

REPORT TITLE: WORKFORCE REPORT 2025/26

16 JULY 2026

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

Contact Officer: Manjit Sandhu, Service Lead Human Resources
Tel No: 01962 848594 Email: msandhu@winchester.gov.uk

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 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Note the report and the data in the appendices.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

- 1.1 The performance of the council's workforce is critical to the delivery of all priorities 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

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Financial Exposure <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 <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 <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.	
Innovation	None	None
Property	None	None
Community Support	None	None
Timescales	None	None
Project capacity	None	None
Local Government Reorganisation	This report provides a 'snapshot' of workforce metrics	

	and commentary for the 2025/26 financial year and its content has limited impact on LGR. However, 'People and Culture' will be a critical LGR workstream as we prepare for change and transition to any new Unitary Authority.	
Other	None	None

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 2025 to 31 March 2026. Figures throughout the report show prior year equivalents in brackets.

11.2 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

Staff Establishment

11.3 As at 31 March 2026, the council employed 472 (460) permanent and fixed-term staff, a 2.61% (3.14%) increase in headcount compared with the beginning of the year. Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of staff numbers by headcount and full-time equivalent (FTE), together with grade and contract type data.

Recruitment and turnover

11.4 In the reporting period, there were 64 (61) external appointments, made up of 44 (43) permanent employees and 20 (18) employees (including 2 apprentices) on fixed-term contracts.

11.5 There were 50 (55) leavers; 43 (48) permanent employees and 7 (7) employees on fixed-term contracts. Reasons for leaving are shown in Appendix 1.

- 11.6 Staff who both started and left within the same year are included in the figures above.
- 11.7 Total annual turnover (i.e. employees leaving the council for all reasons) was 10.74% (12.14 %) which continues to be in line with public sector turnover rates.
- 11.8 The average length of service was 9 years and 2 months (9 years and 2 months).
- 11.9 Succession and workforce planning are managed through the council's annual service planning cycle, led by Corporate Heads of Service in conjunction with the Executive Leadership Board (ELB), ensuring that workforce requirements remain aligned with organisational priorities.
- 11.10 This structured approach is supported by proactive people management strategies and the promotion of a positive, inclusive working environment. Together, these encompass a focus on learning and development, health and wellbeing, open communication, and the provision of discretionary employee benefits, all of which play a key role alongside salary in supporting the council's ability to recruit and retain staff.

Learning and Development

- 11.11 Learning and development (L&D) is actively encouraged and supported. An established induction process for new recruits, including a Welcome event with ELB and suite of mandatory training modules on the council's online learning management system (Aspire) and cyber learning management system (MetaCompliance) (see Appendix 2), ensures new recruits are properly integrated into their jobs, their service, their team and the council.
- 11.12 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 coordinates organisational and service training priorities through a structured annual Learning and Development (L&D) planning process. In light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), HR has, during the current year, undertaken a comprehensive, organisation-wide Training Needs Analysis (TNA) covering a two-year planning horizon. This analysis has been used to identify both ongoing essential professional and technical training, as well as targeted upskilling initiatives to support readiness for transition to a unitary authority.
- 11.13 The key priorities of the corporate learning and development programme up until the end of March 2028 are:
- (i) Leadership and management development
 - (ii) Digital upskilling
 - (iii) Change readiness
 - (iv) Health and Safety

- 11.14 The programmes for each priority are being developed, and delivery will take place from June 2026 to March 2028.
- 11.15 The council supports both Apprenticeships and the National Graduate Development Programme, known as 'Impact', which is delivered by the Local Government Association (LGA). These programmes provide structured, entry-level pathways into local government, combining 'on-the-job' learning with the opportunity to gain recognised qualifications. The council actively recognises and values the benefits these schemes bring in developing future talent and strengthening workforce capability.
- 11.16 7 (5) x full-time apprenticeships and 3 (2) upskilling apprenticeships are currently in place across different services. 2 x apprentices (1 x full-time and 1 x upskilling) successfully completed their apprenticeship during 2025/26. Of the current full-time apprentices, 3 x current are expected to complete their apprenticeship in the summer/autumn of 2026.

