



THE HORIZONS ARE BIGGER HERE

Welcome to our people strategy

Introduction

As Cabinet Member for People and a proud champion of Plymouth, I am delighted to introduce our new People Strategy - an essential part of delivering the vision set out in the Plymouth Plan: to be one of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities, where everyone enjoys an outstanding quality of life.

Our city is full of opportunity, but we also face real challenges. From the need to attract and retain talent, to supporting an ageing workforce and responding to financial pressures, we must work together to ensure Plymouth continues to thrive. The People Strategy is our commitment to meeting these challenges head-on, by investing in our staff and creating an environment where everyone can flourish.

Our workforce is absolutely central to life in Plymouth. Their dedication, professionalism, and care make a real difference to people's lives, and I am deeply grateful for all that they do.

Looking after the wellbeing of our staff is not just the right thing to do - it is essential for the success of our city. By supporting wellbeing, and by fostering a culture of inclusion and respect, we ensure that our teams are equipped to deliver the very best for Plymouth. Together, we are building a council that reflects the communities we serve and is ready for the future.

Thank you for your commitment, your passion, and your service to Plymouth.



**Cllr Sue Dann,
Cabinet Member for HR and
Organisational Development,
Plymouth City Council**

Plymouth is a city of ambition, resilience, and opportunity. As we launch our new People Strategy, I am immensely proud of the dedication and professionalism shown by our workforce every day. Whether it's keeping our communities safe, ensuring our streets are clean, running world-class events, or driving economic growth, our staff are at the heart of everything that makes Plymouth a great place to live and work.

We face significant challenges as a council, but these challenges are matched by remarkable opportunities. Major investment in the Devonport Dockyard, the growth of our creative and digital sectors, and our commitment to innovation and partnership working all point to a bright future for our city.

Our people are central to our city. Their commitment to public service, their willingness to adapt and learn, and their passion for Plymouth underpin our success. I am proud of the way our teams support each other, champion wellbeing, and embrace diversity and inclusion. Together, we are building a workforce that reflects the communities we serve and is ready to meet the city's evolving needs.

This strategy is about empowerment - helping every member of staff to thrive, supporting our community, and ensuring Plymouth continues to grow and prosper. Thank you for all that you do for our city.



Tracey Lee,
Chief Executive
Plymouth City Council

Plymouth City Council's People Strategy 2025 – 2028

Welcome to our People Strategy

Our People Strategy fits with the bigger plans for our city and shows our dedication to creating a lively, caring, innovative, and inclusive organisation. This means we are not only handling today's challenges with flexibility and strength but also building strong foundations for a successful future.

A big part of this is taking care of and developing our workforce. We want to grow talent, encourage continuous learning, and use the diverse skills of our employees to provide exceptional public services and to ensure the development of our city. Our plans aim to make jobs satisfying, improve employee wellbeing, and create opportunities for career growth, ensuring our workforce stays motivated and prepared to meet our community's changing needs.

At the same time, we are committed to tackling the unique challenges and opportunities Plymouth faces. Investment in Devonport Dockyard, for example, presents great potential for growth as well as significant challenges, which we plan to address through smart investments and working in partnership with organisations and residents. Similarly, projects like our new Digital Academy, apprenticeship and management and leadership development programmes are designed to take advantage of technological progress, preparing our employees for the future while encouraging innovation across the city.

Our strategy is about empowerment - helping our employees excel in their jobs, supporting our community to thrive, and enabling Plymouth to achieve new heights of success and sustainability. This will be achieved whilst upholding the values and standards required of those who work in the public sector. By aligning our people strategy with the city's vision and the corporate plan, we are setting the stage for a future where every member of staff feels they can contribute to and benefit from Plymouth's growth and vibrancy.



Summary

Plymouth City Council's People Strategy 2025–2028 sets out a bold vision to develop the council as a vibrant, caring, innovative, and inclusive organisation that is equipped to meet both current and future challenges. This strategy is closely aligned with the city's wider ambitions and the Plymouth Plan, ensuring that every member of staff is empowered to contribute to Plymouth's growth and success.

Challenges facing Plymouth City Council

Plymouth is a proud city of opportunity and complexity. The Council operates in a context marked by:

- **Significant economic growth and investment**, such as the £4.4 billion planned for Devonport Dockyard, which brings both opportunities and acute workforce planning challenges.
- **A projected gap of 25,000 between available jobs and the local workforce by 2034**, necessitating innovative approaches to recruitment, retention, and partnership working.
- **An ageing workforce**, with nearly 50% of staff aged over 50, raising risks around turnover and the need for flexible working options.
- **Persistent recruitment difficulties** in key roles, due to competition, pay, and national shortages.
- **Financial pressures**, with ongoing budget constraints and rising demand for services, particularly in social care and homelessness.
- **Socio-economic challenges**, including high levels of economic inactivity, deprivation, and disparities in health and housing across the city.

Positive work and achievements

Despite these challenges, the Council has made significant progress:

- **Workforce Health, Safety and Wellbeing:** Sickness absence has reduced, supported by strong wellbeing programmes, a network of Wellbeing Champions, and the 'Work Safe Home Safe' campaign.
- **Equality, diversity, and inclusion:** The Council is a Disability Confident Leader, has achieved 'Gold' status in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, and supports vibrant staff networks.
- **Talent development:** Apprenticeships and early careers strategies have worked well, with 6.5% of the workforce currently undertaking apprenticeships.
- **Leadership and management:** New management and leadership programmes have been launched, and career development opportunities have reduced reliance on agency staff.
- **Staff engagement:** Workshops and appreciative enquiry sessions have shaped the new strategy, ensuring it reflects the real experiences and aspirations of the workforce.

Proposed outcomes

The People Strategy focuses on four key outcomes:

- 1 **Place – Respectful and Inclusive:** Building a workforce that reflects the diversity of Plymouth's communities, with inclusive recruitment, support for young people and those with disabilities, and strong community engagement.
- 2 **People – Valued and Supported:** Creating an environment where staff feel valued, supported, and able to develop their careers, with a focus on wellbeing, flexible working, and financial support.
- 3 **Passion – Innovative and Creative:** Fostering a culture of innovation and learning, with investment in digital skills, leadership, and behavioural change to embrace new technologies and ways of working.
- 4 **Purpose – High Performing:** Ensuring clarity of expectation, robust performance management, and a culture of recognition and continuous improvement, underpinned by agreed values and behaviours and strong leadership.

A clear and ambitious people strategy is essential for Plymouth City Council because our ability to deliver high-quality services, drive city-wide growth, and respond to complex challenges depends on the strength, wellbeing, and adaptability of our workforce. This strategy is rooted in a deep understanding of our local context, shaped by the voices of our staff, and informed by evidence of what works. It builds on proven successes, addresses real and emerging challenges, and sets out practical, measurable outcomes. By focusing on inclusion, wellbeing, innovation, and high performance, this strategy ensures that every member of staff is empowered to contribute to Plymouth's future, making the Council not just a great place to work, but a driving force for positive change across the city.

