

People and Culture Strategy 2023 - 2028



West Midlands
Combined Authority

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Context

WMCA was formed in June 2016 and has grown and developed significantly in that time. Expanding from its transport routes to include Strategy Integration and Net Zero, Economy, Skills & Communities, Transport, Housing, Property and Regeneration. Now is the time to review what is and isn't working well and set out our strategy for People and Culture.

There has also been significant change since 2020 due to Covid and the wider external context changing; the working practices that have developed along with expanding and welcoming more colleagues to the organisation.

At the end of 2022 support was commissioned to develop a People and Culture Strategy. The purpose being to define what great looks like for people working within the Combined Authority.

43 interviews took place with leaders across WMCA in January and February 2023. In the interviews leaders expressed what they wanted to keep and change in the existing culture. This strategy has been developed using this feedback.

It sets out the context internally and externally and the three principles upon which the strategy is built, guiding the employee journey and way in which WMCA will operate.

This strategy creates a bold vision for how WMCA may/could operate over the next 3-5 years to ensure it attracts and retains the talent needed. This is a 'To be' document, rather than an 'As Is' and indicates how the employee journey may be adapted to achieve the three foundation principles.

These three principles are how WMCA will:

- Create an agile, curious and learning organisation
- Provide the environment to help everyone to bring their best energy and thrive
- Think and act as 'One Team WMCA' aligned to our overall purpose, values and strategy.



Internal Context

WMCA exists to build a better connected, more prosperous, fairer, greener and healthier West Midlands through:

- Strategy
- Integration and Net Zero
- Economy
- Skills and Communities
- Housing
- Property and Regeneration
- Transport

Values – because people and places matter

- **Be collaborative** – We achieve more by working together
- **Be innovative** – We continuously improve through transformation & development
- **Be driven** – We are focused and determined to deliver our priorities
- **Be inclusive** – We make a difference by valuing people

WMCA has 6 Strategic Aims with a number of objectives beneath and activity identified in the Annual Business Plan outlining the focus for each year

Aim 1

To promote inclusive economic growth in every corner of the region and stimulate the creation of good jobs

Aim 2

To ensure everyone has the opportunity to benefit as the region recovers from COVID-19, improves resilience and tackles long-standing challenges

Aim 3

To connect our communities by delivering transport, and unlocking housing and regeneration

Aim 4

To reduce carbon emissions to net zero, enhance the environment and boost climate resilience

Aim 5

To secure new powers and resources from central government, and demonstrate the strength of our regional partnership

Aim 6

To develop our organisation and our role as a good regional partner



External Context

The immediate context for public sector organisations has never been as challenging, with increasing post-pandemic pressures as inflation, rising interest rates and the cost-of-living crisis start to bite. Coming on top of the pre-existing expectations as well as the pressures to de-carbonise and create a truly sustainable business model, public sector organisations face a heady cocktail of risk and opportunity.

The wider external environment is changing around us too - with the economic, technological, societal, and global political situation. We also face the immediate and longer-term consequences of Russia's invasion of the Ukraine and a challenging political climate in the UK. There has never before been the volume, diversity and intensity of drivers for change on the people leadership and culture agenda and we need to respond to these with an open mind.

There have been several national and international grass route movements that have and continue to change the narrative for organisations including Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Climate change and Sustainability. These and other grass route activism should continue to influence how successful organisations respond to both customers and colleagues

Organisations that will flourish will be those that have everyone focused on being agile, seeing opportunity over fear in uncertainty, with leaders that are listening for and responding with boldness, speed and agility to the 'weak signals' that highlight that a particular scenario is developing.

The approach to the delivery of the full range of people services has been relatively static with only incremental change for many years. Now, with the above forces in play, is the time to think more radically in how to deliver impactful modern people services.



This is....

Changing how we feel about work.

How and where we work to get a better balance in our whole life, allowing us to bring our true selves to work as well as fit with our personal values.

Changing how we behave at work.

There is a shift in demanding fairness and feeling valued. People from more and more sectors are prepared to strike. Individuals are no longer looking the other way when people or organisations are doing/ getting it wrong/ abusing their power.

Creating a values shift.

