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# Update on HR Activity Q1 and Q2 - 2023/2024

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Personnel Committee
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	26 February 2024
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Jeff Brooks
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	11 January 2024
<b>Report Author:</b>	Paula Goodwin, Vicky Holland, Karen Turner, Lorraine Collins

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report is an information only report for the purposes of updating on HR activity for Q1 and Q2 of 2023/2024 for Personnel Committee, Corporate Board and Operations Board.
- 1.2 This report is part of bi-annual updates to the Personnel Committee and sets out some of the changes to HR activity and statistics in the current year. The report includes some of the detail behind the key statistics, including to directorate level. Overall, the report is highlighting some positive areas of activity, for example a fall in turnover and sickness levels and greater levels of recruitment activity, though further work is being undertaken within the HR service to continue to improve the statistics included within the report.

## 2 Recommendation

This is an information only report. Personnel Committee is asked to consider and feedback on the information provided within the report.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	None as this is an information only report.

<b>Human Resource:</b>	The activity stated within this report is completed as either part of BAU activity or as part of the delivery of the Workforce Strategy. This is an information only report so there are no direct implications from the outcome of the report.			
<b>Legal:</b>	None			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	None			
<b>Property:</b>	None			
<b>Policy:</b>	All information provided in the report take account of the relevant WBC policies and procedures.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		This is an information only report.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		This is an information only report.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		None
<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		None

<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		None
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		None
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		X		This update report provides information that supports the Workforce Strategy and HR BAU activity to meet Council priorities.
<b>Core Business:</b>		X		This update report provides information that supports the Workforce Strategy and HR BAU activity to meet Council priorities.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		None as all data is anonymised.
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	Corporate Board Operations Board Service Director, Strategy & Governance Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Internal Governance			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report is for information only that will go to Corporate Board, Operations Board and Personnel Committee to provide an update on the HR matters contained within the report for Q1 and Q2 of 2023/2024 year.
- 4.2 The paper includes the detail behind a range of statistics from HR, but the main items highlighted are:
- (a) That there has been an increase in the established number of posts at the Council over the past 5 years, though the number of occupied posts has remained relatively flat over this period.
  - (b) That the voluntary turnover figure for all staff has reduced to just below 12% for the current year.
  - (c) That there has been a reduction in the amount of casework within HR for the first two quarters for the current year.
  - (d) That there has been significant recruitment activity in the current year, with an increase in recruitment into children’s and families services posts where there has been a greater reliance on agency staff.
  - (e) That sickness absence has reduced to 8.75 days per worker in the current year.

## 5 Employment Data

- 5.1 A full year of employment data is published at the end of each year i.e. following on from March annually. As this is a 6 monthly update then comparative data is not available, however some data has been produced for the purposes of the report.
- 5.2 See table below for headcount and post data for the last 5 years. (This data excludes all temporary posts and agency and off contract workers).

	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	As at end of Q2 2023/2024
Headcount	1486	1512	1545	1532	1511	1539
Post FTE	1561.59	1576.61	1621.98	1667.93	1731.10	1768.85
Occupied FTE	1297.10	1323.62	1366.44	1362.10	1357.90	1388.13
Vacant FTE	264.49	252.99	255.54	305.83	373.20	380.72

- 5.3 The table above highlights a higher level of headcount and occupied posts as at Q2, and a great deal of positive work has been undertaken to reduce agency worker numbers and where possible to transition workers from agency to direct employees. An increase in organisational post FTE and vacancies can be seen as at Q2 from the end of Q4. This is assumed to be connected to posts that are transitioning from old to new structures as well as posts held where budget savings are required.

## 6 Starters, Leavers and Turnover Q1 and Q2

- 6.1 The following table highlights the number of starters and leavers and turnover for the past 5 years and as at end of Q2 in 2023/2024 year i.e. 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023	Q1 and Q2 2023/2024
Number of starters in year	209	243	175	210	247	129

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023	Q1 and Q2 2023/2024
Number of leavers in year	211	211	142	220	242	93
Turnover (%)	14.19%	14.08%	9.29%	14.30%	15.9%	12.53%
Voluntary turnover (%)	12.30%	12.14%	8.44%	13.00%	14.86%	11.86%

6.2 The following table gives further details of the headcount and turnover by directorate for the past 12 months.

Department/Service Unit	Rolling Year leavers	Headcount Q3 2022/2023	Headcount Q4 2022/23	Headcount Q1 2023/2024	Headcount Q2 2023/2024	Average Headcount YTD	YTD Turnover based on average YTD headcount
People	110	811	829	836	841	829	13.26
Place	35	361	370	374	374	370	9.47
Resources	45	320	323	328	326	324	13.88
CEO & Support	1	2	2	2	2	2	50.00
<b>Total</b>	191	1494	1524	1540	1539	1524	12.53
<b>Voluntary Turnover</b>	179	1494	1524	1540	1539	1509	11.86

