

REPORT TITLE: - WORKFORCE REPORT 2024/25

17 JULY 2025

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

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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 2025.

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 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

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
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.	

## 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 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 11.2 This is the fifth 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 2025 unless stated otherwise and have been extracted from the council's Access HR system and separate monitoring records. For ease of reference, the equivalent 2024 data is shown in brackets in red.

#### **The council's staff establishment**

- 11.4 As at 31 March 2025, the council employed 460 (446) permanent and fixed-term staff. This was an increase of 3.14% of headcount compared to March 2024.
- 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 In the reporting period, there were 61 external appointments, made up of 43 permanent employees and 18 employees (including 1 apprentice) on fixed-term contracts.
- 11.7 There were 55 leavers; 48 permanent employees and 7 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 12.14% as compared to 16.16% in 2023/24.
- 11.10 The average length of service was 9 years and 2 months (9 years and 7 months).
- 11.11 Succession/workforce planning is managed through the annual service planning cycle by Corporate Head of Services and the Executive Leadership Board (ELB).

- 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 'tools' 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 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, their team and the council.
- 11.14 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.
- 11.15 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 5 (4) x full-time apprenticeships, 1 (1) x degree apprenticeship and 2 (2) upskilling apprenticeships are currently in place across different services. 1 (one) full-time apprentice successfully completed their apprenticeship in April 2025. 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 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.

- 11.19 The Staff Forum is a representative group of employees from across the organisation who can be called upon as needed to 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 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 66% response rate to the 2024 survey. The 2024 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', 71% (72%) 'I would recommend the council as a great place to work to my family and friends', 75% (73%) 'I am proud to work for the council, 95% (95%) 'The colleagues in my team are supportive and friendly' and 69% (81%) 'I understand the top priorities for Winchester City Council.' More information about the 2025 Employee survey can be found at 11.39.
- 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 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 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 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 6.71 days per employee was a slight increase from 6.11 days reported in 2023/24.
- 11.24 The current rates are slightly above the average sickness rate for the public sector of 6.1 days per employee in 2024 as reported by the ONS.
- 11.25 The split of short term and long absence remained largely consistent, with a marginal increase in long term absence – 35% short term and 65% long term vs 39% short term and 61% long term in 2023/24. These figures have historically shown little fluctuation, with the exception of during the pandemic.
- 11.26 'Mental health – Personal' continues to be the most common reason for sickness absence again this year, accounting for 23.22% of all sickness absence, which is a year-on-year percentage increase from 16.09% in 2023/24. However, it should be noted that this figure is still slightly down on the post-pandemic figure of 24.25% from 2021/22. Historically 'Mental Health – Personal' has commonly been the highest reason for sickness.
- This is indicative of a continuing upward 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, although the last 2 years have seen atypically lower rates (20.56% in 2022/23 and 26.93% in 2023/24). 2024/25 saw a return to a more typical level of 34.47%.
- 11.27 'Mental health – work related' has risen slightly from 5<sup>th</sup> most common sickness reason last year to 3<sup>rd</sup> most common reason. Two instances of long-term sickness absences (1 of whom was absent for a prolonged period and has since left) primarily account for this increase.
- 11.28 Sickness absences due to 'neurological including headaches and migraine' have risen significantly this year, rising from the 12<sup>th</sup> most common reason last year to 4<sup>th</sup> in 2024/25. However, this figure is inflated by 2 employees

who were absent for this reason for an extended period of time (1 of whom has since left and the other has returned to work); the majority of sickness for this reason was short term and in line with expected levels.

- 11.29 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.
- 11.30 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.
- 11.31 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.
- 11.32 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 2024 Employee Survey indicate high employee awareness of and value in the support offered by the council with 74% (73%) strongly agreeing/agreeing 'The council takes the health and wellbeing of its employees seriously' and 85% (80%) strongly agreeing/agreeing 'My manager cares about me as a person.'



## Equality

- 11.33 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 61% female and 39% male as at March 2024, remaining stable from last year's circa 60/40 split.
- 11.34 The council reported a 6.6% (7.3%) 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.
- 11.35 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% (37%) of employees who have disclosed their ethnicity as at 31 March 2025 is included in Appendix 1.
- 11.36 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

- 11.37 Over the year, 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:

- Introduction to Accident Investigation
- IOSH Working Safely (Institute of Occupational Safety and Health)
- IOSH Managing Safely
- Fire Marshal
- Conflict Resolution
- Working at Height
- Safeguarding Level 2
- Handling Disclosure about Domestic Abuse
- Project Management Methodology

HR continues to work with the Strategic Project Lead on 'Domestic Abuse on the 'Domestic Abuse Housing Association (DAHA)' Accreditation and on Level 2 Domestic Abuse Awareness.

