

Notice of Meeting



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Personnel Committee

Tuesday 15 July 2025 at 6.30 pm
in Council Chamber, 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 7 July 2025

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Sam Chiverton (Apprentice Democratic Services Officer) on (01635) 519462
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Further information and Minutes are also available on the Council's website at www.westberks.gov.uk



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

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

Substitutes: Councillors Martin Colston, Carolyn Culver, 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 meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 2025 and 15 May 2025.	7 - 12
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 .	13 - 14
4. Update on HR Activity 2024/2025 <i>Purpose: To update on HR activity for 2024/2025 for Personnel Committee, Corporate Board and Executive Briefing. This report also includes annual data for the equality makeup of the workforce as at the 31st March 2025, along with other relevant supporting employment data. This data excludes school's workforce data.</i>	15 - 40
5. Date of Next Meeting The next meeting of the committee will be held on 13 January 2026.	41 - 42

Sarah Clarke.

Sarah Clarke
Interim Executive Director - Resources

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Sam Chiverton on telephone (01635) 519462.

Personnel Committee – 15 July 2025

Item 1 – Apologies for Absence

Verbal Item

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DRAFT

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

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2025**

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

Also Present: Sam Chiverton, Samantha Hodson, Thomas Radbourne, Karen Turner

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Laura Coyle

PART I**1. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings held on 2 July 2024 and 28 November 2024 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Chairman.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Statutory Pay Policy

Karen Turner introduced the report (Agenda Item 4) and explained that the Council was required to publish a pay policy statement on an annual basis. Members were being asked to endorse the report prior to it being referred to Full Council for approval.

Councillor Jeff Brooks highlighted that HAY pay scales were being used and sought confirmation that the percentage differential between the salary of the highest and lowest paid workers was being maintained. Karen Turner confirmed this was the case.

Councillor Biyi Oloko queried whether all local authorities adopted the same pay scales. Councillor Brooks advised that the majority did so, he clarified that the authority was not required to adopt them but was guided by them.

Councillor Matt Shakespeare recommended a histogram be created that showed the number of staff at each grade.

Actions:

- Create a histogram that showed the number of staff at each grade.

RESOLVED that: The Statutory Pay Policy be recommended for approval by Full Council on 27 March 2025.

4. Update on HR Activity Q1 and Q2 - 2024/2025

Karen Turner introduced the report (Agenda Item 5) which provided an update on HR activity for quarters one and two of 2024/25. The report formed part of the bi-annual update to the Committee and outlined some of the changes to HR activity and statistics throughout the current financial year.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - 14 JANUARY 2025 - MINUTES

Karen Turner highlighted that there had been an increase in the amount of case work for HR, she advised that there had been significant recruitment activity and that turnover for all staff had increased by 1%. It was also noted that sickness absence had increased from 8.75 days to 10.24 days per employee when compared to the same period in the previous year.

Councillor Biyi Oloko queried the percentage of the overall budget that was committed to salary costs. Councillor Jeff Brooks advised that someone from Finance would need to answer Councillor Oloko's question but estimated that around 60% of the budget was dedicated to covering salaries.

Councillor Oloko noted the headcount had dropped between 2021 and 2024 however, the number of full-time employees (FTES) was going up. He sought clarity on why this was. Councillor Brooks advised that post FTE had reduced from 1767 to 1637 meaning this figure was becoming more closely aligned to 2021/22 figures.

It was clarified that post FTE was the total number of posts whereas occupied FTE were the posts that had someone assigned to them.

Councillor Brooks highlighted that iTrent had been used to refine the number of vacant posts. He noted the table on page 28 of the pack which equated to about 70 posts that the authority was actively looking to recruit to.

Councillor Oloko sought clarity on the context behind the number of agency workers employed by the Council. Sam Hodson advised that temporary workers were recruited through the Council's Comensura contract. She noted that the temporary workers were not reported in the figures however, they were potentially filling a post contained within.

Councillor Oloko highlighted the need for clarity on the effect privatisation of local care homes was to have on headcount.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj noted that three people had very sadly died in service and sought assurance that the authority was offering support to colleagues. Karen Turner reassured Members that the Council had offered support to those affected.

Councillor Jeff Brooks advised that he was pushing for HR to be involved in exit interviews.

Karen Turner highlighted Appendix A of the report which contained the figures pertaining to starters, leavers and staff turnover for the previous five years.

Councillor Amirtharaj queried whether there was any change in the authority's approach to home working. Karen Turner advised that the Cd a flexible working policy that had been in place for a number of years.

Councillor Brooks asserted that he wanted to see figures that showed the number of people that were leaving the Council within one year of employment.

Councillor Oloko noted that the number of new starters between the ages of 55 and 64 was relatively low whilst the number of leavers within this demographic was high and sought clarity on the cause for this. Councillor Brooks advised that after the age of 55 retirement could become a possibility for some.

Sam Hodson highlighted section 7 of the report noting that there had been a 37% increase in new starters and a 24% increase in application numbers over the period. She advised the recruitment and on-boarding module had been rolled out on iTrent, progress had been made on developing staff, a number of T-Level students had been hosted and a greater focus had been given to graduate and post-graduate apprenticeships. She noted that the Employee Value Proposition and the careers site had been launched. It was highlighted that the number of agency staff had decreased.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - 14 JANUARY 2025 - MINUTES

Councillor Oloko noted several people had asked him about working for the local authority and queried where he could direct these residents. Councillor Oloko also queried the level of automation utilised by the system. Sam Hodson advised that they did utilise AI internally for the purpose of advert generation.

