
Update on HR Activity Q1&Q2 2022/2023

Committee considering report:	Personnel Committee
Date of Committee:	21 February 2023
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Tom Marino
Date Head of Service agreed report: <i>(for Corporate Board)</i>	23 December 2022
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	11 January 2023
Report Author:	Paula Goodwin, Vicky Holland, Abigail Witting, Nikki Davies, Harriet Saunders, Lorraine Collins

1 Purpose of the Report

This report is an information only report for the purposes of updating on HR activity for Q1 & Q2 2022/2023.

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 and has been written at the request of members of Personnel Committee to provide an update on the matters contained within the report.
- 4.2 This report provides and update on HR activity for Q1 and Q2 of 2022/2023.

5 Employment Data

- 5.1 The headcount at WBC has remained pretty static over the last 5 years. The current headcount as at the end of Quarter 2 is 1490. (This data excludes all temporary posts).
- 5.2 There were 127 leavers during the period 1st April to the 30th September 2022 as detailed below.

Department/Service	Headcount of number of leavers	Headcount of employees as at the 30 September 2022
Adult Social Care	50	394
Children and Family Services	7	144
Commissioning and Procurement	1	30
Communities and Wellbeing	2	79
Development and Regulation	15	201

Education Services	22	193
Environment	13	149
Finance and Property	6	115
ICT	4	44
Strategy and Governance	7	131

- 5.3 Voluntary turnover (i.e. not due to redundancy) has increased to 17.14% as at the 31st October 2022 from 13% (2021/2022). Averages for UK turnover are at around 14%. There is no evidence to support the increase except for the increase in opportunities in the job market post Covid which continues to impact many local authorities. Unfortunately there is no comparative data available at present as data is reported a year in arrears. There are currently 1318.54 occupied FTE and 402.59 permanent FTE vacant posts (316 posts are covered by agency staff as of the date of writing – Jan 2023).
- 5.4 A recent and ongoing exercise has been undertaken to establish where vacant FTE are being fulfilled by agency employees and one of the Talent Acquisition Business Partners is working with finance, commissioning and the respective Executive Director to drill down further into the data and to agree an approach on how agency usage and spend can be reduced by moving to direct recruitment solutions. This work has commenced with updates to be considered by senior leadership on a regular basis.

6 Recruitment & Retention

- 6.1 The information in this section is based on the last 5 years, focusing on full-time equivalent numbers. The data excludes staff employed in schools, casual and agency workers unless otherwise stated.
- 6.1 During 1st April 2022 to 31st October 2022 there were 270 adverts placed on the website. From 1st September 2022, the Council introduced a recruitment and agency panel system to review requests to recruit to support the financial position with a more managed approach to agency usage and recruitment activity. From November 2022 there has been a recruitment freeze with the option to seek ‘Executive Director Exemption’ for recruitment to essential roles. The recruitment freeze will be reviewed in January 2023 with consideration of the current financial position within the organisation.
- 6.2 Source of Job Applications

WBC uses Jobs Go Public (JGP) as the applicant tracking system where all candidates apply for jobs with WBC. Data shows that nearly all applicants come through this system and the WBC website. The external website has been updated recently and will continue to be reviewed as part of the project to review current recruitment approaches. During

2022 we have created two specific microsites for Children & Family Services (<https://westberkschildrensocialwork.jgp.co.uk/>) and Adult Social Care (<https://westberkshireadultsocialcare.jgp.co.uk/>). It is too early yet to determine whether this is supporting the Council in attracting potential candidates but reviews will take place during 2023 and amendments made as feedback determines.

- 6.4 There is the intention to develop a broader approach to using social media and alternative marketing campaigns to attract suitable candidates to WBC. Adult Social Care have engaged a pilot project with 'Socially Recruited' to target more passive applicants. To date only one campaign out of the potential five has been completed for Social Work roles. Analysis of the activity related to this has not produced a significant increase in applications as yet however this will continue to be monitored as an alternative approach to direct recruitment. LinkedIn templates for adverts have been updated and are now more engaging from a WBC marketing perspective and the first newly updated advert template to LinkedIn for an Emergency Planning Officer post has already had a very high 'hit rate' and with 16 applications started at the time of writing which is more than might have been expected.



