
Update on HR

Activity Q1 and Q2 - 2025/2026

Committee considering report:	Personnel Committee
Date of Committee:	13 January 2026
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Vicky Poole
Report Author:	Karen Turner, HRBP Manager,
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 2025/2026 for Personnel Committee (13 January 2026), Corporate Board (25 November 2025) and Executive Briefing (4 December 2025). This data excludes school workforce data and only covers corporate WBC employees.
- 1.2 This report is part of bi-annual updates to the Personnel Committee and sets out some of the changes to HR activity and statistics in the current year. The report includes some of the detail behind the key statistics, including to directorate level.

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:	This is an information only report so there are no direct implications from the outcome of the report. All activity is part of HR BAU.

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>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 in November 2025, December 2025 and January 2026 to provide an update on the HR matters contained within the report for Q1 and Q2 of 2025/2026 year, i.e 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025.
- 4.2 This report provides an update on recruitment activity, training, employee experience 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 14.18% (projected) for the current year, from 10.4%.
 - (d) That sickness absence has decreased to 8.79 days per worker (projected) for the current year from 10.24 days per worker for the same period in 2024/25. HR have seen greater activity with management of sickness absence
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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, i.e after Q4. As this is a 6 monthly update then comparative data is not always available, however some data has been produced for the purposes of the report.
- 5.2 See the table below for headcount and post data for the last 4 years on the establishment. (This data excludes all temporary posts and agency and off contract workers).

	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026 Q1 Q2
Headcount	1532	1511	1537	1552	1549
Post FTE	1667.93	1731.10	1767.83	1650.95	1670.41
Occupied FTE	1362.10	1357.90	1387.80	1412.92	1399.85
Vacant /Other FTE <i>Note: this includes all part posts and full post vacant FTE</i>	305.83	373.20	225	238.03	270.56

Total vacancy figures breakdown as of 30 th September 2025	
No of vacant posts (excluding part post FTE vacant)	256
Posts being recruited to (advert/shortlisting/interviewing)	57
<i>(Note: some adverts are for multiple posts)</i>	
Onboarding/start dates confirmed after 30 th September 2025	74
Agency workers filling vacant posts excluding care homes	45
Vacant posts held	80

- 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 17.15% if the same number of staff left in the second half of the year (all leavers not just voluntary). This would see an increase from 12.9% to 17.15%%. The national average turnover rate in the UK is around 15%. 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
Resignation	99
TUPE transfer out	12
Retirement	11
End of Fixed Term Contract	4
Dismissal	3

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Retirement – Ill Health	2
Redundancy – Compulsory	1
Death in Service	1

Leavers by Length of Service for Q1 & Q2 2025/2026

Length of Service	Number of Employees
Under 1 Years Service	32
1 – 4 Years Service	40
5 - 9 Years Service	29
10 – 14 Years Service	5
15 - 24 Years service	19
25 + Years Service	8

Leavers By Directorate	Number of Leavers
People ASC	29
Children's Services	45

Place	28
Resources	31

5.4 Exit Data

For Q1 & Q2 of 2025/2026 there has been 133 leavers. We ask everyone that leaves to complete an exit interview either online or face to face and they are given the option to do the exit interview with a member of the HR Business Partnering Team. 15.78% of leavers have completed an exit interview

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 2025/26 year i.e. 30th September 2025.

7 Talent Attraction

- 7.1 We have had a total of 145 new starters in the period from 1st April 2025 through to 30th September 2025, compared to 140 in the same period in 2024 – these are new external applicants. In addition to this figure, we have had a total of 57 internal movers, compared to 139 in the same period in 2024. As of 30th September 2025, there were also an additional 61 candidates awaiting imminent start dates with completed pre-employment checks.
- 7.2 We have received a total of 3393 applications in the period of 1st April 2025 through to 30th September 2025, compared to a total of 2314 applications in the same period of 2024. This represents a 32% increase in applicant numbers.
- 7.3 Use of iTrent for Recruitment has been embedded and managers are getting used to the system. We have developed a number of reports and are still working on developing more. We are in the early stages of setting up a vacancy newsletter to keep unsuccessful candidates up to date with other vacancies.
- 7.4 Since April 2025 we have managed a large number of senior recruitment campaigns, successfully recruiting to the Chief Executive position, as well as the Executive Director Resources, and two Service Directors.
- 7.5 We launched an applicant experience survey in February 2025, and received 162 responses from 1st April to 30th September 2025. Approximately 60% of respondents would recommend applying at West Berkshire Council to people they know, and approximately 75% of respondents felt that the application process met, exceeded or greatly exceeded their expectations.
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EDI in Recruitment

