

Notice of Meeting



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Personnel Committee

Tuesday 2nd July 2024 at 6.30 pm
in Committee Room Council Offices
Market Street Newbury

Note: This meeting can be streamed live here: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/personnelcommitteelive>.

Date of despatch of Agenda: Monday, 24 June 2024

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer) on 01635 519052, e-mail: sadie.owen1@westberks.gov.uk

Further information and Minutes are also available on the Council's website at www.westberks.gov.uk



To: Councillors Matt Shakespeare (Chairman), Biyi Oloko (Vice-Chairman), Antony Amirtharaj, Jeff Brooks and Laura Coyle

Substitutes: Councillors Martin Colston, Denise Gaines, Ross Mackinnon and Howard Woollaston

Agenda

Part I

	Page No.
1. Apologies for Absence To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any).	5 - 6
2. Minutes To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 26 February 2024 and 9 May 2024.	7 - 14
3. Declarations of Interest To remind Members of the need to record the existence and nature of any personal, disclosable pecuniary or other registrable interests in items on the agenda, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct .	15 - 16
4. Update on HR Activity 2023/2024 Purpose: the report is an information only report for the purposes of updating on HR activity for 2023/2024 for Personnel Committee. The report also includes annual data for the equality makeup of the corporate workforce as at the 31st March 2024, along with other relevant supporting employment data. This data excludes school workforce data.	17 - 38
5. Date of Next Meeting The next scheduled meeting will be on 14 January 2025.	

Sarah Clarke
Service Director (Strategy & Governance)

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Sadie Owen on telephone (01635) 519052.



Personnel Committee – 2 July 2024

Item 1 – Apologies for absence

Verbal Item

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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2024

Councillors Present: Antony Amirtharaj, Jeff Brooks, Vicky Poole and Matt Shakespeare (Chairman)

Also Present: Paula Goodwin (Service Lead HR), Olympia Byrne (HR Services Manager), Karen Turner (HR Business Partner Manager) and Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Biyi Oloko

PART I

5. Election of the Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Matt Shakespeare be elected as Chairman of the Personnel Committee for the remainder of the 2023/2024 Municipal Year.

6. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

8. Update on HR Activity Q1 and Q2 - 2023/2024

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 5) which provided an update on HR activity for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2023/2024. Paula Goodwin introduced the report, starting with the Executive Summary, and highlighted the following positive points:

- The number of established posts had increased over the past five years, but the number of occupied posts had remained relatively flat over this period.
- Voluntary turnover had reduced to 12% over the past year and there had been a marked reduction in the amount of HR casework across the Council.
- There had been significant recruitment in the past year. Especially in challenging areas for recruitment. This had helped to reduce the reliance on agency staff.
- Sickness absence had reduced to 8.75 days per worker on average.

Turning to section 6 of the report (Starters, Leavers and Turnover), it was noted that the People Directorate had yet to be split into the separate Directorates of Children and Family Services and Adult Social Care for the purposes of this report, but this would change in the next financial year.

Councillor Vicky Poole queried whether there had been any feedback as to why people were leaving the Council, had any trends been identified or areas of concern. She

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - 26 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

highlighted that the report did not mention longevity of staff and further queried whether there were any areas that had experienced particularly high staff turnover.

Paula Goodwin noted that outgoing staff were given the opportunity to complete exit questionnaires when leaving but take up of this was not as high as they would like and this would be promoted more going forward. It was advised that individual reasons for leaving varied, often this was for promotion to another role, and that there was an ongoing effort to improve quality of data gathered so that there could be greater focus on retaining staff. Longevity figures had not been included in the report but the average length of service for Council employees was eight years.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that there were lots of encouraging aspects of the report and that work was ongoing to better understand the reasoning behind staff leaving within 12 months of joining. He was hopeful that HR could be involved in the exit interview process, capacity allowing, as it was important to give departing staff a safe space to encourage a more open and honest dialogue.

Councillor Brooks then queried section 5 of the report (employment data) in order to understand whether the increased headcount was due to the ongoing process of converting agency staff or due to increased service demand.

Paula Goodwin explained that the higher headcount was partially due to changes in the way data was collated and partially due to a move away from temporary staffing arrangements. She noted that both this and how length of service related to turnover, could be explored in more detail in future reports.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj queried whether there was a disconnect due to the large disparity in the number of vacancies mentioned in the report and the number of adverts listed on the website. It was also suggested that the tab on the website should say careers rather than jobs.

Paula Goodwin noted that the Council often posted one job advert for multiple vacancies and utilised rolling adverts. It was also explained that not all vacancies were true vacancies and that some posts were held as vacancies with the budget for the post allocated elsewhere. Paula added that some of the vacancies could in fact be a small FTE (full time equivalent). The data on this point would be explored in more detail.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that budget management was helped by keeping some posts vacant for a period of time, although this was not an ideal scenario. He explained that there was an ongoing review designed to ascertain which vacant posts needed to be recruited.

Councillor Matt Shakespeare highlighted that the numbers in the table in section 6.1 of the report were encouraging. He queried if it was the expectation for this to continue into Q3 and Q4. Paula Goodwin advised that the expectation was that the data would not dramatically change. It was explained that work was being undertaken to move agency staff to permanent posts and that Q3 to Q4 tended to be slower with regards to staff turnover.