The image shows a job advertisement for an Emergency Planning Officer. The ad is set against a background of a flooded street with a traffic light. The text is as follows:

JOIN US!

Emergency Planning Officer

Salary: £32,909 to £39,493 per annum (Grade I)

Permanent: Full Time

Closing date: 18th December

Find out more at www.westberks.gov.uk/jobs

West Berkshire

- 6.5 As well as starting to rebrand our advertising material and web pages there is now a more proactive approach using social media such as LinkedIn, as well as consideration of other forms of free ways of advertising which has not previously been progressed. The two new Talent Business Partners started in November 2022 and although have only been in post a very short while, progress is being made with a review of the current recruitment process including all templates as well as being more proactive in the jobs market and updating our benefits offer to be more easily visible. They are also starting to develop an Employee Value Proposition and a plan for Early Careers opportunities such as graduate schemes, internships, T Level work experience and better work experience programmes, as well as a continued development of the WBC offer for apprenticeships.

7 Performance Management – Casework

Context

- 7.1 The Council has a range of established employment policies and procedures to manage different issues that may arise during the employee lifecycle these include disciplinary, grievances, performance capability, probation and sickness absence/ ill-health capability issues (this comes under the umbrella defined for the purpose of the report as casework). The HR team supports managers and services in managing these issues to resolution. The team also supports organisational change including TUPE transfers, restructures and redundancies. The team supports both corporate teams and provides a traded service to 60% of West Berkshire schools.
- 7.2 There are key principles in all of our procedures, which are developed with input from our recognised trade unions, and in line with ACAS codes of practice. These include:
- An emphasis on resolving issues informally if possible
 - Sharing information about the concerns with the employee and gaining their response
 - Acting consistently
 - Acting promptly
 - A right to representation at formal meetings
 - Reasonable notice of formal meetings
 - The right to appeal any formal outcomes.