Employee Engagement

- 11.17 Volunteer leave (i.e. up to three days paid leave (pro-rata for part-time) encourages employees, individually or as part of a work-based team, to be involved in voluntary activities. The benefits of volunteering for individuals and organisations are widely reported (e.g. connection with others, developing new skills, increased productivity etc.), can provide learning & development opportunities 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 an annual Employee survey, quarterly (or as required) ELB led "All Staff Briefings" with open opportunity for questions, team meetings held at an operational level, and regular meetings between HR and Unison to support organisational development and effectively manage organisational change.
- 11.19 A key element of the council's LGR Transition Plan to being unitary ready is a strengthening of employee wellbeing initiatives, with a particular focus on supporting employees to navigate and manage change. A programme of LGR-focused all-staff briefings, led by the Chief Executive, has been delivered as required to ensure timely, open, and consistent communication at key updates and milestones. These are recorded and available on the Intranet to all staff. To support employees further, a dedicated LGR intranet site has been established, providing readily accessible information, regular updates, and a dynamic Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section to address common queries and emerging issues. Furthermore, additional training events are being developed to support staff through transition.
- 11.20 The Staff Forum is a representative group of employees from across the council who meet bi-monthly with senior management to share feedback from

their services on employee matters. The forum also provides an opportunity for senior management to provide key updates on workforce matters including LGR. The Forum was refreshed during the year, now chaired by Service Lead for HR, with the Director of Finance attending on behalf of ELB. The Staff Forum is anticipated to play an increasing role as a mechanism for gathering insight and supporting the effective dissemination of key messages as LGR progresses.

- 11.21 The annual Employee 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, with a 68% (66%) response rate to the 2025 survey undertaken in June/July. The 2025 survey scored positively across all of the survey's themes of employee engagement, working environment, working relationships and corporate/service priorities, with 84% (84%) strongly agreeing/agreeing with the statement *'I enjoy working at the council'*, 74% (71%) *'I would recommend the council as a great place to work to my family and friends'*, 78% (75%) *'I am proud to work for the council'*, 93% (95%) *'The colleagues in my team are supportive and friendly'* and 86% (69%) *'I understand the top priorities for Winchester City Council'*.
- 11.22 This year's employee survey will run for four weeks, 24 June to 24 July. In addition to the standard 'core' questions, five additional LGR specific questions have been added to get a 'sense' of how staff are 'feeling' about the forthcoming organisational changes.
- 11.23 A programme of LGR 'pulse' surveys are currently being developed by the Hampshire wide Communications Lead group. These will support ongoing monitoring of the 'mood' of the workforce and will inform decision making in relation to the effectiveness of LGR communications, engagement and employee support initiatives.
- 11.24 Facilitated by HR, the council has supported the establishment of Staff Identity Networks Groups (SINGs), created by staff, for staff. These currently include the Christian Network; Women's Network (Women's Health and Women in Leadership); Carers' Network and Disability Network. Additional networks will be supported where there is staff interest.
- 11.25 SINGs provide a safe and inclusive space for employees, with shared aspects of identity or lived experience, to connect, inspire and support one another and contribute to positive change across the council. Each SING has its own purpose and operates on a voluntary and self-managing basis, setting its own agenda, meetings and activities.
- 11.26 The reported benefits of SINGs for an organisation include strengthening employee engagement, enhancing two-way communication, supporting inclusion, and informing organisational decision-making, whilst also contributing positively to culture and the effective delivery of change programmes.

- 11.27 A refreshed Management Forum was launched in February, this provides a supportive space for council managers who are responsible for others' performance and wellbeing to come together, explore topics and access training directly relevant to their role.

Employee Benefits

- 11.28 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 the council, 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 33 days annual leave per year for the majority of our workforce (more than the Local Government 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 accrued enough hours.
- 3 days (pro-rata for part-time employees) paid leave to carry out volunteering.
- 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

- 11.29 Sickness absence continues to be monitored. Reports on sickness absence and completion of return-to-work interviews are reviewed by Corporate Head of Service on a quarterly basis.
- 11.30 The average number of days of sickness of 4.73 days per employee in 2025/26 was a decrease from 6.71 days reported in 2024/25.
- 11.31 The current rates are below the average sickness rate for the public sector of 6.2 days per employee in 2025 as reported by the ONS.

