



# PEOPLE STRATEGY

2021-2025

# OPENING STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

**It has been more than a year since the first cases of Covid-19 were reported in the UK and in our borough. It has without doubt been the most difficult year we can recall.**

This has been a challenging time for everybody. Lives have been upturned by losses of loved ones, while many have suffered wider negative health or economic consequences. Throughout the pandemic, our communities in Waltham Forest stood strong, united together against adversity.

The workforce of Waltham Forest Council, alongside our partners, has been a driving force behind bringing people together. They worked tirelessly to respond to urgent needs.

Among other things, our staff have delivered food parcels to shielding residents, adapted to stay in touch with vulnerable young people, and are now heavily supporting the outstanding vaccination effort. Everyone can rightly feel proud of what our workforce has achieved with residents to support everyone in the borough through difficult times.

This strategy will ensure we put as much energy into supporting our staff as they put into supporting residents. It was truly co-designed.

Through engagement, staff were brave in sharing their honest experiences, the values that resonated the most with them, and their thoughts about the working culture they wanted to see.

This will all help in understanding how we attract and retain the best talent, and ultimately deliver the best services possible to residents. We are proud of the diversity of our workplace and that the Council is becoming more and more reflective of the communities we serve.

We know we can still progress, and make sure that everyone regardless of their background has the opportunity to achieve their goals.

We would like to thank Waltham Forest Council staff for everything they have achieved over the past year and are confident that we can keep rising to new challenges and work together to improve the lives of Waltham Forest residents.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clare Coghill'.

**Cllr Clare Coghill**  
Leader of Waltham Forest Council



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clyde Loakes'.

**Cllr Clyde Loakes**  
Deputy Leader of Waltham Forest Council

# INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

At the heart of exceptional service is a belief in people.

Our unifying force is our focus on our residents and communities. Our Customer Experience Strategy defines the excellence we strive for in the services we provide. Our Public Service Strategy recognises everybody's role in public service and alters the Council's role from provider to partner. Together with this People Strategy which defines the future of our workforce they set out the driving principles of all we do.

When the pandemic hit, we stood together with our communities and faced the unimaginable with the hope that comes in knowing that anyone, anywhere, can provide public service. The Council immediately adapted, with staff changing roles, creating new services and showing incredible resilience.

The skills of our staff, their dedication and their knowledge of local challenges and opportunities, were invaluable. Collectively we showed our skills to innovate, quickly finding new ways to make a difference to the lives of our residents and businesses.

The last 12 months have also created changes in what our residents need, how we solve problems with them, and how our staff work and want to work.

We need to reflect on this, align our culture to value those strengths that were shown, ensure staff feel well equipped and empowered and build on the greater sense of belonging many have felt.

Whilst we had already begun to consider our future offer, how we work, aligning with our exciting redevelopment of Fellowship Square, the response of our workforce has put a spotlight on the need to dedicate the same level of excellence and diligence to developing our workforce as they have to delivering to our residents and our communities.

We have already started to think about how we reset as we come out of the pandemic, setting dedicated resources aside to help us do so to address the needs of our communities and workforce but also to maximise on what we have learned.

This is an opportunity to embed diversity and inclusion more deeply. Our community is one of the most diverse populations in the UK. It is necessary that our workforce and our work reflect this, to co-design services which

respond to needs and strengthen our existing partnerships with the borough's diverse communities.

This starts with looking at our own ways of working, how we hire and develop our workforce. By focusing on the strength of diversity, we will attract and develop even more talented people.

I am always proud of the response of our workforce, none more so than now. This People Strategy was shaped by the candid and honest feedback they gave over the last 12 months.

Through "Our People – Standing Together" we will ensure our organisation is breaking new ground and leading the way, living our values and adapting to meet the needs of our workforce to deliver the public services of the future.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Esom".

**Martin Esom**  
Chief Executive  
of Waltham Forest Council



*"It's really important  
that we see our  
colleagues and  
service users as real  
people and prioritise  
their growth  
and personal  
development"*

**Julie Haughton,**  
Housing Engagement Officer

# OUR PEOPLE

We know that we are already providing services to more households and people of a slightly older age profile.

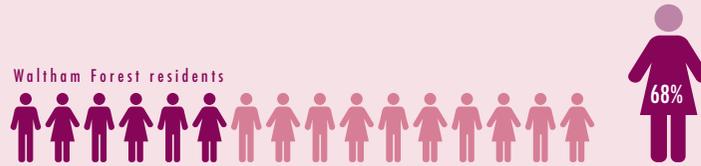
Looking at projections over the next five years tells us that in 2026, our population is expected to increase from 280,000 at least to 294,500. Our own figures predict higher. The fastest growing age cohort will be residents aged 65+, with a projected increase of 3,800 residents in this group over the next five years.\* By then, our housing stock is expected to increase by almost 11,000.

These demographic changes bring additional demands on our workforce.

The range of services provided by the Council is incredibly diverse. Ranging from essential services such as social care, housing and community safety to provision in our libraries and parks, support for businesses and employment and support services such as finance, legal and HR.

## Staff

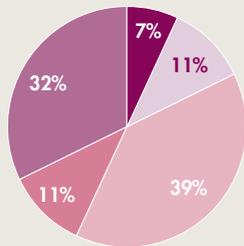
• **2,654** staff of which



**38.9%** are Waltham Forest residents, **25%** are part time, **68%** of our staff are female and approximately 500 in services such as care home, catering, crossing patrol, grounds maintenance, adult learning, music teachers, caretakers and cemeteries do not have a Waltham Forest email address.

