Update on HR Activity Q1 and Q2 - 2024/2025

Committee considering report:	Personnel Committee
Date of Committee:	14 January 2025
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Report Author:	Paula Goodwin, Vicky Holland, Karen Turner, Lorraine Collins, Melanie James, Samantha Hodson
Forward Plan Ref:	N/A

1   Purpose of the Report

1.1   This report is an information only report for the purposes of updating on HR activity for Q1 and Q2 of 2024/2025 for Personnel Committee, Corporate Board and Operations Board. This data excludes school workforce data.

1.2   This report is part of a bi-annual updates to the Personnel Committee and sets out some of the changes to HR activity and statistics in the current year. The report includes some of the detail behind the key statics, including to directorate level.

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 for Q1 and Q2 of 2024/2025 year.

4.2   This report provides an update on recruitment activity, training, wellbeing and performance management -casework. 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 first two quarters of the current year.

(b)   That there has been significant recruitment activity in the current year, with an increase in applicant numbers and new starters.

(c)   That the voluntary turnover figure for all staff has increased to 13.77% for the current year, from 12.47%.

(d)   That sickness absence has increased to 10.24 days per worker in the current year from 8.75 days per worker for the same period in 2023/24.

5   Employment Data

5.1   A full year of employment data is published at the end of each year i.e. following on from March annually. As this is a 6 monthly update then comparative data is not available, however some data has been produced for the purposes of the report.

5.2 See table below for headcount and post data for the last 4 years. (This data excludes all temporary posts and agency and off contract workers).

	2020/2021	**2021/2022**	**2022/2023**	**2023/2024**
Headcount	1545	1532	1511	1537
Post FTE	1621.98	1667.93	1731.10	1767.83
Occupied FTE	1366.44	1362.10	1357.90	1387.80
Vacant FTE	255.54	305.83	373.20	225

Total vacancy figures breakdown as of 26*th* November 2024	
No of vacant posts	225
Live adverts *(Note: some adverts are for multiple posts)*	32
Onboarding/Starting after the 1st December 2024	28
Agency workers excluding care homes	61
Vacant posts not accounted for *(Note: posts are either on hold, only recently vacant so awaiting instructions on recruitment or have no budget and require deletion).*	104

5.3 As reporting on the halfway point of the year, turnover has been calculated as both a 6 monthly and projecting annualised figure. Using the annualised turnover, this would see turnover of 13.77% if the same number of staff left in the second half of the year. This would see an increase from 12.47% to 13.77%. The average UK turnover is 14% or lower. Exit data is collated from leavers information and the reasons for leaving are as seen in the table below.

Reason for Leaving	Number of employees
Death in Service	3
Dismissal	3
End of Fixed Term Contract	5
Redundancy - Compulsory	1
Resignation	74
Retirement	15
Retirement - Ill Health	5

6.   Starters, Leavers and Turnover Q1 and Q2

6.1 Please see Appendix 1 which shows, starters, leavers and turnover for the past 5 years and as at the end of Q2 in 2024/25 year i.e. 30th September 2024.

7   Talent Attraction

7.1 We have had a total of 140 new starters in the period from 1st April 2024 through to 30th September 2024, this is an increase of 37% vs the previous six months. This figure is for new external applicants and does not include existing employees moving into new posts. As of 30th September 2024, there were also an additional 27 candidates awaiting imminent start dates with completed pre-employment checks.

We have received a total of 2314 applications in the period of 1st April 2024 through to 30th September 2024 vs a total of 1873 applications during 1st October 2023 through to 31st March 2024 which represents a 24% increase in applicant numbers.

7.2   We have successfully rolled out the recruitment and on boarding module of ITrent which replaces the Job Go Public ATS system.

Guidance for managers on using the system has been created and during the roll out, demo sessions were set up to walk managers through how to use the system to effectively manage their vacancies.

Managers can now arrange interviews via the system – offering candidates flexibility to select the most convenient interview slot for them. This also increases the visibility of the number of interviews happening within the organisation.

We are currently working on the next phase of the roll out which is developing reports and media tracking. As ITrent does not have a dedicated talent pooling functionality we are also working on setting up a vacancy newsletter to keep unsuccessful candidates up to date with other vacancies.