Councillor Oloko queried if demographic information was collated when job applications were received. Sam Hodson advised that this data was captured and reports could be generated through iTrent.

Councillor Brooks highlighted the recruitment software industry was getting more sophisticated but noted it was important not to lose the human element whilst utilising it. Councillor Brooks advised that they were hoping to utilise iTrent to retain applicant information so that candidates could be approached about future opportunities. He also suggested that they were planning to make better use of the referral scheme.

Karen Turner introduced section 11 of the report noting that the Council's HR team supported both corporate managers and around 60% of WBC schools in managing people issues to conclusion. She highlighted the tables on pages 33 and 34.

Councillor Brooks noted that the executive summary suggested that casework was increasing whilst Table 1 indicated the opposite. Karen Turner explained that the table on page 33 provided data for previous years whilst the 24/25 figures were only for Q1 and Q2. Karen Turner advised that the reason for the uptick was because the HRBP team were regularly meeting managers in order to be proactive rather than reactive with cases.

Councillor Brooks was pleased to hear that more work was being done to intervene early, he highlighted the table on page 34 noting that sickness was the main driver behind the increase in caseload. He queried the point at which sickness became a case and expressed concern about the prospect of it being primarily long-term sickness due to increased challenge in getting those staff back to work. Karen Turner advised that it was a mixture of short- and long-term sickness. She advised that with mental health sickness they asked managers to refer the employee to Occupational Health.

Karen Turner introduced section 12 noting that there had been an increase in sickness absence. She noted that the most common reason for long term absence was mental health conditions whilst for short term absence it was minor illnesses. The most common reason for both long and short-term absence in 23/24 was mental health conditions.

Councillor Brooks highlighted the table on page 35 noting that the 12 days lost in the Adult Social Care Directorate (excluding care homes) was still too high and requested further explanation in the next report if this was still at a relatively high level.

Karen Turner introduced section 13 of the report noting that the table on page 38 presented data on the percentage of managers that had completed their appraisals. She advised that there was no data in Q1 due to the new iTrent system being launched.

Councillor Shakespeare was concerned that the number of managers completing appraisals was so low. Karen Turner advised that performance management training had been rolled out to managers to assist them in supporting their employees.

Councillor Brooks advised that appraisals need more rigour at the top of the organisation, he highlighted section 13.3 and was dissatisfied with the word hopeful, he felt that the organisation needed to take a stronger stance on improving this.

Councillor Oloko queried whether performance appraisal was a KPI for team leads. Sam Hodson advised that to her knowledge they were not but she would take it away and get back to him with a more firm answer. Councillor Amirtharaj agreed noting that this was a key aspect of management.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE - 14 JANUARY 2025 - MINUTES

Section 14 of the report noted that there had been a training holiday for e-learning as the learning hub did not start its staggered rollout until November 2024. She noted the table in section 14.2 of the report which highlighted the type of training that had been completed from April to September 2024.

Councillor Brooks noted the table at 14.2 and highlighted that a lot of work had been done to deliver data protection training. He queried whether the authority had caught up and sought assurance that the Council's emphasis had been correct. He also sought clarity on how the Council defined a courageous conversation. Karen Turner advised that the courageous conversation training was designed to educate participants on how difficult conversations were to be managed. She also advised that Data Protection had to be completed annually meaning every member of staff had to complete it by a certain point. Councillor Amirtharaj advised that completion of mandatory training should have been a KPI for all staff.

Karen Turner highlighted section 15 of the report noting that Occupational Health reviewed employees online, in person and via phone call appointments. She noted the employee assistance programme was available 24/7 to staff and that there was an internal wellbeing provision available to staff.

Councillor Oloko queried why Councillors were not included in this training. Councillor Brooks advised that the Member Development Group assured that Members were given access to training tailored to their specific function. He advised that he would take away the notion that Members be given access to wellbeing training and advised Karen Turner to take this up with Sarah Clarke.

Actions:

- Sam Hodson to advise whether completing appraisals was listed as a KPI for managers.
- Karen Turner to discuss member access to wellbeing training with Sarah Clarke.

RESOLVED that: Personnel Committee had considered the report and provided feedback on its content.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee agreed to hold the next meeting on 15 July at 7pm.

(The meeting commenced at Time Not Specified and closed at Time Not Specified)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

DRAFT

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

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025**

Councillors Present: Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Jeff Brooks, Martin Colston (Substitute for Councillor Kaura Coyle), and Ross Mackinnon, Biyi Oloko, Matt Shakespeare

Also Present: Sarah Clarke (Monitoring Officer and Interim Executive Director for Resources), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), and Darius Zarazel (Principal Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Laura Coyle (Substituted for by Councillor Martin Colston)

PART I

1. Election of the Chairman

RESOLVED: That Councillor Matt Shakespeare be elected as Chairman of the Personnel Committee for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

2. Election of the Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED: That Councillor Biyi Oloko be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Personnel Committee for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

(The meeting commenced at 9.51pm and closed at 9.53pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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Personnel Committee – 15 July 2025

Item 3 – Declarations of Interest

Verbal Item

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Update on HR Activity 2024/2025

Committee considering report:	Personnel Committee
Date of Committee:	15 th July 2025
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Report Author:	Paula Goodwin,
Forward Plan Ref:	P4720