Paula Godwin provided background to section 7 of the report (talent attraction). She explained the aim was to simplify the hiring process for applicants and that agency staff were being approached to establish whether there was desire to become a permanent member of staff.

It was explained that the Council continued to make good use of the Apprenticeship Levy and had recently been successful in hiring a graduate through the national careers graduate scheme. It was highlighted that there was work being done to increase the graduate offer with links to other education establishments.

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An update was then provided on the progress of the Employee Value Proposition. A survey had been held and there had been a positive feedback session with staff. It was noted that staff wanted to make more of a difference to local communities and were looking to be developed more. As a result, opportunities to develop career pathways were being explored.

Councillor Amirtharaj queried why there had only been one graduate recruited, whether there was an ongoing effort to recruit more and whether there was an ongoing effort to reach out to education providers. He also queried that the referral process for recruitment.

Paula Goodwin advised that the referral scheme was only introduced in April 2023 and that she would undertake work to ensure it was easily available. Councillor Amirtharaj queried whether it was possible to highlight it on the advert. Paula Goodwin advised that it was, and she would share the feedback.

Paula Goodwin expanded that the graduate was the first one the authority had been successful in recruiting from the national scheme. It was explained that there were ongoing conversations with universities and that graduates were recruited through other routes. The Council's success with t-levels and work with local schools was noted.

Councillor Brooks gave assurance that effort had been given to improve talent attraction. The referral scheme needed to be publicised more widely and time was required to get this right. It was explained that the HR team were working through a backlog due to the transition to the new payroll system. It was also explained that the Council had begun to use agencies to recruit in some specific circumstances to save money longer term.

The Employee Value Proposition (EVP) would help to document why officers worked for the Council and stayed with the Council, and this information would be publicised.

Councillor Vicky Poole reported that applicants increasingly gravitated towards the benefits on offer at an organisation, rather than pay, and that adverts were not clear enough on the benefits on offer at West Berkshire Council.

Paula Goodwin explained that the Council had started using LinkedIn through which managers had been encouraged to share benefits of working at West Berkshire Council. It was advised that benefits were normally advertised but that work would be done to ensure this was clear.

Councillor Shakespeare queried whether the results from the candidate survey would be published. Paula Goodwin explained that this data was gathered in confidence and therefore could not be published. It was advised that managers were surveyed but more needed to be done to gather feedback from candidates.

Councillor Brooks noted that candidate experience was vital and there was further work to be done with regards to surveying candidates. He suggested that data needed to be aggregated to show trends. It was the duty of managers as well as HR to recruit and find ways to make improvements to the process where possible.

Section 8 of the report was then introduced by Paula Goodwin. It was noted that sickness absence was in line with neighbouring authorities and the situation nationally. Common reasons for absence were in line with averages elsewhere. It was advised that much was being done to try and support employees but that the aim would always be to do more.

Councillor Vicky Poole noted section 8.12 of the report showing that sickness absence due to mental health had risen to 36.2% from 24.1% in the previous year. She sought further detail to help understand the reasoning behind this.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - 26 FEBRUARY 2024 - MINUTES

Paula Goodwin explained that this was part of a national trend and that this was partially due to people getting frustrated because of waiting lists to access NHS services and getting less support. Stress related absence was not necessarily work related. This area of sickness absence could stem from people suffering with Covid/long Covid.

Councillor Vicky Poole highlighted that 77.3% of West Berkshire Council's workforce were assigned female at birth. She queried what support was offered to people going through the menopause. Councillor Poole noted upcoming changes which required organisations to make suitable adjustments and she queried what preparations were being undertaken.

Paula Goodwin noted that West Berkshire Council operated a Menopause Support Group and had a Menopause Policy. It was explained that there was a reasonable adjustment procedure in place amongst other provisions. It was further advised that Unison had menopause support cafes and that there was an employee well-being business partner that could provide advice.

Turning to training, Paula Goodwin highlighted that the Council was implementing a new e-learning solution which offered better learning for staff. It was explained that the Council operated a blended approach to training with e-learning and classroom based learning. It was stated that the annual training on offer needed analysis to better understand where the budget should be targeted.

Paula stated that there was more training on offer than pre-covid. It was explained that the Council did not have a formal managers induction programme but that this was on the agenda. There was considerable in-house training on offer and that take up was very good. It was explained that there was an ongoing process of reviewing appraisals and the one-to-one process with the aim to develop improved personal development plans.

Councillor Poole queried when the management programme would be implemented and whether there would be an effort to seek specialist skills from outside the organisation.

Paula Goodwin explained that there was training for managers, but it needed to be collated into a formal programme.

Councillor Brooks suggested that there was a need to ensure that training was in place in softer skills, i.e. in recognising good performance. He queried whether staff feedback regarding their personal training needs was documented as part of the appraisal process.

Paula Goodwin advised that Personal Development Plans were used as part of appraisals, but they needed to be enhanced and utilised more fully. It would be a separate document that would be used more regularly throughout year. It was confirmed that a new performance management module was being created that would allow the Council to better inform training needs.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9. **Statutory Pay Policy (C4491)**

The Committee considered the Statutory Pay Policy Statement (Agenda Item 6). Approval of the Statement would be sought at the Council meeting on 26 March 2024, prior to its publication which was required by 1 April 2024. This was an annual requirement and was based on the previous 12 months.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj queried whether the report contained a discrepancy regarding bonuses. Section 4.5 of the report referred to bonuses, but this did not align with the information within the Statement. He queried if this was applicable as the Council was a not-for-profit organisation. Councillor Amirtharaj also queried whether a reward or recognition scheme existed to reward exceptional work by staff.