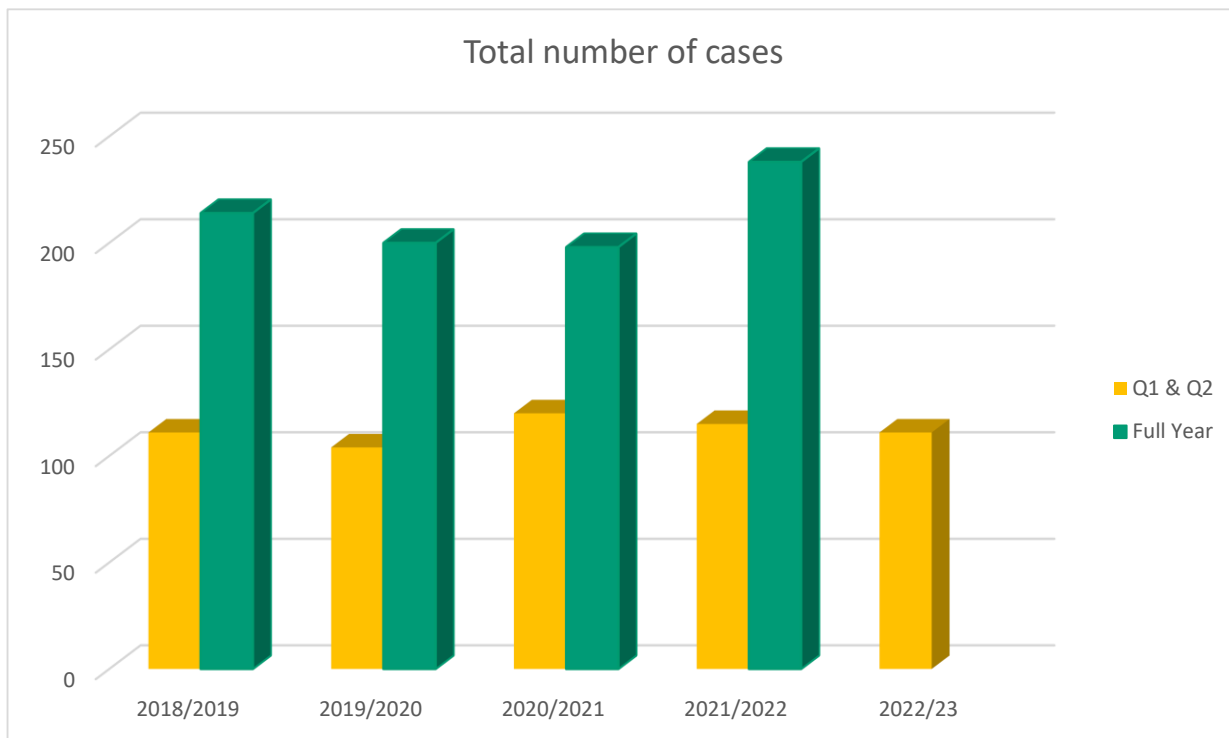
Routine Measures

- 7.3 Quarterly measures are currently reported as below for the Council. These are:
- Numbers of formal cases (schools and corporate)
 - Numbers of informal cases (schools and corporate)
 - Average feedback from managers (supported by the team)
 - Number of Occupational Health referrals
 - Number of contacts with Employee Assistance Programme
 - Number of redundancies (schools and corporate).

The aim of these measures is to monitor the volume and quality of work undertaken by the team.

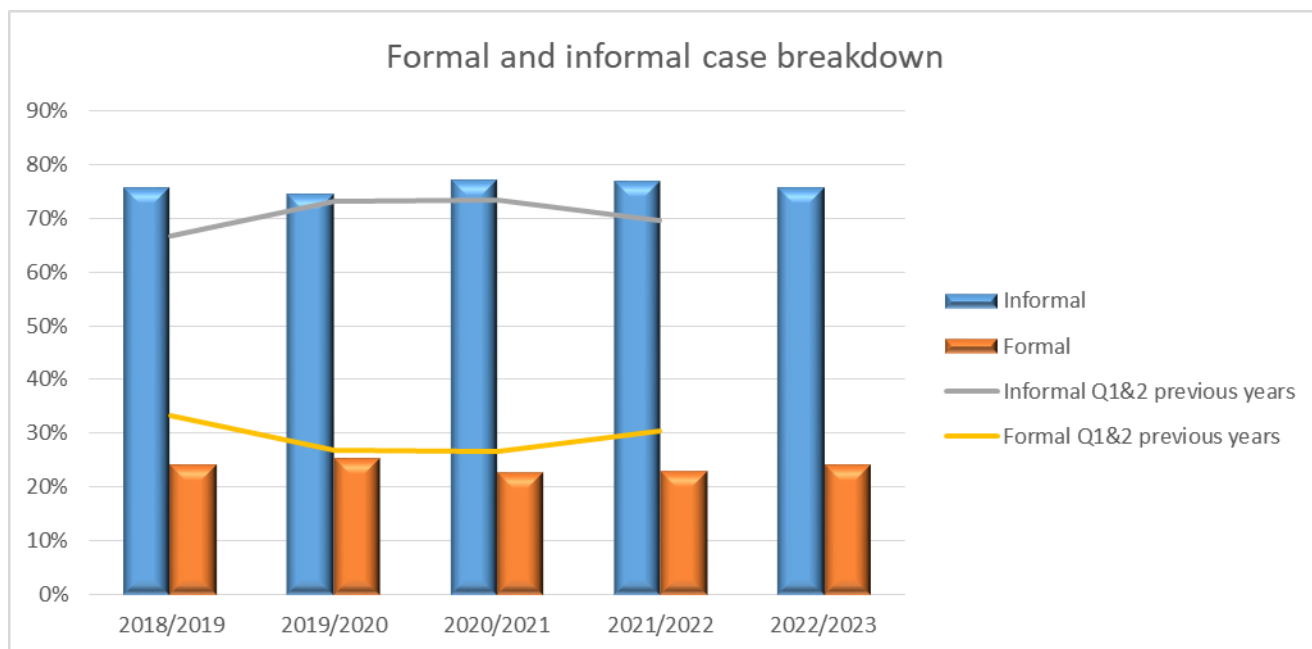
- 7.4 The data in this report covers Q1 and Q2 for 2022/23; where relevant, this has been compared with the same periods in previous years. Data is also split out for corporate and schools, and the data below refers to those cases within corporate teams.
- 7.5 Table 1 below, shows the number of formal and informal cases within corporate, for the previous full years, and with the equivalent figures for Quarters 1 and 2 shown for comparison. The figures track at a very similar rate, and therefore give no concern.