1 Purpose of the Report

This report is an information only report for the purposes of updating on HR activity for 2024/2025 for Personnel Committee, Corporate Board and Executive Briefing. This report also includes annual data for the equality makeup of the workforce as at the 31st March 2025, along with other relevant supporting employment data. This data excludes school's 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:	<p>Corporate Board</p> <p>Executive Briefing</p> <p>Service Director, Strategy & Governance</p> <p>Interim Executive Director for Resources</p> <p>Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Internal Governance</p>			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report is for information only that will go to Corporate Board, Executive Briefing and Personnel Committee to provide an update on the HR matters contained within the report for the whole year 2024/2025.
- 4.2 The report contains a section on the overarching employment data and equalities data either at the 31st March 2025 or for the whole year of 2024/2025 (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, training, employee experience, performance management – casework and appraisals. The report 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 amount of casework within HR for the year compared to last year 2023/2024. Casework includes, Disciplinary and Capability, Grievances, Sickness Absence, ill health retirement and related adjustments. TUPE, restructures and redundancies
 - (b) That there has been significant recruitment activity in the current year, with an increase in new starters.
 - (c) That the voluntary turnover figure for all corporate staff has decreased to 10.4% for the current year, from 11.09%. Crude turnover (all reasons for leaving) has slightly increased to 12.9% in the past 12 months from 12.47%.
 - (d) That sickness absence has decreased to 10.13 days per worker in the year from 10.69 days for the same period in 2023/24.

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).

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Headcount	1545	1532	1511	1537	1552
Post FTE	1621.98	1667.93	1731.10	1767.83	1650.95
Occupied FTE	1366.44	1362.10	1357.90	1387.80	1412.92
Vacant FTE	255.54	305.83	373.20	380.03	238.03
Vacant Posts	-	-	-	-	233

From 2024/25 posts are recorded as number of vacant posts, which relates to the number of wholly vacant posts rather than part of a post being vacant. The table below shows the breakdown of the reasons posts are vacant as at the 31st March 2025.

Total vacancy figure breakdown as at 31 st March 2025	
No of vacant posts	233
Live adverts	83
<i>(Note: some adverts are for multiple posts)</i>	
Onboarding/Starting after the 31 st March 2025	13

Agency workers excluding care homes	49
Vacant posts not accounted for (<i>Note: posts are either on hold, only recently vacant so awaiting instructions on recruitment or have no budget and require deletion</i>)	88

5.3 Crude turnover (all reasons for leaving) has slightly increased to 12.9% in the past 12 months from 12.47%. The number of vacant posts has decreased from 380 to 233 as of 31st March 2025. A further breakdown of reasons for vacant posts can be found later in the report. The average UK turnover ideal rate is 14% or lower.

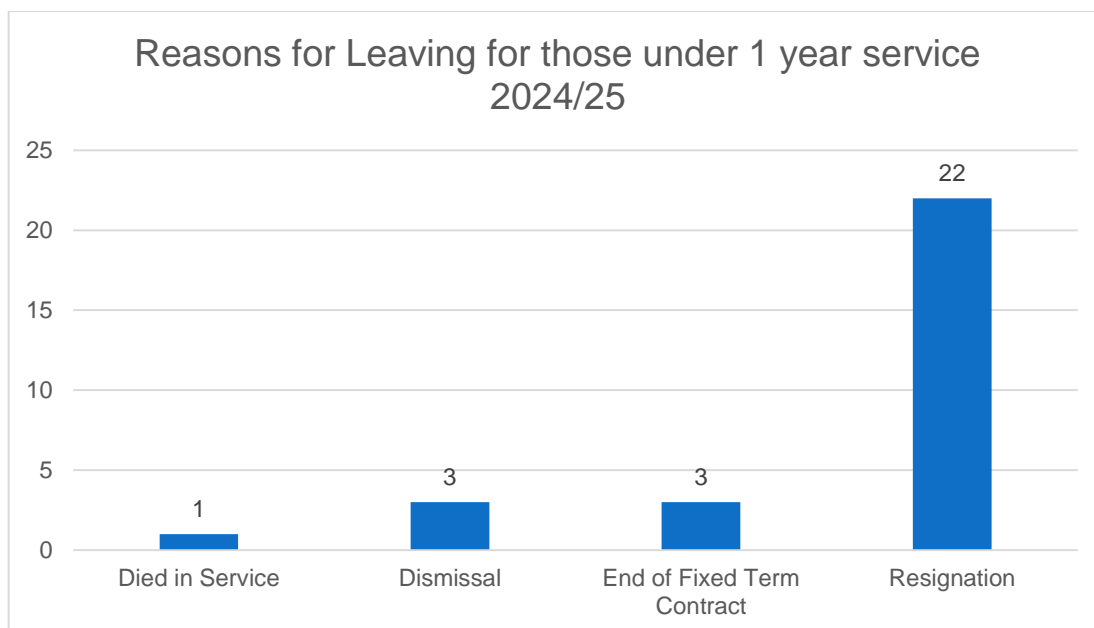
5.4 The equalities data provided in Appendix A was collated from the HR/Payroll Information System (iTrent) which includes information provided by employees when they were job applicants, and some further information provided directly by employees through the HR self-service module (iTrent ESS). Applicants 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.

5.5 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. Employees provide this data voluntarily as there is no mandatory requirement to do so.