11.32 The split of short term and long absence remains largely consistent, year on year, with a marginal increase in long term absence – 46% (48%) short term and 54% (52%) long term. However, month on month throughout the reporting year, it had fluctuated from as much as a 58% short term / 42% long term in September and 40% short term / 60% long term in November.

11.33 Historically 'Mental health – Personal' is regularly the most common reason for sickness absence, and this continues again in 2025/26, accounting for 21.77% of all sickness absence. This is a year-on-year percentage decrease from 23.22% in 2024/25.

This is indicative of a downward trend across all mental health related absences. Historically, when all mental health related absences are combined (personal, work and reason not stated) they account for approximately a third of all sickness absences, 25/26 has seen a reduction to 26.92% down from 34.47% in 24/25.

11.34 There has been little movement in the most common reasons for sickness in 2025/26 compared with the previous year; and the sickness absence reasons 'infections including cold & flu' and 'neurological including headaches & migraine', together with 'mental health personal', reappear in the top 5 most common sickness absence reasons.

11.35 The biggest fall in sickness absences was for 'mental health – work related', moving down from the third most common reason in 2024/25 to the 7th most common reason in 2025/26. Conversely, sickness absence due to 'surgery related' has seen the biggest rise in 2025/26, climbing from 8th to 3rd place. However, there were actually less instances of absence for this reason compared to last year – on average, absences simply lasted longer, and, figures were inflated by several long-term absences.

11.36 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 2025 Employee Survey indicate high employee awareness of and value in the support offered by the council with 77% (74%) strongly agreeing/agreeing '*The council takes the health and wellbeing of its employees seriously*' and 86% (85%) strongly agreeing/agreeing '*My manager cares about me as a person.*' Building on this, additional mental health awareness events and sessions were delivered for Mental Health Week, further enhancing staff's ability to feel heard and supported in this area.

11.37 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 at the point of access; and, an Employee Assistance Programme and online wellbeing resources via the corporate health plan.

- 11.38 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 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.
- 11.39 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.
- 11.40 The health and wellbeing of staff remains a high priority as the council prepares to transition to the new unitary authority through LGR. In addition to the wellbeing support already in place, HR will review this regularly and ensure information and guidance is easily accessible to all employees on the council's intranet. To strengthen this support, team and leadership development sessions have been delivered in short, bite-sized formats on topics such as handling difficult conversations, building resilience and psychological safety.

Equality

- 11.41 The gender profile for all of the public sector remains in favour of women at 65% female and 35% 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 60% female and 40% male as at March 2026, with minimal fluctuation from last year's circa 61/39 split.
- 11.42 The council reported a 6.4% (6.6%) mean gender pay gap as at the snapshot date of 31 March 2025. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average earnings of men and women across an organisation.
- 11.43 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 34% (37%) of employees who have disclosed their ethnicity as at 31 March 2026 is included in Appendix 1.
- 11.44 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.

- 11.45 It is proposed during 26/27 to encourage staff to update their details on the councils HR system to improve our workforce data ready for LGR.

HR Update

- 11.46 HR, and the Council as a whole, has over the past year found itself in the unprecedented position of having to balance ongoing “business as usual” activities with the additional demands associated with preparing the organisation for transition to a unitary authority through LGR. The impact of this challenge, which will continue for another 24 months (and beyond), is reflected throughout the commentary in this report in the relevant section.
- 11.47 As mentioned in 11.14, a primary focus for learning & development (L&D) over the last year has been on HR led training needs analysis exercise carried out across the council to identify L&D needs and funding priorities for the next 2 years.
- 11.48 Alongside this, HR has organised and managed delivery of the following online (via the Aspire learning management system) and face-to-face (external and internal) learning and development training:
- Adult mental health first aid
 - Safeguarding level 2
 - Handling disclosure about domestic abuse level 2
 - Project management methodology
 - Fire marshal
 - First Aid at work
- 11.49 HR has continued to work with the Strategic Project Lead for Domestic Abuse on the ‘Domestic Abuse Housing Association (DAHA)’ Accreditation and on Level 2 Domestic Abuse Awareness. The council achieved DAHA Gold Accreditation (the highest level) in July 2025, recognising compliance with national standards for responding to domestic abuse and reflecting significant organisational improvements.
- 11.50 Circa 30 x Scale 5 and Scale 4 managers, team leaders and supervisors from across the council attended a series of management and leadership training events throughout June 2025. Delivered by Dr Ruth Adams of South East Employers, the programme was commissioned by ELB to provide ‘stretch’ to support line managers with insights and challenge to support them to progress.
- 11.51 Revision of the corporate L&D Policy, which shifts the focus away from traditional classroom style training to capitalising on the wealth of available and accessible self-directed learning resources to facilitate a sustainable and flexible L&D solution.