- 11.38 In addition to the above, 71 managers from across the council, Scale 6 with direct reports to Scale 9, attended Leadership and Management learning &

development event in November to December 2024. Delivered by Dr Ruth Adams, Chief Executive of South East Employers, the programme was commissioned by ELB to provide insights and challenge designed to 'stretch' and support line managers. It also promoted the council's corporate values of 'Collaboration' and 'Innovation' and strengthened the 'One Council' ethos. This was the first corporate leadership/management development event of this type since the pandemic. Feedback from attendees highlighted the value of networking across the organisation and engaging in shared learning and problem solving. This feedback is now being used to inform how we continue to build opportunities for cross-organisational connection and learning (Peer Learning Groups based on Action Learning Sets for example).

A similar event for circa 30 Scale 4 to Scale 5 managers/supervisors with direct reports was delivered in June 2025.

- 11.39 For the fourth year, HR have organised the Employee survey to find out how employees feel about various aspects of their working lives at the council to inform senior managers and elected members how engaged employees are with their work and the council as a whole and to inform an action plan. The anonymised survey ran from 9 June to 4 July and achieved a 68% completion rate. The survey results were discussed with ELB and an update will be provided to Members via the "Democratic Services Update" (DSU) later in the year. Running the survey every year enables the analysis and identification of trends over time.
- 11.40 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.

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

- Absence Management Policy
- Adoption Leave and Pay Policy
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Long Service Recognition
- Managing Workforce Change
- Maternity and Paternity
- Politically Restricted Posts
- Working Hours and Time Off

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

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

### **Local Government Re-organisation**

11.43 The interim plan proposals for local government re-organisation were submitted to government on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025, we have now received feedback on the Hampshire and Solent submission and we, along with our neighbouring councils, are in a 4 week community engagement process and the final submission to Government is being worked on with submissions due by 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

11.44 Regular Chief Executive staff briefings and communications on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) have taken place since the start of the year, the most recent one on the 18th of June 2025. These are recorded and available on the Intranet to all staff.

11.45 The council will continue to support managers and staff through LGR by regularly engaging and providing timely information. The council will brief Managers and Staff through the following channels:

- CX Staff Briefings.
- Management Briefings via Corporate Management Meetings (CMM) and Service Leadership Team (SLT)
- Staff Briefings via Team Meetings
- Staff forum – we are currently reviewing membership and scope to ensure it fully represents all parts of the council.
- HR will continue to meet and engage with UNISON on a regular basis.

11.46 The health and wellbeing of staff continues to be a high priority. In addition to the wellbeing support already in place, HR will review this regularly and ensure access to information and guidance is easily accessible to all employees on the council's intranet.

11.47 'People' 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, leadership development and organisational design. Ensuring continuity of service delivery, retaining talent, and maintaining staff morale during a period of uncertainty will be essential to a successful transition.

In recognition of the importance of this agenda, a new full-time Service Lead – Human Resources has been recruited and took up post at the end of May 2025.

11.48 The council have also recently recruited a 'Change Enablement Lead' who will be supporting the council through the change process, working closely with the wider Transformation and Digital Team and Service Lead - Human Resources, sharing a people-centred approach to change.

11.49 The council is developing an Organisational Development and Change Strategy, which will detail how we navigate through our LGR journey, supported by a detailed action plan, including how we support managers and staff.

## 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

AG126 Workforce Report 2023/24 18 July 2024

AG138 Update on Employee Attitude Survey 2024 26 September 2024

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Workforce Report 2024/25 Data

Appendix 2 – Core mandatory training courses for all employees

## Appendix 1

### Workforce Report 2024/25 Data

#### Establishment

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

	Headcount	% increase	FTE	% increase
<b>March 2024</b>	446	+3.14%	408.03	+1.65%
<b>March 2025</b>	460		414.77	