The Plymouth Plan

The Plymouth Plan is the vision for our city and looks ahead to 2034, setting a shared direction of travel for the long-term future of the city. It talks about the future of the city's economy; it plans for the city's transport and housing needs; it looks at how the city can improve the lives of children and young people and address the issues which lead to child poverty, and it sets out the aspiration to be a healthy and prosperous city with a rich arts and cultural environment.

Plymouth City Council's Corporate Plan sets out a clear direction to build a better Plymouth. It is the guiding strategy for the Council and shapes what every directorate, service, team and member of staff does and how we can work together as one Council to achieve our shared ambition of making Plymouth a fairer, greener city where everyone does their bit

The Corporate Plan has four principles to guide our work:

Democracy	Because we listen and hear what people want
Responsibility	Because we care about the impact of our decisions and actions
Fairness	Because we want to address inequality and inequity in our city
Co-operation	Because we achieve more together than we would alone

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“One of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone.”

OUR PLAN

BUILD A BETTER PLYMOUTH



CITY VISION: Britain's Ocean City

One of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone



OUR MISSION:

Making Plymouth a fairer, greener city, where everyone does their bit

WE BELIEVE IN:

DEMOCRACY
Because we listen and hear what people want

RESPONSIBILITY
Because we care about the impact of our decisions and actions

FAIRNESS
Because we want to address inequality and inequity in our city

CO-OPERATION
Because we achieve more together than we would alone

WE WILL:

Make Plymouth a great place to grow up and grow old

Minimise the impact of the cost of living crisis

OUR PRIORITIES:

- Working with the Police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour
- Fewer potholes, cleaner, greener streets and transport
- Build more homes - for social rent and affordable ownership
- Green investment, jobs, skills and better education
- Working with the NHS to provide better access to health, care and dentistry
- Keeping children, adults and communities safe

DOING THIS BY:

- Providing quality public services
- Trusting and engaging our communities
- Focusing on prevention and early intervention
- Spending money wisely
- Empowering and engaging our staff
- Being a strong voice for Plymouth

www.plymouth.gov.uk/ourplan

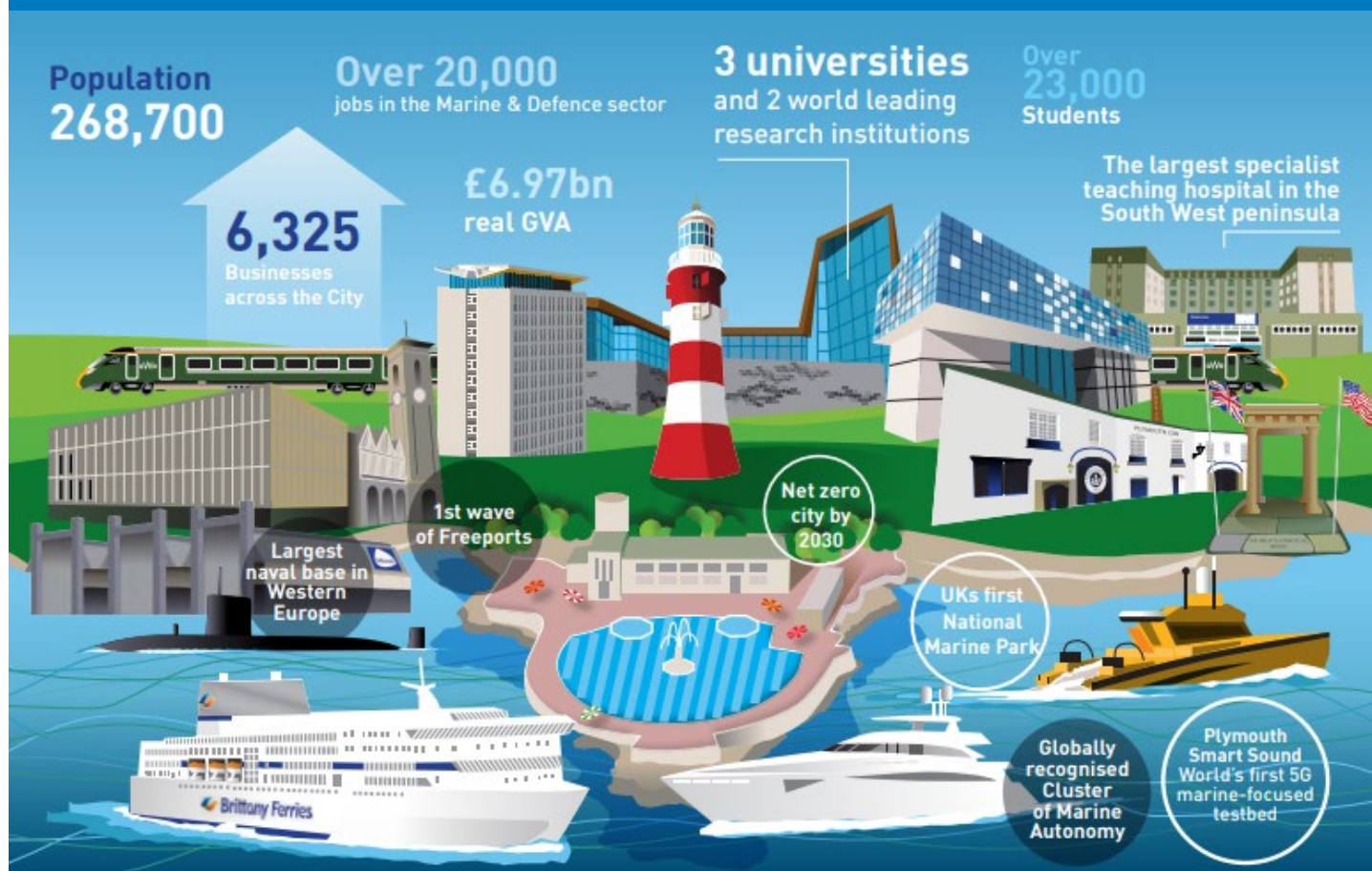
The plan describes how we will deliver the council's priorities, and this is key to the development of this people strategy:

- Providing quality public services
- Trusting and engaging our communities
- Focusing on prevention and early intervention
- Spending money wisely
- Empowering and engaging our staff
- Being a strong voice for Plymouth

The People Strategy will ensure that staff feel connected to the vision and principles of the Plymouth Plan and the Corporate Plan, and that they understand how they will deliver the council's priorities.

