

REPORT TITLE: - WORKFORCE REPORT 2023/24

18 JULY 2024

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Neil Cutler Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

To provide an overview of the workforce of the Council and a summary of key HR activities for the year ending 31 March 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the report be noted.

## IMPLICATIONS:

### 1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

- 1.1 The performance of the Council's workforce is critical to the delivery of all outcomes set out in the Council Plan.

### 2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 Maintaining staffing levels and having the right staff with the right skills is critical to the delivery of the council's services and priorities. Financial implications of the workforce matters covered in this report include: the cost of recruiting and inducting new joiners; the use of agency staff for difficult to fill essential vacancies; sickness absence; and investment in learning and development.

### 3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

### 4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Employees are critical to the delivery of the council's services and priorities and monitoring and reporting on key employment metrics enables proactive employment practises.

### 5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

### 6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 This report is for information only and therefore no consultation or communication is required.

### 7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 None.

### 8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

- 8.1 There is no differential impact on a specified group as all HR matters are applied consistently.
- 8.2 As required nationally, the council reports on any potential discrepancies in pay, based on gender ("Gender Pay Gap" reporting), in accordance with the statutory timeframe.

## 9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 This report does not include any confidential data and therefore a data protection impact assessment is not required.

## 10 RISK MANAGEMENT

| <b>Risk</b>  | <b>Mitigation</b>   | <b>Opportunities</b>                              |
|--|---|---|
| Financial Exposure<br><i>Failure to apply pay principles and rules fairly and consistently leading to discrimination and/or legal challenge.</i>                                 | Consistent application of pay principles and rules.   | Positioning the council as an Employer of Choice. |
| Exposure to challenge<br><i>Failure to comply with statutory reporting requirements, resulting in adverse local media coverage or legal challenge.</i>                           | Statutory reporting is embedded within HR's annual work programme, and within the committee work programme where appropriate, to ensure publication within statutory timeframes.  |   |
| Reputation<br><i>Failure to deliver public services and the Council Plan due to reduced workforce capacity, leading to public criticism and/or adverse local media coverage.</i> | Ongoing workforce monitoring to enable early identification and remedial action where recruitment difficulties and/or high sickness levels could impact on the Council's ability to deliver public services and the Council Plan. |   |

## 11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

11.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Audit and Governance Committee with an overview of the workforce of the Council and a summary of key HR activities for the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

11.2 This is the fourth workforce report to be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee since it assumed responsibility for the human resources functions of the Council from the former Personnel Committee.

11.3 Appendix 1 provides a range of indicators supporting the report commentary relating to:

- (i) the Council's staff establishment
- (ii) recruitment and turnover
- (iii) sickness absence
- (iv) equality

Tables, charts and graphs in Appendix 1 are as at 31 March 2024 unless stated otherwise and have been extracted from the Council's Access HR system and separate monitoring records. For ease of reference, the equivalent 2023 data is shown in red.

#### **The Council's staff establishment**

11.4 As at 31 March 2024, the Council employed 446 (445) permanent and fixed-term staff. This was an increase of 0.2% (3.2%) of headcount compared to March 2023.

11.5 Staff numbers by headcount and Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), distribution by grade and contract type metrics are provided in Appendix 1. Headcount is the actual number of staff employed by the council whereas FTE is the total number of hours worked by all staff (headcount) divided by the standard working week of 37 hours.

#### **Recruitment and turnover**

11.6 There were 76 (79) external appointments, made up of 53 (57) permanent employees and 23 (22) employees (including 5 apprentices) on fixed-term contracts.

11.7 There were 72 (69) leavers (61 (56) permanent employees and 11 (13) (including 1 apprentice) employees on fixed-term contracts). Reasons for leaving are shown in Appendix 1.

11.8 Staff who both started and left within the same year are included in the figures above.

11.9 Total annual turnover (i.e. employees leaving the Council for all reasons) was 16.9% as compared to 16.7% in 2022/23.