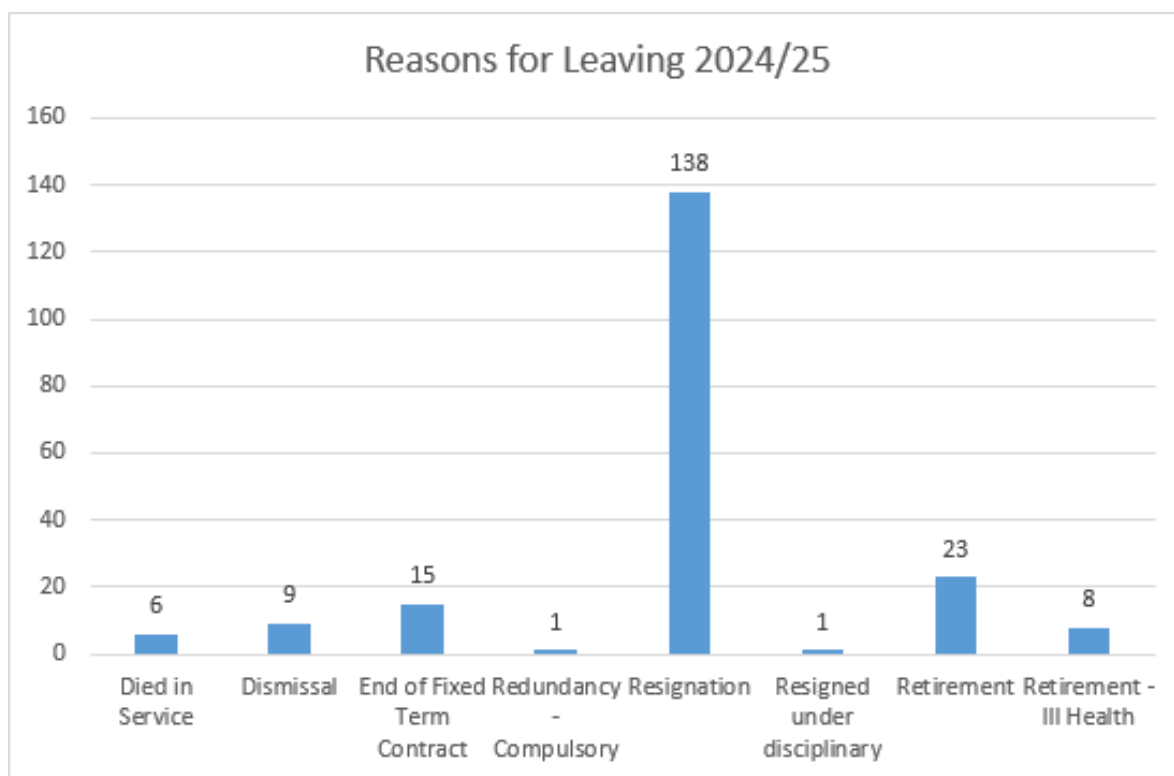
5.6 Exit Data

Over the last 12 months we have had 201 leavers. We ask everyone that leaves to complete an exit interview either online or face to face with a member of the HR Business Partnering Team. 17% of leavers have completed an exit interview.

14.4% of leavers had less than one years' service.



5.7 The graph below shows the reasons for leaving 2024/25 for all leavers.



6 Talent Attraction

Recruitment

- 6.1 We have had a total of 214 new starters in the period 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025. This compares to 219 new starters in 2023/24. These figures are based on new external applicants and does not include existing employees moving into new posts.
- 6.2 In the last 12 months we have made great steps forward in the work to improve our recruitment process and talent attraction efforts including:
- iTrent recruitment module roll out
 - Building recruitment reporting in iTrent
 - Development and roll out our EVP and employer branding
 - Development and roll out of our new careers site
 - Created a careers page for schools' recruitment
- 6.3 The launch of our careers site and EVP has seen an increase in traffic to the careers site of 90% from 14,000 users to 26,000 users in the 7 months since its launch in October vs the 7 months prior. Visibility of the site has improved; the numbers of users landing on our careers site from online search engines has increased by 280%. We have increased our presence on social media around recruitment, which is also driving traffic, with 1,284 users landing on the site from social media vs only 25 users in the 7 months before it's launch.
- 6.4 Simplifying the application process, including accepting CVs has reduced the rate of abandoned applications from an average of 63% in April 2023 to an average of 23% over the last 6 months.
- 6.5 The number of adverts placed in 24/25 has increased to 598 vs 274 in 24/25. This increase is in part due to the new process of continuous advertising which was implemented this year. As part of the recruitment review, we identified that there were periods where adverts had closed before HR were informed to re-advertise. Adverts for vacant posts are now automatically re-advertised after closing, until we are informed that the role is filled.
- 6.6 In the last year we have recruited to a number of key senior posts including Chief Executive, SD ASC, Interim ED Resources, SD Finance, Property & Procurement, SD Transformation, ICT and Customer Engagement, SD Housing & Development and SD Community Services. In doing so there has been a shift to undertaking this activity using internal expertise rather than a need to use external agencies, which in turn has saved the Council money.

Early Careers

- 6.7 We hosted a careers event for Lee Dillon MP and the DWP in the Council Chamber at Market Street. The event required HR to coordinate with colleagues in ICT, Comms, Facilities and Customer Services. The event saw around 200 local jobseekers being invited to meet with 20 local employers to find out about career opportunities in the area.