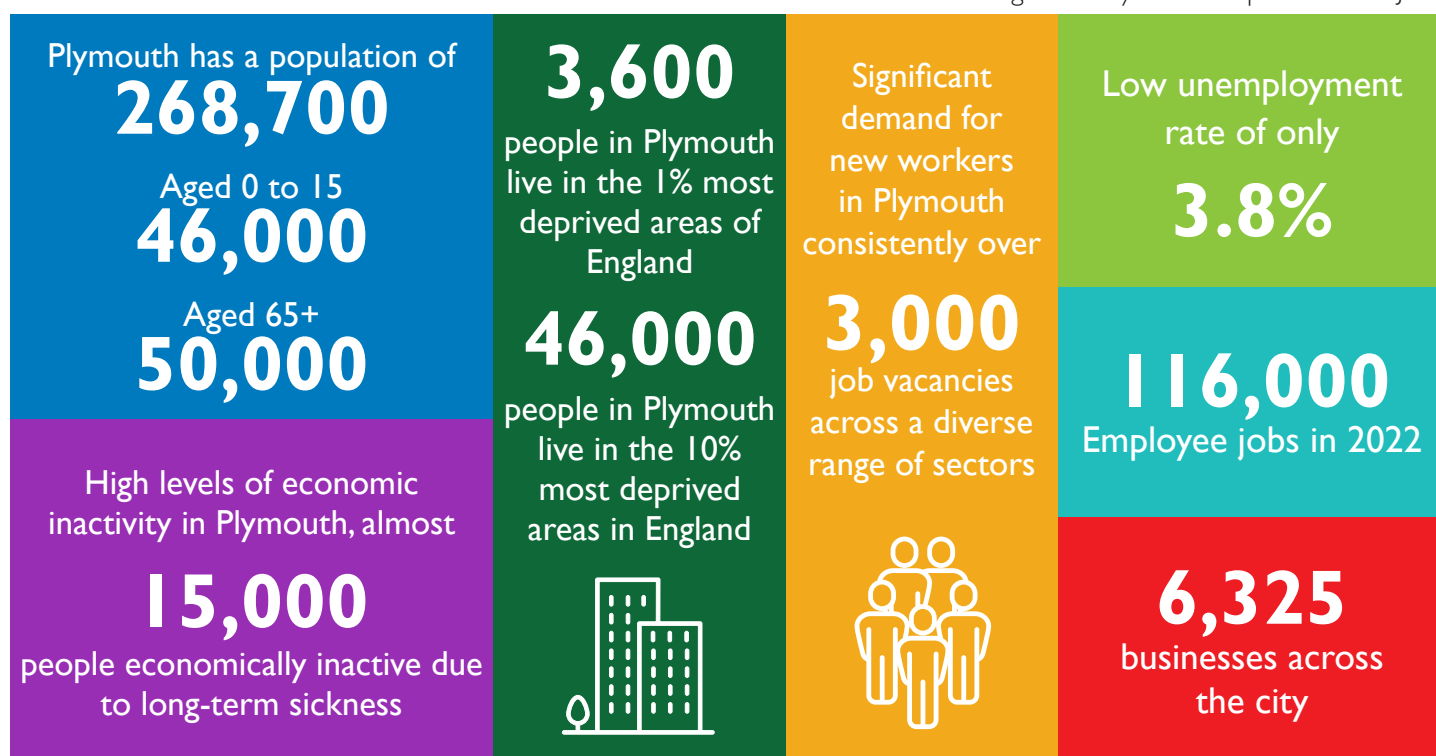
The Plymouth Context

Figure 1 The Plymouth Context



The context in which Plymouth City Council operates highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the authority. The city has a population of almost 268,700, a real economic output of over £6.97 billion and a growing workforce of almost 116,000 people. Our unique assets include the largest naval base in Western Europe; a vibrant manufacturing and engineering sector employing over 13 per cent of the workforce; a burgeoning creative and cultural sector; one of only 16 critical care teaching hospitals in the UK and the associated Plymouth Science Park, three universities and excellent higher education provision. However, there are challenges facing our growing city, including an increasing number of jobs, low unemployment, and high levels of economic inactivity and deprivation, and these are shown in figure 2.

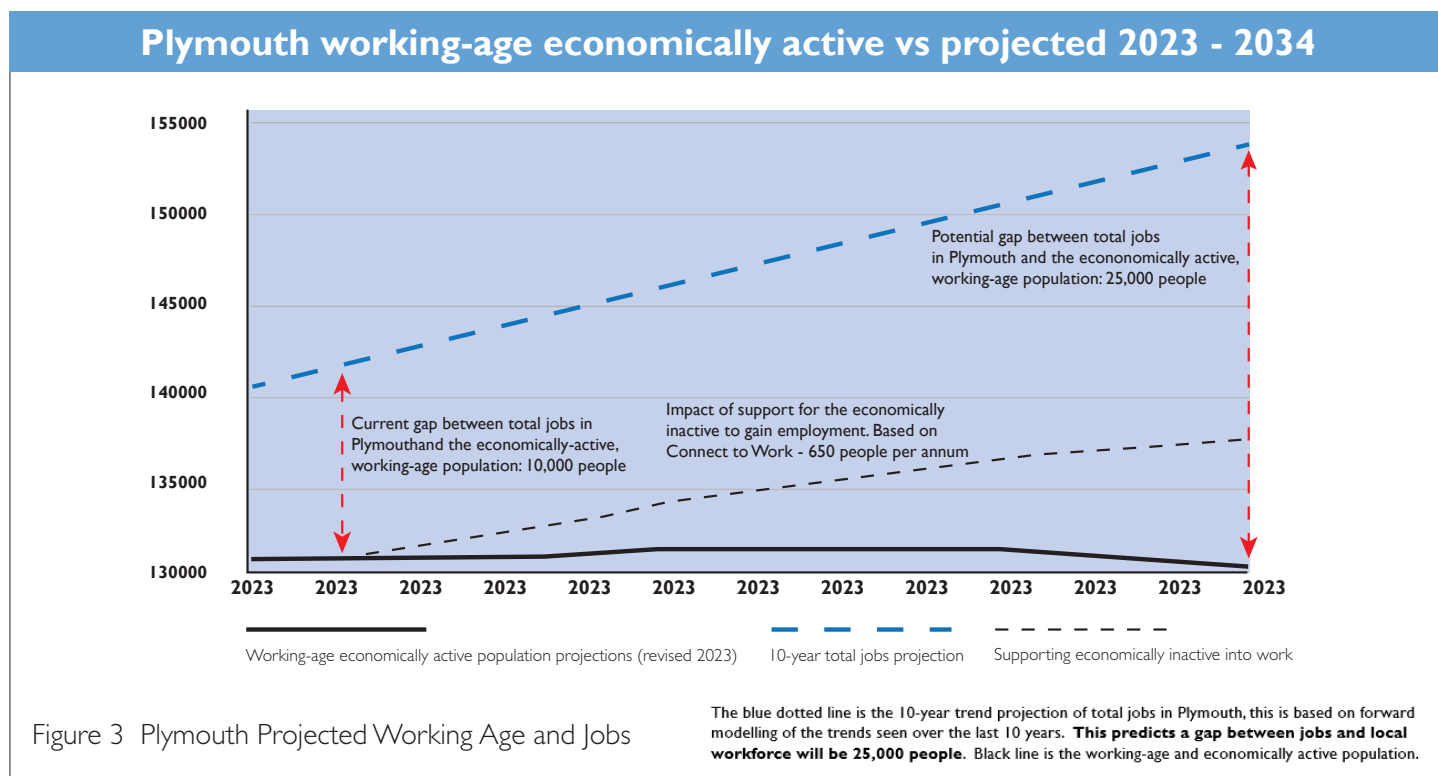
Figure 2 Plymouth Population and Jobs



Plymouth has the largest naval base in Western Europe, and this is where the UK undertakes operational, training and maintenance activities for its naval fleet. There will be a £4.4 billion investment over the next 10 years in the base, with further orders anticipated. This means a skills requirement for 5,500 people, made up of 1,800 entry level jobs and 3,700 experienced workers, for the base alone. We are also forecasting a need for an additional 2,000 construction workers, rising to 4,240 in 2027.

