up of those staff who are employed full or part time on a permanent contract of employment; staff who are on fixed term contracts; casual and seasonal staff; apprenticeships and other training positions; staff who are on secondment into the organisation; and agency or contract staff. In addition, volunteers play an essential role in supporting a number of service functions.

In addition to the different forms of contracting, funding for posts to pay for salary and oncosts has also become more complex. As the organisation's work has increasingly become one of working in partnership with other key public sector providers (such as the NHS, other local authorities, Essex police and others) a significant number of posts are part or fully funded by these partner organisations for a fixed time period. Funding of posts from grants has also become significant. Whilst these funding opportunities are highly valued and enable the authority to carry out far more work than would otherwise be possible it has inevitably led to an increase in the number of fixed term, temporary posts.

Finally, ways of working have also become more varied. TDC has adopted a hybrid working approach where the demands of the role enable this and the majority of the workforce in what might be broadly described as 'office' roles now work from home for part of their working week. Legislative changes have also amended workers rights for flexible working arrangements and, wherever possible, these requests are accommodated. The use of digital communications and IT continues to grow and develop such that steadily more roles require increased literacy and IT proficiency.

All these changes and trends demonstrate how employment within TDC has evolved and continues to evolve. It is expected that during the course of the lifetime of this strategy the nature of employment will change further with an increase in partnership working and funding, greater use of IT, the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and changes in employment legislation which will alter and amend the rights of workers and employees.

For the purpose of this strategy, the phrase 'staff' encompasses all permanent and temporary employees (including secondees and contractors) and apprentices. Casual staff and volunteers will also be covered by the majority of the content of this strategy; however, requirements may be amended dependent upon the specific circumstances of their contract/agreement.

Thematic priorities

This People Strategy is being developed during a time of economic challenge and uncertainty. The Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis continue to echo, and it is expected that financial constraints upon the authority will continue. With this in mind, it is especially important that the organisation is confident of 'getting the basics right'.

What are 'the basics'?

The following is not an exhaustive list, it is indicative of what 'the basics' mean within the people management and development context.

Ensuring that:

- the organisation complies with the legislative and best practice requirements for employment;
- managers are appropriately knowledgeable and skilled in people management in addition to their professional expertise;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development practitioners are appropriately skilled and qualified to provide professional advice and guidance on operational and strategic development and practice;
- the behaviours valued by the organisation are clear and demonstrated in practice. These behaviours include acting with integrity, honesty, respect, professionalism, inclusion, collaboration, innovation, personal, and mutual accountability.

This Plan follows the three phases of the employee life cycle: Joining, Staying and Leaving.

Joining

The process for a person to join the organisation begins at the 'attraction' stage.

Attraction

Although Tendring is a less accessible geographic area than say, Colchester or Ipswich, it expects to attract staff, who are looking for a high-quality work life balance and who wish to contribute to the lives of residents within the District. The organisation's shift to hybrid working and the increased ability to support remote working opens up the option for increased numbers of employees to be based outside the District. This change is also helping with retention and job satisfaction reporting.

Tendring District Council will utilise its excellent 'brand reputation' as a top-performing local authority to become an employer of choice for the local community and beyond. Examples of this commitment include being a Disability Confident Leader and an Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award holder. Both of these merits demonstrate the authority's advocacy in these areas. Additionally, the Council serves as an Anchor organisation. Anchor organisations are typically large entities that are local to a specific place and have the capacity to maximise social value through their roles as workplace developers, employers, and procurers. TDC will further enhance its practice by offering flexible working conditions and a comprehensive benefits package in addition to the basic salary.

The organisation will continually review and assess its advertising methods to ensure it is seen by the greatest potential range of applicants. Ongoing use of social media, targeted recruitment campaigns via agency and recruitment specialists, as well as the continued use of more traditional means such as website, radio and professional press will all be utilised as appropriate to reach the widest possible field of potential applicants. In addition, the organisation plays an active role with the Essex 'Anchors' Network and Reverse Job Fairs to support recruitment, especially for individuals who may have additional needs such a neuro-divergence.

It is expected that the use of secondments across fellow public sector organisations will increase. A number of Memoranda of Understanding are already in place with organisations such as Essex County Council (ECC), East Suffolk District Council, North East Essex Health Alliance, University of Essex, Tendring Education Strategic Board and Essex Public Health. Secondments provide an effective means for staff to gain experience and for recruitment of specialist skills for time limited periods to be achieved. TDC has joined the [ECC Secondment Website](#).

