



# Northumberland County Council

## Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13 July 2020

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### **Annual Update Report for Workforce (2019/20)**

**Report of the Executive Director of HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive**

**Portfolio Member: Councillor Nicholas Oliver, Cabinet Secretary**

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#### Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an annual position statement in relation to workforce related areas of assurance, workstreams/associated action plans and progress to date within key areas for Northumberland County Council for the full financial year of 2019/20.
- To provide assurance to the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee that there is provision and monitoring in place to achieve necessary Key Performance Indicators relating to the workforce on an ongoing
- To provide members with an overview of the monitoring and actions taken during the period from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 in accordance with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy for employees.
- Other aspects of Whistleblowing which are not employee related are logged and maintained by the Council's Monitoring Officer.

#### Recommendations:

The recommendations are:

- Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report.
- Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee receive an annual update of this report for every financial year.
- Note the data that is contained in the whistleblowing report and the ongoing work to promote a safe environment for staff to raise concerns through various mechanisms across the Council.
- Support the continued use of Safecall across the Council as a mechanism for staff to raise concerns accordingly.

## Links to the Corporate Plan

The Northumberland County Council (NCC) Corporate Plan (2018-21) has identified a number of core strategic priorities and supporting key themes of which the following are particularly relevant to the workforce:

- We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone (How)
- We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for (Living)
- We want you to love where you live (Enjoying)
- We want you to have access to the things you need (Connecting)
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential (Learning)
- We want to attract more and better jobs (Thriving)
- We want to make a difference (Success Measures)

HR/OD have also published a Service Statement 2019-2021 that is reviewed and updated annually.

In response to emerging priorities and following review of the HR/OD Strategy 2018/21 a new HR People Strategy & 10 Point Delivery Plan has been developed to systematically align workforce development activities with strategic priorities and outcomes. A further wider People Strategy is in development and will provide more narrative as to our ambition to be an employer of choice.

## Background

An integral part of the Council's success in delivering high quality services to the population of Northumberland is based on the workforce of the Council. This report gives an overview of the employment and workforce related issues which are overseen by the Council's Workforce Committee. The Workforce Committee is a sub-committee of the Corporate Leadership Team and provides assurance and accountability in relation to all Workforce matters.

## Current data

1. The Council currently employs 4,329 staff and 3778.64 FTE (as at 31.3.20).
2. The number of staff employed in schools by Northumberland County Council has decreased to 4032 staff and 2562.79 FTE (as at 31.3.20) . For the purposes of this report the HR performance only relates to NCC directly employed staff.
3. Labour turnover for 2019/20 is 13.03% which has increased from the previous year (11.82%) , The total figure is lower than the LGA reported average of 13.4% labour turnover rate nationally (LGA Workforce survey 2018/19) .

## Workforce Committee

1. The Workforce Committee has established and is regularly reviewing a wide range of metrics which are used to manage and monitor compliance and best practice with workforce related issues across the whole council.

2. On a monthly basis, Managers and Directors through the Workforce Committee are asked to provide a full position statement relating to their area of responsibility. In advance of the meeting, Managers and Directors are provided with their position statement data which is mapped against a suite of workforce metrics for their area. Managers and Directors are then responsible for providing an overview of their current performance and planned performance against the required compliance levels for each set of workforce metrics.
3. Focussed attention continues to be on absence management which is a key challenge for the Council but also to other key performance indicators such as induction, statutory and mandatory training and appraisal for example.
4. The Workforce Committee also monitors the progress of the HR/OD Strategy which for 2018/2021 has five workstreams of activity, all which impact on the workforce across all areas of the council as stated in the links to the Corporate Plan.

### Update on the HR People Strategy & 10 Point Delivery Plan

In November 2019 the HR/OD Strategy for 2018/21 was reviewed to ensure that the strategic service delivery plans aligned with the emerging Innovation & Improvement agenda whilst continuing to support the Corporate Plan. Eight strategic workstreams were developed each with a ten point delivery plan. The outcomes for each strategic theme aligned to the five corporate priorities and seven innovation and improvement themes.

