Insert:
Committee – Employment Committee
23 September 2026

Report by: HR Manager, Project Delivery

Lead Cllr: Cllr Claffey
Portfolio Holder for Workforce

Huntingdonshire
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Wards	Open / Exempt	Key Decision?
All	Open	No

Workforce Strategy Closure Report

Executive Summary:

In 2023, HDC began refreshing its Workforce Strategy to ensure the organisation can attract, retain and develop the talent needed to deliver future priorities. Developed through extensive employee engagement and approved by Full Council in June 2024, the strategy focuses on improving service delivery, employee engagement, retention and wellbeing while positioning HDC as an employer of choice. Built around three key pillars, Attraction and Retention, Engagement, and Wellbeing, it provides a framework for investing in people, fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture, and ensuring the workforce has the skills, support and opportunities needed to thrive and deliver high-quality services.

Recommendations

1.1. Members are asked to note the contents of this report

	Key Corporate Plan Priorities
1	*Doing our Core Work Well*

Report Author(s)

HR Manager, Project Delivery – Kiran.hans@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to feedback to committee on the last 2 years of the Workforce Strategy project, highlighting the impact it has had on the council and the return on investment.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

2.1 The Workforce Strategy was developed through extensive employee engagement and approved by Full Council in June 2024. This report reviews the work done over the past 2 years on the action plan.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED & NOT RECOMMENDED

3.1 N/A.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.1 N/A

5. POST-DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Workforce Strategy will now continue as part of BAU.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

6.1 Council Key Priorities and Performance

- Improving quality of life for local people
- Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations
- Doing our core work well

This report supports a review of key data to review the impact of the Workforce Strategy.

6.2 Financial Implications

This project has been managed within budget and the initiatives have generated an estimated £150,000 in cost savings/cost avoidance, exceeding the investment made and delivering a net benefit of approximately £86,170.48.

6.3 Policy Implications

6.3.1 N/A

6.4 Legal & Constitutional Implications

6.4.1 N/A

6.5 Community Impact

6.5.1 N/A

6.6 Environment & Climate Change Implications

6.6.1 N/A

6.7 Equality & Diversity Implications

6.7.1 N/A

6.8 Implications on Resources

6.8.1 N/A

6.9 Health & Wellbeing Implications

6.9.1 N/A

6.10 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications

6.10.1 Data collation from this report contributes to the progression of the LGR Workforce Workstream. The Workforce Strategy has enabled HDC to set out clearly the support available to staff.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 N/A

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS– LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

8.1 N/A.

Report Template for Cabinet / Committee Reports

Version Control	
Author	**Date**
HR Manager – Project Delivery	August 2026

Workforce Strategy Closure Report

Background

In 2023 the council started work to renew and refresh its Workforce Strategy to prepare for the changing skills needed for its future workforce and to ensure that the council continue to attract, retain, and nurture talent. It focuses on the happiness, well-being and inclusion of staff and investment in HDC's current employees to develop and grow our own talent.

The Strategy was created through engagement with the workforce at all sites and agreed by Full Council in June 2024 with an action plan (49 overarching actions, 119 when broken down).

The aim of the strategy was to achieve:

- Higher quality services for our customers, greater staff engagement and retention, and lower levels of stress.
- Value for money services with our workforce made up of the right people in the right places recognising that the cost of getting it wrong can be significant.
- Assurance that we can deliver our organisational priorities with our workforce.
- Becoming an employer of choice by providing training and empowering an innovative workforce

The Workforce Strategy is based on the following three core pillars that are focussed on making HDC an employer of choice:

- **Attraction and retention –** this includes recruitment to attract top talent, growing talent through apprenticeships, retaining staff through robust onboarding, formal and informal training opportunities and reward through financial benefits and performance output.
- **Engagement –** this includes communication that is two-way and accessible using different methodologies, recognition through formal and informal processes and creating a positive working environment through inclusivity and collaboration.
- **Well-being –** physical, mental & emotional well-being through support services and initiatives, workplace social well-being and financial well-being through employee assistance programmes and discounts.

A budget of £1 million was allocated to deliver on the Workforce Strategy action plan over a 2-year period.

Pillar 1 – Attraction and Retention

The Attraction and Retention pillar aims to make the Council an employer of choice by attracting, developing, and retaining talented employees. Priorities include growing talent through apprenticeships and training, providing effective onboarding, supporting career development and progression, promoting diversity and inclusion, and offering a competitive rewards package with flexible working arrangements focused on performance outcomes.