Table 1



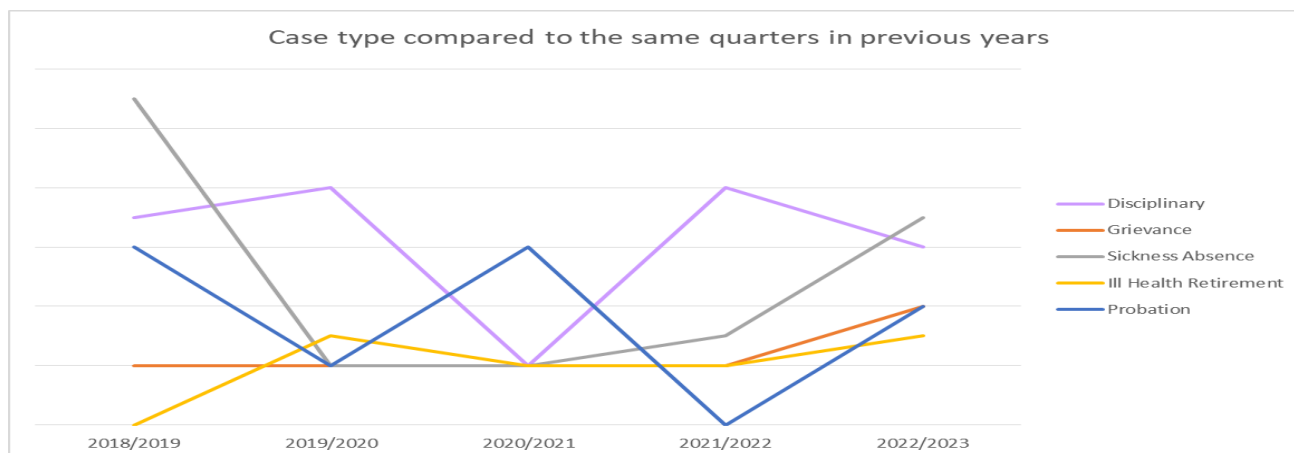
7.6 Table 2, below, shows the mix of informal and formal casework. For the four years shown, formal casework has made up between 23% and 27% of all cases recorded, and this is very stable. A significant proportion of informal casework relates to sickness absence, but it includes any advice and support given outside of a formal process. The first two quarters of 2022/23 follow the same pattern, suggesting the approach to handling cases has ongoing consistency.

Table 2



7.7 Table 3, below, shows the variation in the main types of cases over the same quarters in previous years (note – actual numbers are not given, to ensure confidentiality and data protection). As the numbers of cases are not high, it is difficult to draw accurate assessments of causality for any rise or fall in numbers. Anecdotally, it seems that disciplinary and grievance cases fell during 2020/21 due to changing work practices because of Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns e.g. with more employees working from home. This may also explain the increase in formal sickness absence cases, and 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. However, we stress that because of the small number of cases, no firm conclusions can be drawn.

Table 3



Sickness Absence

7.8 At the end of quarter 4 of 2021/22, the annualised number of days lost through sickness absence for the whole Council is calculated as **9.95 days**.

7.9 The equivalent figure for 2022/2023 Quarter 1 is **8.91 days** and for Quarter 2 is **9.64 days**.

7.10 Long-term absence is defined as continuous absence for more than 28 days. The three highest reasons for long-term absence in Q2 are:

- **Stress: 36.7% - 2021/22 comparison @ 47.0%**
- **Other: 20.5% - 2021/22 comparison @ 7.6%**
- **Musculo-skeletal problems: 9.7% - 2021/22 comparison @ 16.8%**

7.11 Looking at overall reasons for any sickness absence, the three highest reasons are:

- **Stress: 24.3%** – 2021/22 comparison @ 36.4%
- **Infections: 19.3%** - 2021/22 comparison @ 7.6%. This data includes both colds and COVID-19 absence.