### **HR Plan - Strategic Themes**

1. Recruitment and Talent Acquisition
  - a. We will strengthen the quality, consistency and timeliness of our recruitment and talent acquisition activities
  - b. We will develop new approaches to how we attract, recruit and select high quality talent
  - c. We will continue to develop and promote NCC as an employer of choice through a variety of physical, social and digital mediums
2. Inclusion & Engagement
  - a. We will ensure Employees contribute to identifying the aspects of the organisation which make it a good place to work,
  - b. We will ensure the organisation commits itself to ensuring positive aspects of IE are maintained and developed;
  - c. We will build a strong engagement culture where employees feel they are listened to, valued, involved, informed and, more importantly, have different opportunities and ways to feed back
3. Change and Improvement
  - a. We will identify opportunities for employees to become champions of new ways of working in their teams, and to support their colleagues with the transition
  - b. We will create an environment in which continuous improvement is a significant and growing influence on our work.

- c. We will improve our effectiveness in managing change and transition, supporting improvement and achieving our strategic objectives.
- 4. Talent and Leadership Development
  - a. We will establish career pathways, encourage and enable staff to achieve their full potential in whatever way they wish their career to develop.
  - b. We will Identify, nurture and develop the leaders of tomorrow so that we are capable of meeting future challenges.
  - c. We will ensure our leaders and managers are the champions of our values and behaviours, and are responsible for addressing colleagues who do not act in line with those values and behaviours..
- 5. Health & Wellness
  - a. We will promote a culture of wellbeing across the organisations and partnerships to ensure sustainable practices.
  - b. We will make health and wellbeing services accessible to all staff and NCC workplaces across the County.
  - c. We will work with our local partners and utilise and develop what we've already got in place, raising awareness and communicating health and wellness services clearly.
- 6. Performance and Capability
  - a. We will create an HR framework and service-delivery model that supports and encourages manager self-service and empowers managers to be confident 'people' leaders.
  - b. We will continually review our people management processes and procedures to remove/reduce 'bureaucracy' and make them simple, business focused and compliant with legislation.
  - c. We will create a working environment where staff wellbeing is an integral part, and business decisions take into account the impact on staff wellbeing.
- 7. Training and Learning
  - a. We will adopt a 'just in time' approach to learning, ensuring our interventions can respond to changes and the demands of the business.
  - b. We will develop learning solutions that are based on modern pedagogical approaches and learning technologies
  - c. We will focus our learning and development activity on the things that will support the delivery of our business objectives..
- 8. Pay, Reward and Recognition
  - a. We will develop our strategic and total reward approaches to support business outcomes and employee aspirations
  - b. We will use our reward strategies to enhance the organisational reputation as an employer of choice through our capacity to place a value on the non-basic pay or wider non-financial benefits of working for the organisation.
  - c. We will improve access to information and the employee services system

### HR Function and Structure

The HR/OD team has been reconfigured on a temporary basis in order to cover secondments and maternity leave which has offered some positive changes to individuals to stretch and develop them.

There has been the successful establishment of a shared post of an “Equality and Inclusion Lead” with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust which has significantly raised our profile amongst staff and the community locally, regionally and nationally of being a truly diverse organisation.

The HR/OD function has developed new posts to focus on specific areas of growth such as; a Volunteer Network Coordinator to develop the work of volunteers working with the council and to look at the development of voluntary work for employees; a dedicated Recruitment Adviser to develop recruitment programmes for senior roles to reduce the need for engaging search agencies and subsequent savings to the organisation in doing so and an Engagement Advisor position to support and ensure staff engagement is increased to improve organisational outcomes in every directorate.

In addition, our management support to our HR Schools Team within Northumberland continues with North Tyneside Council which provides significant strength to the service.

Moving forward the structure of the HR/OD team will be reviewed to provide a level of permanency in some posts and to make the structure fit for purpose as we move towards a potential longer term change to our delivery of services and people management post Covid-19.