11.10 The average length of service was 9 years and 7 months (9 years and 11 months).

11.11 Succession/workforce planning is managed through the annual service planning cycle.

- 11.12 Proactive people management strategies and a positive, inclusive working environment encompassing learning and development, health and wellbeing, open communication and discretionary employee benefits, are key 'weapons' in an organisation's ability to recruit and retain staff in addition to salary.
- 11.13 Learning and development is actively encouraged and supported. An established induction process for new recruits, including a Welcome event with the Executive Leadership Board (ELB) and suite of mandatory training modules on the council's online learning management system (see Appendix 2), ensures new recruits are properly integrated into their jobs, their service and the Council.
- 11.14 Apprenticeships and the National Graduate Schemes offers entry level to local government and provides for a structured 'on-the-job' learning programme leading to a recognised qualification.
- 11.15 Continuing professional development, including 'upskilling' apprenticeships for existing staff, ensures staff have the right skills to do their jobs, provides for future service needs and provides and enables progression within the organisation. HR manages and co-ordinates organisational and services training priorities through the annual learning and development planning process.
- 11.16 4 (1) x full-time apprenticeships, 1 (2) x degree apprenticeship and 2 (3) upskilling apprenticeships are currently in place across different services and the Council continues to explore ways to extend apprenticeship opportunities.
- 11.17 Volunteer leave (i.e. up to three days paid leave (pro-rated for part-time)) encourages employees, individually or as part of a work-based team, to be involved in voluntary activities that benefit the local district. The benefits of volunteering for individuals and organisations are widely reported (e.g. connection with others, developing new skills, increased productivity etc.) and serve to reinforce employee engagement and wellbeing.
- 11.18 Open communication (i.e. reciprocal sharing and receiving feedback, providing ideas and suggestions, raising concerns) and active participation of employees in the work process are actively promoted and facilitated through the Staff Forum, annual Employee Attitude survey, quarterly ELB led 'All Staff Briefings' with open opportunity for questions, team meetings held at an operational level, and regular meetings between HR and Unison.
- 11.19 The Staff Forum is a representative group of employees from across the organisation who work mutually and collaboratively with senior leadership on organisational wide workforce and workplace matters. HR meets regularly

with Unison in order to support organisational development and effectively manage organisational change.

- 11.20 The annual Employee Attitude survey provides employees with the opportunity to share how they feel about various aspects of their working lives at the council. Participation rates are consistently high by industry standards and have typically shown a high level of engagement. The 2023 survey scored positively across all of the survey's themes of employee engagement, working environment, working relationships and corporate/service priorities, with 84% strongly agreeing/agreeing with the statement 'I enjoy working at the council', 72% 'I would recommend the council as a great place to work to my family and friends', 73% 'I am proud to work for the council, 95% 'The colleagues in my team are supportive and friendly' and 81% 'I understand the top priorities for Winchester City Council.'
- 11.21 An organisation's benefits strategy has the potential to drive the employee experience, enhance the total reward package on offer to employees and be a market differentiator, impacting on an organisation's ability to recruit and retain. The employee benefits offered at WCC, in addition to salary, are listed below (N.B. the actual amount of annual leave depends on grade and previous local government service and is set out in the contract of employment):
- Employer paid health care cash plan scheme.
  - Cycle to Work and Green Car Benefit salary sacrifice schemes.
  - Up to 32 days annual leave per year (more than the Green Book minimum).
  - Flexible working arrangements.
  - Hybrid Working Policy allowing most employees to work from home for up to 50% of their working hours.
  - Up to 13 days additional flexi leave per year (subject to operational requirements) where the employee has built up enough hours.
  - 3 days (pro-rata for part-time employees) paid leave to carry out volunteering within the district.
  - Option to voluntarily buy up to five days additional annual leave.
  - Free park and ride scheme for all employees.
  - Membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme.
  - Confidential Employee Advice and Support Programme.
  - Employee retail and shopping discounts.
  - Season Ticket loans.
  - Excellent central location.
  - Support for continuous professional development.