Examples of activity:

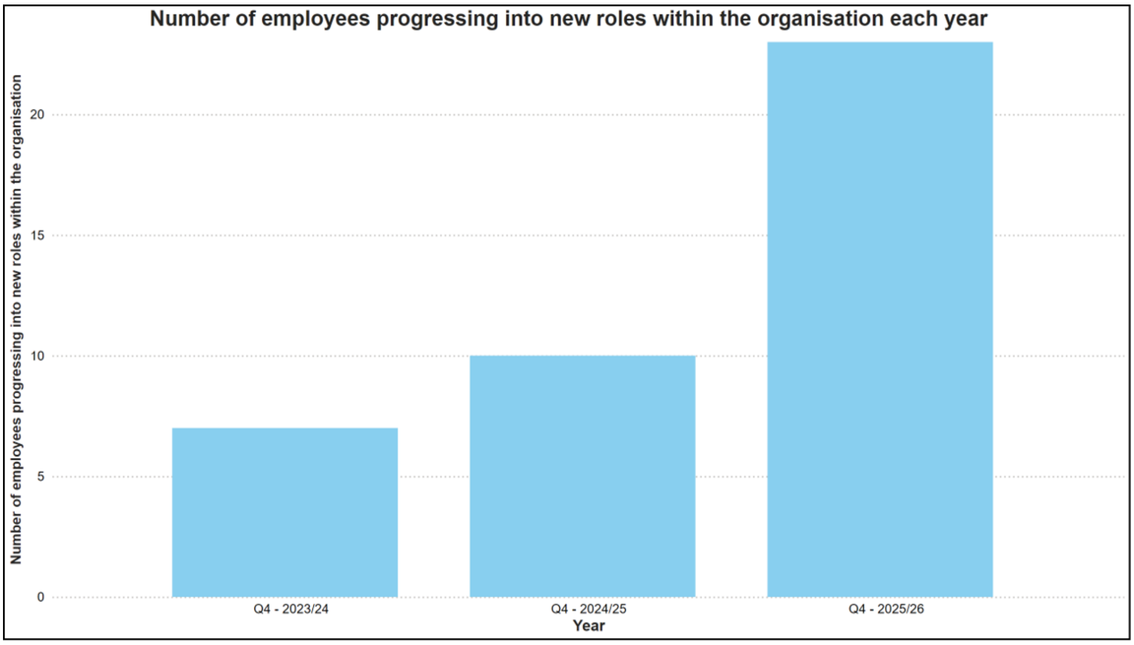
- Attending employer jobs fairs/events
- Review of careers website, online presence and targeted recruitment
- Reviewing the application form
- Review of onboarding and induction including buddy scheme
- Create a succession planning tool
- Mentoring and coaching cohort
- Pay and reward including schemes such as Electric vehicles

Key Metrics

Recruitment

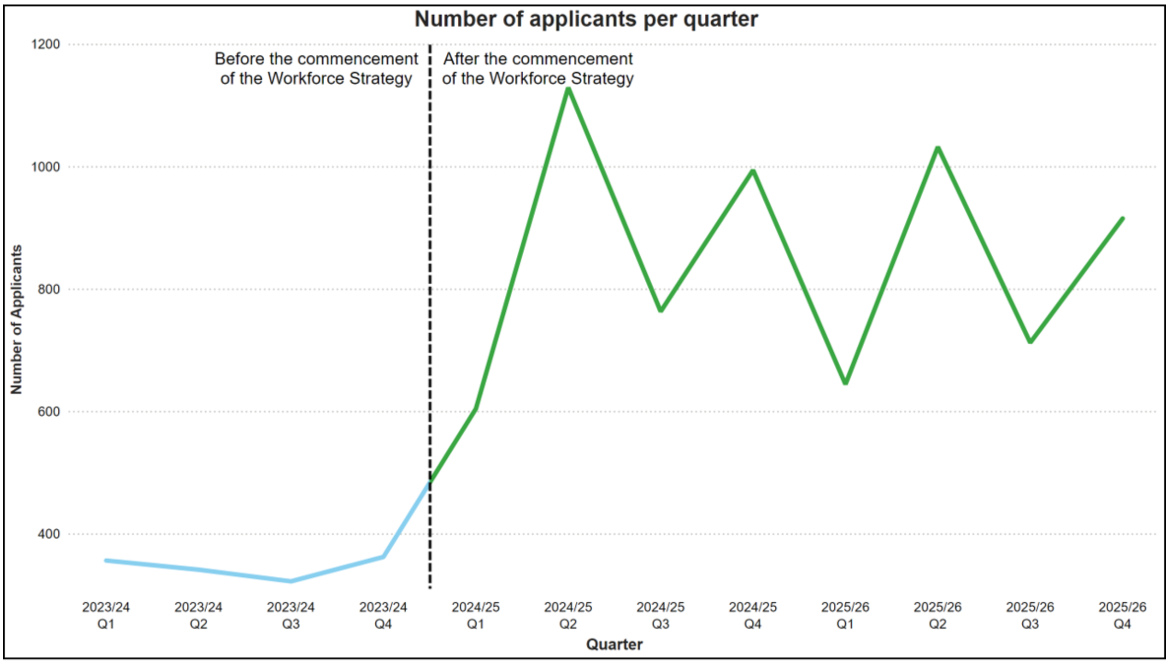
- The number of employees progressing into new roles within the organisation has increased significantly over the past three years. The data shows:

- Q4 23/24 - 7 employees
- Q4 24/25 - 10 employees **(Work on action plan started Q2 2024/2025)**
- Q4 25/26 - 23 employees

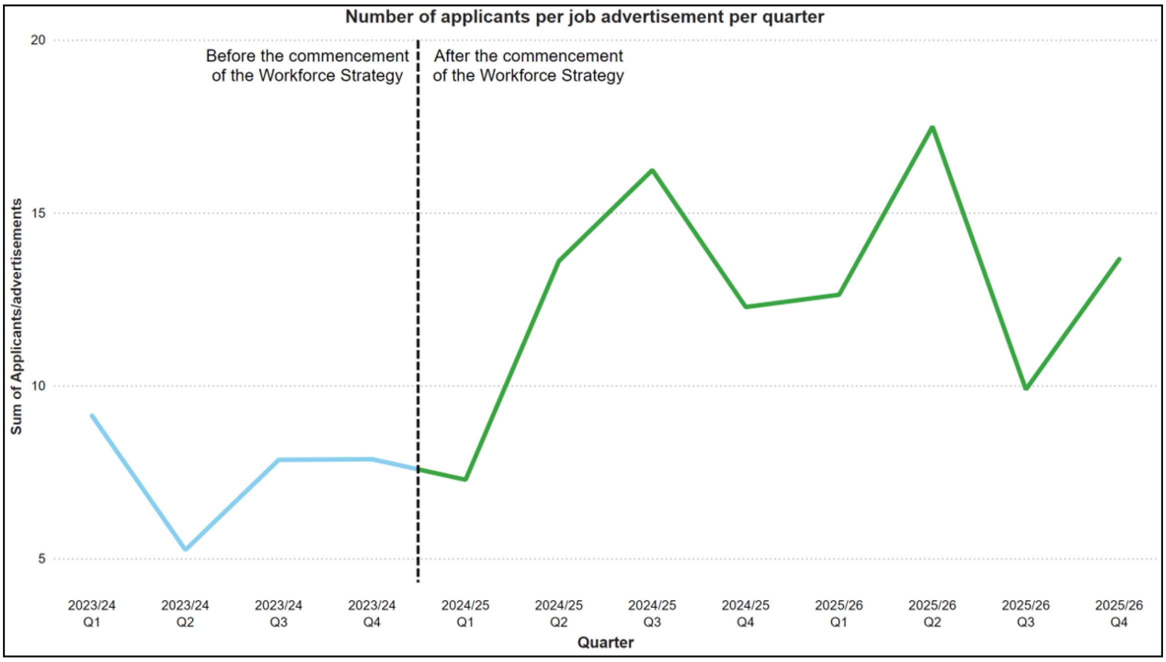


This represents an **increase of 229%.** In which the positive trend, shown on the graph above, highlights our success in creating career development opportunities, retaining talent, and enabling colleagues to grow and progress within the organisation.

- In relation to recruitment, the number of applications has consistently increased from before the strategy started to present quarter, please see graph below:



- The graph and table below show the average number of applicants per role advertised, which also demonstrates a consistent increase in HDC attraction rates.



Quarter	Advertised Opportunities	Total Candidate Applications
Q1 – 2023/24	39	356
Q2 – 2023/24	65	341
Q3 – 2023/24	41	322
Q4 – 2023/24	46	362
Q1 – 2024/25	83	604
Q2 – 2024/25	83	1129
Q3 – 2024/25	47	763
Q4 – 2024/25	81	994
Q1 – 2025/26	51	644
Q2 – 2025/26	59	1032
Q3 – 2025/26	72	712
Q4 – 2025/26	67	915

- In addition, by delivering an in-house talent acquisition function, the Council achieved approximately **£60,000 in agency fee cost avoidance** while successfully recruiting to several senior and hard-to-fill positions, including the Head of Transformation and Corporate Reporting, and Head of Finance. This approach has reduced recruitment costs while strengthening internal recruitment capability and outcomes.
- The Recruitment, Communications and Planning Team **were also shortlisted for an award** in recognition of its work on the Council's Recruitment Microsite. The microsite strengthened HDC's employer brand and played a key role in attracting candidates to apply for planning roles that had previously been difficult to recruit to, helping to address skills shortages and improve recruitment outcomes. Difficult to recruit to roles include Principal Development Management Officer, Development Management Technical Support Officer, Development Management Officer and Senior Recovery Officer).
- Effective onboarding was another focus, and is essential in helping new employees settle quickly, feel engaged, and remain with the organisation. Since the introduction of the New Starter Survey in

September 2025, 26 responses have been received, with **96%** (25 out of 26 respondents) rating the overall induction programme as either **good or excellent,** demonstrating the positive impact of HDC's onboarding approach.