## **Key Performance Metrics**

### Learning and Development Performance

#### ***Performance Appraisal***

During 2019/20 the total % of all staff who had a performance appraisal recorded was 80.80%. This is under the expected level of performance of at least 85% and a small drop from the previous year (83.52%). This has been due to managers not undertaking appraisals in line with their projected timelines for a variety of reasons. A review of the appraisal itself and how it is undertaken will be considered to ensure employees have an opportunity of discussion with managers and ensuring it is useful to both employee and manager.

Need (Headcount)	Number completed (Headcount)	%	Total remaining (Headcount)	%
4329	3498	80.80%	831	19.20%

The Workforce Committee agrees schedules for achievement of appraisals with Directors/Head of Service and they then monitor the performance levels achieved by Directorate and service on a monthly basis to ensure the appropriate performance levels are achieved. These have been revised for 20/21 and Service leads had one to one discussions with the Deputy Chief Executive to account for the results for their area.

## **Statutory and Mandatory Training**

Corporate Training Needs Analysis (TNA) has been developed for all Northumberland County Council staff which is monitored for compliance directly by the Workforce Committee.

The 11 core subjects that all employees are required to undertake are as follows:

- Equality and Diversity – 3 yearly refresher
- Manual Handling awareness – 3 yearly refresher
- Safeguarding Children awareness – 3 yearly refresher
- Safeguarding Adults awareness – 3 yearly refresher
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – annual refresher
- Fire Safety awareness – annual refresher
- Health and Safety awareness – one off
- Stress Awareness – one off
- FOI and Subject Access refresher – one off
- PREVENT awareness or WRAP – one off
- Infection Prevention and Control - one

The Council's OD team have worked alongside HR colleagues to embed support for talent management and development at all levels across the Council. For 2019/20 we had a highly successful set of achievements in relation to Statutory and Mandatory Training which has been well embedded across the organisation. The overall final position for the Council as at 31.3.20 is outlined below.

Appraisal	Fire Safety	GDPR	Equality & Diversity	Manual Handling	Safeguarding Children	Safeguarding Adults	Health & Safety	Stress Awareness	FOI Subject Access	Prevent	Infection Control
75.08 %	87.16 %	84.50 %	89.51 %	86.72 %	86.07 %	85.17 %	93.14 %	86.95 %	92.58 %	91.45 %	89.35 %

Any compliance/performance issues are raised by the Executive Director of Human Resources & Deputy Chief Executive with the relevant Director/Head of Service and compliance will be discussed on a quarterly basis by the Executive Leadership Team in the form of a formal Workforce Assurance report.

### Personal and Professional Development

There is strong feedback both anecdotally and within the Staff Survey for 2019 that the Council is heavily committed to training and developing its staff not only with their statutory and mandatory training but also training to help employees do their job better and also increase their personal and professional development and has been built into supervision and appraisal processes. During 2019 the Council has successfully delivered a number of initiatives to support Corporate talent management and development alongside local initiatives by each department and these are:

- Over 350+ Apprenticeships from levels 1 - 7 exceeding the Councils Public Service Duty (PSD) to have 2.3% of workforce as apprentices. Currently the NCC figure is 3.7% of the workforce are apprentices.
- We have increased our apprenticeships by 40% from 2017/18

- The introduction of a new career pathway network which enables individuals to see their talent management opportunities across a wide range of subjects including leadership and management up to masters level
- We have blended our approach to combine local talent acquisition and high quality learning and development to sit alongside and complement national programmes of delivery. In the past 2 years we have supported 20 graduates offering exceptional training, mentoring, professional qualifications and initiatives that give back to communities, whilst helping to develop a rewarding career within Local Government and in professions such as Health & Social Care, Human Resources, Accountancy, Information Technology, Leadership & Management.
- Our graduate programme provides the perfect opportunity to bring bright, talented and ambitious people in to the heart of the organisation