This is a tremendous opportunity for Plymouth, but it also presents a unique challenge to the council and its own workforce planning. This is shown by analysing figures for the working-age economically active in the city, versus projected total jobs, and predicts a gap between jobs and local workforce of 25,000 people (figure 3).

This also highlights the importance of effective partnership working across the city, and a council workforce that looks and works across teams, directorates and organisations. The projected gap in labour will necessitate working with employers and educational institutions to attract and retain workers, as well as how we develop staff to adapt to emerging technologies to continue and improve our services.



Plymouth City Council – Context for change

This section presents direct impacts on the workforce, including summary data and strategic work programmes.

The Plymouth City Council Workforce - Summary Data

Workforce numbers at Plymouth City Council have remained stable over the past several years, at c. 2,250 whole time equivalent. Turnover of staff is below comparator local authorities, at c. 10%. Recruitment difficulties continue in several occupations, including social workers, project managers, and qualified roles in corporate functions. These difficulties arise from competition for staff in Plymouth and the South West, pay, national shortage occupations, and geographical location.

Sustained work on wellbeing and absence has seen sickness absence reduce to 9.27 days/employee in July 2025, compared to 10.5 days/employee 12-months previously and 9.7 days in comparator authorities.

Aside from short-term absence due to colds and stomach complaints, top reasons and themes for short-term and long-term absence are musculoskeletal conditions and mental health. This matches national trends, as reported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in its Wellbeing at Work report 2023.

Plymouth City Council has an aging workforce, with nearly 50% of staff aged over 50.

Figure 4 shows a breakdown of the workforce by age band

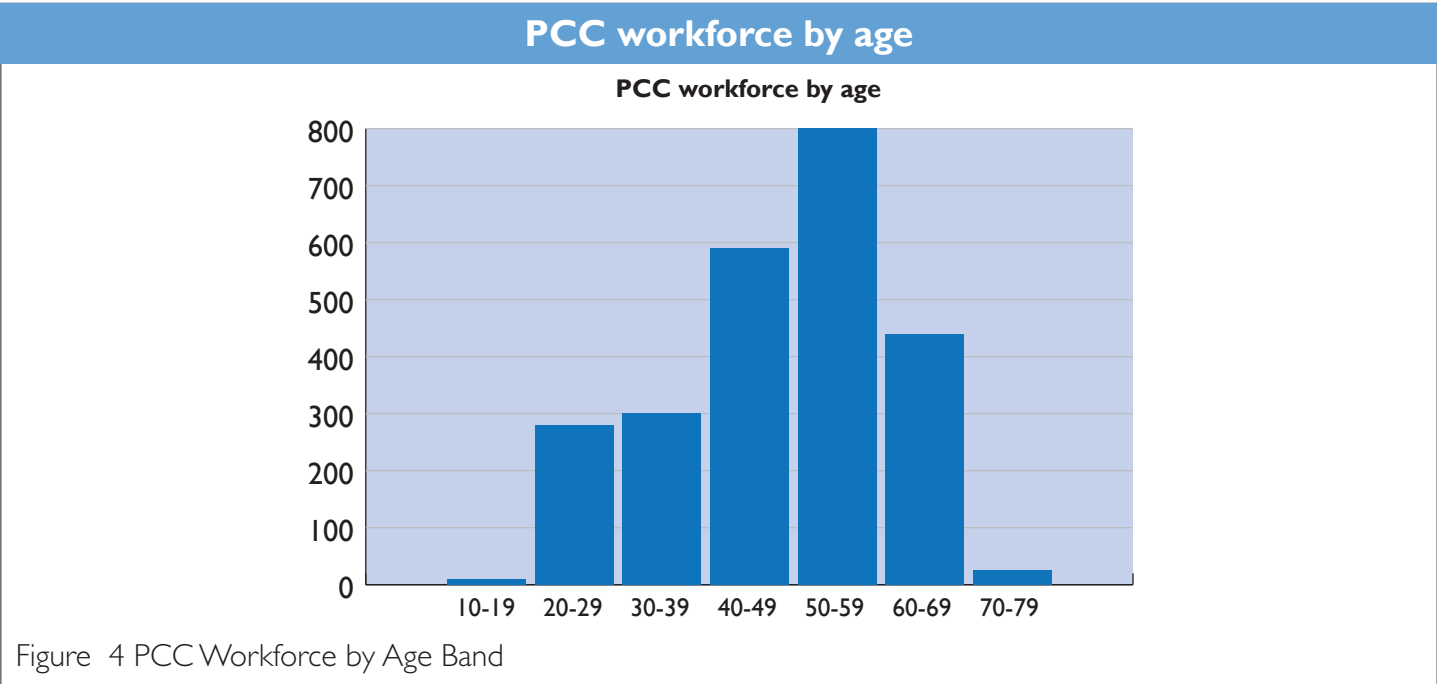
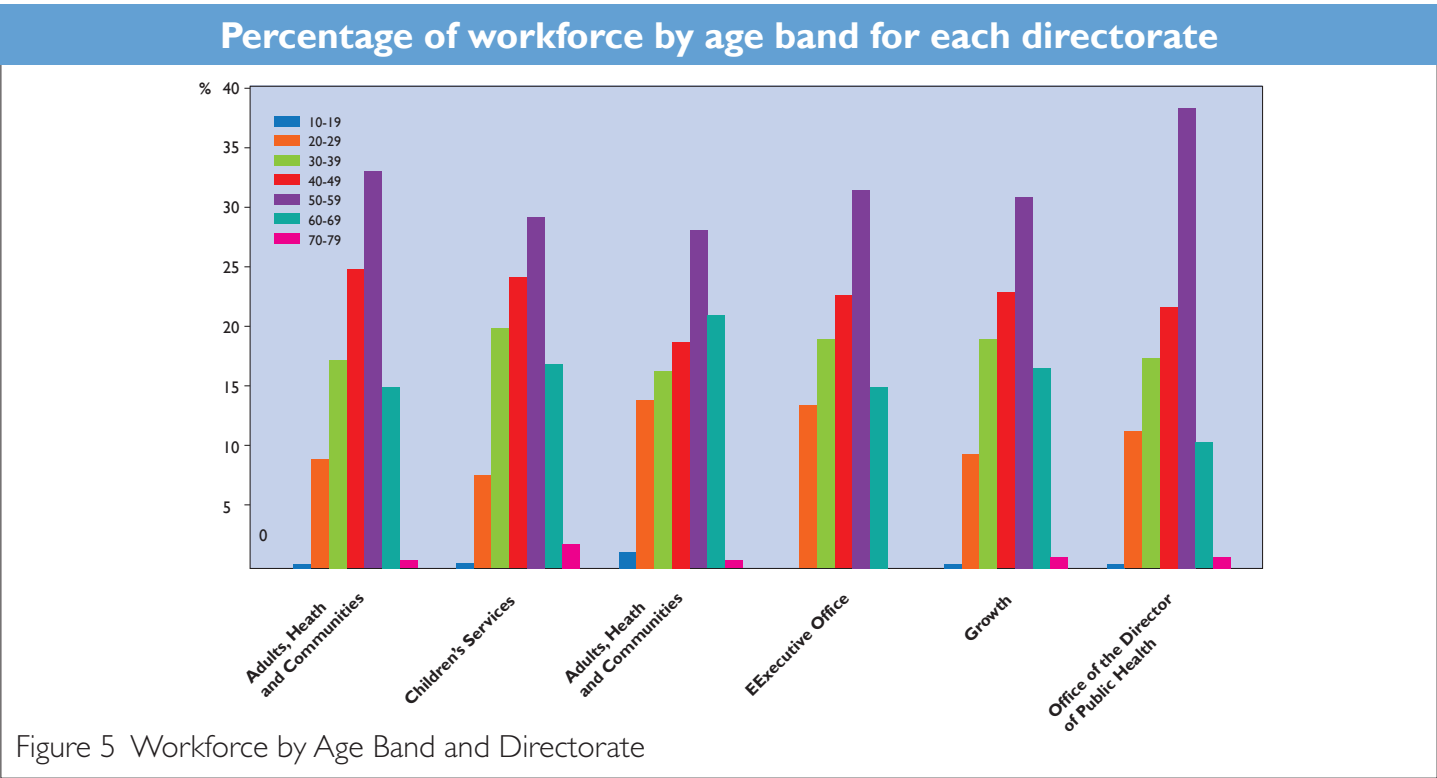