6.3 The table below gives further details of the starters and leavers by directorates for Q1 and Q2 of 2023/2024.

Department/Service Unit	Starters Q1 2023/2024	Starters Q2 2023/2024	Leavers Q1 2023/2024	Leavers Q2 2023/2024
<b>People</b>	31	41	24	26
<b>Place</b>	15	12	11	10
<b>Resources</b>	19	11	11	11
<b>Total</b>	65	64	46	47

6.4 Turnover at the end of Q4 for 2022/23 was 14.86% and at close of Q2 in 2023/24 was 12.5% which is below pre-Covid levels and the WBC average of 13%.

*(Note: Adults and Childrens directorates remain in the People directorate until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 for the purposes of reporting for 2023/2024).*

## 7 Talent Attraction

7.1 For the period of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 there were 312 adverts placed, 139 appointments made and 1989 applications received.

7.2 Following the appointment of two talent attraction officers in November 2022 a flurry of activity related to our recruitment has been ongoing this has included:

- (a) A review of recruitment processes has taken place, removing waste processes, digitalising recruitment forms and providing additional guidance and support to recruiting managers.
- (b) We have simplified the application process to improve the candidate experience and introduced a candidate survey to track candidate experience and consider where further improvements can be made.
- (c) A piece of work has taken place to review our position with agency spend across the organisation, introducing new processes, guidance, and authorisations for booking agency workers. There have been some great strides in moving agency workers into direct employment with around 26 having already moved over or in the process of onboarding. Further work on filling vacancies held by agency workers with direct recruitment has been ongoing.
- (d) We have made significant progress with recruitment within Children & Family Services, since the beginning of May we have recruited 7 permanent Social

Workers, 1 Senior Social Worker, 2 Assistant Team Managers and 1 Team Manager – a total of 11 qualified Social Worker posts. We also currently have three candidates at offer stage who should be in post within the next few weeks – 2 Social Workers and 1 Senior Social Worker.

- (e) Our Early Careers Business Partner has attended various careers events and set up our own events, including a hugely successful return-to-work event at Shaw House which saw us bring together a number of local employers offering career advice, CV writing skills and employment opportunities. We have held an event at our one of care homes and social worker events in collaboration with Children & Family Services and Adult Social Care. We hosted our first recruitment webinar event which brought together the Monitoring Officers of a number of Berkshire Local Authorities which was live streamed on LinkedIn.
- (f) We have started the work on developing our Employee Value Proposition gathering feedback from the organisation and the implementation of an EVP Project Board. This is the start of our next chapter of work around employer branding, EVP and developing a new and improved careers site.

## 8 Performance Management – Casework

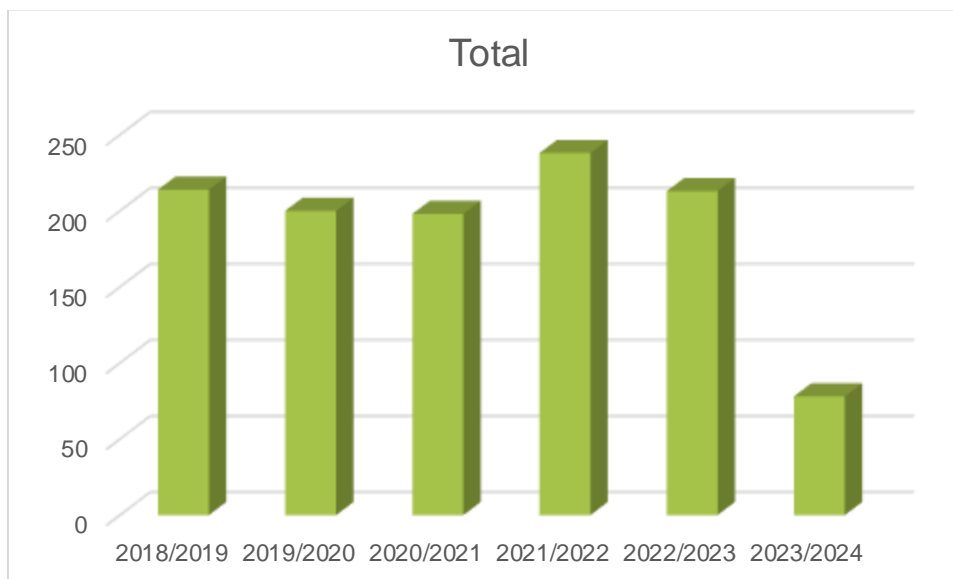
### 8.1 Context

The Council's HR team supports both corporate managers and around 60 % of WBC schools in managing people issues to conclusion. For the purposes of this report, this includes:

- Disciplinary and capability
- Grievances and whistleblowing
- Sickness absence, ill-health retirement, and related adjustments
- TUPE, restructures, and redundancies.