The process for applying for posts will be periodically reviewed to ensure that the system is as streamlined as possible, there are no unnecessary barriers for applicants and that processes are appropriate for the role.

The process for the recruitment of apprentices has been significantly simplified by making use of the National Apprenticeships recruitment website. This will continue to be used and monitored for its ongoing effectiveness.

In specialist roles where recruitment is problematic, we will continue to offer 'student' opportunities for the postholder to 'earn and learn' while they train to become fully qualified. Market Forces Supplements will be used, for hard to recruit roles, where the authority is competing for recruitment in a 'job seekers' market' and it needs to offer an enhanced financial package to recruit and retain appropriately skilled and qualified staff.

The range of additional staff benefits will be kept under review and increased when appropriate.

Recruitment

Aspects of recruitment such as application sifting, interviews and pre-start contact are led by the recruiting manager with HR administrative and advisory support.

Interview assessment will assess technical knowledge, competence, relevant experience and approach for the role as well as profile 'fit'. The Universal Competency Framework will be used to help inform areas of focus at interview.

During the period between an offer of employment and commencement in post all new starters will be encouraged to complete at least some of their essential introductory induction. This will include the use of online learning material including an introduction to the organisation and local government, Health and Safety Basics, Fire Awareness, Safeguarding and Prevent.

TDC has established a Memorandum of Understanding for secondments from partner authorities and the NHS. This framework document enables the smooth transition of employees into secondments and establishes the contractual arrangements for the tripartite agreement.

Starting, the first six months.

The organisation will continue to use a six-month probationary/induction period. During this period clear performance and development targets will be set and monitored by the manager.

A positive and successful probationary/induction period is vital. In the rare instance where performance is unsatisfactory HR will support the line manager to address the issues with the employee and, on occasions, to terminate the employment.

When the applicant is an existing member of staff the 'Joining' process still applies. As part of 'Starting' there will still need to be a planned induction. It can be a mistake to assume that an existing employee already knows all about the organisation and its processes in relation to their new post. In addition, the review stages of the first six months will also be applied and can be extended if required.

When new starters are secondees, especially if they are local authority employees, it is likely that they will be able to 'hit the ground running' however care will be taken to ensure that differences in culture and procedures between the two organisations are covered to mitigate any risks of misunderstandings.

Fixed term employees will still be given an induction period; however, it will be adjusted in proportion to the length of contract and complexity of role.

Occasionally, staff will join the organisation as a result of a TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment) arrangement. In these cases, the organisation will work co-operatively with the 'handing over' employer and will endeavour to ensure that the employees concerned have a planned and structured introduction to the organisation.

Staying

Historically staff retention has not presented a challenge for the organisation as the culture of local government has been one of longevity of service. Retention rates remain high across many areas of the organisation. However, in areas of national skill shortage a higher turnover rate is experienced and is likely to continue. In the main, this applies to HR, Legal Services, Environmental Health, Surveying and Planning.

Nonetheless, a degree of turnover amongst employees is good as it provides the opportunity for new talent to join the organisation and in doing so to promote ongoing change and development. Improved flexible working arrangements are expected to contribute to retention rates in these areas.

Retention

Staff benefits

The factors that come into play for attracting staff are also key for retaining them. Therefore, the organisation will continue to develop a variety of staff benefits and promotions linked to health and well-being and flexible working. Currently the authority offers discounted corporate gym membership, free DSE eye sight tests, and numerous discounts with local businesses.

The Employee Assistance Programme, for all staff and their families is a significant benefit for all staff. Since its introduction in 2020, use has been consistent and staff accessing counselling, advice and support.

The Shared AVC (Additional Voluntary Contributions) Scheme, which was introduced in 2022, is another significant staff benefit. The scheme enables staff to make additional payments to increase their available funds upon retirement. Contributions are free of tax and NI at the point of contribution.

For posts which are especially hard to fill due to national skill shortages the organisation will seek to work collaboratively with other local authorities and the LGA to find ways to attract and retain suitably qualified staff.

Union Recognition

The organisation will continue to foster good working relations with its recognised union, UNISON. The Council is fully supportive of staff rights to utilise union membership and will continue to promote this part of its employee relations strategy.