- 7.6 We have updated our application form to ensure we are compliant with the latest government guidance on EDI data collection.
- 7.7 We are working on reports to enable us to analyse and interpret EDI at recruitment level.
- 7.8 West Berkshire Council has achieved the Silver Award in the Employer Recognition Scheme for the Armed Forces Covenant, and we are also signed up to the Care Leavers Covenant. Care Leavers are put forward for interview where they meet the essential criteria for the role they have applied for, in the same way applicants who declare a disability are.

EVP and Careers site

- 7.9 The new EVP and careers site was launched just over a year ago. Work is continuing to build on our video and written case studies.
- 7.10 Use of social media for recruitment has been increased, and we are doing regular 'Job of the Week' campaigns.
- 7.11 The careers site home page had 39,960 views between 25th April 2025 and 25th September 2025, which is a 76.41% increase on last years 13,117 views.

Agency

- 7.12 As of 30th September 2025, the number of agency workers is down a further 39% in comparison to 10th September 2024, from 144 to 88.
- 7.13 The forecast spend for this year on agency (Comensura) is around £5.7M, down from £7M in 2024 and £9.5M in 2023.
- 7.14 8 agency workers have moved into direct employment between 1st April 2025 and 30th September 2025. This has saved a total of £76,318.
- 7.15 Since 1st April 2024 this totals 28 workers, and a saving of £421,231.