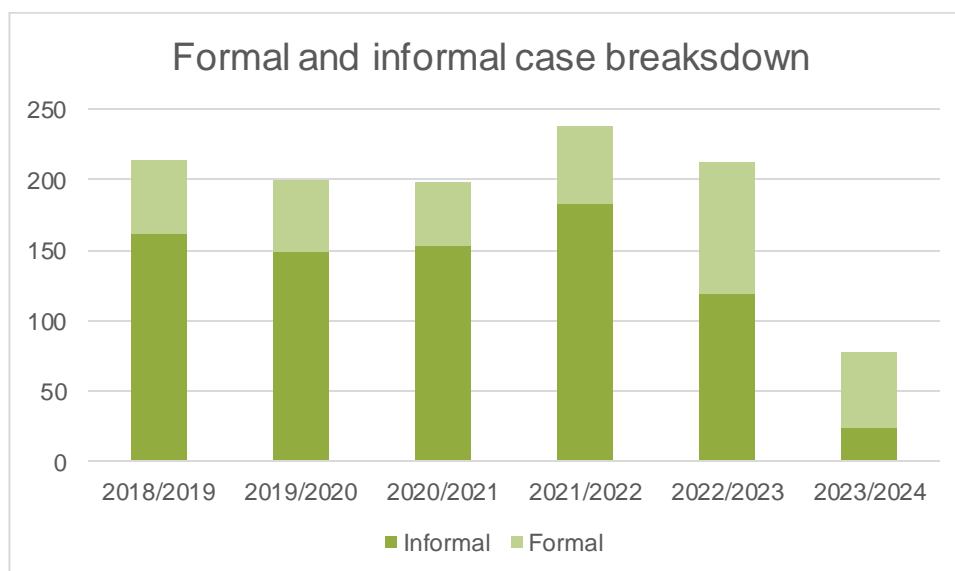
**8.2** This report gives figures for the Q1 and Q2 of 2023/2024 and excludes schools data. Table 1 below, shows the number of formal and informal cases within corporate for five full years plus Q1 and Q2 of 2023/2024. The numbers are slightly decreased on the same period last year but are statistically insignificant.

**Table 1 – total number of formal an informal cases**



8.3 Table 2, below, shows the mix of informal and formal casework. During the previous five years formal casework, as well as Q1 and Q2 for 2023/2024.

Table 2



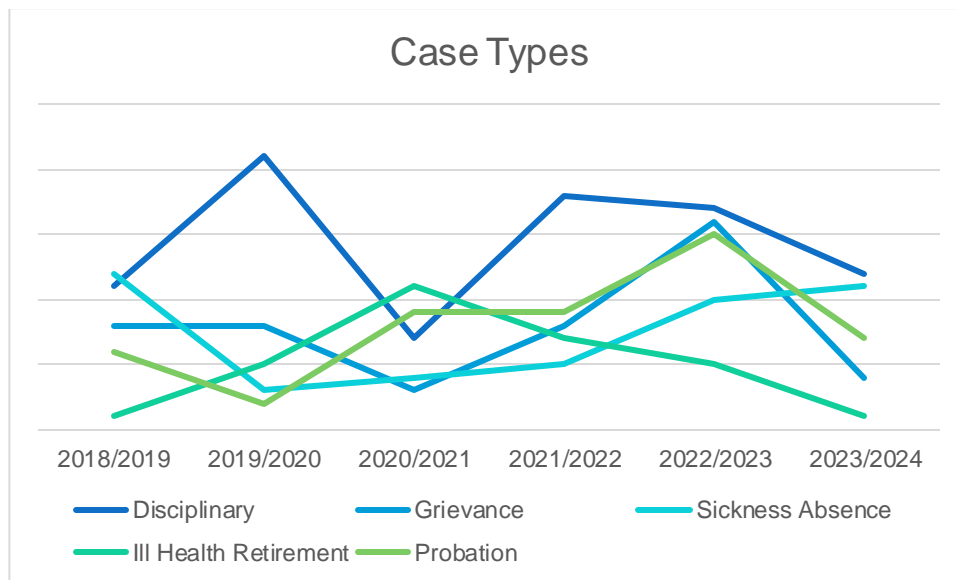
8.4 Table 3, below, shows the variation in the main types of cases over the past five and half years.