- 6.8 We have been keeping abreast of the changes to apprenticeships under the new labour government. We have communicated and supported providers, managers and apprentices through the Government's change in Functional Skills Level 2 Maths and English and await further guidance on proposed changes to Level 7 – masters level apprenticeships.
- 6.9 We have focused on reviewing our processes around apprenticeships and have introduced a new Framework approach to simplify the procurement and legal processes for apprenticeships. This is in the early stages, but it is envisaged that implementing the framework will enhance efficiency, especially by reducing the time and resource demands on Procurement, HR and Legal teams.
- 6.10 We currently provide 36 apprenticeship standards, examples of these include: Social Worker, Teacher, Business administrator, Chartered Manager, Town Planner, Civil Engineer, Commercial procurement, Data Analyst, Data Technician, Environmental Health Practitioner, Governance officer, Insurance professional, Payroll administrator, Regulatory Compliance officer, School Business professional, Solicitor and youth support worker.
- 6.11 We are currently spending our full levy amount that we accrue annually, spending £500,000 on apprenticeship courses, with no funds being returned to central government.
- 6.12 We have seen a decrease in apprenticeship enrolment numbers overall in 24/25 with 58 vs 80 in 23/24, which represents a 27% reduction. This is in part due to the push in 23/24 to attach apprenticeships to all entry level posts that were advertised creating an increase in numbers, with these apprentices still working through their courses. We will focus on reviewing the enrolments over the past 12 months and reviewing where we can increase enrolment numbers moving forward. We have, however had an increase in degree and masters level apprenticeships in 24/25 to 24 from 18 in 23/24 which represents a 33% increase.
- 6.13 We have hosted 49 work experience placements in 24/25, including a work experience shadow day for nine students from Trinity School. On the day we provided a tour of the Council Offices and print room, we engaged students in discussions about early career options, with guest speakers from the Environment and Wellbeing teams sharing insights into their fields. This is an increase of 48% vs 23/24 when we hosted 33 work experience placements.
- 6.14 We have hosted 10 T-Level placements in 24/25 including four T-Level students in HR. It was discovered that one student had an interest in Engineering, HR arranged for him to complete the remainder of his two placement blocks with the Transport and Highways Team, which proved to be a great success for both the student and his manager. There is no comparative T-Level data for 23/24.

Agency

- 6.15 The contact management of the Comensura agency contract moved to HR in April 2024. Since then, new approval processes and guidance on engaging agency workers has been produced and rolled out with further updates to this guidance underway.

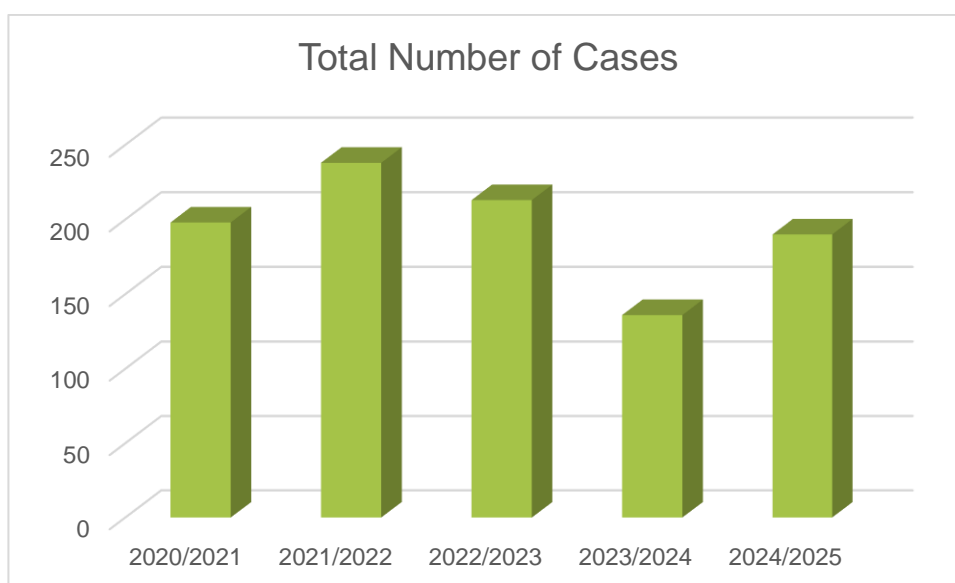
- 6.16 The total number of agency workers at the end of Q4 24/25 was 114 vs 169 in 23/24 and 229 in 22/23 which represents a 50% reduction.
- 6.17 We have had a total of 61 agency workers move into direct employment since January 2023 saving £912,883.
- 6.18 Agency spend year-on-year is down a further £2M to £7.5M in 24/25 from £9.5m in 23/24 and £12m in 22/23, a reduction in £4.5M overall.
- 6.19 The average weekly spend for agency in the year 24/25 was £111,140 vs the average weekly invoice in 23/24 of £164,453 which represents a 32% reduction.
- 6.20 Over the past 12 months we have trialled the usage of agencies to supply permanent candidates for direct employment. This has provided a total of 13 successful appointments across hard to fill roles, removing the requirement for more costly temporary agency workers. Roles that have been filled include posts in occupational therapy, social work, finance and HR. Following the successful pilot, in March we rolled out permanent agency recruitment via Comensura, with the aim of filling more of our hard to recruit posts directly.