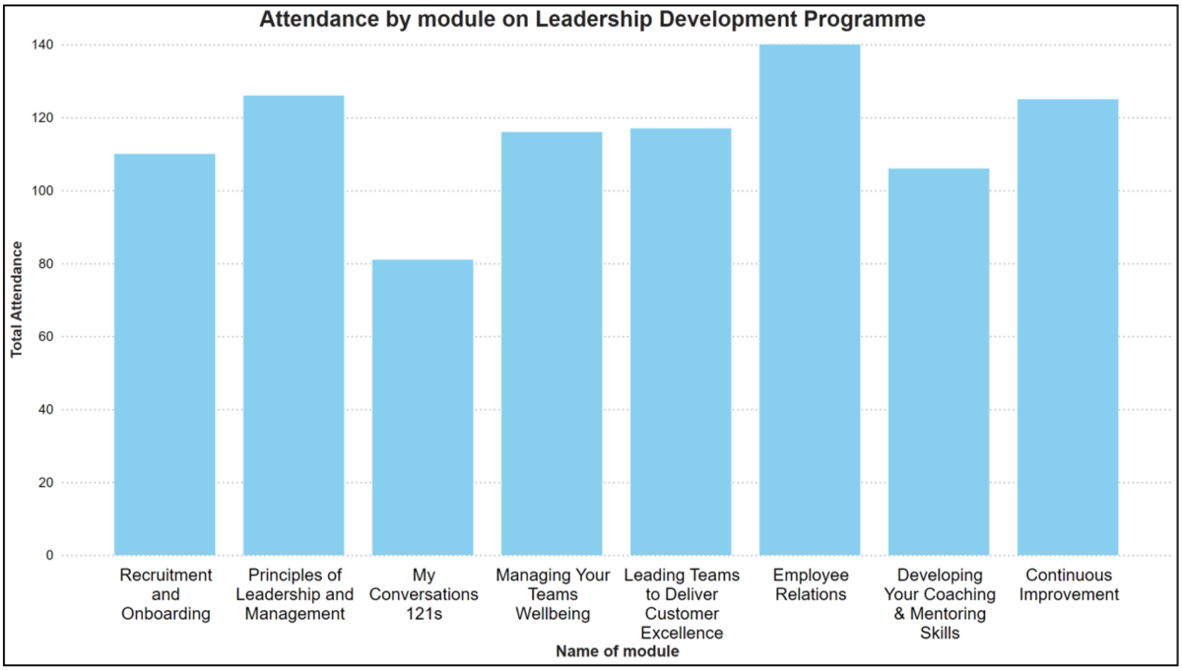
- Another support mechanism for onboarding new starters is the Buddy Scheme. This was introduced at the start of 2025 and helps new starters integrate into the workforce, by pairing them up with another new starter or a longer serving HDC employee. Since then, **23 of our new starters** have chosen to take part in the scheme. The continued uptake of the scheme demonstrates its value to new starters and supports HDC's commitment to providing a positive employee experience and the retention of our staff. According to the LGA, average staff turnover is around 20%. The Council has consistently performed below this benchmark, maintaining turnover levels of **16-17%** across the last four quarters, demonstrating strong employee retention and workforce stability.

Learning and Development

- Since the Summer of 2024, there has been **53 apprenticeships**. Out of the 53, **26 are undertaking Leadership and Management qualifications**, whilst the rest are completing other apprenticeships:
    - 8 completing Level 3 Leadership & Management qualification
    - 9 completing Level 5 Leadership & Management qualification
    - 8 completing Level 7 Leadership & Management qualification
    - 1 completing Level 3 & Level 5 Leadership & Management qualification

- This demonstrates HDC's strong commitment to developing talent and building a sustainable workforce for the future. The Council consistently maximises the use of its apprenticeship levy funding to create development opportunities for both new and existing employees. Where appropriate, HDC has also collaborated with other Local Authorities to access additional levy funds, enabling even more apprenticeship opportunities. This ensures available funding is fully utilised to support skills development, career progression, and succession planning across the organisation.
- Between **100-140 managers** have attended each module of the Leadership Development Programme. Some modules were delivered externally during the first year due to the volume of managers to take through the training. However, most of the training was delivered in-house. This approach successfully built internal capability and expertise, enabling the programme to be fully delivered internally going forward. The Learning and Development resource now delivers the management programme alongside their existing responsibilities including areas such as work experience, apprenticeships, mandatory training, and

mentoring/coaching cohort. As a result, the programme has become embedded within business-as-usual activity, removing the need for ongoing external providers and avoiding approximately **£12,000** per year in training costs.