(Note – actual numbers are not given, to ensure confidentiality and data protection).



Sickness Absence cases are on the rise in 2023/2024 and are heading to pre covid levels. At this stage there is limited evidence to support the reasons why this is the case.

**Table 3**



**Sickness Absence**

8.5 The Councils working days lost per person due to sickness absence as at the end of Q2 2023/2024 is at 8.75 days. The table below shows the year end outturn absence figures for the previous 4 years for comparison purposes.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Q1and Q2 2023/2024
Days lost per person	9.65	7.15	9.95	9.90	8.75

Note that so far this year:

- This is 11.6% (1.15) working days below the 2022/23 Council year end out turn figure of 9.90 days lost per employee.

**Absence by Directorates**

8.6 Table 3 below shows the number of days lost per person by Directorate.



8.7 Q1 and Q2 of 2023/24 shows working days lost per person is 11% (0.30 working days) below the reported Q2 2022/23 figure of 2.60 days lost per employee. However, the Q2 2022/23 figure of 2.30 working days lost per person is 10% (0.21 working days) above the reported quarter one 2023/24 figure of 2.09 days lost per person. For reference below is two full years and part year for 2023/24.

8.8 Sickness absence in days per employee by directorate can be seen in the table below.

	2021/22	2022/23	Q1 and Q2 2023/24
<b>Resources</b>	6.0	6.5	4.7
<b>People</b>	12.0	11.6	12.1
<b>Place</b>	8.6	8.8	4.7

The CIPD (Chartered Institute for Personnel Development) undertook a Health and Wellbeing Survey with results published in September 2023. They suggested ‘a standout finding from our research is the marked increase in sickness absence; at 7.8 days on average per employee per year, this is the highest level in a decade and two days more than we recorded in 2019 (5.8 days)’. So the increase in WBC sickness is a nationally seen statistic.

## Short term vs Long term absence

- 8.9 Long-term absence is defined as a continuing sickness absence of more than 28 consecutive calendar days.
- 8.10 Up to the end of Q2 for the period 2023/24 the overall absence related to employees with long term sickness absence is 63.3%. In comparison for the same period in 2022/23 it was at 59.8%.
- 8.11 Short-term absence is defined as a period of sickness absence less than 28 days calendar days in one occasion.

## Absence Reasons

- 8.12 The most common reason for both short-term and long-term absence so far up to the end of Q2 in 2023/24 is “*stress, depression and mental health related*”. Which currently sits at 36.2%. Comparing to the same time last year 2022/23 it was at 24.1%.
- 8.13 ‘*Other Musculo-Skeletal problems*’ has seen an increase from 6.2% in the same period of 2022/23 to 10.7% for 2023/24.
- 8.14 Infections (includes Colds and COVID19 Sickness) has seen a reduction from 21.7% for the same period in 2022/23 to 12.3% for the same period in 2023/24.
- 8.15 Long term sickness absences are currently at a higher level than short term sickness. The CIPD report findings show us that there is a workplace wellbeing paradox where, despite an increasing number of workplace health and wellbeing services being put in place, employees have an increasing number of mental health issues. Seventy-six per cent of organisations reported some stress related absence, with heavy workloads being the most common cause. Mental ill health is the top cause of long-term absence, with musculoskeletal issues the second top cause. This is consistent with the WBC data.

## Support

- 8.16 Whilst it is concerning that employers are seeing the highest rate of sickness absence in a decade, focusing on sickness absence alone is unlikely to uncover the underlying factors affecting health and wellbeing or identify areas where any significant improvements can be made. To maximise the effectiveness of health and wellbeing provision and address the workplace wellbeing paradox, companies need to develop systemic and preventative health and wellbeing strategies that are supported by the most senior levels of leadership. Something WBC has been doing more of since 2022/2023 with the introduction of a dedicated Employee Wellbeing Business Partner and a commitment to wellbeing initiatives with the introduction of a Wellbeing Principles. WBC continues to offer a range of interventions and services to help maintain employees’ wellbeing and to provide informed support if they do become unwell. Our Occupational Health provider continues to review employees face-to-face or via video/phone consultation; we offer up to six counselling sessions to employees for whom this is indicated; our Employee Assistance Programme is available 24/7; mental health first aiders continue to be trained; and our internal wellbeing provision provides an increasing range of services and sign posting.

