



EDUCATION AND TRAINING



Cheshire West and Chester Council

We Invest in People

The strongest asset any area has is its residents. The strongest asset of any council is its workforce. In early 2025 Cheshire West and Chester Council achieved Gold Standard accreditation against the Investors in People standard. Investors in People (IIP) is the international industry standard for people management, testing organisations against a rigorous framework for best practice in the workplace. Only eight UK councils have achieved Gold standard.

The IIP assessor spoke to over 150 people who work for the Council and evaluated an online survey of over 1200 colleagues. These highlighted a range of consistently positive comments, including an understanding of the organisation's values and priorities; a broad culture of transparency, co-production and support and leaders who empower their people to make a difference.

"Your people agree you are a great employer!" IIP report

During 2023 the Council launched the 'join the conversation' to engage on refreshing the strategic plan for the borough. Alongside responses from over 1500 local people and groups there was a range of work to ensure that council colleagues had a voice and a sense of ownership of the final plan.

Over 400 colleagues were involved through workshops and discussion groups, the council's online 'participate now' engagement platform and through comment postcards from colleagues that are not computer based. Colleagues shared their views about what priorities we need to focus on to further improve our organisation, communities and the local services we provide.

The resulting development of the 'Play your part in a stronger future' plan has focused the borough's ambitions on six missions.



From left to right: Del Curtis, Chief Executive; Cllr Louise Gittins, Leader of the Council; and Cllr Paul Donovan, Council Member for Democracy, Workforce, and Communities.

One Council

The Council has used strong and consistent messaging to focus on the idea of 'One Council' responding to local and national challenges to deliver against the borough missions. These missions are better understood across the workforce and are supporting alignment of plans, structures and people strategies. The Council's THRIVE values have been in place for over a decade and are well embedded. They are:

Teamwork – Honesty – Respect – Innovation - Value for money - Empowerment

Team and colleague objectives

The Borough Plan is supported by an annual delivery plan which sets out the key activity that the Council will undertake in the year and the measures it will use to judge progress, all of which is reported through an interactive on-line dashboard. The Council has developed Play Your Part (PYP) Charters and Conversations, to replace the performance appraisal system and better link individual colleague objectives to the borough plan. PYP Charters and Conversations move performance management from a broad competency framework to a more tailored approach, encouraging teams themselves to consider how they work to deliver Council goals, and designed to fit in with business-as-usual one-to-ones and team meetings.

Trade Unions

The Council commits to solution focused discussions reflecting its vision and values. Trade union colleagues are a key partner and all parties agree to ensure positive and constructive

conversations based on transparency, integrity and collaboration, working together to enable the Council to resolve workforce issues.

The leadership team and trade union colleagues strive to make the Council an employer of choice, through exemplar employment and development practice by shaping innovative and creative solutions to employment related challenges.

The Council and the trade unions recognise the need for a pragmatic and joint approach towards employee relations. This approach will be underpinned by a commitment from the Council to ensure that consultation, negotiation and communication with trade union colleagues is undertaken at the earliest possible opportunity.

Colleague Networks

The strategy to improve inclusion and engagement has included strengthening the network of official colleague groups which now have over 500 members. Each of the five key networks is championed by a senior leader and colleagues agree this raises the profile of the group, gives them a voice and demonstrates good role modelling. Group members feel involved in organisational decision making, value the opportunity to have a voice, and feel that they are able to contribute.

Inclusive Employment Strategy

The Council have committed to all permanent roles at grade four and below being advertised as an Apprenticeship opportunity. Apprentices are paid the local living wage with apprenticeship qualifications funded through the Apprenticeship Levy and, where possible, through local training providers. The way the Council recruits to these roles has also changed, with:

- An updated job advert highlighting the working conditions, development opportunities and the benefit and salary package.
- A 'Job Role Profile' that describes the team in which the role will sit, along with the responsibilities, requirements and key strengths of the role.
- Additional promotion through social media
- An inclusive recruitment process which focused on questions about the role rather than requiring CVs and application forms

This has led to 36 apprentices being employed in entry-level roles. Included in the group are people with declared disabilities, young people who were previously registered as Not in Education, Employment or Training and two care leavers. The Council has committed that anyone with experience of care who meets the minimum essential criteria for the role will be interviewed. Despite apprenticeship funding rules requiring a pass rate in GCSE English and Maths, potential applicants were not excluded on this basis. and a number of the apprentices appointed are now taking on Maths and/or English functional skills training in addition to their apprenticeship skills training.

Colleague engagement

The Council has refreshed its colleague engagement strategy. Colleague Connect is a regular interactive online event, chaired by the Chief Executive and encouraging questions and participation from colleagues. 'Coffee Conversations' provide a deep dive into a topical issue, with Directors, managers and lead Members joining the discussion. Both Colleague

Connect and Coffee Conversations are broadcast live online, with colleagues able to ask questions, and recordings made available afterwards.

“People across the council are proud to work for Cheshire West and Chester and have strong sense of public service commitment”.

IIP Report

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/news/council-achieves-prestigious-gold-investors-in-people-award>

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