## Headcount by directorate

■ Corporate Development ■ Economic Growth ■ Families  
■ Finance & Governance ■ Resident Services



## Staff by directorate

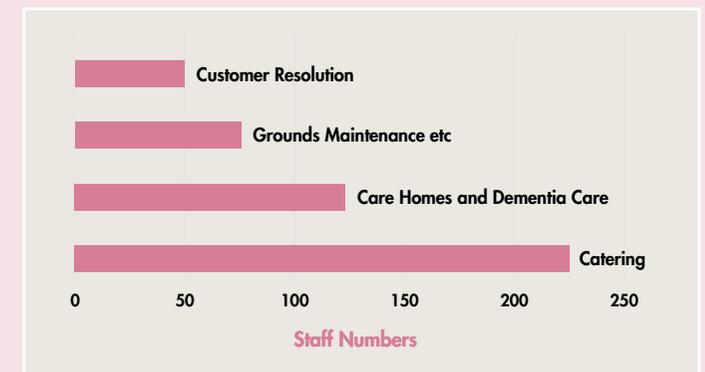
The two biggest directorates are **Families** covering areas such as children and adults and **Residents Services** covering neighbourhoods, parks and highways.



Our people bring a huge skills base across many services



We have an inhouse workforce providing services others may have outsourced



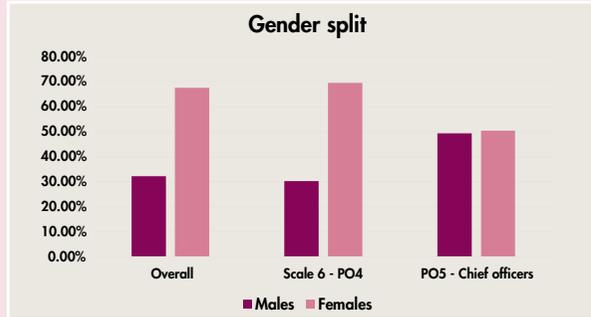
Our support services, including accountants, lawyers, HR, strategy/programme officers, IT and communications teams are comprised of approximately 350 employees.

\* Waltham Forest Borough- preferred option (BPO) - 2019 mid-year estimates.

# OUR PEOPLE

## Gender

- Gender split: **32.3%** males, **67.7%** females
- Gender pay gap: **9.52%** (median)
- More than **two-thirds of Council employees are women** however men are over-represented in higher grades.



## Sexual orientation

- Not recorded: **49.1%**
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual: **1.7%**
- Heterosexual: **49.2%**

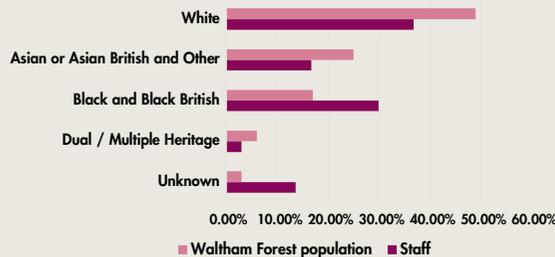


## Disability

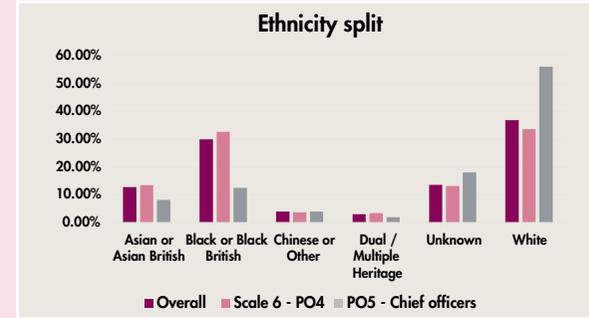
- **2.40%** of staff declared they are disabled



## Ethnicity of Council staff and Waltham Forest residents



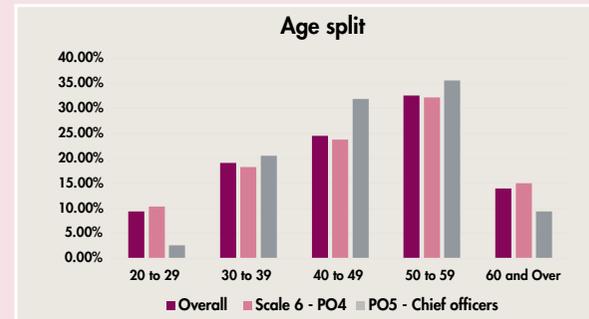
## Ethnicity split



## Ethnicity

- We know our workforce as a whole is diverse but our pay gap shows that this is not at all levels and **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff** are under-represented at senior grades.
- Ethnicity pay gap: **11.72%** (median) / **£2.17** an hour
- White employees are **over-represented** in higher grades

## Age split



## Age

- Employees **aged 50-59** make up the largest proportion of employees (32%)
- Employees **aged 60 and over** are under-represented in higher grades. Before **60 years old**, the trend shows that older employees are more likely to occupy higher positions.



*“This Strategy will ensure we put as much energy into supporting our staff through development programmes such as our apprenticeship scheme as they put into providing excellent services”*

**Rhona Cadenhead,**  
Strategic Director Corporate  
Development



*“Self-confidence is everything and good managers supporting your learning and development is how you get there”*

**Ross O'Flaherty,**  
Service Manager,  
Practice Support

# THE NEED FOR A PEOPLE STRATEGY

**Ask any member of our workforce to describe Waltham Forest and they will say “resident focused”, “ambitious”, “fast paced” and “diverse”. These are great strengths for public service delivery which can be harnessed to create the change our workforce have told us they want and need.**

We are united in our support to residents through our Public Service and Customer Experience Strategies. We want to provide the same quality of support to our workforce, ensuring their wellbeing, creating opportunities to fulfil their potential and connecting to each other.

We commissioned Lane4, a management and people performance consultancy, to assist with our engagement and draw on their expertise in helping to develop this strategy.

They were maybe not the traditional local authority partners, with their approach to developing high performing teams coming from a background in elite sports performance. Their approach to transformation, change and inspirational management brought a fresh dimension to how we thought about our future workforce.

The way we work has changed significantly over recent years. Technology is improving at an unparalleled pace creating a need for new skills, and continuous learning to keep ahead of the pace of development.

The culture of changing career paths means our people are much more likely to work for several different organisations and/or roles during their career.