8.17 The Council offers a wide variety of support staff wellbeing and the range of offers continues to grow to ensure we support staff when required, there are a large cohort of Mental Health First Aiders and a wide variety of staff resources on the intranet as well as a dedicated wellbeing space at Market Street. Managers are asked to ensure they talk to their staff about wellbeing on a regular basis through training sessions or at 121's and team meetings. Wellbeing pulse surveys will take place to ensure that evidence to support activity around employee wellbeing will also continue to take place.

### Other External Comparison

8.18 On 26 April 2023, the ONS released their [analysis of sickness absence in the UK labour market](#) for 2022. The key points in their report can be summarised as follows:

- The national sickness absence rate is at its highest level since 2004;
- The most common reason for sickness absence was minor illnesses, accounting for 29.3% of occurrences;
- Groups with the highest rates of sickness absence in 2022 included women, older workers, those with long-term health conditions, those working part-time and people working in care, leisure or other service occupations.

8.19 This last point is particularly relevant for our employee population, as WBC employs more women than men (77.3% and 22.7% respectively); 30.3% of our workforce is over the age of 55; and our care, leisure and service roles are maintained (in the large) in-house rather than outsourced. Therefore, we are seeing within WBC a picture that is repeated more widely at a national level.

8.20 The ONS notes the following top five reasons for sickness absence in 2022:

- Minor illnesses – 29.3%
- Other – 23.8%
- Musculoskeletal problems – 10.5%
- Respiratory problems – 8.3%
- Mental health conditions – 7.9%

8.21 In understanding the discrepancy between our percentage value for mental health conditions (24.1%) compared to the ONS (7.9%) it's important to remember that the ONS is looking at the working population as a whole; those in caring provisions or providing front line services are more likely to suffer mental health conditions than those who are more able to direct their own work and/or who don't work in front-line roles.

8.22 It is also worth noting that NHS waiting lists continue to get longer; this is a common theme for all services from mental health provision to surgical procedures, and this is likely to continue to impact wellbeing at a national level for some time to come.

## 9 Training

9.1 The Corporate Training Programme consists of Mandatory and Non-Mandatory Training. Some Mandatory training is used to calculate the Corporate KPI's (key performance indicators) which are reported centrally. All of our training is delivered

using a variety of delivery methods and a blended approach of E-learning, Virtual (Zoom or Teams) as well as Face to Face training depending on the subject of the course.

- 9.2 Corporate training is commissioned annually and HR work with key stakeholders within the Council to design the programme based on the needs of the Departments and employees collectively. There is a dedicated resource that supports training for Social Care teams as their annual mandatory and non-mandatory training need is large due to the nature of their service delivery.
- 9.3 Each year HR undertake a Training Needs Analysis survey for all staff to get their views on the training and learning they would like or need in the future to undertake their job roles. We had valuable comments and feedback from the survey this year and in previous years which has helped us evaluate last years programme and design the 2024/25 programme.
- 9.4 Last year we ran training and awareness workshops to support employees with wellbeing, and financial pressure, particularly during the cost of living crisis. Resilience & Wellbeing has been running since 2021, and this is a very popular course, there were staff and manager tailored sessions, and feedback was excellent. We ran some hybrid working courses, financial wellbeing, menopause awareness workshops, mental health first aid sessions, giving and receiving feedback, and emotional Intelligence. All these were additional to the usual mandatory courses that are published on Learning Time. They were well attended and had fantastic feedback.
- 9.5 The Training Programme is published on the intranet and shows what training is available to book within our Learning Management System. There is mandatory and non-mandatory training which is dependent on the role. For example, managers have different mandatory training to non-managers. Social Care workers have quite different responsibilities therefore their mandatory training is more extensive and specific.
- 9.6 The learning can be classroom (face to face or virtual) or e-learning. Courses are run by subject matter experts, some internal and some external. WBC have internal experts that run training, for example the majority of our Health & Safety training is run by the Health and Safety Manager and his team. Some Social Care training is run by Social Care experts who are qualified and experienced in specific areas. Many courses are run by external training organisations with specifically commissioned skills, experience and expertise. HR have received excellent training feedback and have worked with some companies for many years, and therefore they understand our culture, as well as our policies and procedures.
- 9.7 2024/2025 will see a new wave of e-learning training on offer from the Council's new Learning Management System which will be rolled out from April 2024, with a much broader catalogue of training options for staff to take advantage of. There will also be a focus on financial management, governance and change management as the Council embraces the challenges of 2024 and large scale transformation ideas.

## 17 Conclusion

The contents of the report are for information for Personnel Committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

## 18 Appendices

None

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### Background Papers:

Not applicable

### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** not applicable

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