Note: from 1st April 2022 Covid 19 absence was recorded as an infection and no longer separated out in reporting. As this is a new illness in addition to other infectious illnesses it is expected that figures would be higher than previous years and until such time as this settles in terms of cases.

- **Other: 16.7%** - 2021/22 comparison @ 8.3%

7.12 These figures reflect the main reasons for referral to our Occupational Health provider.

7.13 As reflected in the most recent data in April 2022 from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), absence reasons related to stress/anxiety, and COVID-related absences are trending as the main reasons for employee absence from work. Grounded in the wider frame of the global pandemic, and the more recent challenges that have appeared relating to the Cost of Living crisis, these figures are not unexpected. WBC employees may be both affected personally by these issues, while also dealing with the effects of them within the communities to whom we deliver, and therefore will not be immune to feeling these pressures.

Management processes

7.14 Sickness absence is reported by managers or services on the MyView portal, which is linked into the main HR and Payroll system.

7.15 The Council's Sickness Absence procedures include trigger points for action under the procedure. These are:

- Three or more sickness/injury absences in a rolling three month period

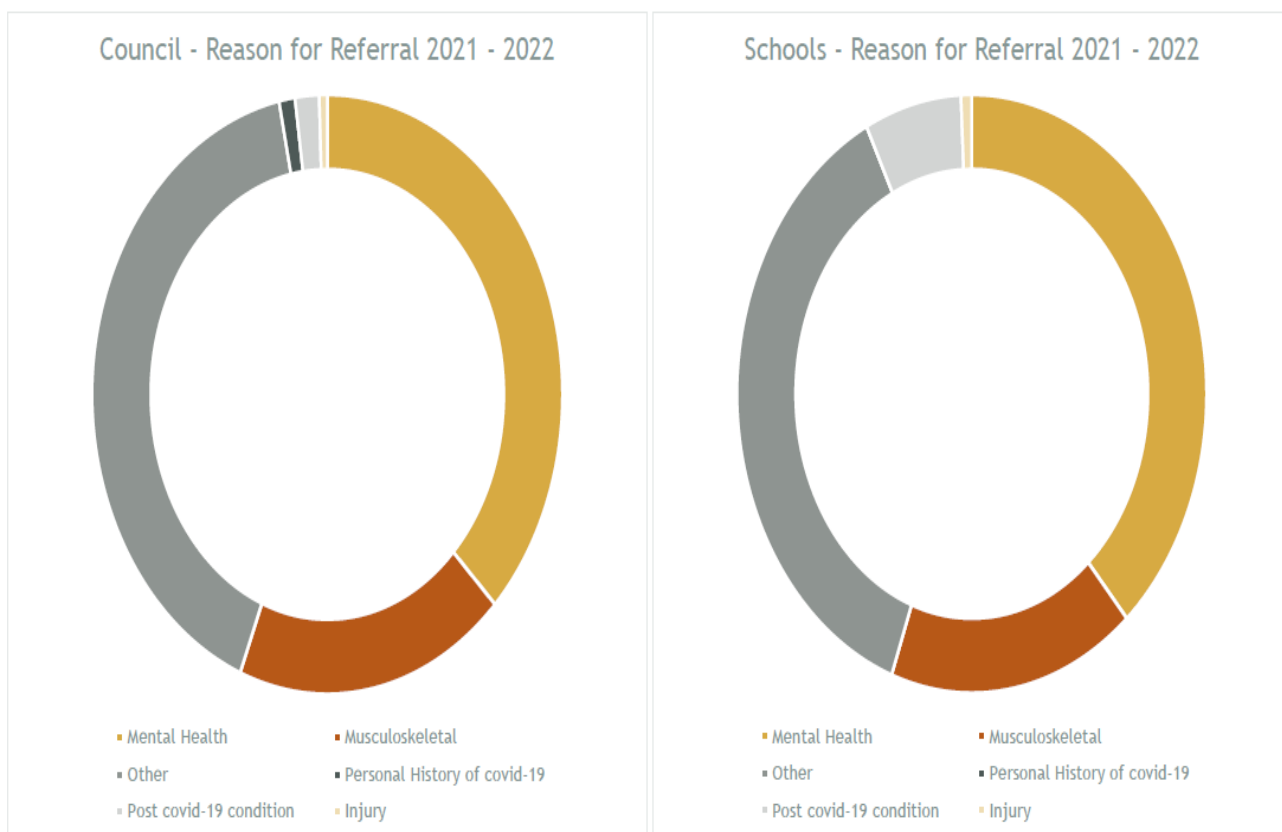
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- Unacceptable patterns of absence; for example a pattern of calling in sick the day before or after a weekend or bank holiday, or before or after annual leave.
- A period of long term absence of more than 28 calendar days (long term sickness absence) where the return to work date has not been specified or is of concern to the line manager

