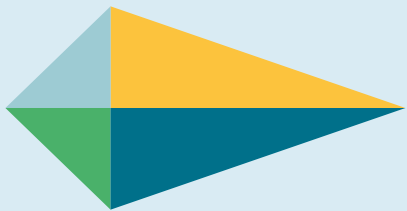


# People Strategy

2024 - 2028



**EASTSUFFOLK**  
COUNCIL



## INTRODUCTION

Here at East Suffolk, we are determined to ensure that we attract, develop and retain talented people, committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for our communities and stakeholders.

Our people, and the people we hope to attract, are critical to the successful function of East Suffolk Council and we are justly proud of the effort and commitment of our teams across the organisation.

A high quality People Strategy is a key part of this, creating the culture, processes, and policies that enable us all to thrive.

Our last People Strategy (2021 – 2024) focussed on supporting the organisation through rapid transformation, following the creation of East Suffolk Council, and much has been achieved.

However, the Council continues to evolve, responding to significant challenges such as the Covid 19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. None of this would be possible without the Council's dedicated workforce.

Now, as the current strategy reaches the end of its cycle, a new approach has been developed, by our people, with the next four years in mind.

We want to ensure that East Suffolk Council continues to provide the best possible environment for its workforce between now and 2028, ensuring we have the tools to deliver against the Administration's ambitious agenda, responding to any challenges we may face in an agile and progressive way.

## DEVELOPMENT

This People Strategy has been developed following staff engagement sessions which were held during September 2023. Representatives from all service areas and levels of staff have engaged with this process, through a mixture of face-to-face and online workshops.

Feedback from these session has informed the development of this strategy and, as a result, we have two strategic themes with key priorities sitting underneath each of them.



## THEME 1: PEOPLE

We will ensure that we put our people at the heart of everything we do. We want to unlock the full potential in every individual, collectively supporting service areas and teams to deliver the best outcomes they can for our residents. To do this we have identified five priorities within this theme:



**Wellbeing**



**Ways of Working**



**Tools and Resources**



**Recruitment and Retention**



**Connectivity**



**Reputation**



**Values**



**Communication**



**Relationships**



**Consistency**

## THEME 2: CULTURE

Culture is about our organisation's beliefs, values and attitudes and how we are recognised by our employees, residents and stakeholders. We are an inclusive, flexible, and welcoming place to work, and to build on this, five priorities have been identified:



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

We are fully committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in all that we do. We always strive to ensure a supportive and inclusive culture throughout our workforce, promoting diversity, and eliminating all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination.

This Council is proud to have signed up to Unison's Anti Racism Charter and we have further reinforced our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion by developing a four-year action plan to ensure that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is integral in all that we do.



### What we hope to achieve in the next four years

- Ensure staff feel valued, included and able to raise issues.
- Increase knowledge, awareness and understanding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the 10 'protected characteristic' groups for all staff.
- Ensure our recruitment processes are genuinely accessible and attract a diverse workforce that represents the local population.
- Provide opportunities for staff to share lived experience, leading to increased visibility and understanding.
- Ensure that all staff have a positive experience working for the Council, providing new staff with a welcoming environment where everyone is included and valued.
- Identify and challenge discrimination, including racism.
- Ensure that all our workplaces are accessible.
- We will seek to become a Disability Confident Leader.

# THEME 1: PEOPLE



## Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of our employees is paramount, they are our best assets. This is no longer simply a 'nice to have', it is crucial that we always invest in our employees, enabling them to be happy, healthy, and resilient in the workplace.

### Context for the priority

We have been through unprecedented times over the past three years which have challenged our employees, physically, socially, financially, and mentally. More than ever, as their employer, we have a duty of care to ensure we support them in these key areas.

In our recent Emotional Needs survey carried out by Suffolk Mind, we received some positive feedback, with most employees stating that we are meeting their needs well. However, there were areas that we can improve on: developing a greater sense of community and improving physical wellbeing, in particular around sleep (especially for Port Health shift workers), but also what we eat and how much we move around when we are at work.