Sustainable practices for how people can work and how an organisation works are more important. From travelling to meetings to building new stations, the environment and sustainable solutions are increasingly in the spotlight and demanded by employees and customers. The 'values fit' for individuals is increasingly seen as important, especially for younger people. Matching words and actions will be judged, which will influence whether colleagues join or stay with an organisation.

More opportunity than ever before.

The move from 'a job for life' to a 'a life full of jobs' is underway. Many people born in the last few years will live to be 100, with a working life of 50 to 60 years. More people will have several careers in their working life and more people will work for longer. This presents opportunities for WMCA as an organisation as well as for employees.

The traditional change curve is no longer relevant.

In recent years there has been a shift in recruiting leaders from IQ (intelligent quotient) to EQ (emotional quotient) and this is moving to AQ (agility quotient). The need for leaders to be agile and adapt to the ever-changing external environment will be a desired skillset. This will be combined with the need for a dynamic work force who are committed to continuous learning so the skill sets they have keep pace with what is needed to deliver.



Principles

People and Places matter to WMCA. People are critical to ensuring that WMCA can build a better connected, more prosperous, fairer, greener and healthier West Midlands. Three principles have been created that will guide the Journey from attraction to exit and beyond, making it collaborative, inclusive and a positive experience for everyone.

Whilst the organisation has undergone significant change since it was formed including massive growth, diversification, dealing with the pandemic, supporting the Commonwealth Games along with the cost of living and energy crisis, more change is still to come. The advancements of technology and data, sustainability and economic challenges along with social and political shifts, mean that the only constant will be change.

Create an agile, curious and learning organisation

WMCA will develop a learning organisation that has the agility to at least keep pace with, ideally ahead of, the changing skills and expertise needed to deliver. Colleagues will be self motivated to learn, curious and open to fresh thinking and new ideas. They will be willing, able and excited about flexing what they do to meet the demands required

Provide the environment to help everyone to bring their best energy and thrive

WMCA will ensure colleagues feel connected to its purpose and operate in an environment where they can deliver high performance. Our people, leaders and those we work with should reflect the diversity of our region and be inclusive of the people we serve. Technology, ways of working and policies will be progressive and provide tools and frameworks for people to be their best.

Think and act as 'One Team WMCA' aligned to the overall purpose, values and strategy

WMCA will foster a one team WMCA culture through developing a community of colleagues who collaborate effectively, focussing on delivery of the purpose and overall strategy. WMCA will use diverse platforms to share information and generate open dialogue. Everyone will be expected to participate and contribute, everyone is responsible for creating our culture.



Employee Journey

To help understand how the People and Culture principles will be used and embedded into WMCA, the employee journey has been broken down into five key stages along with a section on Leadership. Several questions have been posed, which the strategy seeks to answer.

- **Attracting & Recruiting**

How do we attract, engage and recruit the talent, skills and experience needed at WMCA? How do we create the right skills set at the right time and bring diverse thought, to deliver a more prosperous and better-connected West Midlands which is fairer, greener and healthier?

- **Onboarding**

How do we integrate colleagues into WMCA when they join to ensure they can deliver to their potential? How do we do that in an agile working environment?

- **Learning and Development**

How do we create a culture that derives value in continuous learning for the skills? How do we continue to identify, nurture and retrain? How do we open minds up to the range of possibilities and opportunities that this approach can bring?

- **Rewarding**

How do we offer pay and reward that is fair, competitive and respects contribution and impact? How do we offer development opportunities that are seen as connected to our overall approach to reward?

- **Leaving and Beyond**

How do we create a 'leaving well experience'? How do we ensure those that move on stay connected and can still add value to the business through our alumni network and may return with their new skills and experiences in the future?

- **Leadership**

How do we attract, create and develop modern, contemporary leaders at WMCA? How do we identify the leaders of tomorrow? How do we provide opportunities from aspiring managers through to senior leaders?

Employee Journey

Attracting & Recruiting

Taking time to understand what skills, experience and talent WMCA want for both now and the future is key to maximising the value of recruitment. This will determine when, where and how recruitment takes place. This is articulated in a Employee Value Proposition.

When attracting and recruiting new colleagues to WMCA, be guided by the principle of '*Creating an agile, curious and learning organisation*'. WMCA will develop a learning organisation that has the agility to at least keep pace with, ideally ahead of, the changing skills and expertise needed to deliver. People will be self motivated to learn, curious and open to fresh thinking and new ideas. They will be willing, able and excited to flex what they do to meet the demands required.