Rewards

- As part of the WFS actions around taking proactive steps to ensure we offer a competitive rewards package for our employees, HDC launched an Electric Vehicle and Hybrid vehicle scheme in January to supports both affordability and sustainability. In addition, this provides, HDC with approximately £1370 in Employer NI savings since January 2026. The scheme has received a positive response from employees, demonstrating its value and appeal.

> I was genuinely impressed by how smooth and well-organised the EV salary sacrifice process was, with clear updates and a much faster turnaround than I expected. The inclusion of a home EV charger added real value and made the switch to electric driving **simple and convenient**. I'm extremely pleased with my new EV and would **highly recommend the scheme** to anyone considering an electric vehicle through workplace benefits.

Pillar 2 – Engagement

The Engagement pillar focuses on creating a positive and inclusive workplace where employees feel valued and supported. Key priorities include clear leadership, open and transparent communication, and actively seeking and responding to employee feedback. The strategy also promotes recognising and celebrating achievements, supporting effective hybrid working, and encouraging collaboration across teams and services. Embedding the Council's iCare values to strengthen inclusivity and help foster a culture of engagement, wellbeing, and high performance.

Examples of activity:

- Leadership Development Programme
- Job shadowing process
- Communications Strategy
- Equality Diversity and Inclusion Network
- Embed iCare values, updating iCare video and further training
- Celebrating success
- My conversation new One to One process
- Engagement Calendar

Key Metrics

Communication

- Staff survey results for 2025/26 show an improvement in communication-related measures compared with the previous year, following the completion of the action to introduce a new Communications Strategy. This suggests that staff feel better informed and engaged, demonstrating the positive impact of a more structured and consistent approach to communication for wired and non-wired staff. In addition, staff engagement increased to **307 completed surveys in 2025** compared to **276** in the 2024 annual staff survey.

Question Asked	2024 Score	2025 Score	Score Improvement
I am kept informed about news and updates	3.72/5	3.87/5	↑ 0.15 (4%)
HDC communicates its priorities and values clearly	3.58/5	3.77/5	↑ 0.19 (5.3%)

- In relation to the introduction of the Comms Strategy, general views on intranet posts have increased since the start of the Workforce Strategy. From May 2024 to May 2026, there has been a **128.7% increase** in online engagement.

  May 2024 average news post views: **81.6**
  May 2025 average news post views: **149**
  May 2026 average news post views: **186.6**

- The LGR intranet page has also recorded **2,300 views and 301 unique visitors**. The level of engagement, particularly the number of repeat visits, demonstrates that employees are actively using the page to stay informed. This indicates that key organisational messages are reaching employees effectively and suggests that the comms strategy is playing an important role in keeping colleagues informed and engaged especially during times of key organisational change.

Engagement Initiatives

- Over the past two years, a wide range of staff engagement events have been delivered, many of which were provided at little or no cost. These events have created valuable opportunities for colleagues to connect, share experiences, and access information and support. Activities included International Men's Day and International Women's Day events, which highlighted the importance of mental health and wellbeing, while also raising awareness of available support and opportunities for personal and professional development. In addition, quarterly roadshows have been held at all sites since the launch of the strategy, led by Michelle and members of the Corporate Leadership Team. These sessions have provided a valuable forum for staff to engage directly with senior leaders, ask questions, share feedback, and discuss potential improvements.
- Celebrating success has been an important part of the culture that HDC has sought to develop over the past two years. The organisation's values play a key role in recognising and celebrating work that delivers a direct benefit to residents and communities. The iCare Awards have become a significant part of this approach, attracting a high number of nominations each year and providing an opportunity to showcase outstanding contributions from across the organisation. The most recent awards ceremony was attended by approximately **160 members of staff**, demonstrating the strong level of engagement and commitment to recognising achievements and HDC's values.

Consistent Performance and wellbeing discussions

- The introduction of the My Conversation one to one form, developed in collaboration with services, has helped to create a more consistent and meaningful approach to manager and employee conversations. The form supports regular discussions about performance, wellbeing, development and objectives, helping to strengthen engagement and improve communication across teams. Since its introduction, **90% of staff** had started to receive their one to one, demonstrating strong adoption across the organisation (staff survey results 2025). In addition, the staff survey results show a positive picture in relation to feedback provided to employees and their understanding of HDC goals.