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Paula Goodwin explained that reward schemes were not covered by the Pay Policy. She clarified that there was no bonus scheme for officers. She advised that pay policy statements followed a standard template and reference to bonuses had to be included as some councils did offer them. Paula further clarified that allowances were paid for some departments.

Paula Goodwin went on to advise that the approach taken on recognition was being reviewed.

Councillor Jeff Brooks requested further detail on the methodology of the report and the pay scales used by the Council. Paula Goodwin explained that the Council used local pay scales, but increases in pay were determined by the national pay award. It was also noted that pay scales and grades were determined by Hay job evaluation.

Councillor Vicky Poole queried how the Council’s pay scales compared to those used elsewhere. Did others pay, giving them an advantage with regards to recruiting staff.

Paula Goodwin advised that the Council did link with other local authorities, particularly with regards to hard to fill roles, and benchmarked pay against them. It was also explained that in some cases, jobs were evaluated to ensure the grading was correct. There was also a market supplement policy in place to help to recruit in more challenging areas.

Councillor Shakespeare queried when the report would be published. Paula Goodwin advised that the approved report would be published subject to approval by Council.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and the Statutory Pay Policy Statement be recommended for approval by Council.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.32pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 9 MAY 2024

Councillors Present: Matt Shakespeare (Chairman), Biyi Oloko (Vice-Chairman),
Antony Amirtharaj, Jeff Brooks and Laura Coyle

PART I

1. Election of the Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Matt Shakespeare be elected as Chairman for the 2024/2025 Municipal Year.

2. Appointment of the Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Biyi Oloko be elected as Vice-Chairman for the 2024/2025 Municipal Year.

(The meeting commenced at 9.05pm and closed at 9.10pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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Personnel Committee – 2 July 2024

Item 3 – Declarations of Interest

Verbal Item

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Update on HR Activity 2023/2024

Committee considering report:	Personnel Committee
Date of Committee:	2 July 2024
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	20 June 2024
Report Author:	Paula Goodwin, Vicky Holland, Karen Turner, Lorraine Collins, Melanie James, Samantha Hodson

1 Purpose of the Report

This report is an information only report for the purposes of updating on HR activity for 2023/2024 for Personnel Committee, Corporate Board and Operations Board. This report also includes annual data for the equality makeup of the corporate workforce as at the 31st March 2024, along with other relevant supporting employment data. This data excludes school workforce data.

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
Financial:	None as this is an information only report.
Human Resource:	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.

Legal:	None			
Risk Management:	None			
Property:	None			
Policy:	All information provided in the report take account of the relevant WBC policies and procedures.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A 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 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.
Environmental Impact:		X		None
Health Impact:		X		None
ICT Impact:		X		None
Digital Services Impact:		X		None

Council Strategy Priorities:		X		This update report provides information that supports the Workforce Strategy and HR BAU activity to meet Council priorities.
Core Business:		X		This update report provides information that supports the Workforce Strategy and HR BAU activity to meet Council priorities.
Data Impact:		X		None as all data is anonymised.
Consultation and Engagement:	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.
- 4.2 The report contains a section on the overarching employment data and equalities data either at the 31st March 2024 or for the whole year of 2023/2024 (Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4). Against each data set the date of the data or the period will be stated. Please see Appendix A.
- 4.3 This report provides an update on recruitment activity, appraisals, training and performance management – casework.

5 Employment Data

- 5.1 Appendix A details the employment data and equalities data relating to WBC.
- 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). It should be noted that whilst the data below shows an increase in the numbers of posts across West Berkshire Council over the last 5 years including vacant posts, it should also be noted that the headcount has either stayed static or increased. It is believed the reasons for the increase in posts is as a result of establishment post changes that have remained on the establishment and have not been requested for deletion by managers or are being held should they be required in the future. It is the intention with the move from Resourcelink to ITrent (from April 2024) that there will be a full review of the establishment to ensure posts that have been vacant for a number of years or have no budget are deleted. This will take place in the Q1 and Q2 of 2024 and will ensure there

is an establishment that is reflective of the budget build for 2024/2025 in relation to posts. The data below is published in the format used from Resourcelink and has been published in this way for a number of years, going forward it is intended to review how the data is published to ensure that a greater level of detail be provided. This will ensure a more holistic overview of vacant posts, recruitment and onboarding activity, vacant post resource cover from agency and alternative options as well as where posts are held for budget reasons.