- 11.52 HR has worked with IT Services to successfully implement a new cyber learning platform, with IT/cyber related mandatory training now split out from Aspire and hosted on the separate learning management system, Metacompliance (see Appendix 2). MetaCompliance is a cloud-based human risk management and security awareness platform that helps the Council reduce cyber risk by improving staff behaviour and compliance. It delivers and tracks cyber security training, policy acknowledgement, and phishing simulations, supporting structured awareness campaigns. The platform also provides reporting and analytics to demonstrate compliance and track risk trends.
- 11.53 Central to the Government's ambition to 'make work pay', the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA) passed into law at the end of 2025. Widely regarded as one of the most significant changes to UK employment law in a generation, it will deliver over 25-30 substantial reforms, implemented in planned phases between 2025 and 2027. These reforms seek to improve job security and fairness and enforce employee rights. It will also reinstate and strengthen a range of trade unions rights previously restricted under the Trade Union Act 2016.
- 11.54 Local authority employment terms and conditions already exceed the provisions of the ERA in many cases. However, HR will continue to review and update policies and practises as required, with particular focus on ERA implications for dismissal processes, contractual arrangements, workforce flexibility, and employee relations.
- 11.55 Ahead of this, relevant policies were updated to reflect the introduction of Neonatal Care Leave from April 2025, a statutory entitlement enabling eligible parents to take additional time off work where their newborn requires extended hospital care in the early days following birth.
- 11.56 'People and Culture' will be a critical LGR workstream as we prepare for change and transition to any new Unitary Authority. This workstream will play a central role in ensuring that the workforce is supported, engaged, and equipped to navigate the significant organisational and cultural changes ahead. It will focus on key areas such as workforce planning, staff engagement and leadership development. Ensuring continuity of service delivery, retaining talent, and maintaining staff morale during a period of uncertainty will be essential to a successful transition. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) has provided clear guidance of the key areas that need to be addressed as part of transition, and this includes ensuring staff have up to date job descriptions and open and regular dialogue with the trade unions. The Service Lead for HR meets with UNISON on a monthly basis; it is expected that these meetings will be more frequent over the next 18 months.
- 11.57 Dedicated change management capability within the HR team has evolved to support the organisation in preparing for the move to a unitary. As part of this work, organisational change readiness and team readiness towards the

upcoming transition have been evaluated through a detailed change readiness analysis, engaging staff across leadership and service teams. This has informed the development of change priority interventions that equip leaders to strengthen engagement, communication, trust, and resilience through transition.

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.

12.2

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

AG126 Workforce Report 2023/24 18 July 2024

AG138 Update on Employee Attitude Survey 2024 26 September 2024

AG163 Workforce Report 2024/24 17 July 2025

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Workforce Report 2025/26 Data

Appendix 2 – Core mandatory training courses for all employees

Appendix 1

Workforce Report 2025/26 Data (as at 31 March 2026, unless otherwise stated)

Tables, charts and graphs in Appendix 1 have been extracted from the council's Access HR system and separate monitoring records.

Establishment

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

	Headcount	% increase	FTE	% increase
March 2025	460	+2.61%	414.77	+3.12%
March 2026	472		427.69	

Table 2 – Headcount of staff by grade

Pay Grade	Headcount
Apprentice Scale 3	6
Apprentice Scale 4	0
Scale 3	80
Scale 4	138
Scale 5	95
Scale 6	80
Scale 7	26
Scale 8	25
Scale 9	8
Scale 10	7
Scale 11	2
Scale 12	3
Chief Executive	1
Total	472