### **Sickness absence**

- 11.22 Sickness absence continues to be closely monitored. Reports on sickness absence and completion of return to work interviews are reviewed with Strategic Directors on a quarterly basis.
- 11.23 The average number of days of sickness of 6.11 days per employee was a slight decline from 6.82 days reported in 2022/23.
- 11.24 The current rates are below the average sickness rate for the public sector of 7.7 days per employee in 2022 as reported by the ONS.
- 11.25 The split of short term and long absence remained largely consistent, with a marginal increase in short term absence – 39% short term and 61% long term vs 36% short term and 64% long term in 22/23. These figures have historically shown little fluctuation, with the exception of during the pandemic.
- 11.26 'Mental health – Personal' has increased to first place from second place accounting for 16.09% of all sickness absences. However, it should be noted that whilst this represents a year-on-year increase, this figure is down on 21/22's figure of 24.25% and that historically 'Mental Health – Personal' is commonly the most popular sickness reason.

This is indicative of a slight upward trend in mental health related absences, when mental health for all reasons (personal, work and reason not stated) are combined. Last year's figure of 20.56% was lower than expected, and so whilst this year's figure of 26.93% is an increase, it is under the typical third that we might expect.

- 11.27 Mental health – work related has risen slightly from 8<sup>th</sup> most common sickness reason last year to 5<sup>th</sup> most common reason. Three of these instances are long term sickness absences (1 of whom has since left).
- 11.28 The Council has proactively put in place a number of mental health initiatives, implemented by HR, to create safe and inclusive wellbeing space within the workplace and support those employees who may be experiencing poor mental health. These initiatives are available to all employees and include; wellbeing and mental health resources on the Council's intranet; mental health first aiders; Wellness Action Plans; an externally provided counselling service free of charge; and, an Employee Assistance Programme and online wellbeing resources via the corporate health plan.
- 11.29 The Council has a number of trained mental health first aiders across the organisation who provide; early intervention, support and effective listening for

employees experiencing mental health challenges; and, signposting to and guidance on accessing appropriate services and resources. Wellness Action Plans (WAP) can enable employees to actively support their own mental health, facilitate dialogue with their manager and inform appropriate intervention, helping employees to remain in work and work 'well'. Specialist trauma informed counselling is also available to teams and individuals in the event of traumatic incidents.

- 11.30 HR continues to support managers to manage sickness absence within their teams, including referral to an external occupational health provider as required. Managers can access online wellbeing resources and training to help them support employees across day-to-day work, life and wellbeing events. HR continues to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and is currently planning a programme of mental health awareness training across the council, including specific frontline targeted training, to ensure the Council is able to respond well to the needs of residents and colleagues.
- 11.31 It is widely reported that organisations who take a positive, proactive approach to mental health and wellbeing can benefit from improved employee retention, reduction in absence and more engaged and motivated employees. Positive results from the 2023 Employee Attitude survey indicate high employee awareness of and value in the support offered by the council with 74% strongly agreeing/agreeing 'The council takes the health and wellbeing of its employees seriously' and 85% strongly agreeing/agreeing 'My manager cares about me as a person.'

### **Equality**

- 11.32 The gender profile for all of the public sector remains in favour of women at 64% female and 36% male as at quarter 4 (October – December) of 2023/24 (ONS EMP13: Employment By Industry). The Council's gender profile, aligns closely to this with 61% female and 39% male as at March 2024, remaining stable from last year's 60/40 split.
- 11.33 The Council reported a 7.3% (7.4%) mean gender pay gap as at the snapshot date of 31 March 2024. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average earnings of men and women across an organisation.
- 11.34 Employees are encouraged to update their ethnicity and disability status, which is disclosed on a voluntary basis, to facilitate equality monitoring and reporting. Ethnicity data for the 37% of employees who have disclosed their ethnicity as at 31 March 2024 is included in Appendix 1.



11.35 It is not possible in this report to publish meaningful analysis from the disability data available as it could possibly result in the identification of individual employees.

### **HR Update**

11.36 HR organised and managed the delivery of the following online (via the Council's Learning Management System) and face-to-face (external and internal) learning and development training:

- Asbestos Awareness; Asbestos Awareness for Groundworkers; and, Asbestos – Duty to Manage
- Display Screen Equipment
- Fire Safety Management
- Introduction to Accident Investigation
- Political Awareness
- Project Management Methodology
- Understanding Domestic Abuse

IOSH Safety training will be delivered May – July 2024.