At the same time the importance of maintaining our wellbeing and health is heightened. Home working may blur the lines between work and personal life whilst reduced commuting and greater flexibility can bring a better work-life balance. In February 2021, more than half of employees responding to our survey said working from home was having a positive impact and they wanted the greater flexibility in how and where they work to continue.

Our engagement on our pay gap strategies has highlighted the different experiences of our workforce.

We want everyone to know that diversity and difference will not stop them from achieving their full potential. Everyone deserves the same great experience at work.

The regeneration of Fellowship Square provides a perfect opportunity for this. It embodies the bond the Council has with its local communities, will transform the way the Council delivers services, and provides new working environments.

Waltham Forest has a great story to tell, one that can inspire people to join an organisation with ambition.



# OUR APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THIS STRATEGY

## Our people built this strategy

**We believe that positive cultural change at Waltham Forest is only possible if we champion a shared vision for the future and our work reflects diverse lived experiences.**

The objective of this strategy was to create something that lives and breathes the experience of our workforce and speaks to the times we are living in. We have gathered feedback, stories and ideas from our workforce and combined them with insights from national analysis and research into best practice.

Lane4 conducted workshops, interviews and brought their expertise and knowledge of best practice and engagement.

This enabled us to more clearly understand our working culture, define our shared values, know what our people want to see us do differently and develop our diversity rationale.

Those findings are our guiding priorities for this strategy and inspired the development of high-impact programmes that will make our commitments a reality.

Concurrently with developing this Strategy we also worked with staff to develop our Ethnicity Pay Gap Strategy, gathering insights through specific surveys, crowd sourcing and workshops to really try to understand their lived experience of working for the Council. Those insights, gathered from over 900 responses, have influenced this strategy and its delivery plan.

## The questions we asked

To set the direction of our strategy, we needed to understand how our people perceive and experience the organisation's culture and values. We wanted to understand what our people think of the way we operate, interact and make decisions or how we decide what is important and right.

We wanted to know how our people feel about working for Waltham Forest, what our strengths are, what we want to change and what stands in the way of us achieving our shared goals.

### Organisation-wide surveys:

We analysed 1,201 responses to our 2020 staff survey and 912 responses from our February 2021 Staff Survey.



### Culture research:

We commissioned Lane4 Consultancy to conduct a range of workshops, interviews and reviews of past strategies to understand our current working culture and what our people want to change, as well as helping us to develop the strategy itself.



### The Big Conversation:

We held two of these, each time approximately 1,000 people from almost 100 teams explored the strengths, challenges and opportunities for the organisation's culture and core values. We spoke with our staff networks as well as with our senior leaders, focusing on diversity, developing our diversity rationale, equality, leadership and culture.



The broad range of engagement activities created many different channels for our people to contribute their views, both publicly and anonymously. This enabled us to capture the full spectrum of experiences that make up our workforce.

## STAFF STORY

### Modester Anucha Corporate Director - Housing Strategy and Options



*I want to know who is going to be the best at the job. To recognise and nurture talent, you need to look past prejudice and appearances.*

**In 1988 I was reading a newspaper during my lunch break at the supermarket and I spotted a job at the local council with a £6k annual salary and thought, "I'm going to give this a go!" Several years later, having worked for many councils and housing associations, and overcome countless setbacks, I came to Waltham Forest in 2016 as an interim Head of Service and am now the Corporate Director for Housing Strategy and Options and part of the Top40 Managers Forum.**

At school I was a shy and timid person, not the person you see here today, it took a lot of time and courage to build up my confidence. Over the years, I've had enough rejection letters to fill a whole room, I've been told I'm not "the right fit" or not given any feedback at all. In previous roles I've been the only black face in senior management and I've had to constantly justify myself to people who feel uncomfortable with my cultural behaviours mainly energy and passion.

It shouldn't take an event like the killing of George Floyd to spark conversation around inclusion and support in the workplace. Nearly 28 years ago a similar diversity drive happened when Stephen Lawrence was killed in 1993. I don't want us to be an organisation that talks about inequality but cannot deliver on our promises.

We need to dig deep and ask ourselves; why do we lack diversity in parts of our services?

Why do certain professions only have non BME at the top? Why are professions such as frontline social care and housing roles so prevalent among BME people and why are these professions poorly remunerated?

Why are BME people less likely to become leaders in Planning, Policy or Legal? Representation is important! It's helps us in winning the trust and respect of our diverse residents and workforce.

Something that I have done with my directorate is embed opportunities for progression throughout the service hierarchy. We have introduced a career structure to ensure our apprentices and trainees move up spinal points in their pay scale each year, so they understand the value they are bringing to the directorate.

We know that people need managerial experience before they can become a manager, so we have developed a system of mentoring, training and peer-to-peer support to help our people take the first steps into managerial positions by creating Senior Practitioner roles. If someone hadn't given me a chance 20 years ago, I wouldn't be where I am today!

# KEY FINDINGS

Our staff survey in February 2021 showed that our people are driven and determined and will always step up to a challenge, although they need continued support and flexibility to ensure a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

## Work-life balance

- Work-life balance has improved for over **50%** of staff
- Working from home has had a **positive impact** on the health and wellbeing of the majority of staff



## Health

- **60%** said their general health had stayed the same or has improved since the start of the pandemic
- **79%** said the Council are doing well at supporting their health and wellbeing
- **32%** are dealing with worry/anxiety/stress
- **20%** feel isolated working from home



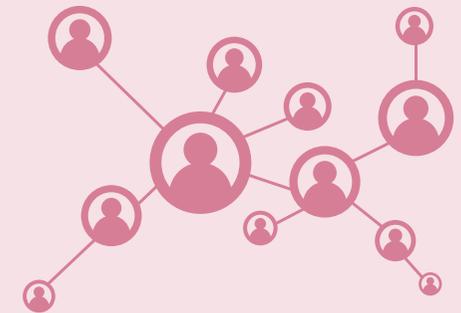
## Pride

- **92%** of employees feel proud to work for the Council
- **1 in 5** employees said that one of the main benefits to working during the pandemic had been doing rewarding and meaningful work



## Connectedness

- **Almost all staff** feel the Council is keeping them well informed
- **92%** are staying well connected to their team and colleagues



## What is important

- Flexibility, the people, good teams and managers
- More opportunity to progress, train and develop
- Better connectedness for all staff



# OUR CULTURE AND VALUES

We want our culture and values to become fully shared and recognisable to everyone.