7 Performance Management – Casework

Context

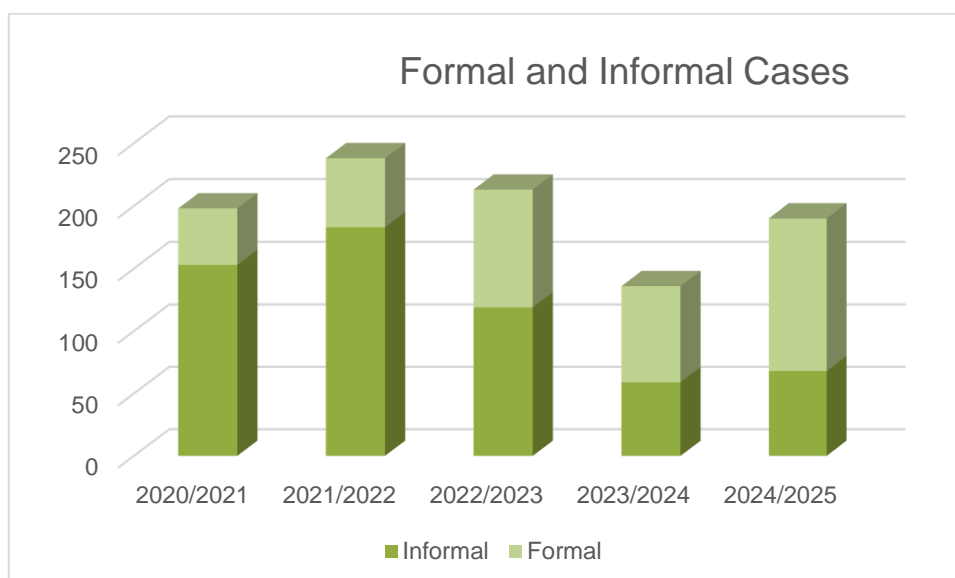
- 7.1 The Council's HR team supports both corporate managers and around 60 % of WBC schools in managing people issues to conclusion. For the purposes of this report, this includes:
- Disciplinary and capability
 - Grievances
 - Sickness absence, ill-health retirement, and related adjustments
 - TUPE, restructures, and redundancies.
- 7.2 The previous report gave figures for the first half of the 2024 - 2025 year; this report now gives a full year's data for 2024 - 2025 (1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025).
- 7.3 Table 1 below, shows the number of formal and informal cases within corporate for five full years. The numbers have increased significantly for 2024/2025 compared to last year.

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 57% of all cases recorded; over the last 12 months formal casework has increased to 65%. Informal casework is generally the first stage of any procedure and then once exhausted a move to formal casework takes place. In some procedures cases can skip the informal stage and move directly to a formal stage. This depends on the circumstances of the case.

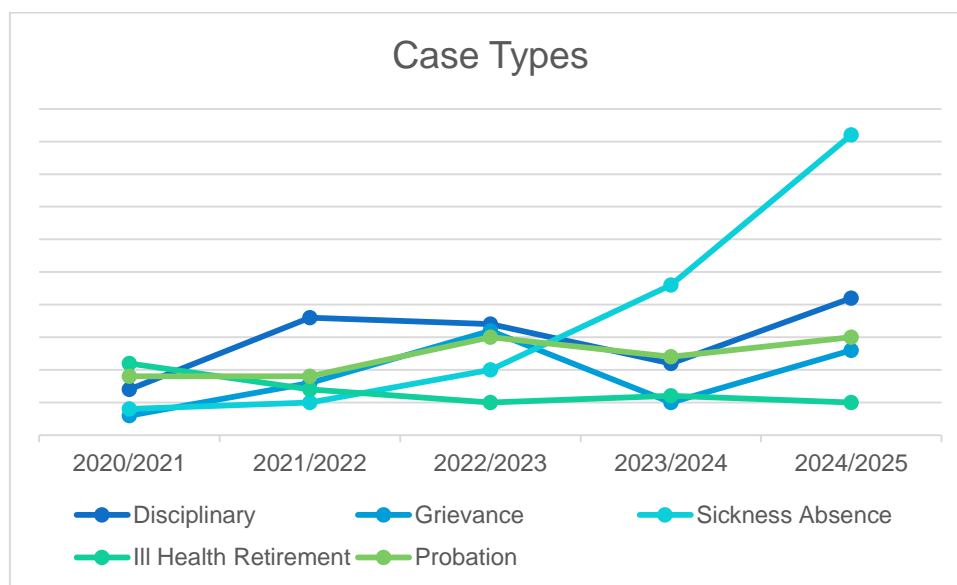
Table 2



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). Formal Sickness Absence cases have risen this year as well as Disciplinary and Formal

Grievances. Whilst this appears to indicate an issue, in reality, it is likely that any rise is due to cases being managed more effectively with the launch of a new Performance Management Framework in the summer of 2024 and more guidance and education being made available for managers to manage performance. There has also been a number of changes in the organisation and as such this can lead to cases being raised. For sickness absence it is important to consider the sickness data which has slowly started to reduce which can also be seen in the paragraph below.

7.6 Table 3



Sickness Absence

7.7 At the end of quarter 4 of 2024/25, the number of days lost through sickness absence for the whole Council is calculated as **10.13 days**. The table below shows the year end outturn absence figures for the previous 3 years.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Days lost per person	*7.15	9.95	9.90	10.69	10.13

* 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.

Absence by Directorates

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

Table 3



7.9 Compared to the 2023/24 year the numbers have slightly increased but there is not a significant increase. 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	2024/25
Resources	6.0	6.5	6.2	7.5
People ASC	12.0	11.6	14.0	15.4
People CFS	NA - Included in People ASC	NA - Included in People ASC	NA - Included in People ASC	8.5
Place	8.6	8.8	7.0	8.5

Short term vs Long term absence

7.10 Long-term absence is defined as a continuing sickness absence of more than 28 consecutive calendar days. During 2024/25, long-term sickness absence was 52.0% of all sickness absences (8,204.5 days lost); in 2023/24 it was 64.2% (10,514.5 days lost). This shows a significant decrease in long term absence.

7.11 During 2024/25, short-term absence has significantly increased to 48.0% of all sickness absence (7561.5 days lost); in 2023/24 it was 35.8% (5855.0 days lost).

Absence Reasons

7.12 The most common reason for long-term absence for 2024/25 is “*Mental health conditions – includes stress, depression, anxiety*” (24.8%). The most common reason for short-term absence for 2024/25 is “*Minor illnesses – includes coughs/colds and flu; sickness/nausea and diarrhoea*” (14.6%).