Employment Policies and Procedures

As a responsible employer TDC takes its commitment to its staff very seriously and seeks to ensure that its policies and procedures are within the law and recognised best practice. The organisation ensures that key staff are appropriately qualified to practice within Human Resources and Organisation Development in accordance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

As such, the organisation will be paying close attention to anticipated employment legislative changes to be introduced by the government. As these changes become clearer the organisation will follow best practice advice from advisory sources including East of England Local Government Association (EELGA), CIPD, HR legal updates provided by VineHR, employment law specialist solicitors and ACAS in order to implement the required changes as smoothly as possible.

Performance Management

The organisation expects that its staff will apply all reasonable endeavour to ensure that they are fulfilling their roles and duties to the best of their ability and to meet the requirements of their role in support of the organisation's aims and priorities.

In supporting staff with this duty, managers will ensure that regular one to one meetings are held with their staff to discuss targets, progress, performance and development needs. Managers will be expected to ensure that a written record of these meetings is kept (clear contemporaneous notes are acceptable) and that d targets are followed up as appropriate.

In addition, managers will meet with their staff on a one to one basis once a year to conduction to annual review.

On the occasions when performance and or conduct is unsatisfactory, the manager will, in conjunction with support and advise from HR, put measures in place to manage and address the issues raised. The organisation has appropriate polices for the management and investigation of poor conduct and performance. These will be regularly reviewed and amended in accordance with changes in the law and/or best practice.

Inclusion

In 2023 the organisation published its Equality and Inclusion Strategy and updated its approach for recording Equality Impact Assessments.

In September 2024 the Equality Act will be updated to place a responsibility upon employers to prevent and protect staff from sexual harassment. It is expected that this duty will, in time, be further extended and reinforced to cover all protected characteristics.

In 2025 the organisation's Equality and Diversity policy will be updated to reflect the changes that have taken place since it was adopted. A full programme of development will be implemented to embed the policy and ensure that all staff understand its importance and their role and responsibility in enabling the organisation to be one where inclusion is part of its culture.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Council's adoption and use of AI will be lead by IT and agreed by Senior Managers and Officers and, as appropriate, Members. During the course of the People Strategy it is expected that AI will be introduced into the organisation and will play an increasing part in the fulfilment of tasks for Officers. This may include the development of reports, statistical analysis, maintenance and monitoring of data, dashboard reporting. It is also expected that key partners will increasingly utilise AI technology.

The organisation will work to ensure that its introduction is managed and secure and that staff affected will be provided with the necessary training and support to utilise it as required.

Development

TDC is fully committed to ensuring that all of its employees have access to learning opportunities to improve their technical and 'soft skills'.

Face to face training will continue to be a feature of all staff development but it is expected that this will mainly be used when subjects are complex or highly interactive. Webinars will also be utilised for development when appropriate.

The organisation will continue to embed and expand its use of e-learning. A five-year contract with Skillgate along with ongoing utilisation of the courses provided by iHasco will form the basis for staff self-development and bite-size learning across multiple subjects.

It is recognised that online learning may disadvantage and cause anxiety for those staff with literacy difficulties. As such the organisation will seek to work with partners (such as Adult Community Learning) to identify ways to support staff to increase their literacy and numeracy skills.

Managers will be given the opportunity to develop coaching skills as a standard part of their line management practice.

The organisation will continue to be an active member of the VineHR Partnership and will utilise the training opportunities it provides whenever possible.

Project Management

As part of the organisation's development, it is recognised that an increased reliance upon appropriate project management expertise is required. The organisation has been successful in gaining various significant sums of grant funding (most notably from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) for the benefit of the

district. The management of these programmes and other projects means that the organisation needs to increase and further develop its project management resource and expertise.

From 2025 appropriate project management training will be rolled out for all relevant staff.

Contract and Delivery Management

Allied with Project Management, the organisation will introduce development for those staff with ongoing responsibility for the management and monitoring of contracts, their fulfilment and delivery. The emphasis will be on ensuring that managers have the skills and knowledge to understand the principles of contract management and negotiation along with the confidence and knowledge to proactively manage and monitor contract delivery to ensure that services are successfully delivered in accordance with agreements and within agreed timescales and budgets, including holding providers appropriately to account as and when required.