At the beginning of 2021, services once again across the Council took part in the second part of our Big Conversation to help shape and develop our future People Strategy.

Directorates held sessions with their teams to discuss how we redefine our values and culture, focusing on what our values and culture mean to us and suggested practical ways as to how we can bring them to life and what barriers may stop us from achieving it.

In our teams we discussed the differences between the way we experience and understand Waltham Forest now, what our ideal looks like, and how we might get there. These conversations developed our values and culture which will ensure we thrive in the future.

These conversations have helped us redefine our values and culture to express what makes our Council unique and will enable us to work together towards our common vision:

## Our Values

Our values are at the heart of everything we do and will guide the way we work with each other, our partners, and our communities.

- F Fellowship**  
We will act with fellowship and care towards each other. We will be open and honest, learning from our mistakes as we continue to strive to deliver high quality services.
- O Opportunity**  
We will create opportunities and look for ways to do things better as we encourage individual achievements.
- R Respect**  
We value and respect each other. Respect is at the core of everything we do at the Council.
- E Equality and Diversity**  
We want our workforce at all levels to reflect our diverse borough whilst recognising the strength and value that comes from our differences to ensure everyone at Waltham Forest feels a sense of belonging.
- S Service**  
We will deliver excellent service to our residents. We value the contribution of everyone working together to achieve shared success.
- T Trust**  
We trust our people to deliver and achieve the best outcomes for our residents whilst we support and equip them with the skills to do so, and will continue working in partnership to build trust together.



## Our Culture

Our vision is to create a culture where everyone is valued, respected, celebrated and can thrive in an environment they trust.

### We will... Communicate

- Drive conversations
- Engage with staff
- Share information and knowledge

### We will... Commit

- Develop and improve staff through training
- Celebrate our staff
- Create a positive environment

### We will... Co-ordinate

- Work towards shared goals
- Make the most of teamwork skills
- Make time to reflect

### We have... Confidence

- Empower people to make decisions
- Encourage creativity
- Show respect by listening



## STAFF STORY

### Phoebe Savidge Consultant Social Worker and Chair of the Differently Abled Forum



*My ideal working culture is one that gives me the permission to thrive and enables my creativity. It is a culture which starts with the question 'what works for you?'*

**Over the past year a lot of key conversations have emerged around inequalities. Starting up the Differently Abled Forum has been a very positive experience because we have created a space where you can find solidarity and care, which is so important given that discrimination is a very common experience among disabled people and can be very alienating.**

The fact that the network has been both recognised and supported by the organisation, and that we now are being approached for our input in the co-production of strategies and programmes, is very valuable.

Historically I have not always been treated particularly well at work because of my disability. It is hard to make your disability understood, particularly if it's not visible. I have, for instance, often been made to feel as though I'm being awkward for asking for adjustments. Having self-compassion has been vital in getting me through these difficult periods.

However, it wasn't until I joined a trade union that I was introduced to the idea that I have rights as a disabled person. When I joined the council, for example, I had the confidence to provide my manager with a document outlining my disability needs, which helped me to access the right support from the beginning.

Even with these expectations made clear, there are still hurdles that you have to jump over to get your basic needs met and the process is never quick. There are amazing people here at Waltham Forest who have supported me to excel but you can never be sure that your manager or your colleagues will be disability-aware. I believe education has an important role to play in this and I want to see reasonable adjustments prioritised and normalised across the organisation so that everyone can get the support they require from the outset.

It is important to me to feel that I am playing a useful role in society and know that I am working to address existing inequalities. Social work feels like a place where I can make this sort of impact. As a Consultant Social Worker in one of the Safeguarding Teams, my work is very varied.

I work directly with families where there are concerns about children's welfare and I support them to make changes to safeguard young people. I am also a manager and educator for a team of four students and support them over a year-long process to qualify as social workers. As a manager, one of the really important things for me is championing team members' rights and needs so that they feel supported in the work that they do.



**“Employer of Choice”**

**“Connected Workforce”**

**“Realising Potential”**

**“Diverse and Inclusive”**

**“Inspirational Leadership”**

# OUR PRIORITIES

The engagement that has taken place has resulted in a set of four overarching priorities for the organisation to achieve, with an overall ambition to become an employer of choice.

To deliver on each of these areas, we have devised a series of key programmes of work:

- 1 GETTING STARTED** — These programmes will be our immediate actions, and some of them are already underway. We expect them to be quickly put in place and make an immediate positive difference to the work environment.
- 2 BUILDING AGILITY** — We will build these programmes over the next year and a half, taking the time to design them based on research and insights, to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

They will be trialled via pilots where appropriate for wider roll out. Where we consider we do not have the internal capacity we will commission the work required; this may require accessing reset funds to do so.

## DEVELOPING OUR PLACE AS AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

By developing and delivering on the initiatives in this strategy we wish to develop our place as an employer of choice.

However, we are not complacent and there are many excellent employers in public and private sector against whom to benchmark ourselves.

We will regularly take stock to see if we are on track, where we have gaps and seek expert advice to challenge our assumptions on what will make us an employer of choice.



# OUR DELIVERY PLAN - CONNECTED WORKFORCE

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, many employees have had to work from home. Our data shows approximately 1,800 staff log on remotely each day, which is about 70% of staff working from home either full time or most of the time.

By the same token we know that there are large parts of our front-line services, for example school caterers, school crossing patrols and care home workers who do not have access to the same information and opportunities as those who are more easily connected through digital internal communications such as email.

Our goal is to increase the sense of belonging and connection with the Council and its purpose. We want employees to feel pride in their role, and to understand how their work is an essential piece of the puzzle.

A sense of belonging is part of the future desired culture for employees, who want to feel connected and valued.