Figure 5 breaks this down, to show the percentage of each directorate’s workforce by age band:

There is therefore a strong risk that turnover will increase as people move towards retirement age. We can also anticipate staff requesting more flexible working options, rather than opting for full retirement. And of course, a 10% turnover rate means that we need to recruit the equivalent of a new workforce every 10-years.



Financial Context: adapting to economic pressures

Underpinning our ambition to adapt and change, is the requirement to save money and respond to growing pressures on key services. The financial landscape for local governments is challenging, with ongoing budget constraints and increasing demand for services, particularly in children's and adults' social care and homelessness provision.

It is a fact that Plymouth is an ageing city, with more people needing support from our social services every day. At the same time there are stark disparities in health outcomes, depending on where you live in the city. Access to housing continues to be one of the most pressuring issues, along with nearly a 10% rise in the number of children needing SEND support.

Therefore, the next step on our journey is not just about our improving services but also about ensuring financial sustainability.

Our Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is central to this effort. It aligns our resources with our strategic goals, ensuring that we can continue to deliver high-quality services while managing our finances prudently.

Moving forward we will need to find ways to identify those residents who might otherwise fall into crisis and support them before this happens, to reduce the long-term costs associated with reactive, crisis-driven services.

Strong Council, Strong City

To ensure that the Council and the city are strong and sustainable, we have to focus on boosting our local economy and improving the services we provide.

At its core, our focus is on addressing inequality, exclusion, and poverty while benefiting the economy by exploring new ways to run our services, making the most of our resources, and building strong partnerships with other organisations. This involves setting up new businesses, optimizing our resources, fostering collaborations, and making strategic investments in projects that deliver long-term benefits for Plymouth.

By focusing on growth, we're not just improving our services – we're also making Plymouth a more vibrant and prosperous place. This means better opportunities for residents and staff.

City help and support

Getting the basics right is vital to enable us to support residents and avoid them falling into crisis. This means we want to tackle problems early, use data to make smart decisions, and work closely with our community to find lasting solutions.

This programme is important for our growth and success. It will help us improve our services, support our communities, and make Plymouth an even better place to live.

We are calling this programme of work **City Help and Support**, a comprehensive programme that will focus on early intervention and community-based support.

This work will establish a capability to generate insights and intelligence using data across the organisation and wider partners. This will enable us to design and deliver services that are evidence-based, help us to address risks and ethically use artificial intelligence to achieve better outcomes for our residents.

Plymouth City Council's People Strategy 2025–2028 sets out a bold vision to develop the council as a vibrant, caring, innovative, and inclusive organisation that is equipped to meet both current and future challenges.



Our People Strategy - What we have achieved

Plymouth City Council's current People Strategy was launched in April 2020. It set out a plan over four years to establish the authority as an employer where **People Feel Welcome, We Aspire to be the Best, We Attract and Keep the Right People, and We are Well Led** (the four workstreams).

Excellent progress has been made with the People Strategy with some notable achievements. These include Health and Safety (our Work Safe Home Safe campaign), Apprenticeships, Management and Leadership Development, and support through our staff networks and wellbeing programmes. This work is described in **Appendix One**.

What the workforce is telling us

A series of workshops took place between March and May 2025, to involve staff in the creation of the new People Strategy and to explore the impact that positive culture in the workplace has on the delivery of services. The top four tiers of leadership in PCC also took part in a similar exercise.

The format of the workshops followed an Appreciative Enquiry model, a strengths-based approach to help build a vision for the future. The format also enabled staff to reflect on what wasn't working well and their experiences in delivering services to the residents of Plymouth.

This work has helped to form the basis of the new people strategy and can be seen in **Appendix Two**.

These conversations with staff will continue, to include the new people strategy and the values and behaviours we want to see in the council.

People Strategy SWOT analysis

This People Strategy considers information and data from different sources and strategies, as well as conversations and workshops with many colleagues. From these, there are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that impact on the current and future workforce at Plymouth City Council, as shown in **Appendix Three**.

Our strengths show Plymouth City Council's position as a good employer, operating in and providing leadership to a city that is attracting significant investment. We have a dedicated and talented workforce, which is committed to the city. The council is ambitious, and this helps provide 'purpose' to our workforce. Underpinning this, we operate with good employment relations, there is a visible focus on health and safety, and the overall employment offer is well-regarded.

But there are significant challenges that we face, including educational attainment, current housing supply, and local government finances. We are also seeing rising demand for services, a tight labour market, and a significant number of staff approaching retirement.

These weaknesses and threats are potentially offset by major opportunities, which is where this People Strategy will focus. These include the city regeneration, growth and prevention programmes, our adoption and use of technology, the council's assets, and a workforce that is keen to learn and has pride in the city.