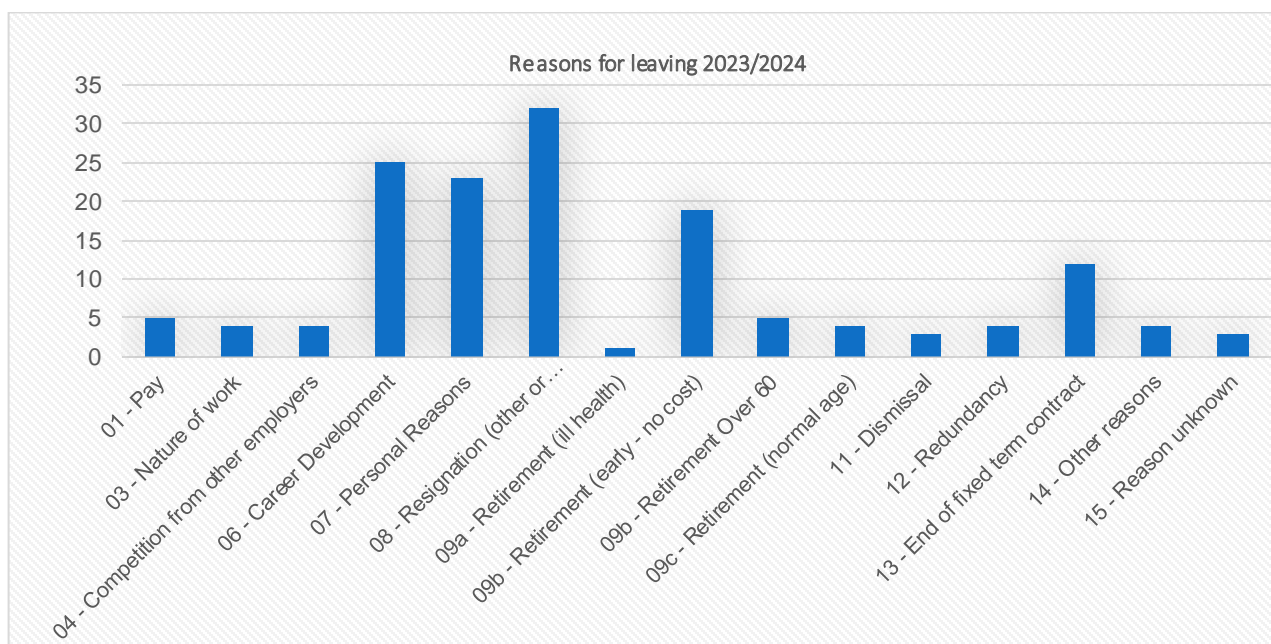
	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Headcount	1512	1545	1532	1511	1537
Post FTE	1576.61	1621.98	1667.93	1731.10	1767.83
Occupied FTE	1323.62	1366.44	1362.10	1357.90	1387.80
Vacant FTE	252.99	255.54	305.83	373.20	*380.03
*See below for further breakdown of vacant post FTE					

5.3 Vacancies at as 31st March 2024

The table below shows the vacant post position as at 31st March 2024. This data has been collated from Resourcelink. Amendments to the data have been identified such as posts for deletion and post changes that have yet to be actioned due to the move to the new HR and Payroll System, ITrent in March/April 2024. As such this data may look different going forward.

Total vacant post FTE (part of fully vacant posts) (on RL)	Part posts vacant FTE	Fully Vacant Post FTE (on RL)	To be deleted from establishment (at time of writing).	Truly vacant posts as at 31 st March 2024	Onboarding or out to advert	Post FTE On Hold/Awaiting Recruitment
*380.03	69.21	310.82	100.23	210.59	143.80	66.79

5.4 Turnover has decreased to 12.47% in the past 12 months from 15.9%. The average UK turnover ideal is 14% or lower. Exit data is collated from leavers information and the reasons for leaving are as seen in the graph below:



5.5 The equalities data provided in Appendix A was collated from the HR/Payroll Information System (Resourcelink) which includes information provided by employees when they were job applicants and some further information provided directly by employees through the HR self-service module (MyView). Applicants are asked to define themselves according to their ethnic origin and whether or not they consider themselves to have a disability as defined under the Equality Act 2010. In some cases individuals choose not to define themselves. The data in these categories, therefore, is based on those who have chosen to define themselves as male/female, having a disability, or minority ethnic. Age data is collected automatically as it is necessary for administrative purposes, such as entry to the pension scheme.

5.6 Other protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 such as sexual orientation and religion have been included more recently, because enough data has now been collected through the recruitment process. However, there are still large percentages of staff recorded as “unknown” in these categories. We aim to improve data collection for equalities through asking staff to update using iTrent the new HR and Payroll system because many of the workforce joined WBC before this data was requested on appointment. “Prefer not to say” will remain an option to select for those staff who would rather not provide sensitive information.

6 Recruitment & Retention

A full review of our direct recruitment took place in 2023 with an updated Recruitment Policy being launched, including a simplified shortlisting process, application form and acceptance of CVs from November 2023.

In the second half of 2023/2024 we saw an increase of 20% in permanent posts being filled in Children & Adults Social Care roles vs. the first half of the year, with a 30% increase in permanent Social Work qualified posts being filled.

We have seen an improvement overall in appointing to posts directly (i.e. candidates that have applied for posts in response to a West Berkshire Council advert), in 2023/2024. With 65% more directly employed staff than in 2022/2023. We had a total of 204 new starters in 2023/2024 as opposed to 123 in 2022/2023.

There was an 18% reduction in the number of adverts placed in 23/24 opposed to 22/23 from a total of 275 to 472 in the 12-month period. This is likely to be as a result of a reduced need to advertise vacancies as more posts are filled. There was also a 32% increase in the number of applicants overall from 2929 in 22/23 to 3864 in 23/24 which would allow for a higher possibility for posts being filled quicker with suitable candidates.