Question Asked	2024 Score	2025 Score	Score Improvement
I am provided with useful feedback on performance	3.44/5	3.51/5	↑ 0.07 (2%)
I understand how my work contributes to HDC goals	4.00/5	4.11/5	↑ 0.11 (2.75%)

Pillar 3 – Well-being

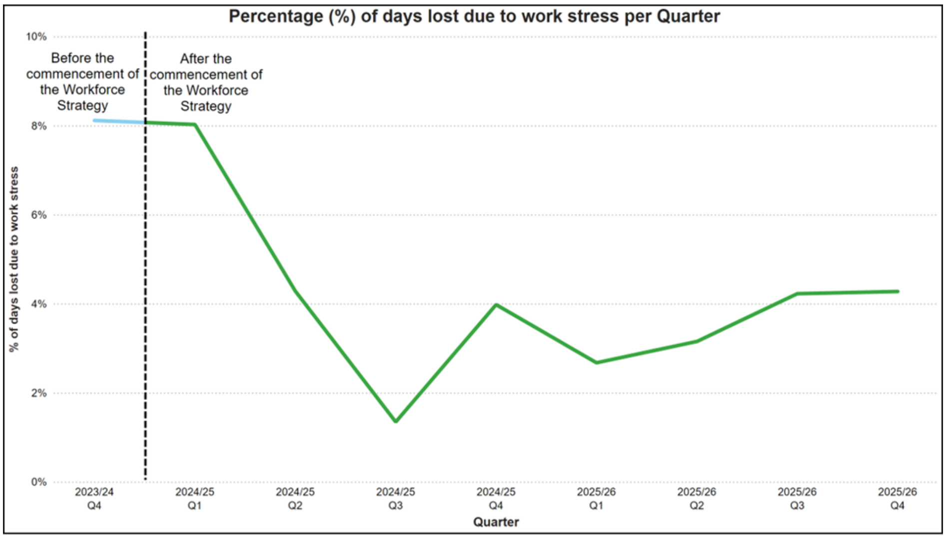
The Well-being pillar focuses on supporting employees' physical, mental, emotional, social, and financial wellbeing. The Council promote healthy working practices, provides access to support services, encourages positive workplace relationships and open conversations about wellbeing. Financial support, guidance, and employee discounts also help promote a healthy, resilient, and engaged workforce.

Examples of activity:

- Social wellbeing - e.g. peer networking, volunteering days
- Upskilling managers and staff in support services
- Employee Handbook
- Workplace adjustments passport
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Sickness absence - training managers on policy, monitoring of Action Stage 1 forms

<u>Sickness Absence</u>

- The Wellbeing pillar of the Workforce Strategy has delivered a positive and measurable impact on employee health and attendance. At the start of the action plan, work-related stress was consistently one of the top five causes of sickness absence, both in the quarter in which the work commenced and in the preceding quarter, contributing significantly to working days lost. Following the implementation of the wellbeing actions, work-related stress **ceased to feature within the top five reasons for sickness absence** from the subsequent quarter onwards. This demonstrates that the targeted wellbeing interventions have been effective in supporting employees, reducing work stress-related absences, and improving overall workforce resilience and promoting a healthier, more engaged workforce.



- Although sickness absence has increased to 10 days per FTE in the most recent reported quarter, (Quarter 4 2025/2026 - winter quarter), this reflects a wider national trend rather than a local issue. Local Government Association (LGA) metrics found that average employee absence reached 10 days per FTE over a 12-month period. While we would have liked to see overall sickness absence reduce, the Workforce Strategy was designed to deliver a broader range of workforce outcomes and the actions implemented have remained aligned to those objectives. Had reducing sickness absence been the primary focus, a different set of interventions would likely have been prioritised. That said, the proposed Wellbeing Strategy has targeted actions to support employee health, wellbeing and resilience, which are expected to contribute positively to attendance over time and support preventative health and wellbeing interventions. Given the national increase in sickness absence, it is reasonable to conclude that absence levels at the Council may have been higher without the workforce and wellbeing initiatives that have been put in place.
- A further review of sickness absence was undertaken to analyse overall sickness levels over the past two years. The analysis sought to distinguish areas where absence could reasonably be considered unavoidable or beyond an individual's control. These included categories such as:

- Benign and malignant tumours or cancers
- Covid-19
- Injury fractures
- Medical Operation Procedure & Recovery
- Pregnancy Related
- Stress related to close bereavement, serious family illness i.e. cancer/terminal

2024/25 sickness	Days lost		2025/26 sickness	Days lost
Total sickness	5817.09 days		Total sickness	8034.93 days
“Unavoidable” sickness	2242.70 days (39%)		“Unavoidable” sickness	3609.01 days (45%)
Other sickness	3573.39 days (61%)		Other sickness	4425.92 days (55% ↓)

- While sickness absence increased over the course of the strategy, there was a corresponding increase in absence related to factors that are generally considered unavoidable or outside the employee's control. This indicates that external and health-related factors played a significant role in the overall increase as seen in the table above.