Plymouth City Council People Strategy

Our Approach

This People Strategy will provide the direction for how we recruit, retain and develop our staff for the next 3-years. Building on the strengths of our previous people strategy, it will have an increased emphasis on how we work across teams, directorates and organisations to both tackle the challenges that the city faces and to realise the incredible opportunities presented by growth and regeneration.

People Strategy outcomes

I Plymouth: Place – Respectful and Inclusive

A workforce that is representative of the communities we serve and inclusive to all who work for us and use our services. We listen to and are respectful of one another.

How will this look and feel?

Colleagues in Plymouth City Council feel confident and ambitious for themselves and their communities. Colleagues create networks and connections, working and developing with partner organisations and our communities.

What we are going to do

- **Using our Apprenticeships and Early Careers Strategy, increase opportunities for those aged under 25 in Plymouth. Increase the number of supported internships in the Council, to provide opportunities for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.**

Why? Our workforce profile shows that we need to bring more young people into our workforce. As a public sector organisation, a leading employer in the city, and a provider and commissioner of statutory services to young people, we provide opportunities for young people to gain experience in the workplace and to take their first steps into working life.

- **Ensure that our recruitment processes are inclusive. Provide different ways of applying for jobs, to encourage and welcome applications from all backgrounds and experiences. Improve opportunities for paid employment within the Council, for people with learning disabilities. Continue to develop our work with our staff networks to deliver improvements to how we recruit, retain and support our staff.**

Why? People applying for jobs at Plymouth City Council come from diverse backgrounds, and a diverse workforce that reflects our communities is essential for the delivery of effective public services. Our focus will remain on breaking down barriers to employment and advancement, and fostering an environment where innovation can flourish through varied perspectives. Our application processes are the start of this process for employment at Plymouth City Council.

- **Ensure that staff can raise concerns in a collegiate and respectful environment, where they will be listened to, and issues can be solved as early as possible.**

Why? Concerns and issues should be solved as early and openly as possible and ideally without reverting to formal processes. This approach would provide a safe, informal channel for staff to raise concerns about behaviours, decisions, or processes that feel “off” but don’t yet meet the threshold for formal action. The approach would cover interpersonal issues, procedural worries, or cultural observations that may otherwise fester and would support the Council’s commitment to responsibility and continuous improvement.

- **Through the Civic Engagement Agreement, work with our partner organisations to engage with communities in the more deprived areas of Plymouth, helping with work experience and employment opportunities.**

Why? Through working in partnership with Plymouth’s large employers, we can use our employment opportunities and practices to help ensure that growth across Plymouth’s economy benefits our communities.

2 Plymouth: People – Valued and supported

A workforce that feels valued and supported by the City. A place where we value physical, mental and financial wellbeing and realise the contribution this makes to a productive organisation and fulfilled lives.

How will this look and feel

Plymouth City Council is seen as an innovative, caring and kind organisation, where people want to and are able to develop their careers at all stages of their lives. The working environment is flexible, adaptive and responsive and teams work with one another and across the organisation. Individuals feel supported and know where to turn to or who to ask when they need help.

What we are going to do

- **Test the impact of rapid interventions for physical and mental wellbeing. Extend network of Mental Health First Aiders across the organisation. Recognise and promote good practice in prevention and support to maintain and enhance staff wellbeing.**
Why? We know that prevention and early intervention are right for our services, they are therefore also correct for helping avoid longer term health, wellbeing and performance concerns for staff.
- **Support staff with financial wellbeing, for example through the continued promotion of salary sacrifice products, and awareness of debt and gambling harm.**
Why? Financial stress has a detrimental impact on people's wellbeing and can lead to absenteeism, presenteeism, and reduced productivity. Supporting financial wellbeing will help reduce sickness absence, improve focus and morale, and enhance individual and service performance.
- **Design our jobs and role profiles to improve colleague experience, help set expectations and provide clarity of purpose. Develop clear career pathways and succession planning that provide staff the opportunity to progress and achieve their potential, whilst also understanding clear objectives and expectations. Assess our pay, grading and reward systems, linked to workforce planning and development of roles.**
Why? Role profiles are central to setting expectations and as such provide clarity of purpose, helping colleagues understand their contributions and how they align with organisational goals. By establishing clear career pathways and succession plans, we can unlock internal talent, reduce reliance on interim appointments, and support staff to reach their potential.
- **Ensure that our flexible and hybrid working offers underpin the delivery of services, promote the wellbeing of individual staff, and support colleagues and teams.**
Why? An effective approach to hybrid working means that we maintain our visibility in the city, develop our services with energy and creativity, and check-in with each other and our teams, whilst enabling colleagues work in a way that supports them. This approach will help recruitment and retention, and help reduce sickness absence, whilst improving the quality of our services.
- **Promote the lives of staff as citizens of Plymouth, who value and care for our communities.**
Why? Plymouth City Council is not just an employer, it's a civic institution rooted in the life of the city. By encouraging staff to see themselves as active citizens, we align personal purpose with public service, fostering a culture where employees feel their work contributes directly to the wellbeing of their families, neighbours and communities. When staff feel connected to their city and its future, they are more likely to be motivated, resilient, and fulfilled in their roles.
- **Continue to champion safety in the workplace, through our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy, to ensure that our staff work in a healthy and safe environment. Plymouth City Council responds when staff experience abusive behaviour towards them. Continue working with and developing our Wellbeing Champions and Mental Health First Aiders, to champion health and happiness across the organisation.**
Why? The safety and wellbeing of staff remains a number one priority for the council. This commitment reinforces the council's duty of care and legal responsibility to provide a safe working environment. The development of our Wellbeing Champions and Mental Health First Aiders ensures that we provide early intervention and support to our colleagues. And happiness in the workplace is central to the Council's ability to deliver high-quality services, foster innovation and build a resilient workforce. This includes a consistent emphasis on kindness, support and open conversations.

3 Plymouth: Passion – innovative and creative

A learning organisation where we are encouraged to be creative and innovative, comfortable and confident in considering different ways of doing things, working with our residents and partner organisations to realise opportunity and to support those that need our help.

How will this look and feel

Colleagues feel excited about technology which improves our work and the potential benefits this brings our residents. Staff appreciate the contribution of others, and work in a spirit of kindness and understanding. The organisation champions great leadership and management, and the difference this makes to our city.

What we are going to do

- **Management and Leadership programmes to focus on developing superb leadership, promoting respectful and collaborative work across Plymouth City Council and our partner organisations.**

Why? These programmes are not just about skills, they're about empowering staff to meet the evolving needs of the city and its residents. The council will continue to equip current and future managers with the skills to lead change, manage performance, and foster team wellbeing. Our Leadership programmes promote a culture of adaptability and innovation, which are essential for delivering high-quality public services.