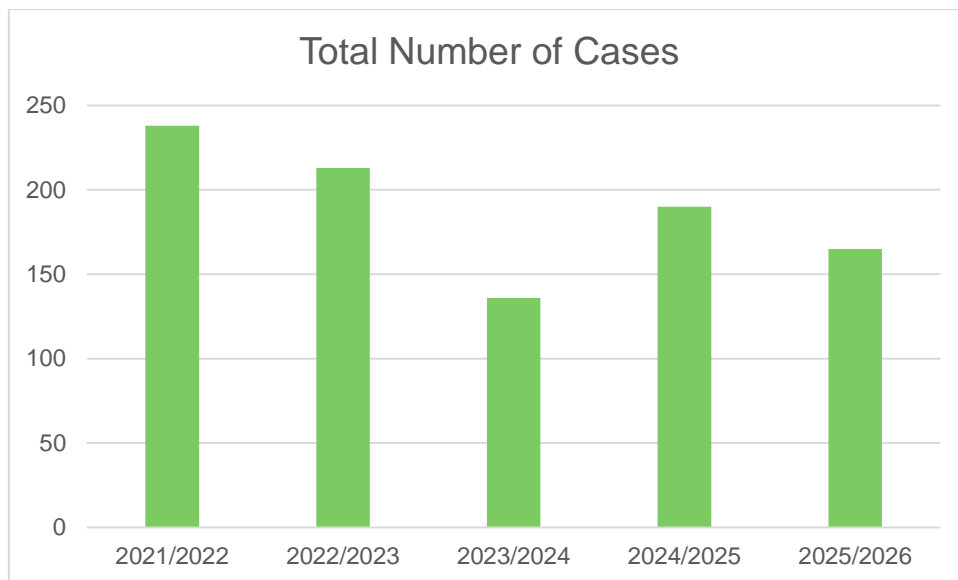
8 Performance Management – Casework

Context

- 8.1 For the purposes of this report, this includes:
- Disciplinary and capability
 - Grievances
 - Sickness absence, ill-health retirement, and related adjustments
 - TUPE, restructures, and redundancies.
- 8.2 This report gives figures for the Q1 and Q2 of 2025/2026 and excludes schools' data.
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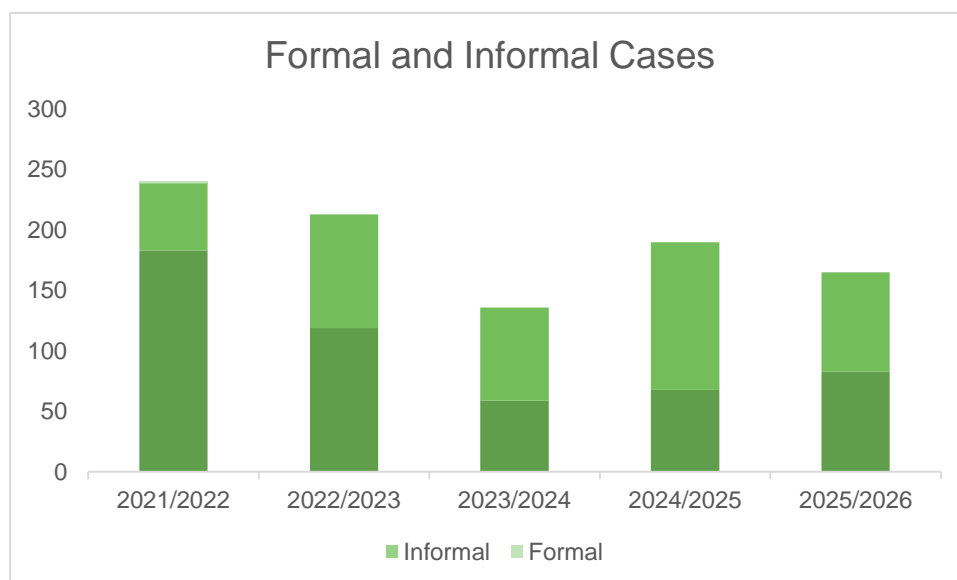
8.3 Table 1 below, shows the number of formal and informal cases within West Berkshire Council (excluding schools) for four full years plus Q1 and Q2 of 2025/2026. The numbers have slightly increased on the same period last year but are statistically insignificant.

Table 1



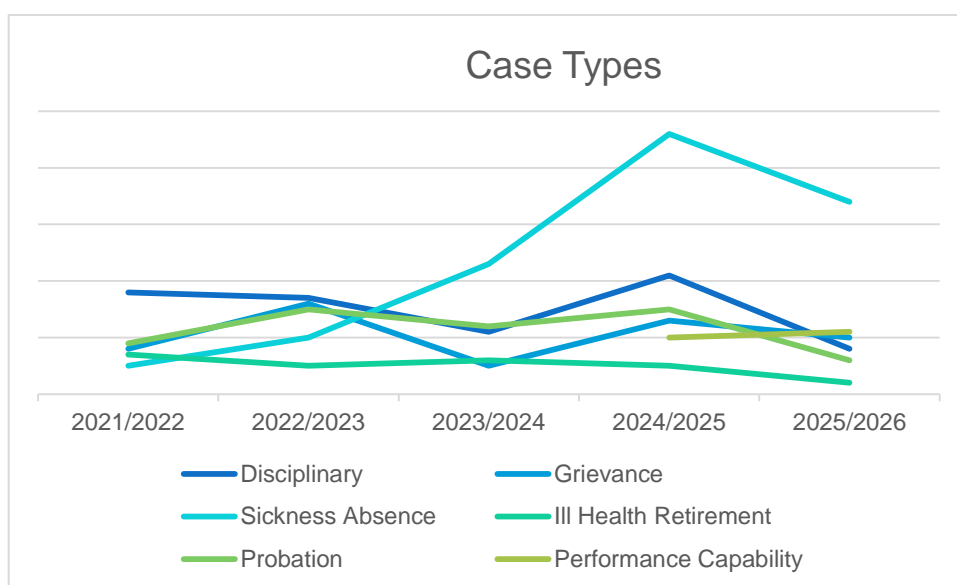
8.4 Table 2, below, shows the mix of informal and formal casework. During the previous four years as well as Q1 and Q2 for 2025/2026.

Table 2



8.5 Table 3, below, shows the variation in the main types of cases over the previous 4 years and Q1 & Q2 of 2025/2026 (note – actual numbers are not given, to ensure confidentiality and data protection).