<u>Health and Wellbeing initiatives</u>

- A new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was introduced at a lower cost than the previous supplier while providing a significantly enhanced range of support services. In addition to confidential counselling, the new EAP offers legal advice, financial guidance, relationship support and dedicated manager coaching, delivering greater value and a more comprehensive wellbeing offer for employees and managers. Reporting indicates a clear increase in engagement since the introduction of the new service. During the full 12-month period from October 2024 to September 2025, **31 new cases** were opened. By comparison, the October 2025 to June 2026 report shows **42 new cases** opened. As the June 2026 report covers only three quarters of the year (October 2025 to June 2026), this increase is particularly encouraging and suggests that the enhanced service offer is driving greater awareness and uptake among employees.
- To support staff wellbeing and help employees be their best at work, a programme of wellbeing webinars was introduced covering key life stages and personal challenges including Early Years, Midlife Matters and Infant Loss. Topics focussed on balancing the demands of parenting and work, support during the menopause, caring for elderly parents, and managing bereavement. These provide practical advice, guidance and support to help employees maintain their wellbeing both in and outside of work and were well received.

> I just wanted to say how good the Midlife Matters webinar was today. It covered all the emotions I have been through. This webinar makes you feel you are not alone and all the emotions are normal. I just wanted to feedback that this is a **great benefit for staff** who need this (and other) webinars. It offers some very good practical advice and signposting as well.

- Engagement with the staff wellbeing page and intranet communications have remained positive throughout the project. The staff wellbeing page received 584 views from 218 viewers, with 133 views recorded in the last 90 days, indicating sustained interest in wellbeing information and support. The level of repeat visits across the page suggests that colleagues are actively using these platforms to stay informed and access key dates or resources.
- A wide range of health and wellbeing initiatives were delivered throughout the year, some of which promoted health screenings and others recommending preventative health measures which can help reduce future demand on NHS services. Access was provided to a specialist Endometriosis Consultant, a service that could cost approximately **£250 privately for each staff member**, as well as Diabetes and Kidney disease awareness sessions ESCAPE Pain Management programmes and Tai Chi classes. In addition, a Cervical screening awareness campaign was also delivered to encourage early detection and prevention. The 9 completed Cervical screenings for staff figure correlates to preventing 1-2 women from ever developing Cervical cancer by catching cell changes early (NHS England).
- Health Kiosks were also arranged to support employees to better understand and monitor their health, with reductions observed in smoking prevalence (11.5% to 9.8%) and high blood pressure (14.1% to 12.5%) between the November 2024 and July 2025 visits. From the results of the visits, 5 employees avoided CVD/stroke over next 10 years which in turn would save 1 life (Health You, 2024).

Measure	Nov - 2024 Score	Estimate annual cost loss of productivity	Jul - 2025 Score	Estimate annual cost loss of productivity	Estimate Cost saving from increased productivity
Smoking rate	11.6%	£51,239	8.6%	£23,911	£27,328 (↓)
Overweight / Obesity Rate	72.2%	£73,084	57.5%	£24,513	£48,571 (↓)
High Blood Pressure	15.7%	£6,559	12.7%	£3,279	£3,280 (↓)

Source: SISU Health UK

- Improvements made to the mental and physical wellbeing of staff members at HDC (2-5 from Health Kiosk results on smoking and obesity)

has very likely reduced time and cost pressures on the NHS. By having a healthier and happier work force, multiple employees that could have required significant treatments totalling up to £100,000 have potentially been avoided.
Source: NHS England

> I haven't had my blood pressure, weight, etc. tested in years! The health kiosk couldn't have made it easier. I popped down for five minutes in the office and was given such **insightful** information, which has really **motivated me to be healthier**!

Financial wellbeing

- In relation to staff wellbeing, financial wellbeing is also an important factor. The introduction of Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) in August 2024 has provided employees with greater flexibility to plan and save for retirement while also delivering financial benefits to the Council. Since the scheme was launched, **237 employees** have taken up the opportunity, generating savings of approximately **£20,000** for HDC through reduced employer National Insurance contributions. As participation continues to grow, these savings are expected to increase.
- Further financial wellbeing support has been given to staff by improving access to pensions guidance through webinars and face to face advice. A Pensions Advisor was made available at Eastfield House for Operational Staff, providing them with a convenient opportunity to discuss retirement planning and pension options. The sessions were fully booked, with approximately **30 employees** attending from across a range of sites. The strong level of participation demonstrates significant employee engagement with financial wellbeing initiatives and further highlights the value of making support services more accessible to frontline and site-based staff.