7.16 If any one of these triggers is met, the line manager is expected to undertake an informal sickness absence meeting with the individual. HR support is available for the planning and preparation of these meetings. Monthly reporting within HR is in place for employees who breach the triggers for long term and short term. All cases are followed up with the line manager to offer advice. This would usually result in a referral to Occupational Health as well as advice on the informal sickness absence meeting.

Occupational Health

7.17 Our Occupational Health provider, Cordell Health, has been in place since 5th October 2021, meaning that we now have a full year's worth of data. The reasons for referral over the past year are shown below:



As noted in Sections 7.10 and 7.11 above, the reasons that employees are presenting at Occupational Health mirror those that we're seeing reported internally. This reflects that managers are pro-actively seeking specialist advice from our providers to help support employees both during sickness absence and on their return to work, but also that wider circumstances relating to health, wellbeing and cost of living are continuing to impact individuals.

Additional support

7.18 The Council offers two sources of emotional support to employees. The first is confidential counselling with a local counsellor who meets our selection criteria including qualification, insurance and professional memberships. We commit to funding up to six sessions from a central budget, based on management referral.

7.19 The second source is the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) with Care First, which was implemented on 1st July 2020 as part of the Workforce strategy. The EAP provides a free access service to all corporate employees 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and can provide advice on a variety of topics as well as emotional support including counselling.

7.20 Measures for the Employee Assistance Programme vary widely. Since it was implemented in July 2020, we have seen up to 19 contacts per month. A recent review has taken place with the provider, and further sources of information and support have been highlighted. It is intended that the current contract will be extended for another two years, at a minimal increased cost per employee, giving access to the following benefits:

- Employee benefits platform and discounts
- Employee assistance programme
- My Possible Self wellbeing app
- On site and online gym discounts
- Green car scheme

7.21 At the time of writing, the contract is in the process of extension, and we will be planning and delivering a soft-launch around the increased benefits over the coming months.

7.22 In conclusion, it is considered that the Council has effective processes and procedures in place to support all employee relations and the relatively low rate of all formal cases, given the size of the Council's employee base, suggests that these are well understood and implemented.

8 Training

8.1 The Corporate Training Programme consists of Mandatory and Non Mandatory Training. The Corporate budget covers the cost of a small amount of courses and the Learning Management System Learning Time. Individual Departments and Services have their own training budgets to cover role specific qualifications or personal development. Corporate Training is delivered using a blended approach of E-learning, Virtual (Zoom or Teams) as well as Face to Face training. Our LMS (Learning Management System Learning Time) holds all of our training resources, you can book a course there or complete an e-learning session on the same site.