The top three overall reasons for sickness absence in 2024/25 were:

- Mental health conditions – 33.4%
- Minor illnesses – 15.0%
- Musculoskeletal problems – 14.4%

7.13 Overall, “*Mental health conditions – includes stress, depression, anxiety*” has slightly decreased by 4.9%, with 5,269.5 days in 2024/25 compared to 5,540 days in 2023/24. “*Mental health conditions*” however remains the significant reason for long-term sickness absence. In total, 33.4% of all sickness absence (long term and short term) was due to “*Mental health conditions*”, compared to 33.2% in 2023/24.

Benchmarking

7.14 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes an annual survey on workplace absence for all sectors. The 2024 report published at the beginning of June 2025 confirms that the percentage of working hours lost because of sickness or injury fell to 2.0% in 2024, a decrease of 0.3 percentage points from 2023 when it was 2.3% but a 0.1 percentage point increase since the pre coronavirus 2019 level.

7.15 The number of working days lost because of sickness or injury was an estimated 148.9 million working days in 2024. This is a decrease from 14.9 million from 2023 and an increase of 9.9 million from the pre coronavirus 2019 levels. There was also a fall in days lost per worker, to 4.4 in 2024, down 0.5 days from 2023 but 0.2 days above its 2019 level.

7.16 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.

7.17 According to the Office for National Statistics Survey (ONS) Minor illness was the most common reason for sickness absence in 2024. This is the third consecutive

year minor illnesses have been on top since the fall they experienced because of coronavirus (COVID 19) in 2020 and 2021.

Employee Experience

7.18 The Employee Experience function within Workforce Development Team, continues to play a central role in fostering a positive, inclusive, and supportive working environment across the Council. It leads on employee engagement, wellbeing, and equity— working towards the goal, that all staff feel valued, heard, and supported. Recent progress includes the successful launch of the Employee Engagement Forum and the recruitment of employee representatives to strengthen two-way communication across the organisation. Mandatory learning on neurodiversity awareness and the Worker Protection Act has been introduced to support a more informed and inclusive workforce. A new digital employee suggestion form has been implemented to encourage staff ideas and feedback. In addition, focus groups have been held to explore the results of the recent Employee Experience Survey, with recommendations which have been considered by the Senior Leadership Team, creating a SLT action plan. The team also continues to manage employee forums, coordinate mental health first aiders, deliver wellbeing and professional development learning sessions and provide guidance for managers and leaders. These efforts support the Council's Workforce Strategy and help embed a culture of wellbeing, equity, and engagement throughout the organisation.

8 Appraisals

- 8.1 WBC requires employees to have an annual appraisal. The annual appraisals and performance development plans are utilised to ensure that there is a balance between the strategic objectives of the Council, the respective service and to support staff development.
- 8.2 Current data recorded for the number of appraisals completed during 2024/25 are **356** as of 31st March 2025. There is a change to what is included in this figure, previously it included 121 meetings, and now we are only measuring appraisals. Whilst this figure appears low compared to a corporate population of around 1500 heads throughout the year, it is not an indicator that appraisals are not taking place but that dates are not being entered into Itrent of when a meeting happens. Itrent is currently not set up to record more than appraisal dates which managers enter and is something being investigated for future use. HR are working to encourage this data being input.
- 8.3 We do expect over the next quarter that appraisal figures will rise due to the time of year for appraisals to take place i.e. Between March and June of each year, and the promotion of the requirement to record dates in Itrent. There has been an appraisal reminder campaign run by HR to remind staff to book their appraisals. HR have run drop-in sessions, as well as provided comms in Reporter and In the Know, and posters have been displayed around the Council buildings at all sites to promote appraisal best practice.



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 and drop in sessions 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. It is expected that every employee has a Personal Development Plan and as such any learning or training is identified on the plan and discussed with their line manager. Whilst HR manage a corporate training budget and programme across WBC, there are training budgets and arrangements in other services where employees can access training if required. There is also a dedicated resource that supports training for Social Care teams as their annual mandatory and non-mandatory training needs are large due to the nature of their service delivery.
- 9.3 The data within this report is data held by HR for corporate training as HR don't hold data for training managed by services. Different types of learning and information sharing will be included in the following figures, including attendance at the newly introduced Corporate Induction, Leadership Forum, and the EDI training for Senior Leaders.

- 9.4 Corporate Induction face to face sessions have been re-introduced in 2025. Prior to that induction was, and still is, managed locally by managers for their new starters. So Corporate induction is an addition to the local induction. The following is some very positive feedback from delegates.

“Thought having the CEO and Leader come and speak to us was a really nice touch and puts faces to the name”

“It was good to hear the speakers share such positive experience of working at West Berkshire Council, the information about what is available to staff was really useful”

“What a really nice way for a new employee to be welcomed into their new role, I thought it was a nice touch of the CEO and Leader to contribute”

- 9.5 The introduction of the Learning Hub in Autumn of 2024 for all corporate employees, which hosts all our E-learning, has been very successful with many courses completed online and on mobile devices for ease. The classroom course bookings for all corporate training are booked via iTrent and staff can do so in their ESS (Employee Self Service) where they can search for upcoming courses, find out the course information, duration and venue. This roll out of a new booking system has gone smoothly, and many courses have full attendance and some with waiting lists.
- 9.6 Learning at work week ran from the 12th to the 16th May 2025. This year's theme was “Get Connected” we look forward to reporting on this in the future. There were many sessions held such as an AI webinar from ICT, a Coaching workshop from the Coaching Hub, and many more. There were approximately 325 employees attending the sessions ran throughout the week.
- 9.7 The figures below show the number of courses completed over the last five years.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of employees who completed at least one course.	1305	1097	1475	1517	1466
Percentage of employees completing any course (e-learning or classroom)	90.42	89.00	97.61	98.69	94.2
Total courses completed	7419	7722	9517	8926	11437