6.1 EVP Update

We have made significant progress in developing our Employee Value Proposition (EVP) to strengthen our appeal as an employer. Initial steps involved surveying staff to identify key themes around why people joined and continue to work here, followed by running workshops with a variety of staff to delve deeper into these themes. From these, we have created our EVP pillars and accompanying straplines. Collaborating closely with the digital team, groundwork for a new careers site has been laid, including site mapping and initial design concepts. We have presented these initial themes to Senior Management at West Berkshire Council, together with some suggested areas of improvement that were highlighted within the survey.

Moving forward, efforts will focus on consolidating the EVP into an internal document, detailing its pillars, total offering, target audience, and communication strategies. Content plans for videos, social media assets, posters, case studies, and website pages are being discussed and finalised over the coming weeks.

The EVP launch plan involves a phased approach from September to December 2024. This strategic approach aims to attract top talent while fostering a culture of engagement and retention within the organisation.

6.2 Agency

The Talent Attraction Team have been working with the Commissioning team and service areas to reduce the number of temporary agency workers in the organisation. A total of 33 agency staff have transferred over to direct employment since June 2023 which represents an annual saving of £559,000.

The overall number of agency workers has reduced by 26% from 229 in April 2023 to 169 in April 2024. This figure does not consider the off-contract workers who are either no longer in the organisation or have subsequently moved over to Comensura.

Agency spend year-on-year is down by £2.5m from £12m in 22/23 to £9.5m in 23/24.

We have seen a reduction from 22 agency workers to 11 in Children & Family Services, with a further reduction to 5 anticipated during the next few months. Posts

having been filled with permanent Social Workers and the Family Support Worker Pilot have both contributed to this reduction.

We have introduced the use of permanent agency recruitment, which has had a positive impact, particularly with sourcing social work and OT candidates. We hope to roll this out further in 2024, setting up permanent agency recruitment via our Comensura contract.

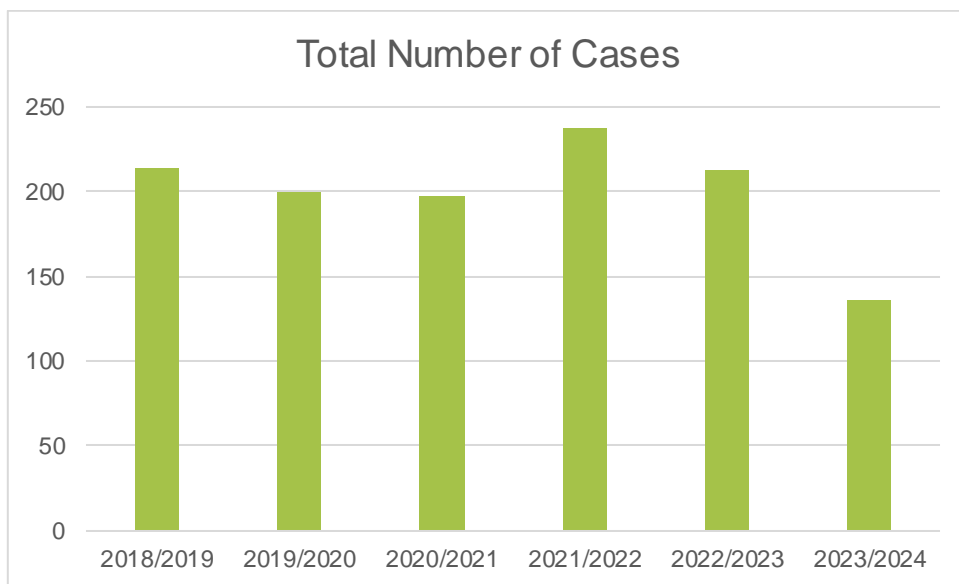
- 6.3 The data in Appendix A shows there were 380.03 FTE at WBC as at the 31st March 2024 (including all temporary posts). What is not known is how many of these roles are filled by agency employees, contractors, consultants. It is intended that HR will undertake further research and evidence gathering to ascertain the picture more fully and to consider how this can then best be filled with a view to ‘direct recruitment’ first and foremost where possible as part of a talent attraction project.