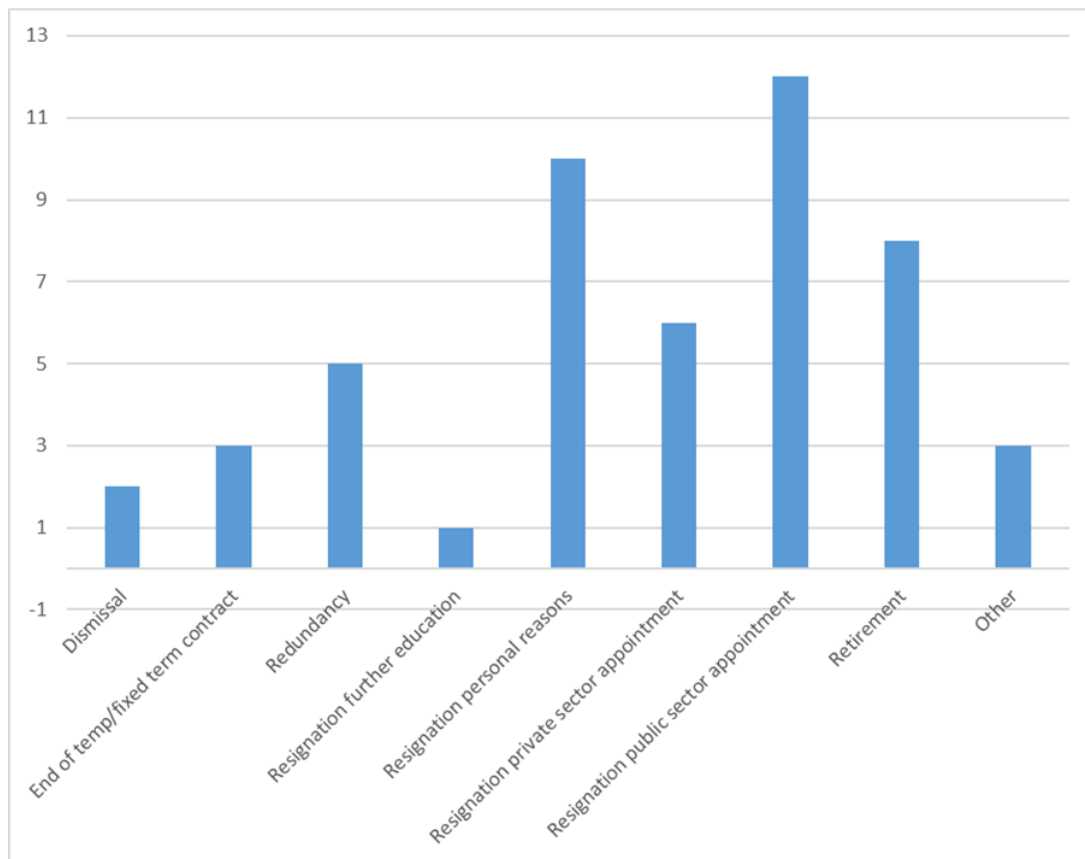
Table 3 – Contract Type

Full time (37 hours)	76%
Part-time	24%
Permanent contract	89%
Fixed-term contract	11%

SicknessTable 4 - Top 5 sickness absence reasons (averaged over April 25 – March 26)

Sickness Reason	Percentage of total annual sickness	Previous Year's ranking (out of 20)	Direction of travel
Mental Health – personal	21.77%	1	=
Infections incl cold and flu	19.19%	2	=
Surgery related	8.52%	8	↑
Stomach, liver, kidney & digestion	7.22%	6	↑
Neurological inc headaches & migraine	5.35%	4	↓