### Why the theme is important to our staff?

We know that by prioritising health and wellbeing we can help reduce stress and help to create positive working environments where our employees can thrive in an open and supportive culture. It directly impacts employee engagement, sickness absence and retention rates.

We already have a well-established Wellbeing group, as well as a wealth of wellbeing initiatives in place through our employee assistance programme. However, we know that we can do more and want to build on the great stuff we already do, achieving measurable outcomes through improved retention and sickness rates and through feedback from our staff surveys.

### What we hope to achieve in the next four years

- Develop a wellbeing strategy, reaching out to each service area and understand what support they need from our wellbeing provision.
- Appoint a health and wellbeing lead to drive this agenda forwards.
- Continue to analyse stress assessments and sickness data to see where we can be more proactive in supporting our staff.
- Gather and review data to enable us to identify stress and mental health triggers, taking action to reduce sickness and improve wellbeing.
- Ensure employees across all service areas and locations have access to the same health and wellbeing support regardless of localised barriers.



## Ways of Working

We are committed to providing flexible ways of working for our employees while meeting the needs of the organisation. We recognise how important flexibility and a good work/life balance is to individuals' wellbeing.

### Context for the priority

East Suffolk Council has always been a flexible organisation, however the way we currently work was accelerated as a response to many of the Covid 19 pandemic challenges. Looking forward, we want to remain agile as we continue to respond to the needs of our residents.

Feedback from colleagues shows us that flexibility is critical to helping us balance our working and home lives, but as a dynamic and changing workplace we need to review these practices regularly to ensure we get this balance right.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Our people told us how important flexibility is for them. It supports carers, those with health issues and disabilities and those who have their own personal life priorities, giving individuals the autonomy to make their own decisions about when and where they work best.

However, this flexibility has also created unintended consequences. People have told us that the shift to working from home means it is not clear when they should be in the office and that they miss the social aspect of coming into the office.

Our managers told us they are unsure about asking someone to come into the office. Managers say some of their employees are anxious about returning to the office: with new team members finding working from home difficult, they need to feel part of a team.

When people do come in, they may feel they can't work as well in the office. Sometimes there is not enough space for conversations that are not always suited to open plan; or their work disturbs other people, especially when using Teams.

Most people talked about the "always on" culture, saying they felt that they are always 'online' and that emails can be overwhelming. We need to find a better balance between flexibility and business need.

### What we hope to achieve in the next four years

- Undertake a full review our policies and procedures around flexible ways of working to ensure the balance we are seeking between individual and business needs is better achieved.
- Learn from what others are doing and embed best practice in terms of our approached to flexible ways of working.
- Ensure there are opportunities for all to collaborate face to face with their colleagues.
- Address the "always on culture" by developing good practice guidance and ensuring that the "My Conversation" process provides an opportunity to discuss workloads and expectations.



## Tools and Resources

Ensuring our employees have the right tools and resources to do their job well will mean they can deliver for the Council, but more importantly, it will improve job satisfaction. If we don't provide the right tools, we may set our employees up for failure. Having the right tools for the job is essential, in absolutely every line of work. Whether your job is office based or skilled labour, you'll want to have the right equipment to hand to keep your work moving. It is more than just making sure we all have desk space and a working laptop!

### Context for the priority

Tools and Resources can be anything from the necessary skills and training, enough resources and capacity, through to having a hard hat and shoes.

It's important to regularly review your tools, ensuring your tools are still fit for the job. This will apply to your skills and job knowledge too as they can become dated. This is especially true if industry methods change, or new laws are introduced.

In our safety-critical areas of work, with the right tools at your disposal, you're better protected from workplace hazards and accidents. Since many pieces of equipment are built with specific functions in mind, using the wrong ones can create situations that put you and others at risk. Therefore, by having the proper tools, you are improving employee safety.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Whilst we have been told that we mostly have access to the correct tools and resources, we can become frustrated when things don't work or go wrong. We also need to think about business continuity.

There was a recognition that the Council is continuously evolving; that what was suitable a few years ago may no longer be. Working practices may have changed and or advancements in areas such as technology means that more effective solutions could be used.

### What we hope to achieve in the next four years

- Work across service areas to understand the tools and resource needs of our staff, understanding what is working, what isn't working and what is missing.
- In developing this understanding, seek to improve access to the right tools and resources to better help our staff do the best they can.





## Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment allows you to identify the talented individuals that will make up your team, and retention allows you to hold onto those talented individuals. East Suffolk is an amazing place in which to live and represent. The Council is an inclusive, flexible, and welcoming employer - we hear this regularly through staff feedback. We need to communicate this to potential candidates in an increasingly competitive job market.

### Context for the priority

LGA Local Government Workforce Survey 2023 showed more than nine out of ten local authorities are experiencing staff recruitment and retention issues, which, in turn, is driving an unsustainable reliance on agency staff. Post-pandemic these challenges are growing, with increased turnover and demand for niche skill sets across the Council.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Discussions at the focus group sessions demonstrated the importance of recruitment and retention. Questions were raised around why we can't always attract specialist staff. Staff recognise that recruitment of candidates with the right skill sets and attitudes is vital. Appointing high quality staff reduces the stress of covering unfilled vacancies and ensures we have the capacity to do the job well.

Vacancies put pressure on teams and our staff understand that the Council needs to recruit and retain talented employees to maintain high levels of productivity, engagement, job expertise, and customer satisfaction. It also helps the Council build a positive image with customers and potential recruits.

Staff sometime feel that there is a lack of career opportunities and further progression within the Council. Staff recognition was also raised – there is scope to do more to say thank you.

**“I’ve been working here for over 20 years – there really is nowhere else I want to work”**





## What we hope to achieve in the next four years

- We will continue to promote our East Suffolk brand which creates a positive image of the Council as an employer, using this in all recruitment initiatives.
- We will target job adverts to reach individuals with the skills and attitudes we need.
- We will extend the use of social media which can target specific talent pools using a diverse range of groups, filters, and hashtags to attract higher-quality candidates.
- We will appoint a Strategic Recruitment Partner to support our approaches to recruitment and retention.
- We will build on our apprenticeship programme and develop a robust work experience scheme.
- We will introduce improved 'onboarding' giving new employees the best possible start, with the confidence to quickly take on their responsibilities and to engage with colleagues.
- We will investigate why valued staff are leaving and what we need to do to retain them.
- We will provide continuous training and opportunities for growth.
- We will look ahead and develop career pathways to address potential future recruitment shortages, succession planning and improved career development opportunities for our staff.
- We will review the employee recognition programme to ensure our employees feel seen and valued. We will always encourage employee feedback and act on it.





## Connectivity

Employees are committed to making a difference to the residents and communities we serve, and want to feel connected to the place, understanding their role in helping to make a difference.

### Context for the priority

Local government employees contribute to the local community whatever their role is. Working in local government gives you the opportunity to not only develop your career, but also to make a difference in people's lives. This is often the reason for people choosing to work for the Council, so it is important, whatever the role, that there are opportunities to feel connected to East Suffolk, and that everyone understands their contribution to this.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Staff said they believe in the power of local government to make a real difference for local people, but that some roles are less connected, especially the more corporately focussed services such as finance and human resources.

Many staff live locally, and they want to spend their working hours doing something that makes their local community a better place to be, for example staff enjoy the opportunity to undertake volunteering work whilst working for the Council.

### What we hope to achieve in the next four years

- In adopting 'Our Direction 2028', our new Strategic Plan, service plans will enable every service area to understand how they contribute to the strategic direction of the Council.
- Through the 'My Conversation' process every member of staff will understand what their priorities and objectives are, and how they feed into the strategic direction of the Council.
- We will build on the marketplace days to showcase the work of all service areas and teams, to share knowledge and increase a shared understanding of how we are collectively making a difference to East Suffolk.

**Our team ethos is great, we will always help each other.**

# THEME 2: CULTURE



## Values

Values capture the guiding principles we expect every employee to embody and steer how our organisation operates. They inform the expected behaviours of all our people and reflect our culture.



### Context for the priority

Our values were developed by a “natural work team” formed of a cross section of staff. A programme of workshops, focus groups and open sessions took place, covering why values are important, and thinking about what was important to staff. Our values were embedded as East Suffolk Council was formed.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Feedback from the engagement sessions tells us that staff like the values, still feel they’re relevant and that they create a sense of belonging to East Suffolk Council.