### Case Management

The HR Advisors work on a ratio of 1:500 employees and the case profiles for 2019/20 are as follows:

No of cases 2019/20	Finance	Fire and Rescue	Place	Regeneration, Commercial & Economy	Children's Services	Adult Services	HR/OD	Total
Disciplinary Cases	8	0	28	11	16	5	2	<b>70</b>
Grievance/ Dignity at Work cases	0	1	1	6	5	2	0	<b>15</b>
Health & Well being policy cases	Review 1 - 105 Review 2 - 18 Review 3 - 4 Review 4 - 1	Review 1 - 24 Review 2 - 0 Review 3 - 0 Review 4 - 0	Review 1 - 112 Review 2 - 30 Review 3 - 13 Review 4 - 5	Review 1 - 89 Review 2 - 19 Review 3 - 8 Review 4 - 2	Review 1 - 196 Review 2 - 42 Review 3 - 1 Review 4 - 3	Review 1 - 150 Review 2 - 49 Review 3 - 8 Review 4 - 4	Review 1 - 50 Review 2 - 10 Review 3 - 2 Review 4 - 3	<b>Review 1 - 726</b> <b>Review 2 - 168</b> <b>Review 3 - 36</b> <b>Review 4 - 18</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>1083</b>

In 2019/2020 we have undertaken 5 cases of mediation using trained facilitators, 2 in Housing, 1 in Schools (invoiced through SLA agreement) and 2 in Education and Skills.

Our cohort of trained coaches have received 27 nominations for coaching from NCC employees that result in an average of 3-5 sessions with a coach for career, leadership or personal/professional development coaching in 2019/2020.