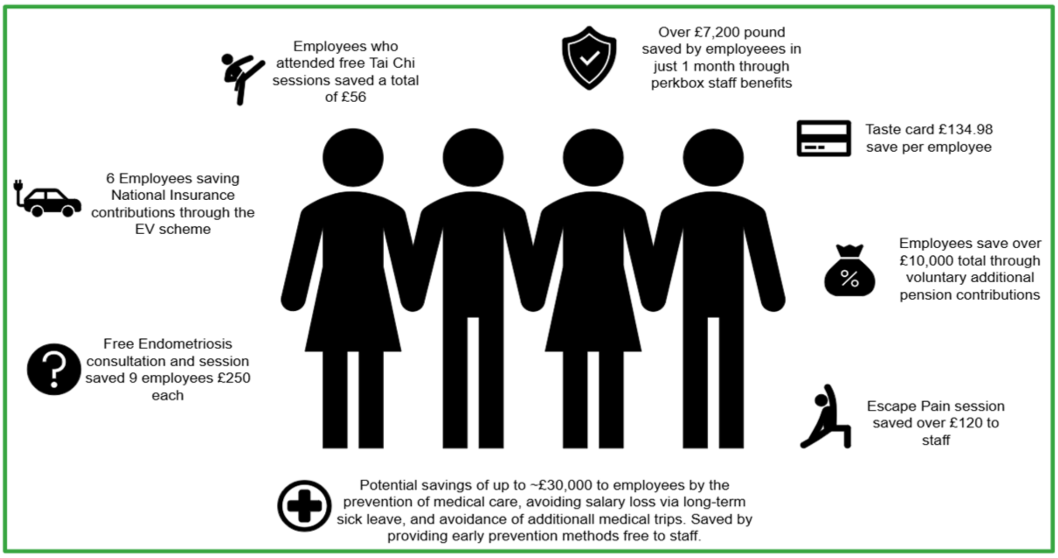
> I have joined two webinars about pensions and retirement, I learned so much about both. The pensions webinar is particularly **enlightening** and **informative**. I recommend it!
>
> \- Officer

Cost Savings

Please see table below with details on budget:

Budget	£1,000,000
Spent	£370, 308.32
Minus salaries which include, figures for Project Manager (2 years) and Project Co-ordinator (2-year project) and 3 years post project (5 years total for Co-ordinator role)	£370,308.32 - ££306,478.8 (salary) = £63,829.52 This means £63, 829.52 spent on initiatives
Cost savings/Cost avoidance through initiatives	Minimum approximation £150,000
Staff Savings	Minimum approximation £34,000

- The Workforce Strategy has delivered a positive return on investment, demonstrating both financial value and organisational impact. Out of the £1 million allocated budget, a total of £370, 308.32 was spent. When salary costs for the Workforce Strategy Manager and Co-ordinator roles are excluded (£306,478.80), the direct investment in workforce initiatives was £63,829.52. These initiatives have generated an estimated £150,000 in cost savings/cost avoidance, exceeding the investment made and delivering a net benefit of approximately £86,170.48. Alongside these financial gains, the strategy has delivered wider benefits including increased employee engagement, greater career progression opportunities, improved retention, and reduced reliance on external recruitment. This demonstrates that targeted investment in workforce development can achieve meaningful organisational outcomes while providing excellent value for money. Whilst the Workforce Strategy forms the primary focus of the dedicated post holders, the Council has also benefited from their experience. This has enabled them to support a range of business-as-usual activities across the wider team, for example acting as impartial panel members for complex employee appeal hearings avoiding the need for external support at an additional cost.
- In addition, staff have benefited from individual savings too, as outlined below:



<u>Source: HDC and NHS Reference Costs</u>

Conclusion

Going forward, Workforce Strategy priorities will be embedded into business-as-usual activity and integrated across the wider HR team to sustain and build on these achievements. The Workforce Strategy has delivered a strong return on investment by creating a more skilled, engaged and resilient workforce while also demonstrating clear cost effectiveness. By increasing opportunities for career progression and significantly growing the number of employees moving into new roles within the organisation, the strategy has helped reduce reliance on external recruitment, lowering associated recruitment and onboarding costs. Improvements in employee engagement, the introduction of more meaningful manager and employee conversations, and increased retention of talent have further strengthened organisational performance and capability. Collectively, these outcomes have enhanced the employee experience, delivered financial value, and ensured the organisation is better equipped to meet current and future workforce challenges. The results provide clear evidence that investment in our people has generated measurable benefits for both employees and the organisation.