We will take time to communicate, share progress, and celebrate successes together. Key contributions to public service will be recognised.

## We have already...

- Launched Forest Wellbeing; a public Teams group allowing employees to connect through general chat, health and wellbeing activities, and e-learning opportunities.
- Established a series of strong staff networks: Race Equality Network, LGBTIQ+ Network, Women's Network, Differently Abled Forum.

## Key programmes of work:

### 1 GETTING STARTED:

- **Three Big Conversations each year** to help create more opportunities for collaboration, discussion and reflection across our services.
- **A buddy scheme** to support people to make more connections across the Council, learn more about other services and draw upon the shared knowledge and experiences of one another.
- **Celebrating and promoting our staff achievements** through case studies, staff stories, and a new quarterly Public Service Awards.
- **Big Conversation**  
Across the Council over 1,127 people took part in the second part of our Big Conversation from over 101 teams/services. Eighty-three per cent of participating teams across different directorates felt the proposed values and cultures resonated with them

### 2 BUILDING AGILITY:

- **Commission gap analysis and programme** to develop a totally connected programme through shared digital or equivalent connection through a co-designed whole system approach to ensure every single member of staff, regardless of work arrangements, feels informed, engaged, and connected.
- **Engagement through back to the floor** programme to help better connect our frontline and senior managers.
- **Pilot a Job Swap programme** to develop a flexible and modern approach to internal secondments to provide opportunities to learn about and experience other directorates and roles.
- **Hold regular Pulse Surveys** to learn more about our staff and their experiences
- **Review our remote working and flexible working policies** so they reflect our changing environment. Review, integrate and reduce our employer policies; develop with managers to help enable manager self-service.

# STAFF STORY

## Desmond Spencer Grime Operative



**A good work-life balance is really important to me. I want to learn and progress at work, but it's just as important for me to spend quality time with my family.**

**I'm one of four operatives in the Graffiti Team working across the north and south of the Borough. I've worked at the Council for three years now. I'm more of an outdoors person so I really enjoy getting out and about in the borough and meeting with lots of different people.**

What motivates me most at work is delivering the right product at the right time to the right people who need it most – if the client is happy, it makes the job worthwhile.

I used to work 60-80 hours a week doing deliveries for a builder's yard and also about 60 hours in my previous job – I feel like I missed out on so much of my kid's growing up time. But since I've been at the Council I've worked fixed hours from 5am-12pm which means I've been able to spend more quality time with my family over the last three years and enjoy other aspects of my life outside work.

Thankfully I had a really supportive manager in my previous job as a Grounds and Park Keeper who pointed me in the direction of the Council when he saw there was no more space for me to grow in my role. When I saw my current job advertised I thought, 'this is perfect for me!' - there were so many more opportunities to broaden my CV and move up on the ladder than in my previous job.

There's a really good working environment here. I have very supportive managers who I can always approach if I have a question. I've had the opportunity to do lots of things I couldn't do before, like using a laptop. I've done IT courses and I've spent time in the office learning about computer programmes, paperwork, emails and office work. But I'm always interested to learn more and take on more responsibility.

For example I have worked with a few people in the Town Hall, but it would be useful to know which departments do what and how they are connected with what I do. I'd also like to know more about the chemicals I use to remove graffiti. I feel like I would need a lot more training to get to where my manager is.

# OUR DELIVERY PLAN - DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

**Waltham Forest is a vibrant and diverse borough. People who live, work and study here are drawn by the incredible diversity of cultures and communities.**

In our conversations, to develop this strategy and our Ethnicity Pay Gap strategy, many employees said that diversity and inclusivity should be at the heart of the culture the Council is building.

We have already started to work on the ethnicity pay gap, to improve the progression and opportunities offered to our people of Caribbean or African heritage and people of Asian or mixed heritage, but we must go further. We need to increase diversity across the council but especially in more senior managerial positions.

We will innovate for diversity, grow our own and strive to hire more local residents, especially from under-represented groups.

Our goal is to create an organisation where every person feels welcomed, represented and empowered to succeed. This means that our people should feel valued for the different perspectives and experiences they bring, are inspired to exceed their expectations of themselves because they can see people like them succeeding at all levels of seniority, and are encouraged and enabled to seize opportunities for development.

The People Strategy underpins the ethos of our Ethnicity Pay Gap Strategy. Our staff are keen to learn: 243 people attended Diversity & Inclusion awareness training in its first two months.

We launched our new Corporate Mentoring scheme with 42 Mentor/Mentee relationships in place.

We have also started a pilot for reverse mentoring Management Board including the Chief Executive who will be reverse mentored by a more junior member of staff.

All the mentors that are part of this cohort are Black people from Caribbean or African heritage and people of Asian or Mixed heritage and are a mix of female and male, from all directorates. An early reverse mentoring pilot in the Children's and Families Directorate has been running since November 2020.

## We have already...

- Developed strategies and action plans to tackle our ethnicity and gender pay gaps.
- Clearly set out our Diversity Rationale, the benefits diversity brings (included to this strategy)
- Launched a Community of Inclusive Practice which brings together an informal collective of people who are interested in improving inclusivity in the way we do things as a Council
- Held webinars and workshops on raising awareness of microaggression and allyship.

**Rumsha Khan,**  
PMO analyst



# OUR DELIVERY PLAN - DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

## Key programmes of work:

### 1 GETTING STARTED:

- **Improve awareness through allyship and of microaggression training** so managers can be better placed to identify and challenge these behaviours, support people, and foster a more inclusive environment where people feel confident to raise issues.
- **Communicate and embed our Diversity Rationale** across the organisation to reaffirm our continued commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- **Ensure more balanced and diverse recruitment panels** by broadening out who can be on interview panels, establishing a pool of staff at all levels that can support interview processes across the organisation.
- **Pilot reverse mentoring** at senior level, learn and improve programme from pilot and roll out wider to all Senior Managers
- **Develop positive action policy under the Equalities Act 2010** to target relevant training initiatives and opportunities set out in this strategy.