7 Performance Management – Casework

Context

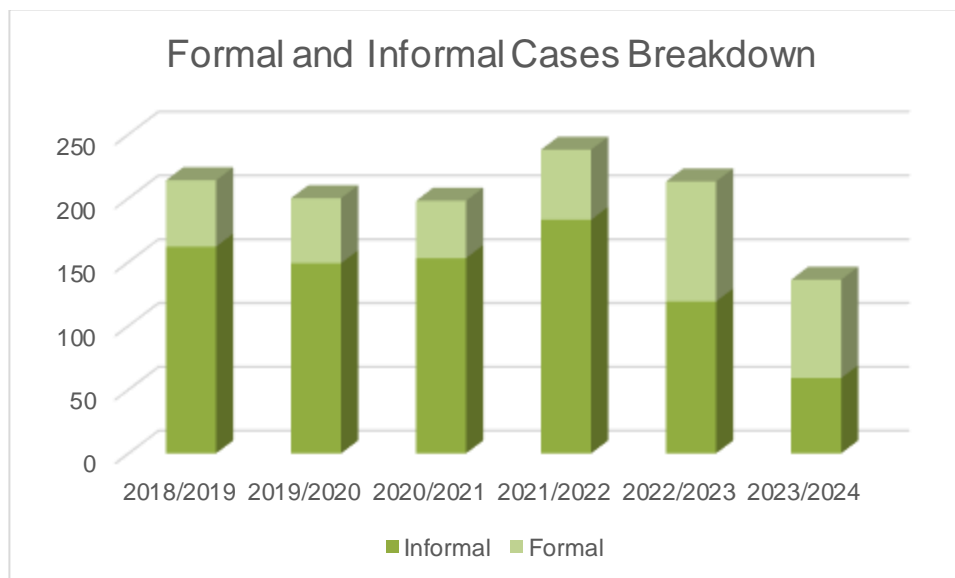
- 7.1 The Council’s HR team supports both corporate managers and around 60 % of WBC schools in managing people issues to conclusion. For the purposes of this report, this includes:
- Disciplinary and capability
 - Grievances and whistleblowing
 - Sickness absence, ill-health retirement, and related adjustments
 - TUPE, restructures, and redundancies.
- 7.2 The previous report gave figures for the first half of the 2023-24 year; this report now gives a full year’s data for 2023/2024 (1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024).
- 7.3 Table 1 below, shows the number of formal and informal cases within corporate for five full years. The numbers have dropped significantly for 2023/2024 compared to the previous five years.

Table 1



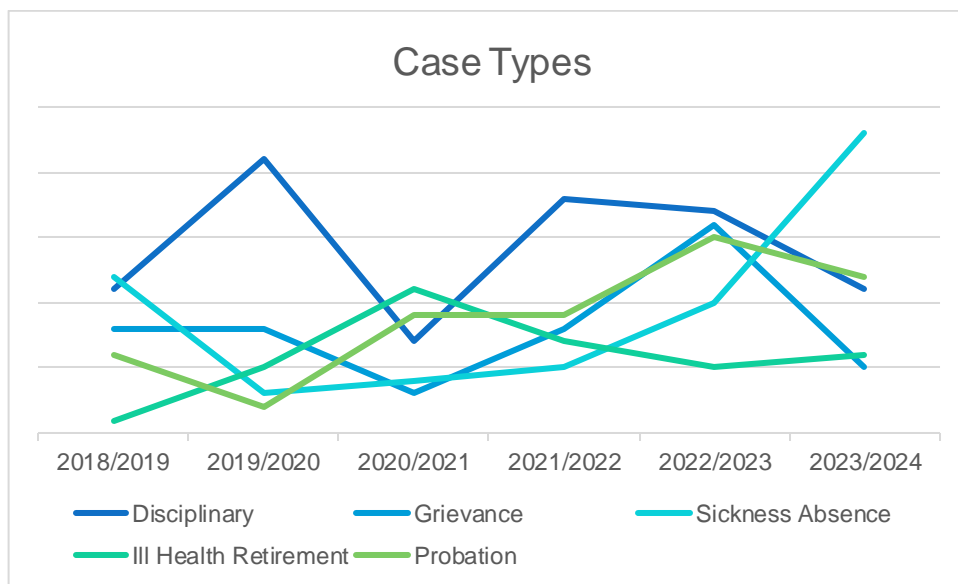
7.4 Table 2, below, shows the mix of informal and formal casework. During the previous four years formal casework has made up between 23% and 44% of all cases recorded; over the last 12 months formal casework has increased to 57%.

Table 2



7.5 Table 3, below, shows the variation in the main types of cases over the past five years (note – actual numbers are not given, to ensure confidentiality and data protection). Sickness Absence cases have risen this year and this may also be the reason for the rise in ill health retirement cases as more employees have considered the impact of long term health conditions and their impact on work and personal life.

7.6 Table 3



Sickness Absence

7.7 At the end of quarter 4 of 2023/24, the annualised number of days lost through sickness absence for the whole Council is calculated as **10.69 days**. The table below shows the year end outturn absence figures for the previous 4 years.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Days lost per person	9.65	7.15	9.95	9.90	10.69

Note: 2020/21 was the primary year impacted by the COVID pandemic. This impacted on absence rates in that normal absence was reduced significantly due to a large proportion of staff working at home for the majority of the year; thus 2020/21 was an anomaly.

Benchmarking

7.8 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes an annual survey on workplace absence for all sectors. The 2022 report published in April 2023 confirms that the percentage of working hours lost because of sickness or injury rose to 2.6% in 2022 an increase of 0.4 percentage points from 2021 and the highest it has been since 2004, when it was 2.7%. This is the latest data available from ONS.

- 7.9 The number of working days lost because of sickness or injury was an estimated 185.6 million working days in 2022, a new record high according to the Office for National Statistics. This represents an increase of 35.8 million from 2021 and 47.4 million more than its pre-pandemic 2019 level. While the number of working days lost was a record high in 2022, days lost per worker was not, as the total number of workers in the UK has risen since the 1990’s. The number of days lost per worker was 5.7 days in 2022.
- 7.10 No information is available in these ONS figures about the type of services and therefore staff for local government. Within Berkshire we are aware that the six unitary authorities have very different approaches to the contracting in and out of services.
- 7.11 The 23rd annual CIPD Health and wellbeing at work report published on the 12th October 2023, supported by Simplyhealth, shows the highest sickness absence rate for over a decade. The average rate of employee absence standing at 7.8 days per employee per year, a considerable increase since last reported in October/November 2019 (5.8 days per employee). Whilst this data is lower than the West Berkshire Council data it should also be noted that the CIPD data will include a variety of organisations and therefore is not a direct comparator for the Council.