8   Early Careers

8.1   Over the past six months, we have made progress in developing our early careers offering, a key achievement has been the partnership with Kennet School's new T-Level centre, where we have established a strong relationship. During this period, we hosted nine T-Level students, including four who worked closely with the early careers team and provided valuable feedback on attracting young talent. In response we have enhanced our apprenticeship case studies, improved careers information, and increased our presence in schools.

We have been active in promoting careers at seven local career fairs and as members of the Apprenticeships Ambassador Network, we are staying informed on developments to ensure our offer remains competitive.

We have increased our focus on graduate and postgraduate apprenticeships in the last twelve months with a 177% increase in Level 6 and a 133% increase in Level 7 learners being enrolled. This increased emphasis on graduate apprenticeships spans a range of disciplines with a specific focus on our hard to fill areas including Legal, Social Work and Occupational Therapy.

Over the period of April to October 2024, we have hosted 24 work experience students which is an increase of 60% vs the previous six months. We have hosted 9 T-Level students on placements which is an increase of 50% vs the previous six months.

Our achievements have been recognised externally, including the Large Employer award and Apprentice of the Year with West Berkshire Training Consortium.

9.   EVP

9.1   We have successfully launched our new EVP and careers site on 1st October 2024. The creation of our EVP has been a collaborative effort across the council, shaped by the

feedback through surveys, workshops and conversations across the organisation. These insights helped us identify key themes that matter most to our employees, including career development, wellbeing, flexibility, and the importance of making a meaning impact within our community.

From these themes, we developed our EV, which embodies the promise we make to our existing workforce and to potential candidates.

The EVP "Working with us" document can be viewed here Working with us but below are some images.
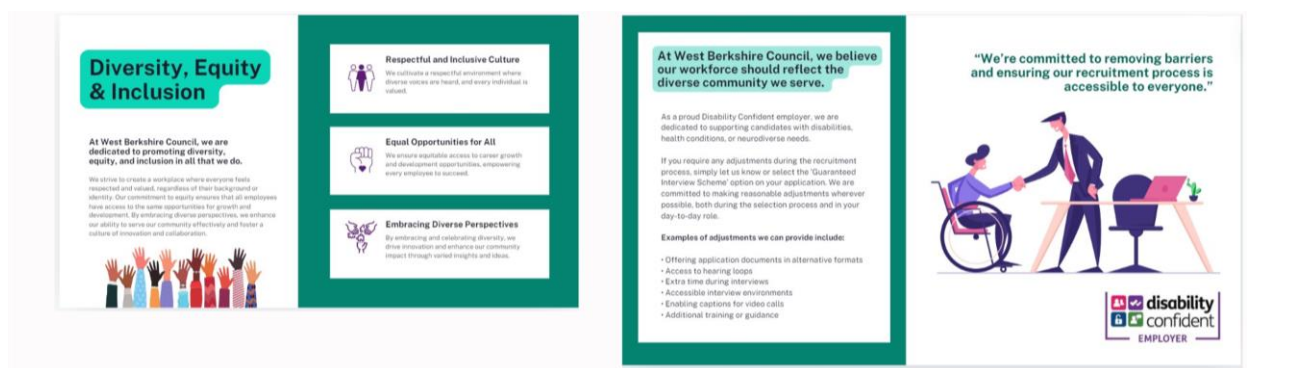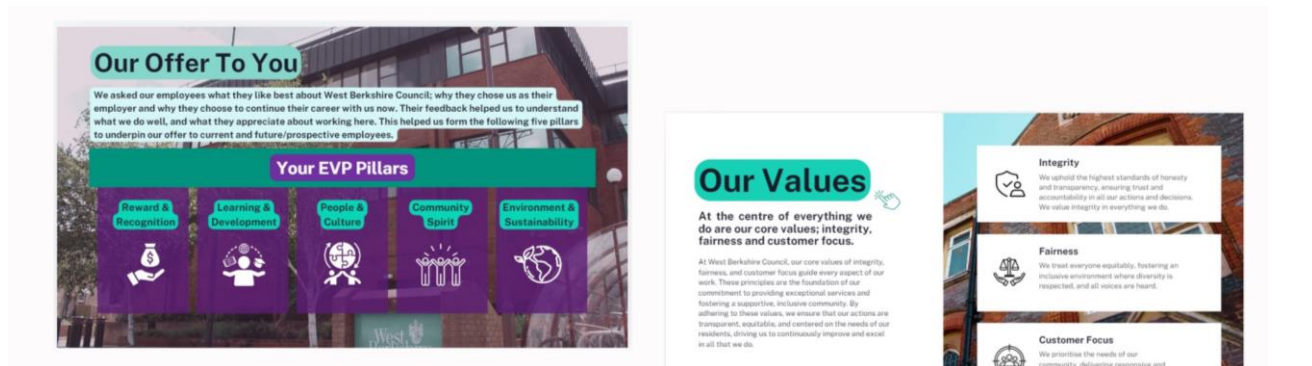
Alongside the EVP document we have worked with the comms team to create video case studies and design assets for social media, banners and posters.