HR has also been working with the Strategic Project Lead on 'Domestic Abuse on the 'Domestic Abuse Housing Association (DAHA)' Accreditation and on Level 2 Domestic Abuse Awareness.

11.37 HR have organised for the third year an employee attitude survey to find out how employees feel about various aspects of their working lives at the Council and to inform senior managers and elected members how engaged employees are with their work and the Council as a whole. The survey is due to close on 28 June and the survey results will be discussed with ELB and Members (details to be discussed at A&G on 26 September 2024). Running the survey every year enables the analysis and identification of trends over time.

11.38 The employer paid health plan is a key employee benefit in the employment package on offer to council employees. By providing cash back on a range of everyday healthcare, a health plan encourages employees to proactively manage their health and can aid a quicker return to work following illness/injury. The health plan also provides an inclusive Employee Assistance Programme and online wellbeing resources which are available to all employees whether they are enrolled on the health plan or not. Children up to the age of 24 can be added free of charge and employees can

voluntarily elect and personally pay to upgrade their level of cover and/or to add a partner.

Feedback from employee's shows this is a highly valued benefit. HR has secured a further 12 month contract with the council's chosen provider, UK Healthcare, at a no cost/premium increase.

11.39 HR continues to review and update HR policies and has published over the past year the following revised policies:

- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in Employment
- Adoption Leave and Pay
- Maternity Leave and Pay
- Paternity and Maternity Support Leave and Pay
- Long Service Recognition
- Politically Restricted Posts
- Working Hours and Time Off
- Flexible Working
- Absence Management

All HR policies and guidance are available to employees and managers on the Council's intranet.

11.40 HR continues to deliver a variety of on-line and workplace resources to support employee wellbeing and mental health.

## 12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 This report is for information only. No decisions are required therefore consideration of other options was not required.

### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

#### Previous Committee Reports:-

AG63 Workforce Report 2020/21 11 November 2021

AG079 Workforce Report 2021/22 29 June 2022

AG085 Update on Employee Attitude Survey and Related Matters 10 November 2022

AG102 Workforce Report 2022/23 20 July 2023

AG114 Update on Employee Attitude Survey 2023 28 September 2023

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Workforce Report 2023/24 Data

Appendix 2 – Core mandatory training courses for all employees

## Appendix 1

### Workforce Report 2023/24 Data

#### Establishment

Table 1 – Staff numbers by headcount and Full-time Equivalent (FTE)

|                   | Headcount | % increase | FTE    | % increase |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|--------|------------|
| <b>March 2023</b> | 445       | +0.2%      | 405.34 | +0.7%      |
| <b>March 2024</b> | 446       |            | 408.03 |            |

Table 2 – Headcount of staff by grade

| Pay Grade                 | Headcount |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Apprentice Scale 3</b> | 3         |
| <b>Apprentice Scale 4</b> | 2         |
| <b>Scale 3</b>            | 82        |
| <b>Scale 4</b>            | 127       |
| <b>Scale 5</b>            | 96        |
| <b>Scale 6</b>            | 75        |
| <b>Scale 7</b>            | 18        |
| <b>Scale 8</b>            | 22        |
| <b>Scale 9</b>            | 7         |
| <b>Scale 10</b>           | 8         |
| <b>Scale 11</b>           | 1         |
| <b>Scale 12</b>           | 4         |
| <b>Chief Executive</b>    | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>              | 446       |

Table 3 – Contract Type

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| <b>Full time (37 hours)</b> | 78% |
| <b>Part-time</b>            | 22% |
| <b>Permanent contract</b>   | 91% |
| <b>Fixed-term contract</b>  | 9%  |