- 9.8 The number of completed courses this year is significantly higher in other years. This is due to the introduction of the new suite of mandatory courses.
- 9.9 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 had 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.
- 9.10 WBC offer an internal coaching network and opportunities for mentoring as part of their learning approach for employees. Whilst this is still in its infancy and there is no current data held of volume of usage, it is felt that this will further support employees in undertaking their roles and with any future development ambitions.

17 Conclusion

There are some really positive changes to people management approaches based on the data provided within this report. With the reduction in turnover, an increase in new starters and recruitment and talent attraction methodologies as well as a reduction in some areas of performance management, this is all perceived to be supporting WBC to be an Employer of Choice. Whilst sickness absence, and specifically stress management is an area that requires further focus, along with appraisal management and education for the future. At the time of writing an updated procedure on Workforce Attendance (replaces the Sickness Absence Procedure) has been implemented and it is hoped that this will help provide an improved approach for both managers and employees in managing all sickness absence in the future.

The contents of the report are for information for Personnel Committee on the 15th July 2025.

18 Appendices

Appendix A Employment and Equalities Data

Officer details:

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Job Title: HR Service Lead
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Appendix A

WBC Employment Data and Equalities Data as at 31st March 2025

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Headcount	1545	1532	1511	1537	1552
Post FTE	1621.98	1667.93	1731.10	1767.83	1650.95
Occupied FTE	1366.44	1362.10	1357.90	1387.80	1412.92
Vacant FTE	255.54	305.83	373.20	380.03	238.03
Vacant Posts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	233

Starters and Leavers – 5 years (1st April 2020 to 31st March 2025)

	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Number of starters in year	175	210	247	219	214
Number of leavers in year	142	220	242	190	201
Turnover (%)	9.29%	14.30%	15.9%	12.47%	12.9%
Voluntary turnover (%)	8.44%	13.00%	14.86%	11.09%	10.4%
Average length of service of leavers	6y 8m	7y	5y 9m	7y 7m	8y
Average length of service of employees employed at year end	8y 8m	8y 9m	8y 10m	8y 9m	8y
Stability index (% employees at year end with 12 or more months' service)	90.29%	89.43%	86.3%	89.13%	86.79%

Percentage % of Starters by Age Range – 5 years (2020 to 2025)

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Under 25	18.29	20.95	9.72	11.42	4.88
25-34	26.86	22.86	25.10	33.33	27.42
35-44	17.71	23.33	25.91	25.11	26.90
45-54	24.00	21.90	21.05	20.09	25.26
55-64	12.00	9.52	17.00	8.22	15.09
65+	1.14	1.43	1.21	1.83	0.45

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

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Under 25	5.63	9.09	5.79	5.26	3.98
25-34	16.20	12.73	23.97	16.32	17.91
35-44	21.13	19.55	21.07	21.58	22.39
45-54	21.83	22.73	19.83	24.21	15.92
55-64	22.54	21.36	19.83	17.37	21.39
65+	12.68	14.55	9.50	14.74	18.41

Equalities Data as at 31st March 2025 (5 years from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2025).

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Female	77.35	77.48	77.30	77.41	75.82
Male	22.65	22.52	22.70	22.59	24.18
Disability	3.88	3.79	4.24	4.58	2.89
Ethnic Minority	6.99	7.77	8.27	9.36	11.45
Under 25	3.75	4.18	3.04	2.69	2.25
25-34	14.82	14.69	15.09	16.76	16.98
35-44	21.36	22.32	21.84	21.94	21.67
45-54	30.61	29.57	29.78	27.90	28.49
55-64	24.40	24.02	24.69	25.02	25.53
65+	5.05	5.22	5.56	5.70	5.08
Bisexual	1.36	1.57	1.59	1.64	0.84
Gay/Lesbian	0.91	0.85	0.86	1.18	0.84
Heterosexual	58.58	61.16	62.74	63.52	27.52
Other	0.84	0.91	0.93	1.11	0.39
Prefer not to say	5.24	5.94	6.29	7.01	1.67

HR Update – Corporate Board Report

Prefer to self-describe	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.00
*Unknown	33.01	29.50	27.53	25.47	68.81
Agnostic	1.94	2.09	2.32	2.42	1.54
Atheist	4.98	5.42	5.82	6.09	3.86
Buddhist	0.13	0.13	0.26	0.20	0.19
Christian	32.23	32.11	32.76	32.74	14.66
Hindu	0.39	0.26	0.86	0.98	0.51
Jewish	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Muslim	0.39	0.52	0.33	0.39	0.51
Sikh	0.39	0.39	0.33	0.33	0.13
None	20.39	23.04	23.23	24.10	9.07
Other religion/belief	1.62	1.31	1.52	1.64	0.64
Prefer not to say	5.18	5.81	5.82	6.29	1.67
*Unknown	32.49	28.85	26.74	24.82	67.20

*High percentages of unknown EDI information affects the figures in all categories. HR are encouraging staff to complete their EDI data in iTrent. Communications have been sent and this is ongoing.

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%

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Personnel Committee – 15 July 2025

Item 5 – Date of Next Meeting

Verbal Item

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