Absence by Directorates

- 7.12 The table below shows the number of days lost per person by Directorate.

Compared to the 2022/23 year the numbers are almost identical, and any change is therefore statistically insignificant. This is to be expected, as the size of the employee population and the roles they carry out within each directorate is broadly identical as previous years. This does suggest, however, that pro-active management intervention may well have a positive effect on absence rates. For reference, the comparison is:

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Resources	6.0	6.5	6.2
People	12.0	11.6	14.0
Place	8.6	8.8	7.0

Short term vs Long term absence

- 7.13 Long-term absence is defined as a continuing sickness absence of more than 28 consecutive calendar days. During 2023/24, long-term sickness absence was 64.2%

of all sickness absences (10,514.5 days lost); in 2022/23 it was 54.5% (8,082.5 days lost). This shows a significant increase in long term absence.

7.14 Short-term absence has decreased to 35.8% in 2023/24 from 45.5% in 2022/23.

Absence Reasons

7.15 The most common reason for both short-term and long-term absence for 2023/24 is “*stress, depression and mental health related*”. In total, 33.2% of all sickness absence (long term and short term) was due to “stress, depression or mental health-related”, compared to 24.1% in 2022/23.

7.16 Overall, *stress, depression and other mental health illness* has significantly increased by 9.1%, with 5,540 days in 2023/24 compared to 3,570 days in 2022/23. Stress however still remains the significant reason for long-term sickness absence.

External comparison

7.17 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.

7.18 This last point is particularly relevant for our employee population, as WBC employs more women than men (77.41% and 22.59% respectively); 30.72% of our workforce is over the age of 55, and we have an in house range of care services. Therefore, we are seeing within WBC a picture that is repeated more widely at a national level.

7.19 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%

7.20 In understanding the discrepancy between our percentage value for mental health conditions (33.2%) 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.

7.21 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.

Support

7.22 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. The Council has a contingent of trained Mental Health First Aiders spread across the organisation and has an intranet dedicated to employee wellbeing that signposts employees to guidance and other organisations that can support employees and managers with wellbeing. The Council has a dedicated wellbeing room at Market Street which is well used as well as offering a calendar of education events to support varying wellbeing topics.

8 Appraisals

- 8.1 WBC requires employees to have an annual appraisal. The annual appraisal, and 6 monthly reviews, are utilised to ensure that there is a balance between the strategic objectives of the Council, the respective service and to help staff development.
- 8.2 Current data for percentages of appraisals completed are shown in the table below, and show an overall total of 81.16% for the Council as a whole as at Q4 in 2023/2024. The WBC target is set at 90% of staff to have had an appraisal/form of performance management within the previous 15 months and there is a continual push from senior managers to support this happening.
- 8.3 The below table is the appraisal data for each quarter of 2023/2024. This relates to appraisals undertaken and recorded on My View, our outgoing HR and Payroll System. It should be noted that there is likely to be a level of underreporting in this data as the ability to record appraisal dates was ceased from the 1st March 2024 when the Resourcelink Self Service was switched off. At present this self service approach is yet to be replaced within the new ITrent system. With the roll out of various aspects of the new system, and that includes a new e-learning system, there will also be areas of learning and management education around the appraisal and 121/check in process over the summer of 2024.

Appraisal/Performance Management Completions %	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
People – Adult Social Care	n/a	n/a	92.93	90.42
People – Children & Families	n/a	n/a	74.55	70.76
People (combined) no longer in structure	84.53	82.75	n/a	n/a
Place	85.42	86.42	87.68	85.11
Resources	73.24	73.00	75.81	74.13
Total	82.42	81.56	83.79	81.16

Note: The People Directorate was split into two separate Directorates half way through the 2023/2024 year i.e. Children and Family Services and Adult Social Care Services, hence the table above having 3 lines and figures for each quarter, combined and then separated out into two for the latter two quarters.

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.

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.

Last year we ran training and awareness workshops to support employees with wellbeing and financial pressure. Resilience & Wellbeing has been running since 2021, and this is a very popular course and feedback was excellent. We ran a financial wellbeing course, as well as mental health first aid sessions, giving and receiving feedback, and emotional intelligence. All these were in addition to the usual

mandatory courses that are published on Learning Time. They were well attended and had fantastic feedback.

Last year we ran a programme of awareness workshops as part of the Behaviour Framework rollout, there were Champion, staff and managers sessions. Turn out for this was good and feedback was positive. The framework is now embedded into our policies and working life. A record number of staff received the training 788 in total which was a huge achievement.

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 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.

The Training Programme was available to book within our Learning Management System - Learning Time for last year. For 2024-2025 this will be available in our new HR System iTrent and our newly designed Learning Hub, where all staff can access learning of all different mediums. It will host e-learning, videos and how 2 guides in all different formats. It has a lot of potential and is still a work in progress but will go live in late spring 2024.

The figures below show the number of courses completed over the last five years.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of employees who completed at least one course.	1169	1305	1097	1475	1517
Percentage of employees completing any course (e-learning or classroom)	89.15	90.42	89.00	97.61	98.69
Total courses completed	7376	7419	7722	9517	8926

As you can see the number of courses completed did decrease slightly last year, this is likely due to the close down of Learning Time for a training holiday mid March 2024 as the contract came to an end and in preparation for the launch of the new Learning Management System in spring 2024.