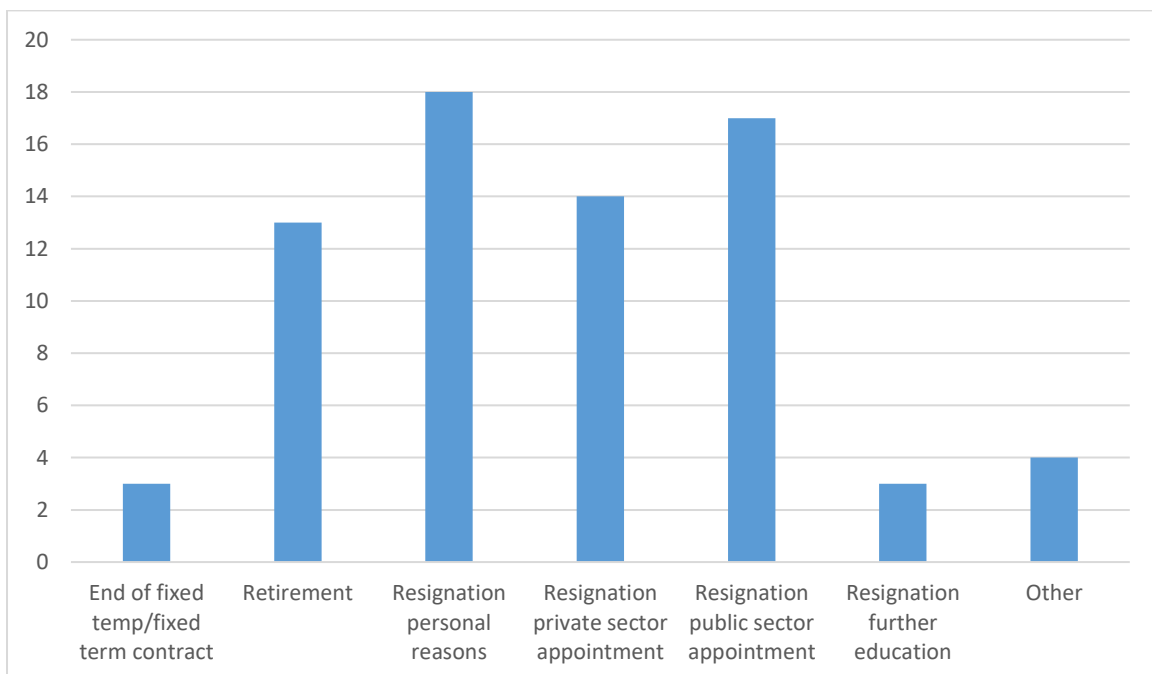
## Sickness

Table 4 - Top 5 sickness absence reasons (averaged over April 23 – March 24)

| Sickness Reason              | Percentage of total annual sickness | Previous Year's ranking (out of 20) | Direction of travel |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Mental Health – personal     | 16.09%                              | 2                                   | ↑                   |
| Infections incl cold and flu | 11.57%                              | 1                                   | ↓                   |
| Stomach, liver and digestion | 8.35%                               | 6                                   | ↑                   |
| Back and neck problems       | 8.03%                               | 11                                  | ↑                   |
| Mental health – work related | 7.95%                               | 8                                   | ↑                   |