Broadening Experience

Opportunities for secondment, job swap and acting up will continue to be used whenever possible. TDC will seek to establish these opportunities not only 'in-house' but also with other authorities or partner agencies where appropriate. This will enable employees to see alternative ways of working, experience different environments and bring a fresh perspective and new skills to their own role.

Qualification Programmes

The 'Grow Our Own' approach for staff to gain professional qualifications in hard to recruit areas will continue. The organisation's sponsorship programme for qualifications will continue and apprenticeships will be utilised whenever possible. Apprenticeships up to and including Level 7 (post graduate level) are increasingly available and can be funded via the organisation's Levy, through 'levy sharing' or from the government's co-investment scheme.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships have become and will remain a vital part of staff development. Since the government reforms of the apprenticeship programme in 2017 the organisation has made increased use of this career development pathway. The organisation will continue to utilise Career Track as its main provider of Level 2 and 3 apprenticeship qualifications. It will use other suitable training providers for technical and higher-level professional apprenticeships. To date the organisation has utilised apprenticeships at all levels from 2 up to 7 and this strategy will continue. Apprenticeship degrees are now the main route through which staff gain the technical/professional degrees for their profession.

In areas where recruitment is difficult the organisation's 'grow our own' approach will continue and an apprenticeship pathway from Level 2 to Level 6 will be identified.

Career Track

Tendring District Council is an approved apprenticeship training provider in its own right and is registered with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to deliver a number of apprenticeship training programmes. As an approved training provider, Career Track (TDC) is subject to inspection from Ofsted and was awarded a 'Good' grade at its last inspection in November 2023.

TDC's apprenticeship training department is known as Career Track. Career Track was founded in 1983 and is a fundamental lynchpin for the organisation's approach to staff development.

Career Track provides apprenticeship programmes for a number of local authorities and public sector organisations within Essex, Suffolk and beyond as well as for a limited number of private sector providers within the district. At the time of writing, 56% of its apprentices are within TDC.

The Career Track service undertook a significant modernisation programme during 2022/23 with the introduction of electronic portfolios and the launch of OneFile.

The Career Track Governance Board will continue to provide oversight and quality and compliance monitoring of the service. This Board will also oversee the ongoing growth and development of the service as a corporate priority for improving education and work opportunities within the district.

The Career Track vision and mission statement can be viewed in Appendix 1 of this document.

Corporate Mandatory Training

As an organisation TDC covers a wide range of professions and areas of work. All of these areas will have their own particular requirements for staff knowledge and skills. Managers are expected to establish what these are to ensure that their own departments' mandatory training needs are met. Advice and guidance on the best approach or providers can be given by the Organisational Development Manager or HR as appropriate.

The following list covers the subject areas of identified mandatory training that apply for all or the majority of staff. This list is not exhaustive.

- *Safeguarding*

Tendring District Council has a legal and moral duty to ensure the safeguarding of all its staff (including apprentices, casual and temporary employees). The organisation has an appointed safeguarding lead and a detailed policy for how it will ensure its responsibilities are met. Safeguarding training is mandatory for all staff.

- *Prevent*

Prevent and anti-terrorism training will be provided as mandatory training for all employees engaged in supporting apprentices (especially those identified as vulnerable and under 18). It is also mandatory for staff and volunteers supporting large scale public events such as the Clacton Airshow.

- *Health and Safety Awareness and Fire Safety*

These courses are mandatory for all staff and renewable every three years. These are the very minimum requirement. Service areas (in conjunction with the health and safety team) are responsible for identifying and meeting the specific safety training needs for their teams

- *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

Overall awareness training covering the importance of the Equality Act and Protected Characteristics is mandatory for all staff. See 'Inclusion' for more information.

- *Cyber Security*

The organisation's reliance upon digital technology exposes it to increased risk of cyber-attack from numerous sources. Although the organisation has business continuity plans in place it is right to work on a basis that 'prevention is better than cure'. Therefore, cyber security awareness training has been made mandatory for all staff who have a @tendingdc.gov.uk email address.

- *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*

Data protection training covers the fundamentals of data protection law and practical ways to apply them. It helps our staff understand how to collect and process personal data lawfully, obtain consent where necessary, and ensure effective data security.

Responsibility for the commissioning and monitoring of Cyber Security and GDPR training rests with the Information Governance and IT Services Manager.