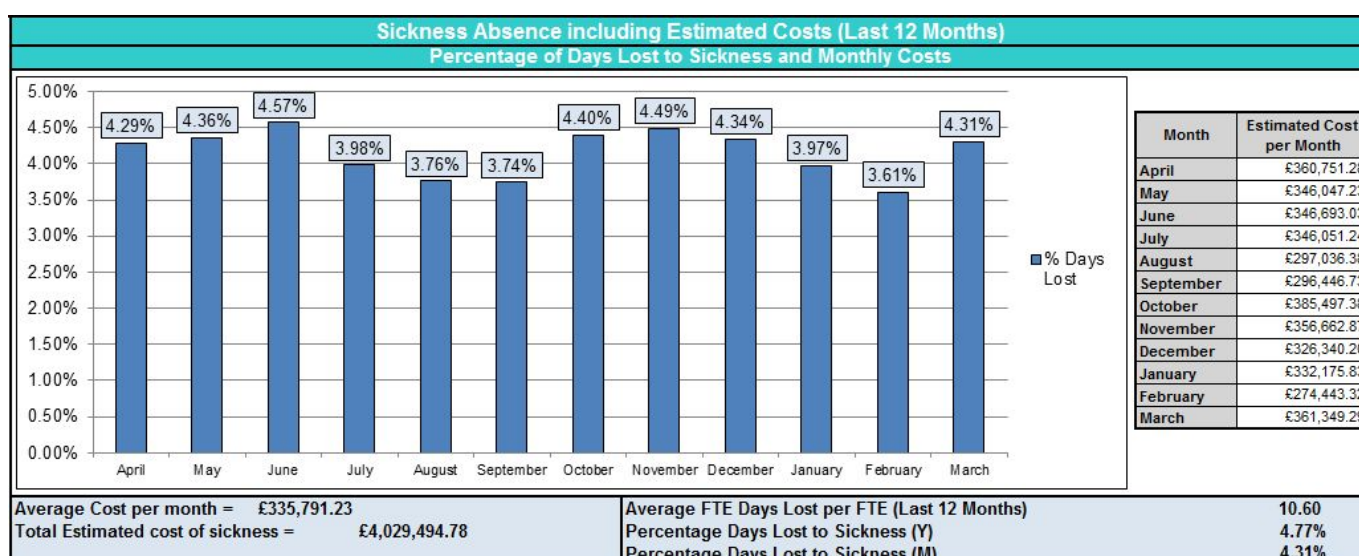
### **Health and Wellbeing**

The shared service for Occupational Health with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is now well established and staff are now offered a county wide Occupational Health Service. A Shared Services Management Board is in place to review and manage the service and activity and quality is being reviewed on a regular basis. The Occupational Health service team well known within the Council and the team work closely with managers to ensure that they focus in on key issues, particularly managing sickness absence. The Health & Wellbeing Co-ordinator continues to support wellbeing initiatives including fitness classes, beginners running, weigh and go, genealogy, reading promotion, staff singalongs, mental wellbeing network and lunchtime health walks. The Co-ordinator has recruited a cross section of 100 employees to act as Health & Wellbeing Champions to help promote good workplace health. The role has progressed to specific action planning directly with services. NCC has the Better Health at Work Award at Maintaining Excellence level and intends to provide evidence to continue with the Award at this level moving forward.

### Sickness Absence

Sickness absence for 2019/20 had an annual cost of £4.02m. The average number of FTE lost days per FTE is 10.6. This is a reduction from the costs of 2018/19 - Annual cost £4.14m and FTE lost days per FTE were 11.36 although sickness absence continues to be above the Workforce Committee target of 7.5 days per FTE.