Managers in those sessions told us they feel the values are well embraced throughout the organisation, including by new starters.

In our 2023 staff survey most staff stated that they understood the Council’s vision and values, and how they contributed to achieving them.

### What we hope to achieve in next four years

- We want to check in – do these values still reflect how we see ourselves as an organisation? Do they still embody the way we want to work?
- We will continue to ensure that these values are communicated widely throughout the organisation – even the best values won’t be embedded if we don’t communicate them effectively.
- We will talk about our values with everyone as part of our “My Conversation” process, highlighting ways of working that demonstrate these values in practice, and provide support and guidance if more is required in adopting these values by individuals.



## Communication

Communication is important in all that we do. There are many ways we can communicate, so it's about understanding that different methods of communication are suitable for different messages, depending on what we are trying to convey. Communication is also about how we listen to and respond to feedback.

### Context for the priority

Good organisational communication builds trust, boosts engagement and establishes stronger working relationships. It ensures everyone has a voice at all levels. Communication is also about feedback; we need feedback to continue to improve and grow. Effective communication can help staff to feel a sense of belonging by understanding how they contribute to the organisation.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Throughout the engagement sessions staff raised communication in both positive and negative ways. Staff recognised there are many ways in which information is shared, however staff felt that sometimes they missed important messages and did not always have time to look at SharePoint for example, to understand what is happening. Some staff stated they didn't even have access to SharePoint.

### What we hope to achieve in next four years

- We want to get the balance right between the various communication methods we use, depending on the message being conveyed.
- We want to ensure that communications are timely and relevant for our staff.
- We want to ensure that all communication is presented in a way that is easily understood by all.
- We want to stay up to date with the ways we can communicate with staff, identifying and adopting best practice.





## Reputation

Feedback from the People Strategy engagement sessions, and other staff feedback mechanisms such as surveys and exit interviews, confirms that the Council's reputation, both internally and externally, is extremely important to staff. Internally, staff place a high value on East Suffolk Council being a good employer and a great place to work. Externally, the public perception of the Council really matters to staff, not only as an employer, but in terms of the services the Council provides to the district.

### Context for the priority

Working for an organisation with a positive reputation is important as it will have a significant impact on:

- Job satisfaction – how happy, motivated and engaged staff feel in their own role and the part they play in the services the Council provides.
- Personal performance – being motivated to perform well, be a high achiever, develop and progress with the Council.
- Individuals' mental health, wellbeing and general morale.
- Recruitment and Retention – wanting to work and stay working for the Council with a good reputation.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

“Negative comments about the Council on social media can really get to me” – this was said at one of the people strategy engagement sessions.

Staff said they wanted to feel able to talk about working for the Council outside of work, and that the Council's reputation was key to feeling whether they could do this or not.

Staff felt that East Suffolk Council does have a good reputation, but there was still some work to do in terms of residents' perceptions of what the Council does and how it works.

### What we hope to achieve in next four years

- See increased customer satisfaction rates as measured through customer surveys.
- A reduction in complaints and negative reviews.
- Enhanced social media presence – increased followers, likes, shares and positive reviews.
- We want to increase individual and team job satisfaction across all service areas, as measured through regular employee surveys, feedback sessions, one to ones, and reduction of grievances and complaints.



## Relationships

We form relationships with our colleagues within our own and other teams as well as with our elected members and external partners; forming good relationships is fundamental to our “sense of self” and our engagement with our employer and our workplace.

Good relationships in the workplace not only produce higher levels of morale but also have a positive knock-on effect on productivity and allow time and space to focus on opportunities, innovation and creativity.

### Context for the priority

Relationships at work, how they are developed and how they make people feel, are always a prominent theme in any focus groups. The importance of relationships scores highly in our engagement surveys.

Relationship building in the workplace can give you freedom, motivation, and peace of mind. The more comfortable your employees are with each other, the more confident and motivated they will be. Relationships are crucial in all that we do, whether it's working with external stakeholders, elected Members or directly with your colleagues.

### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Feedback from the engagement sessions backs up how important good relationships in the workplace are to our staff. Staff said:

- They love the camaraderie, us all working as a team.
- They felt that good relationships are meaningful and increase the sense of self-worth.
- That good relationships provided an opportunity to learn from others.

However, they also told us that we need to work on the relationships between and across teams and on how we share information and work on projects together.

### What we hope to achieve in next four years

- We will aim to maintain and where appropriate increase the good relationships that staff have with each other and their line managers.
- Management development will include elements on relationship building – rapport, listening, coaching, trust and respect.
- We will ensure that staff are provided with regular opportunities to meet with their teams in person and their line manager on a regular basis.



### Consistency

We deliver a varied range of services which require our employees to work differently depending on the services' needs. However we need to ensure we are consistent in the way we lead, support and manage our staff irrespective of the service area they work in.

#### Context for the priority

To provide a variety of services to our customers, we need to deliver consistent leadership, management and support for our people. When we aren't consistent, we can cause frustration in the workforce. Where we can't be consistent we need to be transparent about the reasons why.

#### Why this theme is important for our staff?

Our people have told us that, in some teams, flexibility is managed differently than in other teams, and that management approaches to policy and procedures differs. 20% of our employees are managers so achieving consistency is important.

The opportunities to progress are not clear, not everyone has had a My Conversation objective-setting session. In some areas, it is felt reward and recognition is inconsistent and training opportunities are not always a priority.

#### What we hope to achieve in next four years

- We will develop all our managers so they can be the best they can be, providing them with the right tools and skills to enable them to provide consistent leadership and management.
- We will establish a managers' forum to enable our managers to collaborate and share good practice.
- We will review our reward and recognition schemes and promote our wide range of benefits as a total rewards package.
- We will commit to ensuring every member of staff has an annual objective session and six-monthly review. This will provide an opportunity for two-way feedback.



**I love the flexibility offered to me by East Suffolk Council**



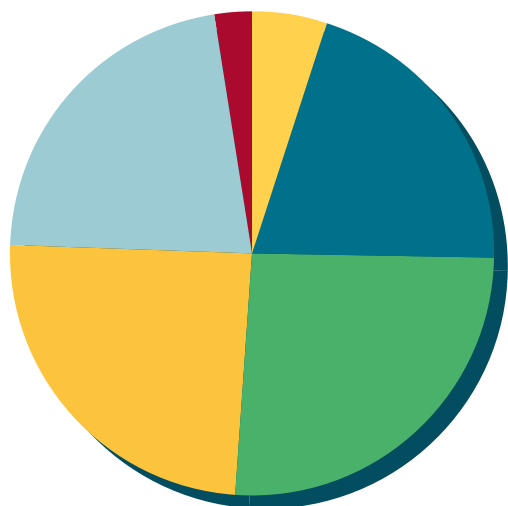
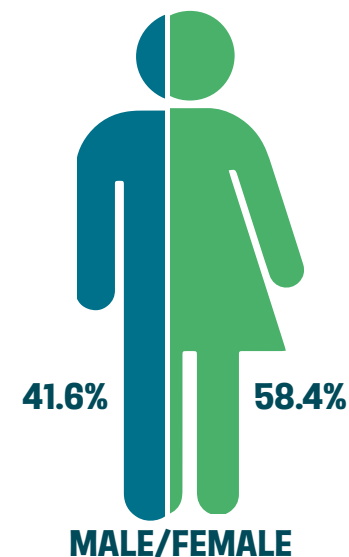
## GOVERNANCE

This people strategy sets out our two themes and a number of priorities for our people over the next four years. It is important that we deliver against this strategy, and that progress can be easily evaluated and reported.

Therefore, we will develop a yearly action plan where we can be clear about what we will be doing and what outcomes will be achieved in line with this Strategy.

We will also undertake regular staff surveys, using the feedback from these surveys to ensure this strategy remains relevant and that the actions we commit to undertake are making a positive difference.

## OUR WORKFORCE DATA (2023 Context)



### AGE RANGE

16 - 24	5.2%
25 - 34	20.2%
35 - 44	25.8%
45 - 54	24.4%
55 - 64	21.9%
65+	2.5%