WMCA will have a Employee Value Proposition that creates a two way 'deal' between the organisation and the colleague.

WMCA wants to attract people to be curious, have a learning mind, have values that are in line with the organisation, bring agility and emotional intelligence into the workplace, be willing and flexible to meet the demands of the organisation. In return people will want to work for an organisation where these skills are recognised and rewarded, innovation is encouraged and supported.

People want an environment they can be themselves in. An environment that recognises, embraces and celebrates the differences that colleagues bring, promoting the visibility of this approach. People feel able to push through whatever glass ceilings that are perceived to be there.

Ideas for actions

This could be supported Action Learning to help embed this, along with/or building an 'Our People Library' where other get to tell their stories.

The Race Equality Taskforce inwards look at the WMCA has 3 priorities on Cultural Intelligence, Leadership and Data will help celebrate all the differences people bring.

Recruitment will move from recruiting solely into a 'role' into being recruited into the WMCA. Whilst the recruiting will be for the role now, it will also focus on the opportunities and possibilities that the wider organisation has. WMCA will be clear what skills are needed for the following 12-60 months, which will feed into each recruitment. It will be common for employees at all levels to move around the organisation. The focus will be on adding value through learning and experience to 'your basket'. Your basket will become the currency on how you are valued and will also support your future self.

Job profiles as we know them now, will cease as roles change and adapt at a faster pace. Profiles based on an outcome(s), skills and experience will be more common.

Employee Journey

Onboarding

The onboarding process is incredibly important. It connects people to the purpose of the organisation quickly; integrating them into the organisation culture; an opportunity to connect and bond with people in their network, allowing them to become effective contributors.

Onboarding will be very much about the organisation and its possibilities first and then about the role. As well as recruiting for curiosity, onboarding will also continue the theme.

Onboarding will be invested in, supporting both the practical and the cultural. Experiencing WMCA service and products as a customer will be included, both the new and the not so new, internal and external. Employees need to feel part of the community quickly and have access to resources in the same way their peers do. The power in a hybrid environment moves from a hierarchical one to one of resource access and the opportunities to build networks and relationships. If resources are not shared equally amongst the team, the power shifts from the 'have not's' to the 'have's'.

This will include the connection to the purpose of WMCA through their own personal value. Story telling will be used to support this, with a clear focus on the citizen and the value generated. Colleagues want to make a meaningful social impact with their work choices. Building a message that resonates and drives engagement using people stories, experience and successes will be important.

Work will be broken into tasks and people into skills and behaviours. This will support a move towards a more agile approach to work. Employees will have a focus on 'their basket', what skills and experiences they already have in it and how they continue to fill it with new skills and experiences. This may lead to what was seen in the past as a 'generic graduate approach' to onboarding for some and even roles in their future, so that both understanding of the business and movement of skills in the organisation is embraced.

Action learning sets will be used to support new leaders/ apprentices learn about the organisation and support problem solving.

The on-boarding will lead into the Thriving Team approach in Learning & Development. "Learning a living" will start from day one.



Employee Journey

Learning and Development

WMCA will create a learning culture that drives value in continuous learning for the skills needed in the future with a self serve, self driven approach.

Employees will be encouraged to see themselves as owning a basket of skills, experience, values and behaviours which opens them to a range of possibilities and opportunities inside and outside of WMCA. The basket will need refreshing – both taking things out of the basket and putting more in.

Some learning will be led corporately but people will be encouraged to use their networks and other resources including informal/ on the job training, blended learning to nourish the basket. The ownership to develop is with the individual.

Recruiting, onboarding for curiosity will allow WMCA to keep ahead of the competition and focus on the future. Curiosity will be fed through learning and development activity.

Ideas for actions

This could be supported by moving people in the business into different roles, especially senior roles. These roles are complex (so many unknowns) rather than complicated (difficult but the answer is known)

Roles will change and adapt to internal and external challenges, and some roles will no longer exist as technology provides a better, cheaper and more consistent solution. The use of technology and data will only continue to grow. Digital literacy and dexterity will be the norm.