### 2 BUILDING AGILITY:

- **Create an Advocates and Allies programme**, to explore what it means to be an authentic, active and inclusive ally e.g. anti-racist, trans inclusive and disability confident across all levels. We will empower people to have difficult but transformative conversations.
- **Commission and develop high quality equality, diversity and inclusion training for all staff and managers to improve** application and interview skills; manager training on staff wellbeing, inclusive management and communication
- **Safe Spaces** - development and training of group of champions to provide support to staff experiencing micro-aggressions and to carry out exit interviews.
- **Expand Recruiting for Difference pilot** to attract more diverse experience, talent and skills.
- **Review relevant policies** – e.g. recruitment/progression processes so they are more inclusive, integrate and reduce our employer policies; develop with managers to help enable manager self-service.

## Our Diversity Rationale

Many organisations set out their vision to reflect the communities or customers they serve. Few set out the benefits this will bring. We wanted to set out how diversity at all levels in the Council, in our teams and when we make decisions will lead to improved service delivery and working environment. The Leadership team together with input from our employee networks have developed our diversity rationale. This is a living statement which we will review and revise together as we go forward.



# OUR DIVERSITY RATIONALE

**We know we want to reflect our community at all levels of the organisation and that diversity and inclusion are important to us as an employer and service provider. Many organisations will state this but do not articulate the “how and why” behind the statement. It was important to us that we set out our shared vision of the commitments needed to achieve greater diversity and the benefits this will bring.**

We developed this rationale with Senior Managers, Elected Members and our employee networks.

At our heart is our shared commitment to excellent services for our community, it is what unites us. We want to promote a culture that truly values the benefits of diversity and celebrates all it brings to Waltham Forest.

We want working life to be a positive experience for everyone. Waltham Forest firmly believes that its people deserve to be the best they can be, working in an environment where everyone can be their authentic self and fulfil their true potential.

**Waltham Forest Council will demonstrate this commitment to the importance and value of diversity by:**

- Actively tackling all forms of discrimination against any identity or background including microaggression and bias which will improve the working lives of everyone
- Recognising that not all our staff will have had the same opportunities before joining Waltham Forest and doing what we can to address those earlier inequalities
- Unblocking and developing the talent of staff - focusing particularly on groups of staff underrepresented at a more senior level
- Valuing, creating and promoting the combination of difference of backgrounds, perspectives and approaches in all teams
- Tackling the deficits in recruitment and promotion that have been identified by our gender and ethnicity pay gaps
- Being anti-racist allies
- Speaking out against injustices even when it doesn't feel easy and keeping focus on those affected

- Raising awareness of formal and informal procedures and the support available to staff when reporting discrimination / biased practices and monitoring its impact.

**The increase in the diversity of our staff will greatly improve:**

- Our insight and understanding of difference and diversity
- Our response to the lived experience of our residents.
- Our capacity to problem solve and radically innovate
- How we co-design services with people in the borough which serve those differences in an effective way
- The strength of our partnerships with the borough's diverse communities
- Our influence on opening-up greater opportunities for children and young people.
- Our ability to attract talented people who live in the Borough to work in the Council
- How we grow and develop talented people from under-represented groups already working.



**Rosamund Cox**  
Co-Chair of Womens Network



**Pauline Campbell**  
Co-Chair of Race Equality Network



**Wareece Jackson**  
Co-Chair of Womens Network



**Thomas French**  
Member of LGBTIQ+ Network



**Phoebe Savidge**  
Chair of Differently Abled Forum



**Sienna Gardner - Hillaire**  
Co-Chair of Race Equality Network

## STAFF STORY

### Thomas French Democratic Services Officer



*An inclusive work environment is one where everyone has a seat at the table, where you can be your authentic self, but it is your skills rather than your identity that determines your success.*

**I have worked in and with local government for my entire working life, working across campaigns and governance. My LGBTIQ+ identity has never obviously impinged my progression, as it is not something that is immediately obvious to colleagues.**

However, I have been questioning my gender identity for a few years now, so working in an inclusive environment is very important to me. Undergoing a formal gender transition would be such a big move, especially in the workplace where there's no visible representation or precedent.

I've asked myself, what do I gain from disclosing my gender or sexuality at work? But I think a better question is; why should I lose anything for being my authentic self?

The workplace should be a welcoming place for all of us and where it's not, I want to be a force to change things. I want to get to the point where you demonstrate you have the skills, and that's enough.

I have been very lucky to have such a supportive manager since joining the Council, and it's fantastic to see various diversity networks being set up to create space for colleagues to discuss their experiences and feed into council decision making.

This has been particularly important as a new starter during the pandemic, as I have not had the informal conversations and chance encounters with colleagues that you would usually have.

I really hope that we continue to be proactive in tackling inequalities that exist across the organisation and ensure our diversity is reflected at all levels. The more I see people being themselves, the more I feel comfortable to do the same.

# OUR DELIVERY PLAN - REALISING POTENTIAL

**We are an organisation full of talented people and the Covid-19 crisis only highlighted this further. Staff were empowered to act faster and more flexibly and delivered the support residents needed. Harnessing these talents and realising staff potential is essential to sustain performance, help the Council retain talent, and establish itself as an employer of choice.**

We take staff development seriously and in 2020 had the highest number of apprenticeships across all London boroughs. However our staff have told us that the ability to access such opportunities is not uniform.

They have told us that development opportunities felt inconsistent and without deliberate intent or links to career paths. We want to improve this, allowing cross-functional growth of all employees, and helping them to find exciting and fulfilling career paths.

An individualised approach is needed, where each member of staff can imagine and develop their own roadmap, with the support of the organisation. In parallel, organisation-wide opportunities such as secondments, skill swaps, and staff networks will encourage a culture of learning, development, and knowledge sharing.

## We have already...

- Developed our apprenticeships scheme to offer more internal apprenticeships at higher levels.
- Developed a pipeline of Lunch & Learn sessions on a wide variety of topics such as technical ICT skills, soft skills, and general wellbeing.
- Launched traditional and reverse mentoring schemes, focussing on our female and ethnic minority staff.