Table 2 – Headcount of staff by grade

Pay Grade	Headcount
<b>Apprentice Scale 3</b>	5
<b>Apprentice Scale 4</b>	1
<b>Scale 3</b>	81
<b>Scale 4</b>	130
<b>Scale 5</b>	105
<b>Scale 6</b>	75
<b>Scale 7</b>	20
<b>Scale 8</b>	20
<b>Scale 9</b>	9
<b>Scale 10</b>	7
<b>Scale 11</b>	3
<b>Scale 12</b>	3
<b>Chief Executive</b>	1
<b>Total</b>	460

Table 3 – Contract Type

<b>Full time (37 hours)</b>	75%
<b>Part-time</b>	25%
<b>Permanent contract</b>	90%
<b>Fixed-term contract</b>	10%

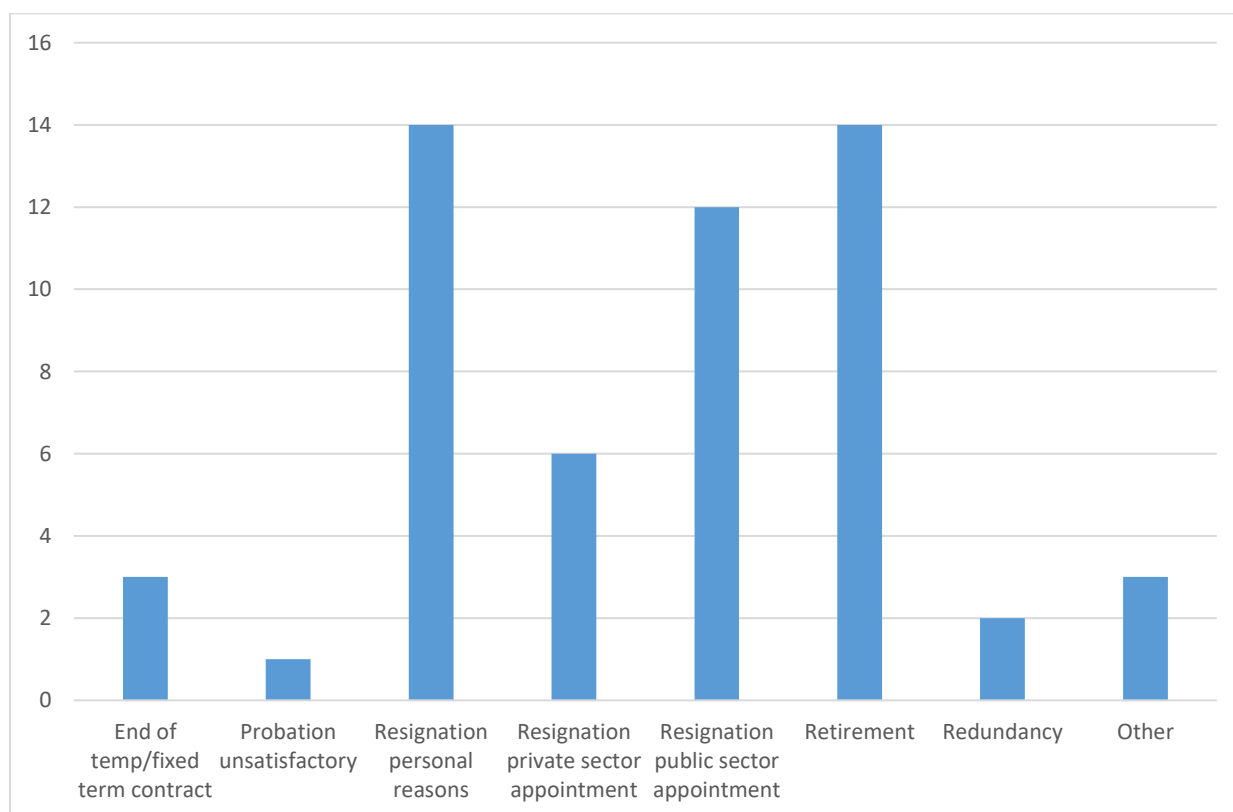
## Sickness

Table 4 - Top 5 sickness absence reasons (averaged over April 24 – March 25)

Sickness Reason	Percentage of total annual sickness	Previous Year's ranking (out of 20)	Direction of travel
<b>Mental Health – personal</b>	23.22%	1	=
<b>Infections incl cold and flu</b>	13.64%	2	=
<b>Mental health – work related</b>	8.93%	5	↑
<b>Neurological inc headaches &amp; migraine</b>	8.02%	12	↑
<b>Back and neck problems</b>	7.42%	4	↓