The table above only relates to corporate training. This is not fully reflective of all training and employee development that takes place at WBC. Each department will have it's own budget for post specific training such as CPD for lawyers. The 70-20-10 rule, a key principle used for employee learning and development, reveals that individuals tend to learn 70% of their knowledge from challenging experiences and assignments (generally on the job learning), 20% from developmental relationships (coaching, mentoring and buddying for example) and 10% from coursework and training. So, it is important to ensure a holistic approach to all employee learning to ensure WBC offer an approach that suits all employees and their learning styles too to get the best from them.

17 Conclusion

There are some really positive changes to turnover data, increase in new starters and recruitment and talent attraction methodologies as well as a reduction in some areas of performance management. Sickness absence, and specifically stress management is an area that requires further focus for the coming year, although is in line with the national picture.

The contents of the report are for information for Personnel Committee on the 2nd July 2024.

18 Appendices

Appendix A Employment and Equalities Data

Background Papers:

Not applicable

Officer details:

Name: Paula Goodwin
Job Title: HR Service Lead
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Appendix A

WBC Employment Data and Equalities Data as at 31st March 2024

	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Headcount	1512	1545	1532	1511	1537
Post FTE	1576.61	1621.98	1667.93	1731.10	1767.83
Occupied FTE	1323.62	1366.44	1362.10	1357.90	1387.80
Vacant FTE	252.99	255.54	305.83	373.20	380.03

Starters and Leavers – 5 years (1st April 2019 to 31st March 2024)

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Number of starters in year	243	175	210	247	219
Number of leavers in year	211	142	220	242	190
Turnover (%)	14.08%	9.29%	14.30%	15.9%	12.47%
Voluntary turnover (%)	12.14%	8.44%	13.00%	14.86%	11.09%
Average length of service of leavers	6y 2m	6y 8m	7y	5y 9m	7y 7m
Average length of service of employees employed at year end	8y 7m	8y 8m	8y 9m	8y 10m	8y 9m
Stability index (% employees at year end with 12 or more months' service)	87.10%	90.29%	89.43%	86.3%	89.13%

Percentage % of Starters by Age Range – 5 years (2019 to 2024)

	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Under 25	10.29	18.29	20.95	9.72	11.42
25-34	19.34	26.86	22.86	25.10	33.33
35-44	25.51	17.71	23.33	25.91	25.11
45-54	25.93	24.00	21.90	21.05	20.09
55-64	17.70	12.00	9.52	17.00	8.22
65+	1.23	1.14	1.43	1.21	1.83

Percentage (%) of all leavers during the last 5 years by age range

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Under 25	3.32	5.63	9.09	5.79	5.26
25-34	19.43	16.20	12.73	23.97	16.32
35-44	20.38	21.13	19.55	21.07	21.58
45-54	24.17	21.83	22.73	19.83	24.21
55-64	25.12	22.54	21.36	19.83	17.37
65+	7.58	12.68	14.55	9.50	14.74

Equalities Data as at 31st March 2024 (5 years from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2024).

	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Female	78.04	77.35	77.48	77.30	77.41
Male	21.96	22.65	22.52	22.70	22.59
Disability	3.70	3.88	3.79	4.24	4.58
Ethnic Minority	7.08	6.99	7.77	8.27	9.36
Under 25	3.70	3.75	4.18	3.04	2.69
25-34	14.02	14.82	14.69	15.09	16.76
35-44	22.09	21.36	22.32	21.84	21.94
45-54	30.89	30.61	29.57	29.78	27.90
55-64	25.00	24.40	24.02	24.69	25.02
65+	4.30	5.05	5.22	5.56	5.70
Bisexual	0.93	1.36	1.57	1.59	1.64
Gay/Lesbian	0.93	0.91	0.85	0.86	1.18
Heterosexual	56.28	58.58	61.16	62.74	63.52
Other	0.73	0.84	0.91	0.93	1.11
Prefer not to say	5.22	5.24	5.94	6.29	7.01

HR Update – Corporate Board Report

Prefer to self-describe	0.00	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.07
Unknown	35.92	33.01	29.50	27.53	25.47
Agnostic	1.59	1.94	2.09	2.32	2.42
Atheist	4.43	4.98	5.42	5.82	6.09
Buddhist	0.07	0.13	0.13	0.26	0.20
Christian	30.89	32.23	32.11	32.76	32.74
Hindu	0.40	0.39	0.26	0.86	0.98
Jewish	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Muslim	0.40	0.39	0.52	0.33	0.39
Sikh	0.26	0.39	0.39	0.33	0.33
None	19.71	20.39	23.04	23.23	24.10
Other religion/belief	1.65	1.62	1.31	1.52	1.64
Prefer not to say	5.22	5.18	5.81	5.82	6.29
Unknown	35.32	32.49	28.85	26.74	24.82

Census Data 2021 for West Berkshire - Equality

	Headcount of population	% of total population
Disabled under the Equality Act	23671	15%
Not disabled under the Equality Act	137777	85%
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	5991	4%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	2030	1%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	3856	2%
White	148384	92%
Other ethnic group	1186	1%