- 8.2 The programme is commissioned annually and HR work with key stakeholders within the Council to commission the courses based on the needs of the departments and employees collectively, as well as using the Training Needs analysis results, and objectives from the Workforce Strategy.
- 8.3 In March 2022 HR undertook a Training Needs Analysis survey. This was open to all staff to get their views on the training and learning they would like or need in the future to undertake their job roles. There were various significant areas of development mentioned in the results. One was Leadership & Management skills. We are currently seeking quotes for a Leadership and Management Programme, Aspiring Leaders Programme, and a Management Development Programme. These should be rolled out over the next year and enable staff and Managers to develop their knowledge and skills and ultimately progress their career further.
- 8.4 We are running a very successful programme of Resilience training, at different levels, for staff, Managers and Senior Managers. This was one of the areas highlighted in the training needs analysis results by staff. So far we have trained 312 staff and there are 2 further sessions planned, adding another 50 bookable spaces. The feedback on this course is 95% good or excellent. We have an excellent relationship with the training provider and are currently reviewing their resilience e-learning module to consider if this may be a way to embed resilience further into our offering.
- 8.5 We have listened to the needs of our staff via various methods and used the budget wisely to support them where we can. We have commissioned the following workshops on a face to face basis and the take up and feedback has been very positive:
- Financial Wellbeing sessions
 - The Menopause
 - Working and Managing in a Hybrid Way
 - Emotional Intelligence
 - Giving and Receiving Feedback
- 8.6 During the summer Certification (alerts for staff and managers for mandatory course attendance and reminders when a renewal is due) was launched. This also means Managers can look in Learning Time (current Learning Management System) and see what outstanding training their teams need to complete.
- 8.7 HR are still ensuring learning opportunities are as accessible as possible, whether face to face, over Zoom or Teams or via e-learning.
- 8.8 The Annual Corporate Training Programme is published on the intranet and shows what training is available to book within our Learning Management System - Learning Time. There is mandatory and non-mandatory training. For example, managers have different mandatory training to non-managers.
- 8.9 The figures below show the number of courses completed over the last four and a half years. This includes 6 months' worth of data for 2022, April- September. Data for 2018/2019 is skewed due to the introduction of mandatory e-learning for GDPR for all staff due to the introduction of new legislation which required all staff to complete a data protection refresher.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	1 st April to 30 th September 2022
Percentage % of employees completing any course (e-learning or classroom)	94.76	89.15	90.42	89.00	75.00
Total courses completed	8509	7376	7419	7722	4542

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 has their 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. As you can see the number of courses completed has increased which is down to more available training and the end of social distancing for face to face courses.

9 Wellbeing

One of the themes of Workforce Strategy is around Employee Wellbeing. The 3 actions are as stated below:

To increase wellbeing and resilience for all staff.

9.1 Mindfulness applications

Consideration was given to a proposal for investment in a digital wellbeing application, which was not pursued due to the in-year financial position of the Council. The focus will therefore be on the embedding, knowledge of and usage of current wellbeing initiatives. Corporate employees can access mindfulness practices through the Microsoft Viva application.

9.2 Mental Health First Aid

One of our four pillars of wellbeing is Mental and Emotional Wellbeing which forms part of a tailored programme of initiatives aimed at increasing employees' sense of value, supporting

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employees to manage their health and wellbeing, support life/work integration and develop personal and organisational resilience.

Within mental and emotional wellbeing we aim to:

- Support a culture of open discussion around emotional and mental health to reduce stigma
- Promote practical strategies supporting individuals to better manage their psychological wellbeing and develop personal resilience
- Provide access to support, advice and signposting including Mental Health First Aiders, Counselling and Employee Assistance Programme

Mental Health First Aid programme

The WBC workplace MHFA programme was launched in January 2022 and for 2022/23 is funded by Public Health. The Wellbeing Officer is the programme lead and manages the MHFA Working Group and Network.

The programme aims to recruit, train and support up to 10% of the workforce as MHFAiders by 2025, the training is delivered in-house by MHFA England trained WBC Education Psychologists.

Currently there are 63 trained MHFAiders. The MHFAiders have all volunteered to take on this additional role and responsibility as they want to support colleagues, reduce stigma and discrimination and to normalise conversations about mental health. The following table shows the breakdown of which Directorates the MHFAiders sit at present, and the breakdown of male versus female. We continue to support a diverse mix of applicants to train as MHFAiders.

MHFA - Directorate Overview

Place 13	People 36	Resources 13	CEO and Support 1	% of Establishment 4%
Women 11	Women 33	Women 10	Women 1	87%
Men 2	Men 3	Men 3		13%

Training of MHFAiders will continue for the next three years to reach our target of 10% of the workforce.

9.3 Workplace Health Initiatives

At West Berkshire Council we have a vision to create a workplace focused on health and wellbeing which supports all of our people to thrive and work well.

To support this vision the wellbeing proposition is defined within 4 pillars of wellbeing.