Recruitment and Turnover

Table 5 – Reasons for leaving the council

Equality

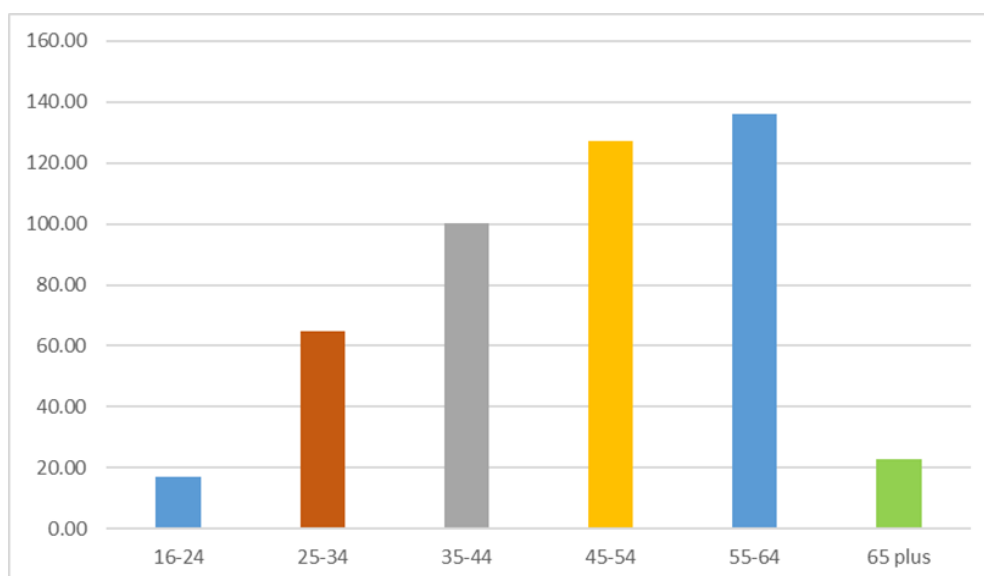
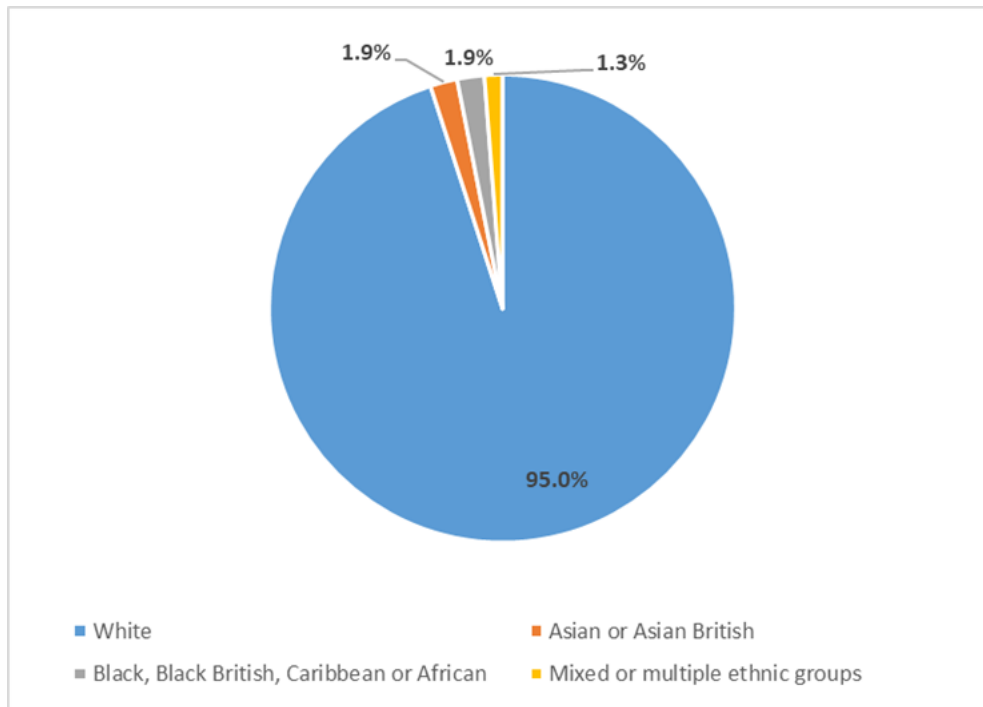
Table 6 – Age profile of the workforce (averaged over the 12 months)

Table 7 – Ethnicity profile of the workforce



Appendix 2

Core mandatory training courses for all employees

Aspire Learning Management System:

- Display Screen Equipment (DSE)
- Data Protection: Compliance Following GDPR
- Essential Safeguarding for Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults
- Prevent Duty Awareness Training for the Public Sector
- The Importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Understanding Domestic Abuse
- Working Safely - An Introduction to Workplace Health and Safety for Employees

MetaCompliance

- Cyber Security Awareness
- Information Security
- IMT Policy

New starters must also attend the Corporate Welcome Event and Carbon Literacy training.