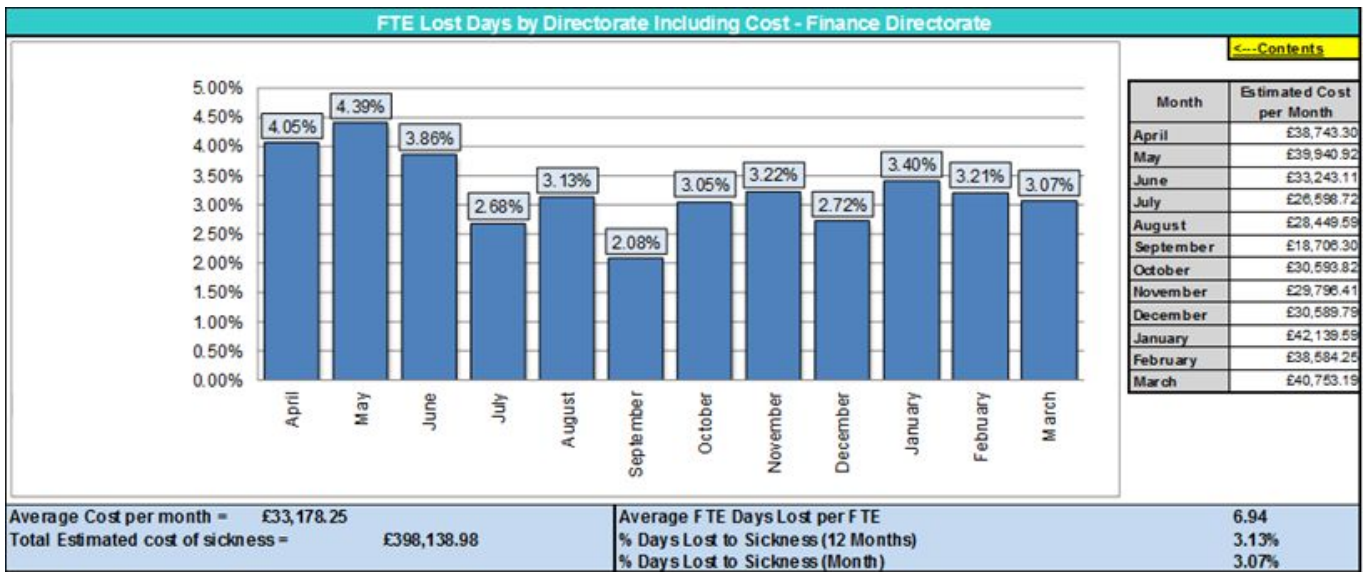
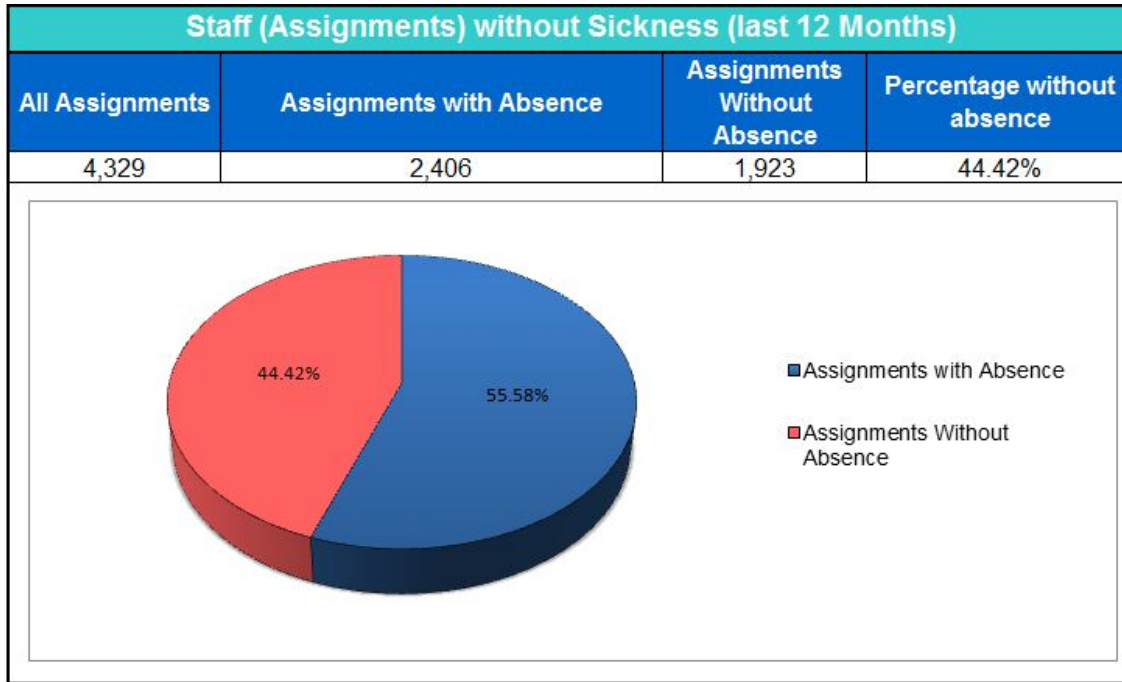
The WFC report highlights specific trends and areas with high absence levels in each service area. Departments are scrutinised, and areas discussed to look at how they can best deal with reducing absence. The Health and Wellbeing Policy has now been adopted by NFRS to ensure a consistent approach throughout all of the organisation in regards to Health and Well being of employees and the management of absence. Mental health support is now part of the health and wellbeing process through use of Wellbeing Action Plans for employees. Questions for managers have been included in the supervision proforma to record all aspects of an individual's well being by the manager on a regular basis.



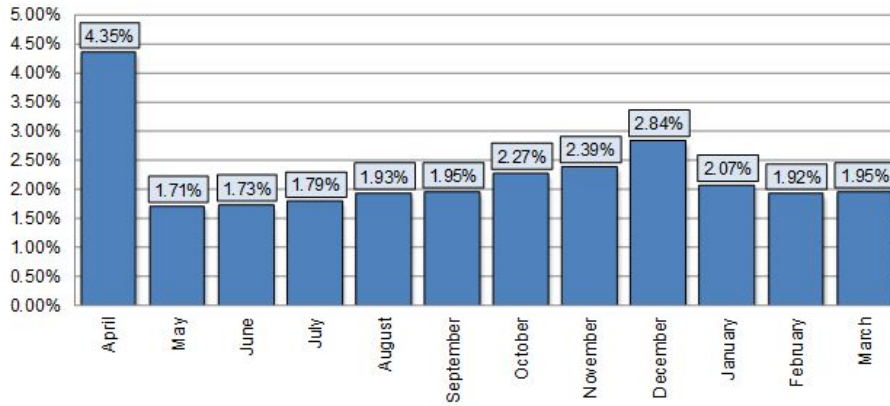
The cost of sickness absence by Directorate (see tables below) similarly shows the greatest areas being Adult Services, Place (Local Services) and Children's Social Care