- **Work with staff on the behaviours and values needed at all levels of the council. Promote a culture that encourages staff to support and value others.**

Why? A culture where staff support and value one another is central to building a resilient, motivated, and high-performing workforce. A framework will help frame how we show up and behave at work each day, take accountability and work consistently with elected members and service users. A values and behaviours framework helps to recruit the right people, identifies skills gaps, and guides professional development.

- **Develop our Digital Academy and our network of Digital Champions, linked to our City Help and Support Programme. Work on the behavioural change we need to make the best use of digital technology, data and artificial intelligence.**

Why? Our work developing staff to use artificial intelligence and data insights is not just a technical upgrade for the council, it's a cultural transformation. Work in these areas will improve services and processes, reduce costs, and enable the council to use data, insights and AI to identify risks early and design services that are evidence-based. Technology alone doesn't transform services – people do. We will therefore focus on behavioural change to ensure staff are not only equipped with new tools but also confident and motivated to use them effectively.



4 Plymouth: Purpose – High performing

A workforce that is focused on purpose and priorities, where colleagues respectfully challenge and support each other for the benefit of our residents, businesses and partners.

How will this look and feel

We are clear on our expectations of each other and what is needed in our work. Staff can challenge how things are done, with senior leaders open to new thinking. We celebrate our work throughout the year, showing great practice and learning from each other.

What we are going to do

- **Staff understand what is expected of them in their roles, including behaviours, standards, and contribution to strategic goals. Managers and staff engage in regular, open, and constructive performance conversations, and managers are equipped with the skills and confidence to lead performance effectively.**

Why? A clear performance framework will ensure that all colleagues understand what high performance looks like and how their work contributes to the council's goals.

- **Ensure that Plymouth City Council does the basics brilliantly, through great people management.**

Why? Brilliant basics include effective HR practices, clear communication and consistent leadership, and these are the bedrock of a high-performing council. These fundamentals create stability, trust and clarity, enabling staff to focus on delivering and developing excellent services.

- **Use values based/behavioural based recruitment, where suitable, to ensure that we recruit people with a change-mindset and potential to grow with the organisation. Deliver a clear and distinct employer brand.**

Why? The use of values and behaviours-based recruitment will support a workforce that is adaptive, purpose-driven and open to new thinking. A clear employer brand is essential for attracting talent and retaining staff, and signals what the council stands for – purpose, inclusion, growth and social impact – which resonates with candidates who have similar values. A brand also supports broader city promotion efforts, linking the city's cultural and economic development.

- **Grow a network of coaches and mentors to support personal development. Implement a 'reverse mentoring' scheme, where leaders are mentored by more recent recruits and challenged on why things are done in certain ways.**

Why? Coaching and reverse-mentoring will encourage leaders to reflect on legacy practices and embrace new thinking. This will foster a culture of learning and adaptability, and helps to promote inclusion and equity. Reverse mentoring, in particular, will help to drive culture change by dismantling hierarchical barriers and fostering openness to innovation.

- **Celebrate and share great work**

Why? We should of course celebrate the great work that we do. Celebration and recognition aren't just cultural, they're strategic, supporting behavioural change, transformation and civic engagement. This is also about learning and highlights the importance of showcasing great practice and learning from each other, throughout the year.

Measures

The impact of our new People Strategy will be measured and reported quarterly to the Corporate Management Team. This will be in addition to the 'standard' workforce metrics that are presented monthly to the Corporate Management Team and Directorate Management Teams.

The measures will focus on outcomes and impacts, across areas including Workforce Inclusion and Diversity, Career Development and Progression, Health Safety and Wellbeing, and Staff Support and Feedback. A proposed list can be seen in Appendix Four.

Delivering our People Strategy

Plymouth City Council's People Strategy will be implemented from November 2025. Much of the work described, including the 'Outcomes', is already in progress, and we are therefore not setting off from a standing-start; we see brilliant people-work across the organisation – as well as areas for improvement – and we will develop and showcase this within the council and across the city.

The strategy will be delivered using a framework and series of actions and will be reported to the Corporate Management Team and Directorate Management Teams on a quarterly basis. There will also be a series of workshops with staff, to show how their feedback has influenced and helped develop this strategy, as well as regular updates through internal communications.

Our People Strategy is vital to the development of Plymouth City Council as an organisation, the services it commissions and provides, and its leadership role in the city. The strategy is all about honesty, teamwork, and making sure everyone feels supported at work whilst understanding what is expected of them. By working together and always looking for ways to improve, the Council wants to celebrate what's going well and tackle any problems quickly. This way, staff wellbeing and development will stay a top priority, helping everyone do their best, both as individuals and as a team.



Appendix One – Our People Strategy 2020-2024

Everyone feels welcome

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“We want to be a diverse workforce which is strong, better performing and represents the community and citizens it serves. An inclusive workplace will make people feel comfortable to be themselves and they will thrive to be their best.”

Plymouth City Council has been accredited by the Department of Work and Pensions as a Disability Confident Leader and we have achieved ‘Gold’ status in the veteran’s charter, as part of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. Our Staff Networks are well-established, including a vibrant community for our neuro-diverse staff that hosted a hugely successful conference for organisations and staff in March 2025.

Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing and Human Resources teams are a significant positive presence, working with managers, staff and trade unions in promoting wellbeing and safety. This includes our memorable ‘Work Safe Home Safe’ campaign and our network of wellbeing champions and mental health first aiders, as well as support for staff and managers to reduce the personal and business impact of sickness absence. Our work on staff wellbeing has been recognised locally through a Wellbeing at Work gold award.

Aspire to be the best

“

“Our workforce is our biggest asset and we must have the right people in the right roles, retain them and grow them. We want our employees to know we value their talents and will help them develop.”

Plymouth City Council has an apprenticeship and early careers’ strategy and exceeds the national target of 2.3% of the workforce being apprentices. In the 15-months prior to July 2025, none of our apprenticeship levy was returned to the Treasury. We also use our levy to support partner organisations with their own apprenticeship schemes. We have seen success with our work placements programme, with good outreach to our schools and colleges. As of July 2025, there are 167 colleagues studying for an apprenticeship qualification in Plymouth City Council (this includes our new Digital Academy); this is 6.5% of the workforce.

Our Health and Safety Improvement Plan is progressing well and has put in place crucial assurance mechanisms, including a Corporate Steering Group, Management Framework and Toolkit, audit programme and training at all levels. The practical side of our work on Health and Safety includes our highly visible ‘Work Safe Home Safe’ initiative.



Attract and keep the right people



“We want to be recognised as an employer of choice. People should consider working for the Council to be a rewarding, fulfilling and valuable opportunity. This means we will attract the best talent and keep the best people.”

We are working on a culture of improved recruitment practice, using effective modern tools such as LinkedIn, to target and attract good candidates, as well as the development of our recruitment ‘brand’. This includes focused work on targeting young people (Generations ‘Z’ and ‘Alpha’), engagement work with schools and colleges, and recruitment fairs including children’s social work events.