Ideas for actions

A move from annual IPM to Future Fit Plans will support this shift. The plans will look at the colleague as a whole (in and out of the organisation), what they need to do to have a fulfilled life and how the business needs fits with that (or not). It creates a move to a deeper learning tailored to the individual, making their basket fit with their plans.

The skills in the baskets and the knowledge that is acquired is shared across the business, providing transparency to ensure the right skills match with the right task. Strong leadership will be demonstrated by the willingness to release and nurture talent for the wider benefit of the individual and the business not the traditional approach to protect defend and retain.



Leading

People and Places matter to WMCA. Great leadership is needed to ensure this is felt and demonstrated across the organisation. The skills needed in leading a project, a team, a station have changed significantly since 2020. Leading people through the changes accelerated by the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and often different places and ways of working have been and continue to be challenging, for leaders and for many people across WMCA.

Great leadership is crucial to embed the culture of WMCA. Leadership has moved from managing a 'static' team, even when they have been based remotely, into one of leading dynamic crews or squads on tours of duty voyages or journeys.

Great leadership will need to be defined by great influence and the creating of the right networks not by hierarchical structure charts.

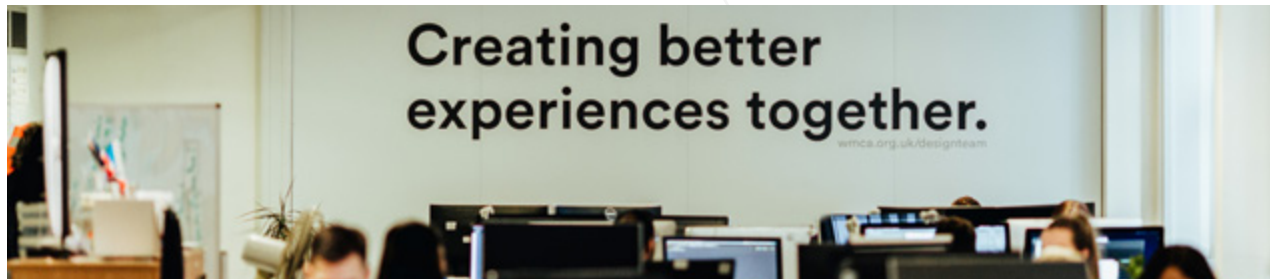
WMCA have moved from a predominately office-based organisation into a more flexible one, albeit many of the team have remained and will do for the foreseeable in front line roles. Like many organisations WMCA are in the process of getting this new balance right for the organisation and the individual.

The majority of people in all sectors are spending more time in virtual meetings since the start of Covid in March 2020. The problem solving that comes from the spontaneous conversations from someone peering over your shoulder to the diverse views/ blue sky thinking is missing for many. The casual interactions matter much more than we all thought. However, the benefits that hybrid working brings of avoiding commuting costs as well as the wellbeing effect of the flexibility of time and supporting caring (children, animals, elderly etc) is valued by many.

There is a lot of research on what the conditions for a thriving team were before the pandemic, although this work in the context of the effect of the pandemic is still new and emerging. However, there are some key patterns that are forming. For teams to thrive they need

- Connections, community and for many the possibility of friendships
- A sense of belonging
- Purpose and values that fit with their own values
- A culture which has stories and rituals they are proud of and can add their own voice to
- The ability to continually learn and grow.

Leaders need to be social designers, subtly creating 'moments that matter' within and between teams. Leaders need to be purposeful in making this happen. When face to face social interactions don't happen people report feeling disconnected from people, customers and the organisation. Leaders will make a conscious space for social interactions, facilitating a connection, comradery, friendship and fun not just in their own team but across the business.



Leading

Modern contemporary leadership has many facets and is critical to develop the three key principles of this strategy, leaders must:

- Create an agile, curious and learning organisation
- Provide the environment to help everyone to bring their best energy and thrive
- Think and act as 'One Team WMCA' aligned to the overall purpose, values and strategy

They can do this by

Leading for agility

Leaders will develop agile resourcing models (e.g crew). Assemble the right resources that are agile and dynamic to meet the flexible needs of the organisation. Work will be broken into tasks and people into skills, with an eye on what is needed for the future. Leaders will be recruited for their AQ (agility quotient). The need for leaders to be agile and adapt to the ever-changing internal and external environment will be a desired skillset. Have the agility as a leader to rip up the plan on Wednesday that you created on Monday.