Further work to build on our video and written case studies is ongoing and a three-month social media plan has been developed.

9.2 Our use of social media for recruitment will be rolled into BAU to ensure that when the comms team are out filming, we have a "working with us" slant to continue to build on our assets. We are great at showcasing the results of our work to the residents but aim moving forward is to extend that spotlight to the team behind that work and showcase the breadth of careers and projects we can offer future talent.

9.3 By launching the new Careers Site, we're making it easier for people to explore the opportunities available, reinforcing West Berkshire Council as an 'employer of choice'. The site showcases all the great things we offer, from our diverse range of roles to the benefits that make a career with us so rewarding.

We are tracking the traffic coming to the site, in the first two weeks we had a 61% increase in new users and 59% increase in existing user's vs the same period last year.

10 Agency

10.1 As of 10th September 2024, the number of agency workers is down a further 15% vs April 2024 from 169 to 144.

The forecast spend for this year on agency is around £7M VS £9.5M in 2023 and £12M in 2022.

A total of 45 agency workers have now moved into direct employment since May 2023 which has saved a total of £726,000.

11 Performance Management – Casework

Context

11.1 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.

11.2 This report gives figures for the Q1 and Q2 of 2024/2025 and excludes schools' data.

11.3 Table 1 below, shows the number of formal and informal cases within <u>corporate</u> for five full years plus Q1 and Q2 of 2024/2025. The numbers have slightly increased on the same period last year but are statistically insignificant.
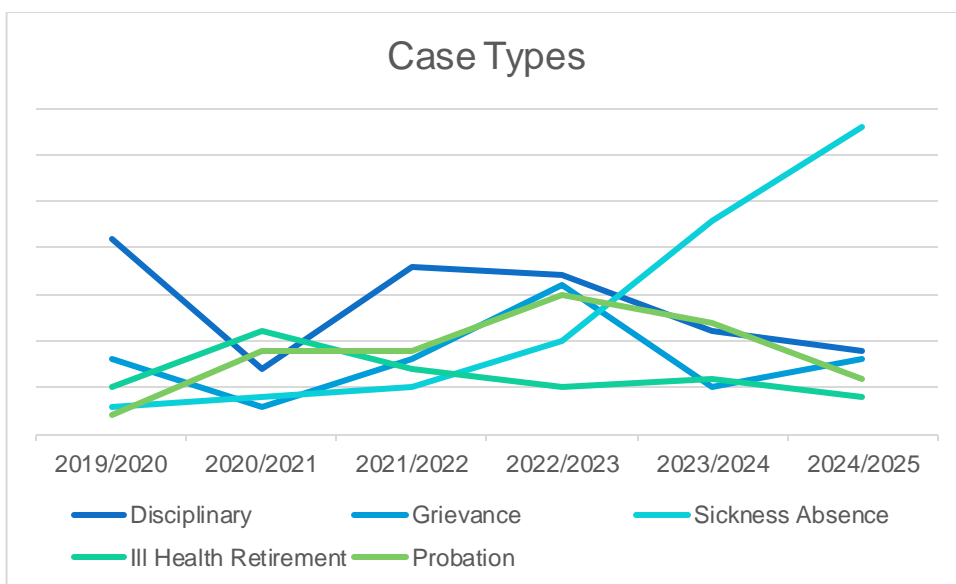
Table 1
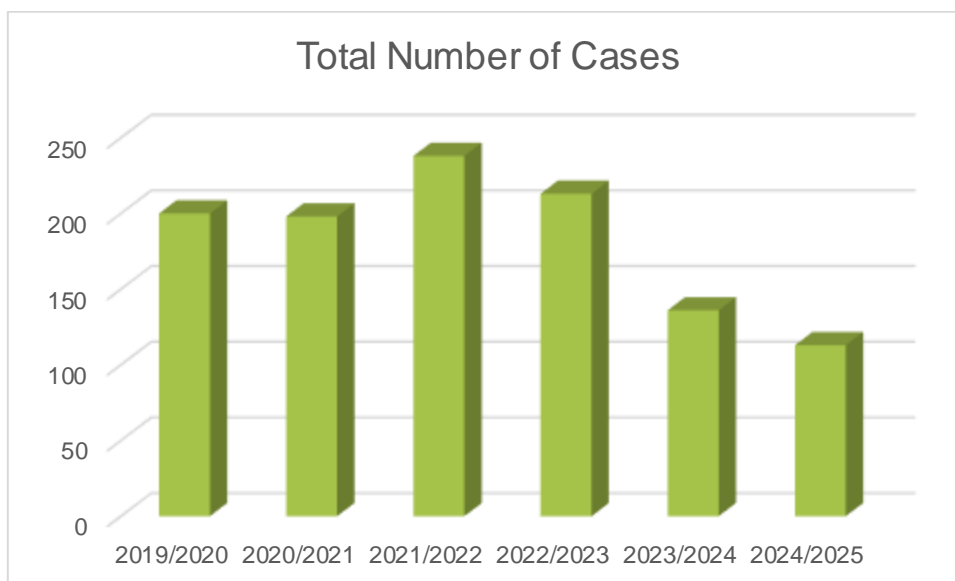
11.4 Table 2, below, shows the mix of informal and formal casework. During the previous four years as well as Q1 and Q2 for 20244/2025.
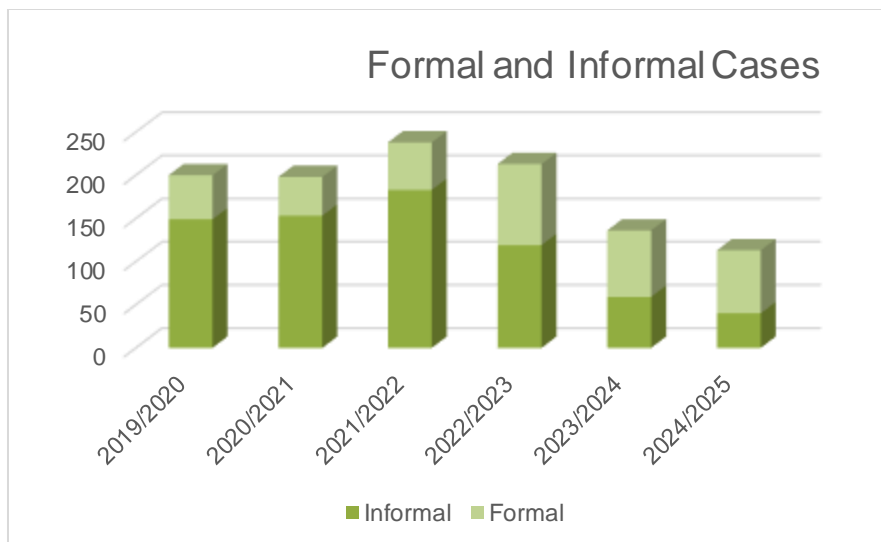
Table 2

11.5 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 are on the rise in 2024/2025.

Table 3

12   Sickness Absence

12.1 The Councils working days lost per person due to sickness absence as at the end of Q2 2024/25 is at 10.24 days. The table below shows the year end outturn absence figures for the previous 4 years for comparison purposes.

	2020/21	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**	**Q1 & Q2 of 2024/25**
Days lost per person	7.15	9.95	9.90	10.69	10.24

Note that so far this year:

- This is 4.2% (0.45) working days below the 2023/24 Council year end out turn figure of 10.69 days lost per employee.

12.2   The table below shows thew number of days lost per person by Directorate based on Q1 & Q2 2024/2025 year to date figures.