## Key programmes of work:

### 1 GETTING STARTED:

- **Embed corporate mentoring programme** to help people realise their potential and ensure staff have access to dedicated support and time to consider their own careers and managers corporately fulfil their role in developing staff through mentoring.

### 2 BUILDING AGILITY:

- **Commission a review of our appraisal scheme** to define what makes a future manager, required skills and competencies and deliver a co-designed strengths-based appraisal model encompassing; assessment, 360 feedback, behavioural competencies and development/talent roadmaps ensuring input from staff in developing the new scheme and training for managers to support delivery.

- **Commission Frontline Managers Development programme**, a pilot development scheme designed with and delivered for staff that enables them to move into their first managerial roles. It would be easily upscaled and rolled out across front line services following pilots and evaluation.
- **Develop strategic approach to apprenticeship levy** and fast-track scheme for junior staff.
- **Develop our wellbeing offer** for both the mental and physical wellbeing of all staff and commission relevant services.
- **Develop Fellowship Square Jobsmart** to create a single front-door for jobs internally and in our community that helps us to retain and grow our talent and support local recruitment.

## STAFF STORY

### Shahid Mallam Head of Housing Engagement & Insight



*We need to take a more holistic and person-centred approach to career progression. Success is personal and development, for me, is not always upwards.*

**I've lived in Waltham Forest all my life and started working for the Council on the local graduate scheme in 1999. Since then I have moved through many different service areas including Corporate Policy, Strategy, HR, Diversity and Inclusion, Performance & Transformation and more recently Housing.**

I've always pursued a path of continuous learning, so it's not been a simple upwards trajectory for me. I've taken on secondments and sideways moves to broaden my experience in different service areas.

I have taken full advantage of opportunities for being mentored and have shadowed colleagues across the organisation. I've been through many reorganisations and service re-designs and although sometimes unsettling I have always viewed and used these as opportunities and have worked hard to shift the direction of my career when I have desired change.

Autonomy at work is crucial for me - I want to make difficult decisions, take managed risks and innovate - Waltham Forest has allowed me to do all of that.

It's so important to have time to reflect on your personal development. Through mentoring I have identified my strengths and blindspots and through a year-long leadership programme for aspiring future leaders, I was able to dedicate time to developing my skillset and experience as a leader.

I received a full 360 review from my colleagues and at the end of the year I presented my progress to Management Board and Cabinet. This was a really formative experience.

We've had peaks and troughs on our way to making our workforce truly diverse and inclusive. There is certainly a genuine aspiration to make real change, but I think we need more consistency and a sustained commitment, so that we can be proactive rather than respond to triggers.

We need to ask ourselves, 'How will we know when our gender and ethnicity pay gaps are closing, how are we measuring success? Where do we want to be in a year's time, in four years' time?'

# OUR DELIVERY PLAN - INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Being a public sector manager in today's complex uncertain environment requires new skills and behaviours.

Our managers will be key to supporting people and the organisation to deliver excellence in the future. Great managers can turn challenges into opportunities for innovation and excellence. They are key to building inclusive and diverse teams that embody a collaborative outlook. Furthermore, effective people managers are the fundamental success factors for both building trust and belonging. They also have the biggest impact on employee engagement and our peoples' day to day experiences of our culture.

Our managers will be key to how we reset and come out of the pandemic. We won't go "back to how we were"; no one can or wants to. We will provide managers with the support they need to visualise the best way to reset so that we can come out of this last year stronger and more resilient.

We want to ensure our managers are equipped to inspire and lead effectively. This is why the strategy has an explicit priority for support, investment, standards and engagement to develop managers. We will prioritise developing leaders at every stage of the management life cycle, moving focus from tasks to outcomes to empower our people and build trust.

### We have already...

- Delivered unconscious bias and brave conversations sessions with the Top 40 managers forum
- Offered formal apprenticeships in management qualifications, alongside people's roles

## Key programmes of work:

### 1 GETTING STARTED:

- **Commission support for Inaugural Managers' Conference.** These skills-based conferences will take place twice each year. They will be thought provoking, with expert external speakers and masterclasses from different sectors to inspire and develop our current and future leaders.

### 2 BUILDING AGILITY:

- **Commission Future Leaders Programme** Development and delivery of market leading, imaginative, and mixed delivery programmes to ensure a pipeline of talent and become a key selling point as an employer of choice; Strategic approach to apprenticeship levy (including positive action); Fast track scheme for junior staff; middle manager programme (PO4-PO7) to work towards Heads of Service ensuring related action from the Ethnicity Pay Gap Strategy action plan is built in.

- **As part of Future Leaders Programme develop a Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic apprenticeship/management programme** under our positive action policy to take steps to address our Ethnicity Pay Gap, supporting future managers in gaining qualifications so they can progress.
- **Commission support for council wide reset.** Managers will proactively work with their teams to ensure that they can support their staff through lockdown easing and ensure the Council can deliver the reset. There will be engagement and training sessions for all managers to help equip them to work with their teams to deliver our priorities as we look to the future.

## STAFF STORY

### Saima Mehmood Day Opportunities Service Manager



*I want to be a role model to people in my family, in my community and at work, that it doesn't matter where you've come from, you can get anywhere with appropriate support and education.*

**I manage day services for adults with learning disability, Autism and complex needs. We offer a range of activities, from art, health and beauty to gardening, which we tailor to different abilities depending on the service users' needs and their desired outcomes.**

I used to work in a bank and the thing I loved most about it was talking to customers. I would always find myself gravitating towards people in need. I think having a brother with learning difficulties meant that I was always attuned to people who need additional support, so when I saw a job pop up at Waltham Forest as a Support Worker for women with learning disabilities, I jumped at the opportunity. Over the years I have worked my way up through the service, pursuing a four year Open University course in Social Care, deputising as manager, project managing huge programmes, managing a team for Community Day Services and eventually becoming Service Manager.