where the headcount is significantly higher. It is recognised that nearly 56% of all staff assignments have had some absence due to sickness during the last twelve months (as outlined below).



FTE Lost Days by Directorate Including Cost - Fire and Rescue Directorate

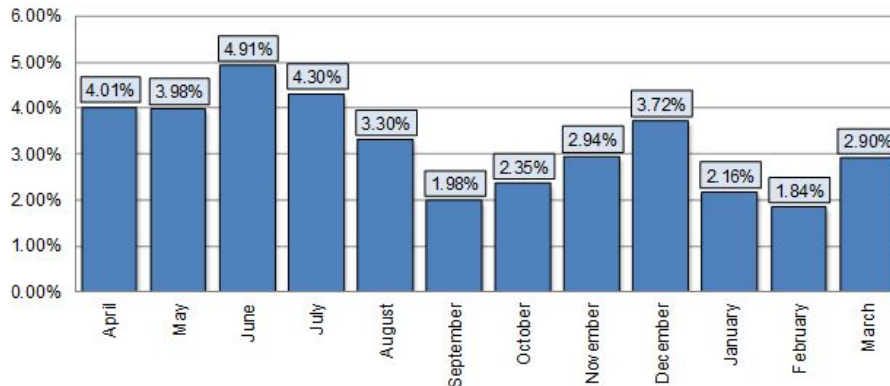


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Month	Estimated Cost per Month
April	£24,785.40
May	£9,438.55
June	£9,082.83
July	£10,789.25
August	£10,554.71
September	£10,747.58
October	£14,024.08
November	£13,442.58
December	£14,722.82
January	£11,841.54
February	£9,440.00
March	£11,338.33

Average Cost per month = £12,515.68      Average FTE Days Lost per FTE 5.73  
 Total Estimated cost of sickness = £150,188.20      % Days Lost to Sickness (12 Months) 2.58%  
 % Days Lost to Sickness (Month) 1.95%

FTE Lost Days by Directorate Including Cost - Human Resources & OD Directorate

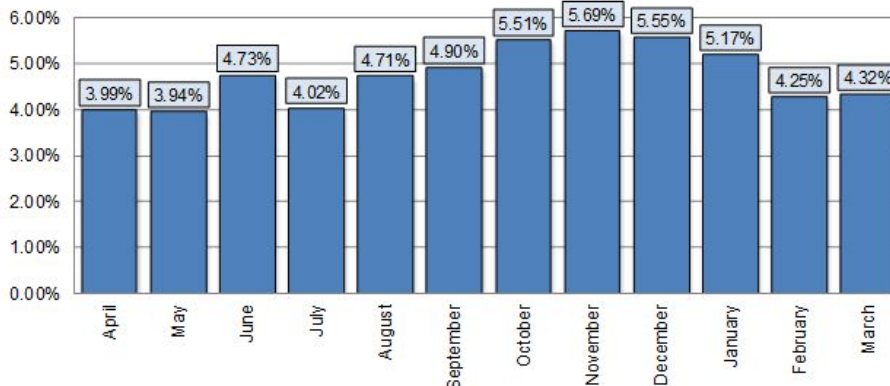


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Month	Estimated Cost per Month
April	£40,119.83
May	£37,847.11
June	£44,746.48
July	£44,535.13
August	£31,211.14
September	£19,044.84
October	£25,693.31
November	£28,566.70
December	£26,545.97
January	£16,939.74
February	£13,310.48
March	£23,192.58