	2021/22	**2022/23**	**2023/24**	**2024/25** Annualised based on Q1&Q2 sickness reported
Resources	6.0	6.5	6.2	7.6
People	12.0	11.6	NA	NA
People ASC	NA	NA	18.1	16.3
People CFS	NA	NA	8.5	7.8
Place	8.6	8.8	7.0	8.6

Note: People ASC sickness levels not including Care Homes would reduce down from 16.3 12.0 days lost per person within the Directorate

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

12.4   Q1 and Q2 shows annualised working days lost per person was at 14.5% (1.49 working days) above the reported Q2 2023/24 annualised figure of 8.75 days lost per employee. The Q2 2024/25 figure of 2.88 working days lost per person is 28% (0.64 working days) above the reported Q1 2024/25 figure of 2.24 days lost per person.

Short term vs Long Term absence

12.5   Long term absence is defined as a continuing sickness absence of more than 28 consecutive calendar days.

12.6   Up to the end of Q2 for the period 2024/25 the overall absence related to employees with long term sickness absence is 60.1% of all sickness absences (4,750 days lost); for the same period in 2023/24 this was 63.3% (4,230.5 days lost). This shows a slight increase in long term absence.

12.7   Short term absence is defined as a period of sickness absences less than 28 calendar days in one occasion. Up to the end of Q2 for the period 2024/25 short term absence has increased to 39.9% (3,153 days lost); for the same period in 2023/24 this was 36.7% of all sickness absences (2,448.5 days lost).

Absence Reasons

12.8   Up to the end of Q2 2024/25 the most common reason for long term absence is "Mental health conditions". The most common reason for short term absence is "Minor illnesses – which includes coughs/colds and flu; sickness/nausea and diarrhoea". The most common reason for both short term and long-term absence in 2023/24 was "Mental health conditions".

In total, 33.4% of all Q1 and Q2 2024/25 year to date sickness absence (long term and short term) was due to "Mental health conditions" compared to 33.2% in 2023/24.

12.9 '" Mental health conditions" remain the significant reason for long term sickness, with Q1 and Q2 showing the same trend as last year (2,042 days) compared to 2,018 days for the same period in 2023/24.

12.10 Human Resources are addressing the levels of sickness absence within the Council, by ongoing policy and training reviews with line managers. Ensuring that managers are supporting employees from the onset of the sickness absence.

Benchmarking

12.11 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.

12.12 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 of 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.

12.13 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.

12.14 The 23rd annual CIPD Health and Wellbeing at work report published on 12th October 2023, supported by Simply Health shows the highest sickness absence rate for over a decade. The average rate of employee absence stands 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 be noted that the CIPD data will include a variety of organisations and therefore is not a direct comparator for the Council.

13 Appraisals

13.1 WBC requires employees to have an annual appraisal. The annual appraisals, are utilised to ensure that there is a balance between the strategic objectives of the Council, the respective service and to help staff development. While appraisal and performance management data was imported from the old HR system, reported completion rates are lower than before the change of HR system. This is likely to be manager adjusting to the new way of reporting appraisal dates.

13.2 The below table is the appraisal data for each quarter of 2024/2025. Data was not available in Q1 because manager self-service was not available through ITrent. It is reported for the first time from iTrent for Q2. Further promotion to input appraisals and 1:1s will continue before the next reporting period.

13.3 We are hopeful that the introduction of the Performance Review module in iTrent along with workflow and scheduling in Employee Self Service will encourage managers and staff to complete and record objectives with ease.

Appraisal/Performance Management Completions %	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
People – Adult Social Care	92.93	90.42	n/a	73.16
People – Children & Families	74.55	70.76	n/a	46.29
Place	87.68	85.11	n/a	65.27
Resources	75.81	74.13	n/a	59.81
Total	83.79	81.16	n/a	61.86

14 Training

14.1 The Corporate Training Programme consists of Mandatory and Non-Mandatory Training and runs annually between April and March.

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 is large due to the nature of their service.

Learning is face to face or virtual, or learning. Courses are run by subject matter experts, some internal and some external. We work closely with our Apprenticeship partners to run bitesize sessions as well as other training organisations and internal subject matter experts.

From 1st April 2024 to the present, we have been running a variety of training face to face and virtual, whilst we implement our new Learning platform Docebo, which will be known as **Learning Hub**. There has been a delay with the Learning platforms as we have experienced some issues around the licence requirements.

Learning Hub will roll out from November 2024 starting with the EDI module and other mandatory e-learning. Staff will work through mandatory e-learning initially giving them a chance to focus on the mandatory training. The Learning Hub has the potential to host other medias of training for example, videos, presentations, links to webinars and other training mediums.