Engagement

The extent to which staff feel able to influence their working life and to manage the demands of their role, to be heard, able to take responsibility and have the opportunity to influence change greatly affects retention. Staff engagement will therefore be a continuing priority.

TDC has worked hard to improve internal communications and staff inclusion through the increased use of Video Blogs, staff newsletters and communications updates. The organisation's Communications Strategy, 2024 to 2028 was adopted in March 2024. It includes the following objective:

Create an internal communications strategy and/or policy to regularise and formalise current approaches, by the end of 2026. This will help to bolster corporate communication with all staff and could include a section on the new Intranet.

Leaving

The vast majority of people who leave the organisation are going on to another job. From leaving forms and exit interviews, it appears that the most common reason is career development or salary. Approximately 90% of all leavers part on good terms, ensuring that the opportunity to return at some later date remains an option. To further

support the practice of 'parting well' and of being a 'learning organisation', the practice of exit interviews will continue.

As staff leave and go on to other employment, often having gained a more responsible role, we can view this as a compliment. It is a testimony to our staff development and professional expertise. It demonstrates that other employers consider Tendring to be a reputable employer. In addition, it consequently provides new employment and development opportunities for our staff and new entrants.

When the parting is not positive and the leaver is disillusioned with the organisation, then an exit interview with an independent manager is especially important for the organisation to learn from the circumstances and possibly address their concerns and so part on better terms.

Changing Roles

When staff move within the organisation as part of personal development and/or promotion, they are treated as a transferee. Dependent upon the circumstances an exit interview from their former role, may be appropriate.

Promoted staff will be provided with an induction programme and will have regular reviews throughout their first six months in post using the probationary period 'model'. In addition, staff will be actively encouraged to seek an appropriate coach or mentor from either within or outside the organisation.

Occasionally staff may leave the organisation as the result of a TUPE transfer to another employer. In these cases, whenever possible, the organisation will work closely with the 'receiving' employer to support a smooth hand over. The Council's HR department leads on this in conjunction with the relevant senior manager(s), ensuring the affected staff informed about the process and consulted as appropriate.

Organisational Change

The organisation is committed to retaining its staff but recognises that restructures can be necessary to ensure the Council is able to deliver its services effectively and cost efficiently. The organisation will seek to avoid compulsory redundancy whenever possible and, in cases where posts are lost, will try to come to a mutually agreed solution that might include some element of voluntary redundancy as appropriate.

Retirement

Staff are entitled to continue working for as long as they wish, providing that they are capable of performing their duties. Flexible Retirement is a discretionary benefit enabling staff to reduce their working hours and take their retirement benefits. This approach enables the employee to begin adjusting to a different work/life balance and the organisation to implement succession planning ready for the staff member to take full retirement when they are ready. On average, staff who take flexible retirement remain in employment for a further five years, working two or three days per week. The length of time that staff remain does, of course, vary but with an average of five

years it demonstrates this this is seen as an attractive benefit and means by which knowledge and skills are retained.

Although the organisation has several staff members who will reach their state retirement age during the period covered by this strategy, previous experience has shown that retirement has not caused the level of disruption that might be expected. This appears to be due to a number of factors: some staff have continued working past their state retirement age, some have left in advance, in some instances to pursue other opportunities, and others have either reduced their hours or reduced their hours via the Flexible Retirement Scheme. Overall, the organisation's approach and support for staff as they move from work to retirement has been successful.

To further enhance the organisation's offer, retirement planning webinars will be commissioned to cover issues such as financial planning, lifestyle changes and health and wellbeing in older age.

Performance Management

On rare occasions employees leave due to capability or conduct issues. The organisation will apply a simultaneously empathetic and robust approach to the management of long-term sickness and poor performance. Managers continue to be given the necessary training and support to manage these issues and will continue to be supported by HR. Dismissal due to capability or conduct will always be used as an action of last resort.

Appendix 1

Career Track Vision and Mission Statement

Vision

Our vision is to be known and recognised for our excellence in the provision of apprenticeships; engaging learners in the development of workplace knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable them to actively contribute to the economic, health and social wellbeing of the district.

Mission

- To educate, engage and inspire
- To inform, advise, support and mentor
- To establish and maintain high quality standards in apprenticeship training
- To safeguard and promote the welfare of our learners