We link recruitment and employment to improving outcomes for Plymouth residents, such as being a fostering friendly employer, guaranteed interview schemes for military veterans, care experienced and disabled candidates, and internships for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Pay and career progression are of course important tools for developing and retaining staff. In order to address employee turnover in senior professional roles, new grades were introduced in 2024, bridging the gap between the existing pay structure and chief officer roles. An improved focus on career development (including apprenticeships) has seen a reduction in our use of agency staff, with a 15.4% reduction in 2024-25 compared to the previous year.

Employee recognition and our staff communications have also been an important feature of our People Strategy, and we continue to celebrate achievements across the council through features on staff and our Staff Awards. Staff Awards are also linked to strategic priorities, for example celebrating the ‘Apprentice of the Year’ and ‘Children’s Social Worker of the Year’.

We actively support the council’s Net Zero Action Plan including the Green Travel Plan. This includes using salary exchange mechanisms to enable staff to lease electric and hybrid cars. We also promote and encourage alternative means of transport within the working day and as methods of commuting.

Plymouth City Council takes the wellbeing of its staff extremely seriously. The programmes and policies in place include Occupational Health provision, an Employee Assistance Programme, a network of Wellbeing Champions and employees trained in Mental Health First Aid. Good work across HR, managers, trade unions and staff means that we are now seeing sickness absence decrease across the organisation. We have developed our staff support networks, with for example vibrant groups including Disabilities, Neuro-Diversity, Women, Race Equality and Cultural Heritage. These groups provide invaluable feedback to inform our work, as well as personal support to individual members of staff.

Be well led



“A great organisation needs great leadership. Our leaders from all levels of the organisation should be highly skilled and reflect our values. They lead by example, exhibiting the behaviours we wish to see from all our people. We need leaders for different purposes, and we need to prepare leaders for the future.”

Plymouth City Council has developed three management and leadership development programmes, starting in 2024-25. These include a People Management Skills programme, initially delivered in Children’s Services and now rolled out into other areas. We have recently launched the first cohort of our Management and Leadership Programme, with 100 managers taking part, followed by a level 3 ‘Pathfinder’ programme for newer managers. These programmes are in addition to individual and sector specific development and qualifications, such as leadership programmes with the Local Government Association, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, Association of Directors of Children’s Services and leadership qualifications through apprenticeship frameworks.

Appendix Two – What the workforce is telling us

A series of workshops took place between March and May 2025, to involve staff in the creation of the new People Strategy and to explore the impact that positive culture in the workplace has on the delivery of services.



Whats going well?

- Flexible Working and Benefits: Work-life balance, salary-sacrifice schemes (e.g. electric vehicles).
- Equality and Inclusion.
- Teamwork: Strong internal and external collaboration.
- Training and Development: Apprenticeships, career progression.
- Leadership: Caring, visible, values-driven management, relationships with members.
- Investment and Innovation: Regeneration, partnerships, doing things for the good of the city and its residents.



What isn't going well?

- Outdated ICT systems in some areas, digital exclusion in the city
- Budget Constraints: stretched services.
- Communication Gaps: Internal silos – need to ensure we talk across teams and directorates.
- Management Concerns: Turnover, inconsistent support, top-down culture in some areas.
- Processes and Policies: Bureaucracy, inefficiencies.
- Workplace Conditions: Safety in customer-facing roles, hybrid inconsistencies – isolation when at home.
- Pressure and Stress: Risk of burnout.
- Team: lack of team-building (e.g. social), empathy from some, developing mini-cultures.



What you'd love to see at PCC

- Better Recruitment and Pay: Accessible job ads and application processes, fair pay and grading.
- Improved Induction and Training: Onboarding, coaching.
- Wellbeing and Recognition: Belonging, team celebrations.
- Stronger Team Culture: Cross-team collaboration.
- Leadership and Culture: Trauma-informed, psychologically-aware, curious, celebrating our city, recognising that staff are also residents.
- Hybrid Working: Consistency, visibility, community use of space.

The workshops also looked at people's motivations for working in an organisation. The largest factor was Purpose, including Values, Culture and Ethos in the workplace.

Appendix Three – SWOT analysis

This People Strategy considers information and data from different sources and strategies. From these, there are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that impact on the current and future workforce at Plymouth City Council.

Strengths

- Ambitious council
- City presence and visibility
- Committed workforce
- Developed Higher/Further Education sector with three universities in the city
- Employment Relations
- Focus on Health and Safety
- Flexible employment offer
- Government investment in Plymouth
- Improving Children's Social Care
- Innovation
- Plymouth as 'Place'
- Terms and conditions of employment
- Use of apprenticeships



Weaknesses

- Below national average levels of higher qualifications
- Digital and ICT literacy in the workforce
- Geographical location and difficulties relocating potential staff
- Housing supply
- Inequality in the city
- Local government finances
- Low population growth



Opportunities

- Automation/artificial intelligence
- City Help and Support Programme
- City regeneration and growth
- Civic Engagement and social value
- Committed workforce
- Data and Data Insights
- Digital Academy and Digital Apprenticeships
- Flexible employment offer
- Government investment in Plymouth
- Investment in management and leadership
- Learning organisation
- Local government reform
- New HR Management, Recruitment and Payroll system
- Partnership working
- PCC estate
- Supported Internships
- Use of apprenticeships and early careers framework



Threats

- Cost of living
- Digital exclusion in the city
- Forecast retirement profile for PCC
- Growth in jobs v. labour supply
- Local government reform
- Rising need for services
- Tight labour market leading to overheated jobs market



Appendix Four – Success measures

The impact of the new People Strategy will be reported on using measures across several key areas. These proposed measures include:

Workplace Inclusion and Diversity:

- Monitor recruitment process changes and the diversity of applicants and hired staff.
- Survey staff satisfaction regarding recruitment practices and career progression opportunities.
- Analyse feedback from staff networks on improvements in recruitment, retention, and support.
- Ensure the staff profile is representative of the city we serve.
- Increase in paid employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities within the Council.
- Track the number of supported internships for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Assess the impact of the Civic Engagement Agreement in deprived areas of Plymouth, focusing on work experience and employment opportunities.

Career Development and Progression:

- Track the success of leadership programmes developed and the engagement levels among participants.
- Record the progression and achievements of staff in career pathways and succession planning.
- Workforce plans written for services and directorates.
- Succession planning in place for key roles and professions.

Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of rapid interventions for physical and mental wellbeing, such as Mental Health first aiders.
- Monitor the uptake and impact of financial wellbeing support, including salary sacrifice products and awareness of debt and gambling harm.
- Conduct regular surveys to assess the working environment and staff satisfaction regarding wellbeing.
- Track incidents of abusive behaviour towards staff and the Council's response actions.

Staff Support and Feedback:

- Survey staff on their ability to raise concerns and the effectiveness of the resolutions provided.
 - Analyse feedback on flexible and hybrid working offers and their impact on individual staff and team dynamics.
- Increase in the number of staff who rate Plymouth City Council as a great place to work.



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