8.6 Table 3



9 Sickness Absence

9.1 The Councils working days lost per person due to sickness absence as at the end of Q2 2025/26 is (projected) as 8.79 days. The table below shows the year end outturn absence figures for the previous 4 years for comparison purposes.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Projected 2025/26 based on Q1&Q2
Days lost per person	9.95	9.90	10.69	10.13	8.79

Note: so far this year, this is 13.2% (1.34 working days) below the 2024/25 Council year end out turn figure of 10.13 days lost per employee.

9.2 The table below shows the number of days lost per person by Directorate based on Q1 & Q2 2025/2026 year to date figures.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Projected 2025/26 based on Q1&Q2 sickness reported
Resources	6.0	6.5	6.2	7.5	7.6
People	12.0	11.6	NA	NA	NA
People ASC	NA	NA	18.1	15.4	12.3
Children's Services	NA	NA	8.5	8.5	7.9
Place	8.6	8.8	7.0	8.5	7.0

Note: People ASC sickness levels not including Care Homes, Resource Centres and MI Reablement and Sensory Needs would reduce down from 12.3 days to 8.9 days lost per person within the Directorate.

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



9.4 Q1 and Q2 shows annualised working days lost per person was at 8.79 (1.44 working days) below the reported Q2 2024/25 annualised figure of 10.13 days lost per employee.

Short term vs Long Term absence

- 9.5 Long term absence is defined as a continuing sickness absence of more than 28 consecutive calendar days.
- 9.6 Up to the end of Q2 2025/26 the overall absence related to employees with long term sickness absence is 53.9% of all sickness absences (3,678.5 days lost); for the same period in 2024/25 this was 60.1% (4,750 days lost). This shows a decrease in long term absence.
- 9.7 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 2025/26 short term absence has slightly decreased to 3,143.5 days lost (46.1%); for the same period in 2024/25 this was 3,153 days lost (39.9%) of all sickness absences.

Absence Reasons

- 9.8 Up to the end of Q2 2025/26 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 2024/25 was “Mental health conditions”.

In total, 29.0% of all Q1 and Q2 2025/26 year to date sickness absence (long term and short term) was due to “Mental health conditions” compared to 33.4% in 2024/25.

- 9.9 “Mental health conditions” remain the significant reason for long term sickness, with Q1 and Q2 showing the same trend as last year 1,500 day) compared to 2,042 days for the same period in 2024/25.
- 9.10 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

- 9.11 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes an annual survey on workplace absence for all sectors. The 2024 report published in 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. This is the latest data available from ONS.
- 9.12 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 of 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 levels.
- 9.13 The 2025 CIPD Wellbeing at work report published in September 2025, supported by Simply Health shows that the average absence levels have increased to 9.4 days per
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employee per year compared to 7.8 days in 2023 and 5.8 days in 2022 for all employment sectors.

- 9.14 Employee absence rates have risen across the board but remain their highest in the public sector at 13.3 days per employee per year as stated in the CIPD report. West Berkshire Council sickness data currently sits at 8.79 days per employee per year.

10 Appraisals

- 10.1 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 managers adjusting to the new way of reporting appraisal dates.
- 10.2 We are hopeful that the introduction of the Reviews module in iTrent along with workflow and scheduling in Employee Self Service will encourage managers and staff to complete and record objectives with more ease. These processes are being tested and with some new functionality due next year we will hope to release more guidance and training around this process. These rates are not evidence that appraisals are not taking place as dates alone are recorded in iTrent at present. The responsibility for ensuring that appraisals and other measures of performance management sit with line managers and there are a variety of procedures, educational materials and advice available to support managers undertaking such processes.

11 Workforce Development

Corporate Training

- 11.1 The Corporate Training Programme consists of Mandatory and Non-Mandatory Training and runs annually between April and March. Data for training managed by Directorates is not reported here as is not recorded in a central record and so reporting is unable to take place.

For 2025/2026 corporate training has mostly been delivered at zero cost due to savings required from the corporate training budget. We have made use of our Learning Hub which hosts our suite of mandatory training. The Learning Hub gives us the opportunity to make other non-mandatory modules available to staff. Some of these are soft skills, for example; dealing with customers over the phone, mindfulness, and resilience, but many more modules are available.

There have been **3087** e-learning course completions over Quarters 1 & 2, which we hope to build on as we review more content and release to staff. Neurodiversity Awareness has had over **750** completions over the last 2 quarters.