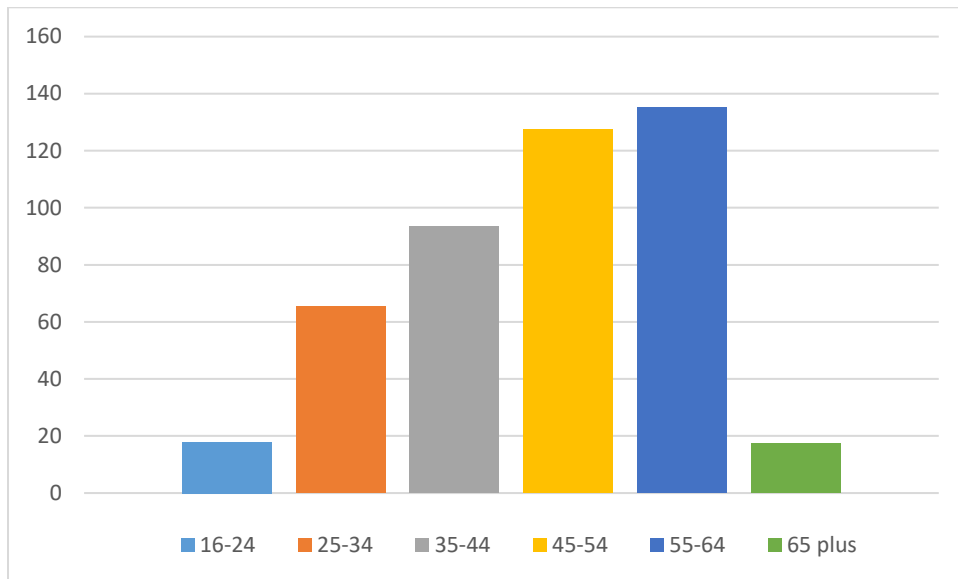
## Recruitment and Turnover

Table 5 – Reasons for leaving the council

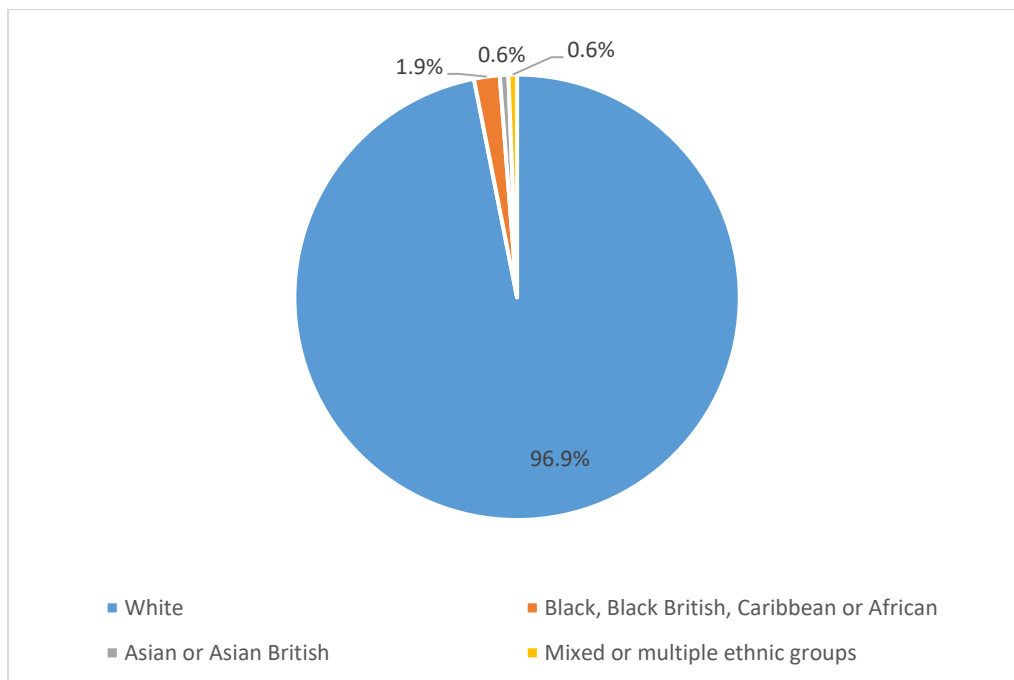


## Equality

**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**

- Cyber Security Awareness and Staying Safe Online
- Display Screen Equipment (DSE)
- 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

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