Leading for a thriving environment

Be the organisational energy by creating the environment for people to thrive as a team. Creating trust and psychological safety to allow people to be themselves. Actively promoting EDI as you understand the value of difference. Being a social designer to create the 'moments that matter.'

Leading for great connection

Network with purpose, to build positive relationships. Leaders are ambassadors inside and outside the organisation, creating a community in their team(s) and connecting the team to the organisations purpose.

Leading for innovation

Collaboration to achieve what is needed for customer is at the heart of how WMCA work. Seeking new and better ways to do things through innovation and continuous improvements. Support the team to take control of their learning and development, there is no spoon. Use coaching and mentoring to develop people. Future thinking with an appetite for learning and scanning the horizon to ensure the organisation stays ahead of the game.

Leading for the whole organisation, not just the area

Leaders know the strategic plan inside out. They help others to understand that what they do matters. Their teams are aligned to delivery of the plan and they support collaboration to deliver the plan. Make decisions based on short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Think as one team. Don't wait to be asked, act up or down or across the hierarchy when needed to help the organisation.

Leaders that are digitally driven

Leaders need to be 'tech competent' in a modern business. Use data and insight to help tell a story and use it to deliver good decision making.

Employee Journey

Rewarding

WMCA will offer pay and reward that is fair, competitive and respects contribution and impact. The approach will be transparent and will have built in flexibility to suit individuals needs.

WMCA recognise that the average tenure of a job role is changing. Millennials and Gen Z are reported to change roles more than three times the rate of other generations, with an average tenure of between 2 years 9 months and 2 years 3 months respectively. WMCA won't design people policies with a view that colleague will stay there for ever, they will have more of a focus on how to support, embrace and reward the agile workforce that is coming through.

Learning and curiosity is valued. WMCA will value and reward people's drive for learning and curiosity and how it is then used in the organisation.

Ideas for actions

This could include bus drivers supporting the practical onboarding process, raising issues and not walking by.

Digital dexterity will be rewarded. To solve complex problems creativity, critical thinking and digital upskilling will be needed. Employees will need to keep their digital dexterity refreshed to meet these needs what ever their starting point.

The way of managing and evaluating colleague performance is changing. Rather than a traditional IPM once a year with static management processes and procedures, leaders will be recruited and developed to be great coaches, mentors and operate with empathy.

Change will be seen as an opportunity that generates lots of positive energy and creativity. Whilst some will naturally feel the fear of change, leaders will help teams see both the threat and the opportunity it creates. A measure of leadership capability will be of how change is dealt with.

WMCA don't want energy being preserved into what was, instead they want energy targeting into the opportunity to thrive and grow. Overall people the lens on uncertainty will shift to predominantly possibilities, innovation, creativity opportunity and change.



Employee Journey

Leaving and Beyond

WMCA will create a leaving well experience and ensure those that move on stay connected and can still add value to the business through an alumni network.

Alumni management will be purposeful. This resource will be included in succession planning, with a target set for recruitment from alumni and networks.

An Alumni lead will keep connected and active with those that have left. They will keep them curious, if people are getting value from networks, then more likely to invest their time in it.

Exit interviews will change to **Onboarding to Alumni** meetings. This will include looking at the basket you started with in WMCA and what they are leaving with. This will feed into the review of the Future Fit. People leaving will be signed up to the WMCA LinkedIn group where roles with skills will be advertised, encouraging comments on articles and sharing or roles to their networks.

Inviting alumni to events such as the launch of the Annual Business Plan or coffee/ breakfast events encourages the community and belonging. This pool could also be offered short term consulting opportunities e.g., 3 weeks or 8 weeks where a skill is needed, and they are seconded from their current employer back into WMCA for a short time. Alumni gain skills, WMCA get consultancy done from a known person, the new employer gets the benefit of the experience they have gained.



Summary

This People and Culture strategy is ambitious for WMCA to be leading the way as a forward thinking, contemporary organisation. This is an exciting opportunity that needs the wider senior leadership team aligned with the three principles of:

Create an agile, curious and learning organisation

Provide the environment to help everyone to bring their best energy and thrive

Think and act as 'One Team WMCA' aligned to the overall purpose, values and strategy

This strategy will be delivered in sprints - 3 month plans that are communicated, delivered and reviewed.





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