14.2 The summary below shows an example of what Corporate Training has been running from April – September 2024

Course Title	No of Sessions	Delegates Trained
Fire Awareness	4	39
Personal Safety	3	34
Health and Safety for Staff	1	7
Performance Management Framework	3	36
Budget Manager Training	3	66
Governance - Report Writing Training	3	49
Behaviour Framework for Staff & Managers	1	6
Data Protection Security Essentials	25	631
ITrent Recruitment Module Training	3	45
Sickness Absence	1	12
Managing the Probation process	1	12
Apprentices Wellbeing workshops	2	22
Stress Awareness	1	33
Meditation practice	1	30
Mental Health Awareness Week – Mental health and movement	1	74
Menstrual and menopause health	2	3
Sleep	1	80
Suicide Awareness	1	73
Team Development Session	1	7
Induction for CFS	3	25
Total	**61**	**1284**

14.3 We do have further training booked between October 24 through to March 2025 in the following areas.

Equality Diversity and Inclusion training
Managing Difficult Conversations/Courageous Conversations
Hybrid Working - Managing Remote Teams
Mental Health First Aider Training
Worker Protection Act Training
Managing Change
Courageous Conversations
Leadership & Management

15   Wellbeing

15.1 The Wellbeing at Work Programme sits within our corporate training offering and continues to support employee wellbeing through universal and targeted services and support. Our Occupational Health provider continues to review employees face-to-face or via video/phone consultation; our Employee Assistance Programme is available 24/7. Through the EAP employees can self-refer to access up to six free counselling sessions; our mental health first aiders continue to deliver on the aims of reducing stigma and discrimination and normalising mental health conversations; and our internal wellbeing provision provides an increasing range of education, team development, services and sign posting.

The wellbeing hub on the intranet is dedicated to employee wellbeing and 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 provides space for employees to support their wellbeing, for religious practice and space for breastfeeding employees to express. The calendar of wellbeing education events has seen an increase in attendance following the changes to how employees are invited to participate. The Equality Staff Forum is moving into an action focused space, the first success was creating top tips for employees on how to thrive in an open office environment.

From October 2024 employee wellbeing, equity and engagement will be led by Employee Experience Specialist in the Workforce Development Team. Priority areas for this new HR function will include Workers Protection Act 2023 and employee related actions within the EDI Framework.

16   Conclusion

The contents of the report are for information for Personnel Committee on the 14 January 2025

17   Appendices

Appendix A – Starters and Leavers – 5 years from 1 April 2020 – 30 September 2024

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

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

Appendix A

Starters and Leavers – 5 years (1st April 2020 to 30th September 2024)

	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025 Q1-Q2
Number of starters	175	210	247	219	121
Number of leavers	142	220	242	190	106
Turnover (%)	9.29%	14.30%	15.9%	12.47%	6.88% (6 months) 13.77% annualised
Voluntary turnover (%)	8.44%	13.00%	14.86%	11.09%	5.78% (6 months) 11.56% Annualised
Average length of service of leavers	6y 8m	7y	5y 9m	7y 7m	8y 6m
Average length of service of employees employed at year end	8y 8m	8y 9m	8y 10m	8y 9m	8y 7m

	2020/21	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025 Q1-Q2
Stability index (% employees at year end with 12 or more months' service)	90.29%	89.43%	86.3%	89.13%	88.4%

Appendix B

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

	2020/2021	**2021/2022**	**2022/2023**	**2023/2024**	**2024/2025 Q2**
Under 25	18.29	20.95	9.72	11.42	4.53
25-34	26.86	22.86	25.10	33.33	29.37
35-44	17.71	23.33	25.91	25.11	26.12
45-54	24.00	21.90	21.05	20.09	24.86
55-64	12.00	9.52	17.00	8.22	15.12
65+	1.14	1.43	1.21	1.83	0.00

Appendix C

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

	2020/21	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**	**2024/25 Q2**
Under 25	5.63	9.09	5.79	5.26	5.66
25-34	16.20	12.73	23.97	16.32	12.26
35-44	21.13	19.55	21.07	21.58	25.47
45-54	21.83	22.73	19.83	24.21	15.09
55-64	22.54	21.36	19.83	17.37	25.47
65+	12.68	14.55	9.50	14.74	16.04