- Mental and Emotional Wellbeing
- Social Wellbeing
- Physical Wellbeing
- Financial Wellbeing



9.4 Our Wellbeing Pillars

Our Wellbeing Principles 2022-2024 will focus on four key pillars of integrated wellbeing underpinned by the 5 Ways to Wellbeing: Connect, Keep Active, Connect, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give to Others.

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing, developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF), are a set of evidence-based actions. A combination of all of these behaviours will help to enhance and support individual wellbeing.

Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

- To support a culture of open discussion around emotional and mental health to reduce stigma
- To promote practical strategies supporting individuals to better manage their psychological wellbeing and develop personal resilience
- To provide access to support, advice and signposting including Mental Health First Aiders, Counselling and Employee Assistance Programme

Physical Wellbeing

- To encourage individuals to take care of themselves and make positive steps around health and wellbeing
- To support a culture where individuals feel empowered and are educated about their physical wellbeing
- To support a healthy and safe working environment for all

Social Wellbeing

- To value the relationships we have with each other, our customers, service users and partners.
- To build healthy, collaborative, respectful, nurturing and supportive relationships, which includes good leadership, to foster a genuine community within WBC.
- To encourage community engagement to improve a sense of belonging and create strong links within the wider communities of West Berkshire.

Financial Wellbeing

- To provide financial education and access to support, advice and signposting to support individuals to know where and how to get help
- To communicate about financial wellbeing regularly through a range of channels, both to promote available support and encourage open discussion about financial issues.
- To support the principle of fair and equitable pay.
- To ensure reward and benefits policies allow opportunities to support employees at all stages of their lives.

9.4 The definitions and outcomes as stated above were developed through employee engagement sessions including a workshop for CLT and CMT and are being introduced during late 2022 and onwards.

WBC has a clear wellbeing proposition that is communicated to all employees through:

- A dedicated Wellbeing Hub on the intranet providing resources, support and links;
- Resources for team meetings and team communications;
- Wellbeing assets for noticeboards;
- Wellbeing updates in the Reporter and at Let's Chat;
- Wellbeing Calendar; and
- Wellbeing Conversations through 121's and other informal employee/manager catchups.

9.5 During 2022 a template for a Wellness Action Plan has also been set up and is available for use by employees and managers. The WAP template has been developed in partnership with Cordell Health, our Occupational Health provider as a supportive tool for employees who have long-term or recurring mental health issues, it can be used effectively for those suffering from stress-related ill-health, long-term physical issues or short-term post-injury recovery, due to the similar principles. These principles are to identify the work-related triggers and agree mitigating factors on both sides.

A Wellness Action Plan (WAP) helps to direct and consolidate conversations, as well as acting as 'permission' to revisit those conversations if any of the potential trigger points are noticed.

A Wellness Action Plan can be used by all employees whether they have a long term, recurring, short term or no ill health. A WAP allows people to plan in advance and develop tailored support for a time when they're not coping so well. It also facilitates open dialogue with managers – leading to practical, agreed steps which can form the basis for regular monitoring and review. It also enables managers and colleagues to understand how to anticipate and address risk of relapses for both mental health and long-term health conditions.

9.6 Menopause Pledge

WBC have signed up to the Menopause Pledge which is a nationally recognised pledge.

In signing the Menopause Workplace Pledge, we have committed to:

- Recognising that the menopause can be an issue in the workplace and women need support
- Talking openly, positively and respectfully about the menopause
- Actively supporting and informing your employees affected by the menopause

WBC have been running training and open discussion sessions on the menopause which has been well received and feedback positive.

Find out more about the Menopause Workplace Pledge campaign here:

<https://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk/campaigns/menopausepledge>

9.7 Women's and Men's Networking Groups

WBC have very recently set up a Women's Network and is encouraging employees to support a Men's Network. This was requested by employees to encourage more openness around those issues that affect men and women whilst in the workplace. Cllr Lynne Doherty joined the recent Women's Network to talk about herself and her career and this was very well received.

10 Conclusion

The contents of the report are for information for Personnel Committee on the 21st February 2023.

11 Appendices

None

Background Papers:

Not applicable

Officer details:

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