There has been a positive move to SME's (subject matter experts) throughout the Council delivering learning sessions virtually or in-person. In May the Council took part in the national Learning at Work Week event with the theme "Get Connected". Over **325** delegates attended sessions, and the sessions have continued, and become part of our training offering. This includes iTrent awareness sessions, AI Webinars, and Co-production workshops now appearing in the corporate training programme regularly.

- 11.2 The Workforce Development team organise the corporate training programme and are the official administrators for the Learning Hub which hosts all e-learning. The Learning Hub also hosts Social Care Training e-learning as well as in-person training, which is run specifically by the Directorate and supported by Workforce Development. The Learning Hub hosts courses on behalf of Democratic Services for Members also, which went live over the summer. Emergency Planning are using iTrent for their training bookings which is managed by Workforce Development. We used iTrent to organise the Annual Employee Meetings that took place in the Summer and was attended by **216** staff.

PREVENT training has now become a mandatory course for all staff. There is a link to the module and instructions on the Learning Hub. As of the end of September we had **77** completions recorded in iTrent.

Looking forward over Quarters 3 & 4 the introduction of the "Lead with Confidence" workshops, "Supporting Wellbeing and Attendance", "Recognition" and Reasonable Adjustments" has been popular for bookings from September 2025.

Other future training plans include specific iTrent workshops for Managers focussing on the People Manager module, and Pension Awareness sessions.

- 11.3 Over Quarters 1 & 2 there have been a total of 47 sessions held with a total of 1204 delegates. These sessions held were a variety of virtual or in-person workshops.

Early Careers

- 11.4 Over the past six months, Early Careers have continued to actively support local schools and students through work experience, T-Level placements, and paid internships. Some key highlights include:

- **The Family Hub in Thatcham** has remained a strong partner in hosting T-Level placements, with one student successfully progressing to an apprenticeship after completing their studies and currently hosting another T-Level student.
 - **Transport and Countryside** offered a paid internship, while the Transformation Team successfully delivered and completed another.
 - **The Phoenix Centre** extended a work experience placement for a student from The Castle School, through their World of Work programme, who has shown remarkable growth in confidence within a working environment.
 - The **Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Team** hosted three simultaneous work experience placements.
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Additionally, our CEO Joseph Holmes and Executive Director Sarah Clarke welcomed a total of 48 students from St Bart's and Trinity School across two work experience shadow days in the Council Chambers. These sessions provided interactive activities on topics such as Devolution and emergency planning and gave students the opportunity to engage with council members, including the Leader of the Council.

We also partnered with the **DWP and local Job Centre** to host a careers fair in the Council Chambers, where local businesses showcased employment opportunities to residents. This event was supported by MP Lee Dillon.

11.5 Apprenticeships have been equally busy:

- Partnering with the **Salisbury Framework** to streamline collaboration with apprenticeship providers, improving efficiency.
- Successfully completing a procurement process to secure a new provider for **Social Worker apprenticeships** and initiating another for the upcoming **2026 Occupational Therapy cohort**.

We continue to see WBC schools making excellent use of the apprenticeship levy to train early years educators, teaching assistants and Teacher's, both undergraduate and postgraduate.

Beyond schools, we've supported local businesses through **levy transfers**, enabling their staff's development in roles such as:

- Pharmacy Technician
- Digital Support Technician
- Early Years Lead Practitioner
- Children, Young People & Families Manager and four Business Administrator positions

Employee Experience

11.6 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, included, and supported to thrive and work well.

What was previously known as the **Equality in Employment Policy** has now evolved into the **Dignity in Employment Policy** — a change that reflects a broader, more inclusive approach to how we support and respect every individual in our workplace.

This update comes at a pivotal time, aligning with the introduction of the **Worker Protection Act**, which places greater emphasis on creating safe, respectful, and inclusive working environments, and our duties to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. Across many organisations, there is a growing shift from focusing solely on equality to embracing the wider concept of **dignity at work** — ensuring that everyone is treated with fairness, respect, and compassion.