Being a Muslim in this day and age is not easy. The events of 9/11 really set the world on a different pathway in viewing people of a particular belief and that was really difficult. Not all women from my community sit at home and cook and clean. My mother was a really hard worker, but she never had the opportunities so ended up doing sewing and machine work. For me, studying was the key to getting me to where I am – it helped to broaden my own thinking, take on a wider view of social care, understand thought processes and other people's views and increase my empathy and understanding for different service users.

People look at my headscarf and presume that I am ultra-orthodox, anti-LGBT or will forget to consider Christmas. But that's not how it works - my faith is something that is personal to me but at work, my service users, my staff and the requirements of my job come first.

I had an amazingly supportive manager as a frontline support worker. My manager used to organise honorary payments for me taking on pieces of work above my pay grade. There was a strong culture in my team of women empowering other women and helping each other to overcome barriers, and I think that was really an essential aspect of my development. There are less opportunities for support workers nowadays; services have shrunk and often there is no progression path, especially for women and BAME staff. I've been in meetings about my service provision before where I've been the only female and the only Asian person - everyone spoke over me, I felt invisible, as if I were there to fulfil the tick box quota for BAME staff.

It was a real struggle and made me think, why am I treated differently? After a while you can begin to feel boxed into a particular role and you can subconsciously play to it, perpetuating other people's prejudices about you. As a manager, it's really important that I am there for my team, that I'm listening and visible as a manager and that there's time and space to talk, bounce off ideas and be creative. Frontline workers work incredibly hard and I want to make sure their talent is recognised and nurtured, with more opportunities for them to progress through the organisation in the future.

# DELIVERING OUR PEOPLE STRATEGY

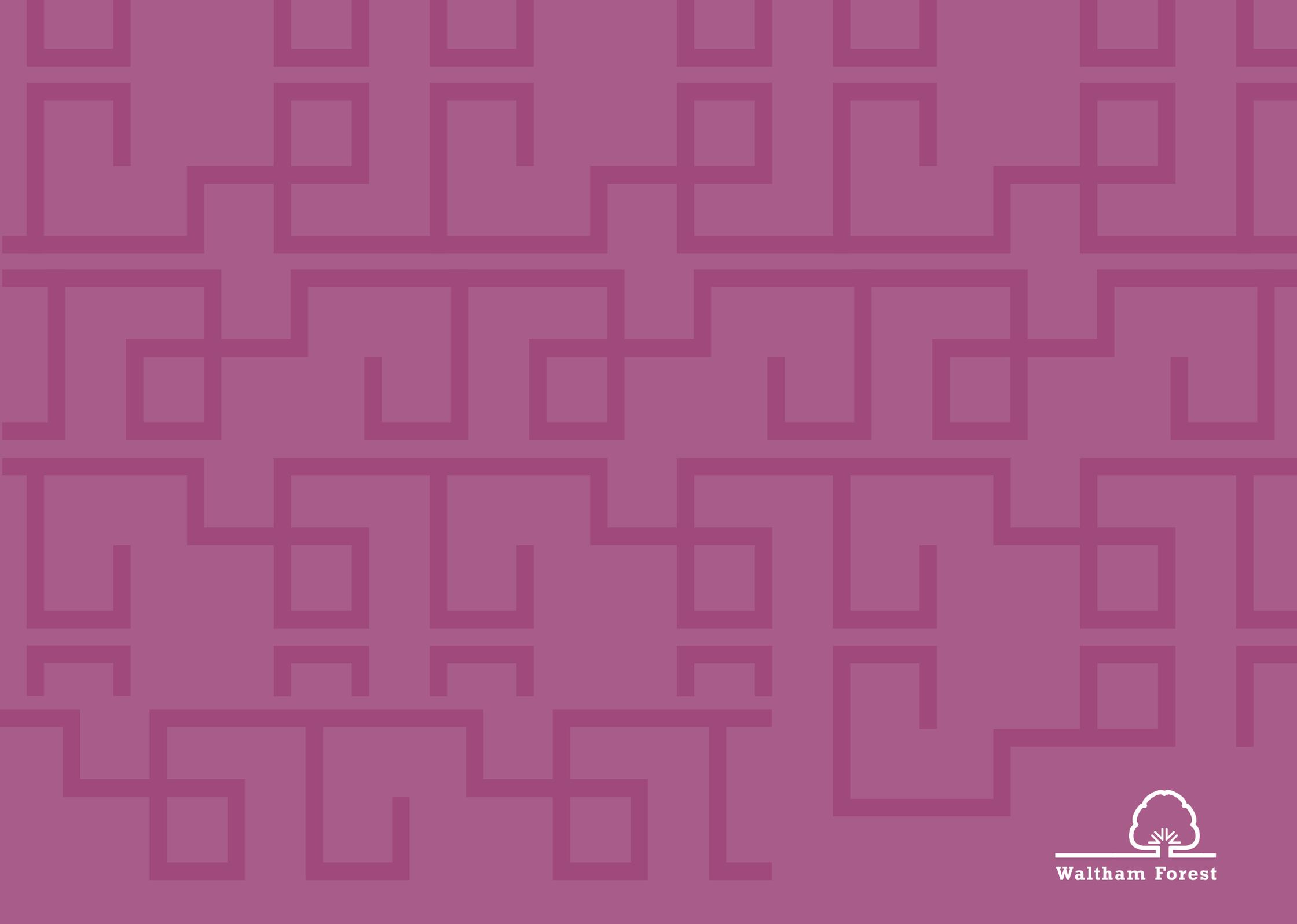
---

We are committed to delivering everything that we have set out to do. We have included our delivery plan actions within this strategy to show the roadmap of how we will achieve our workforce priorities. Alongside this Strategy we have developed detailed action plans against which we will be held accountable through reporting twice a year to members, Trade Unions and our employee networks.

The scale of ambitious change we are looking to achieve, in transforming the culture and behaviours of the organisation, will take time to develop and embed. We will keep engaging with our people to adapt and evolve our plans as we go, making sure the initiatives have maximum impact.

Our people really are our greatest strength. Together, we will reimagine the Council of the future.





Waltham Forest