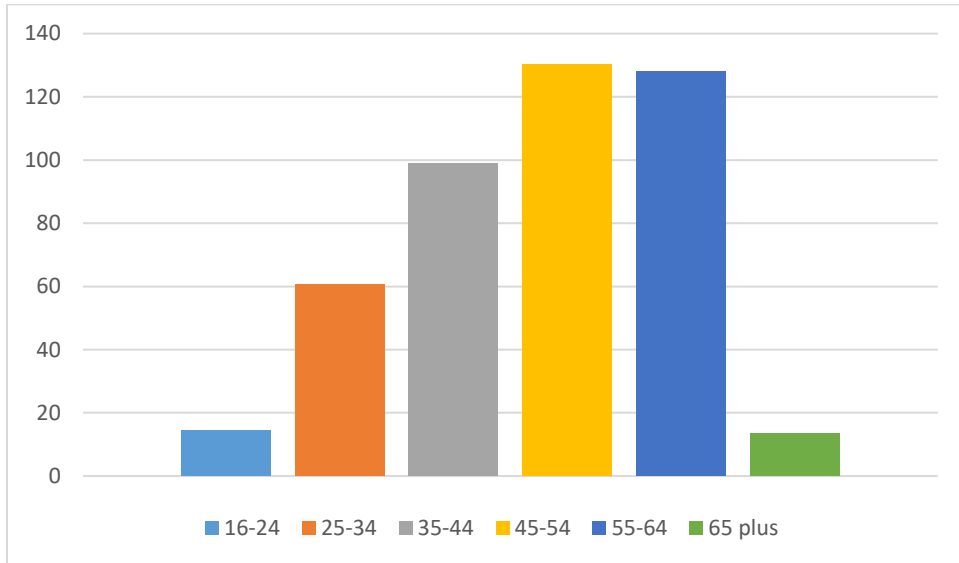
## Recruitment and Turnover

Table 5 – Reasons for leaving the Council

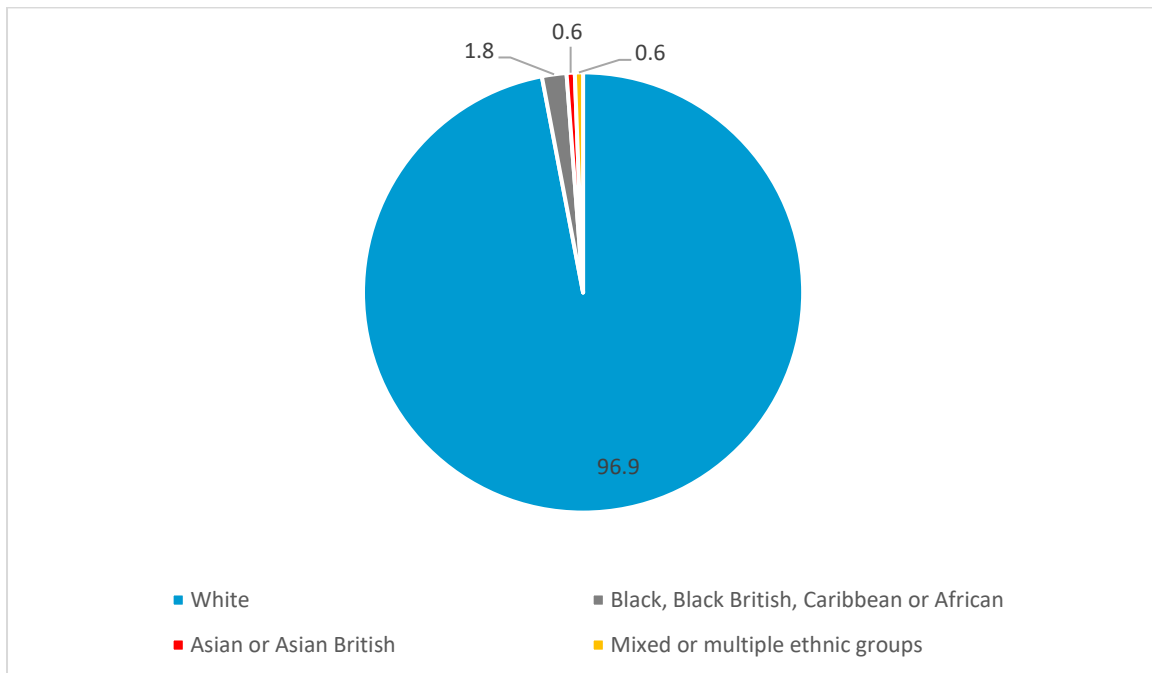


**Equality**

**Table 6 – Age profile (averaged over the 12 months)**



**Table 7 – Ethnicity profile**



## **Appendix 2**

### **Core mandatory training courses for all employees**

Cyber Security Awareness and Staying Safe Online

Display Screen Equipment

How to Manage Information Securely

Introduction to GDPR

Introduction to Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

IT Policy and Declaration

PREVENT - Understanding the Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The Importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Understanding Domestic Abuse

Working Safely - An Introduction to Workplace Health and Safety for Employees