Our new **Dignity in Employment Policy** reinforces our commitment to:

Fostering a culture of **mutual respect** and **inclusion**

Preventing all forms of **harassment**, **bullying**, and **discrimination**

Ensure the **legal protections** of those with **protected characteristics**

Supporting the principles of our **Behaviour Framework**, which underpins how we work together and treat one another. This is more than a name change — it's a reaffirmation of our values and a step forward in creating a workplace where everyone feels safe, valued, and empowered to thrive.

- 11.7 The Employee Engagement Forum (EEF) meeting cycle has now started, meeting in May and September 2025. There are 29 EEF representatives including two SLT representatives. The whole organisation is represented at the EEF. The EEF has provided SLT recommendations and reflections on employee recognition. This has resulted in several actions to embed and develop meaningful employee recognition.

- Digital colleague recognition form and intranet page. Colleagues can use an intranet form to recognise a colleague who has gone above and beyond, demonstrated our values, or made a positive impact.
- Lead with Confidence – Recognition workshops and guide for people managers
- New starters and employee long service recognition included in monthly Reporter

The EEF is providing robust questioning of SLT in a multitude of areas including organisational change and communication. The EEF is solution focused providing suggestions and ideas for improvement.

- 11.8 The first annual Employee Conference was held at Shaw House July 2025. 216 colleagues attended, the sessions were led by CEO, ED's and Council Leader and Deputy Leader and included a Q&A session. Attendees were invited to complete a feedback survey on the conference. The key feedback was to develop an **Employee-Centric Focus** to;

- Celebrate long service milestones
- Highlight employee achievements, challenges, and culture
- Share balanced updates on council finances and strategic priorities
- Showcase how teams are delivering the Council Strategy and Behaviour Framework
- Increase time for Q&A

- 11.9 The team also continues to manage employee forums, coordinate mental health first aiders, lead and manage the internal coaching hub, deliver wellbeing and professional development learning sessions and provide guidance for managers and leaders. The team creates and publishes regular Employee Experience internal communications for all employees and for people managers to include in team meetings. These efforts support the Council's Workforce Strategy and help embed a culture of wellbeing, equity, and engagement throughout the organisation.
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12 Conclusion

The contents of the report are for information for Corporate Board, Executive Briefing and Personnel Committee on the 13 January 2026.

13 Appendices

Appendix A – Starters and Leavers – 5 years from 1 April 2021 – 30 September 2025

Appendix B - Percentage % of Starters by Age Range – 5 years (2021 to 2025)

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

Background Papers:

Not applicable

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council ☐

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position ☐

Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months ☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☒

Wards affected: not applicable

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Document Control

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Version:		Date Modified:	
Author:			
Owning Service			

Change History

Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1			
2			

Appendix A

Starters and Leavers – 5 years (1st April 2021 to 30th September 2025)

	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026 Q1-Q2
Number of starters	210	247	219	214	118
Number of leavers	220	242	190	201	133
Turnover (%)	14.30%	15.9%	12.47%	12.9%	8.58% (6 months) 17.15% Projected annualised
Voluntary turnover (%)	13.00%	14.86%	11.09%	10.4%	7.09% (6 months) 14.18% Annualised
Average length of service of leavers	7y	5y 9m	7y 7m	8y	7y 8m
Average length of service of employees employed at year end	8y 9m	8y 10m	8y 9m	8y	8y 9m
Stability index (% employees at year end with 12 or more months' service)	89.43%	86.3%	89.13%	86.79%	87.17%

Appendix B

Percentage % of Starters by Age Range – 5 years (2021 to 2025)

	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026 Q2
Under 25	20.95	9.72	11.42	4.88	7.63
25-34	22.86	25.10	33.33	27.42	21.19
35-44	23.33	25.91	25.11	26.90	32.2
45-54	21.90	21.05	20.09	25.26	22.88
55-64	9.52	17.00	8.22	15.09	13.56
65+	1.43	1.21	1.83	0.45	2.54

Appendix C

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

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 Q2
Under 25	9.09	5.79	5.26	3.98	3.76
25-34	12.73	23.97	16.32	17.91	21.05
35-44	19.55	21.07	21.58	22.39	18.05
45-54	22.73	19.83	24.21	15.92	15.79
55-64	21.36	19.83	17.37	21.39	24.81
65+	14.55	9.50	14.74	18.41	16.54