Average Cost per month = £29,312.69      Average FTE Days Lost per FTE 9.68  
 Total Estimated cost of sickness = £351,752.29      % Days Lost to Sickness (12 Months) 4.36%  
 % Days Lost to Sickness (Month) 2.90%

FTE Lost Days by Directorate Including Cost - Place Directorate

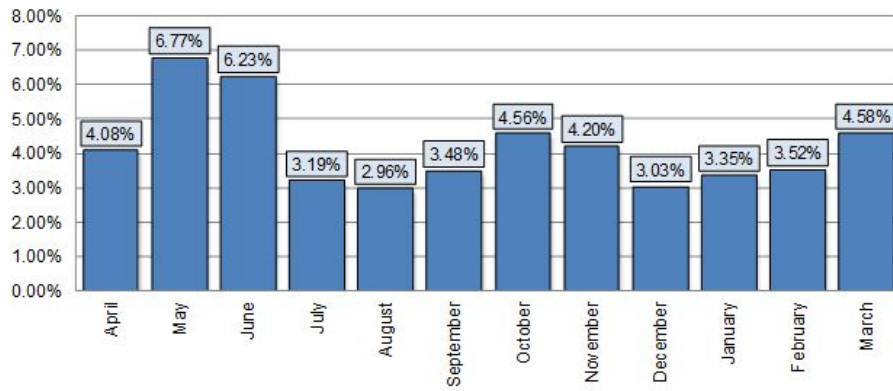


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Month	Estimated Cost per Month
April	£79,649.47
May	£82,443.01
June	£88,958.71
July	£84,939.39
August	£90,670.20
September	£93,688.60
October	£114,086.40
November	£106,863.58
December	£100,562.24
January	£103,039.21
February	£77,358.55
March	£68,898.58

Average Cost per month = £90,763.16      Average FTE Days Lost per FTE 15.02  
 Total Estimated cost of sickness = £1,089,157.92      % Days Lost to Sickness (12 Months) 6.76%  
 % Days Lost to Sickness (Month) 4.32%

FTE Lost Days by Directorate Including Cost - Regeneration, Commercial and Economy



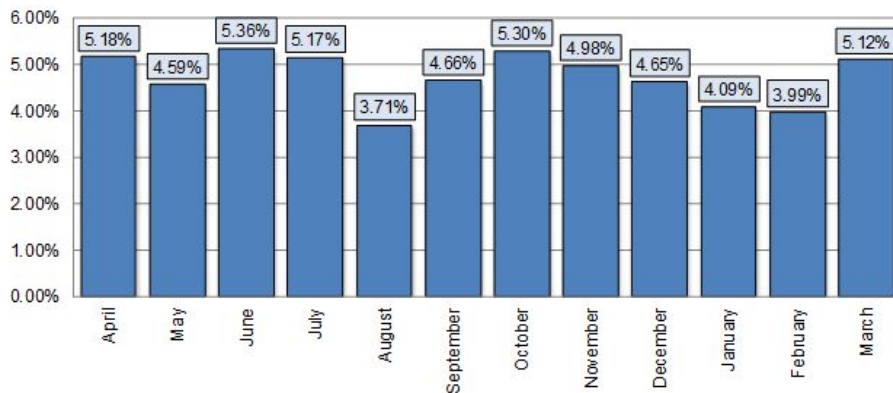
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Month	Estimated Cost per Month
April	£14,109.89
May	£22,052.28
June	£20,010.22
July	£11,844.24
August	£10,102.25
September	£11,809.70
October	£16,830.80
November	£14,136.67
December	£8,947.40
January	£10,890.14
February	£10,440.07
March	£49,558.22

Average Cost per month = £16,727.62  
Total Estimated cost of sickness = £200,731.45

Average FTE Days Lost per FTE 4.08  
% Days Lost to Sickness (12 Months) 1.84%  
% Days Lost to Sickness (Month) 4.58%

FTE Lost Days by Directorate Including Cost - Children's Services Directorate - Children's Services Overall



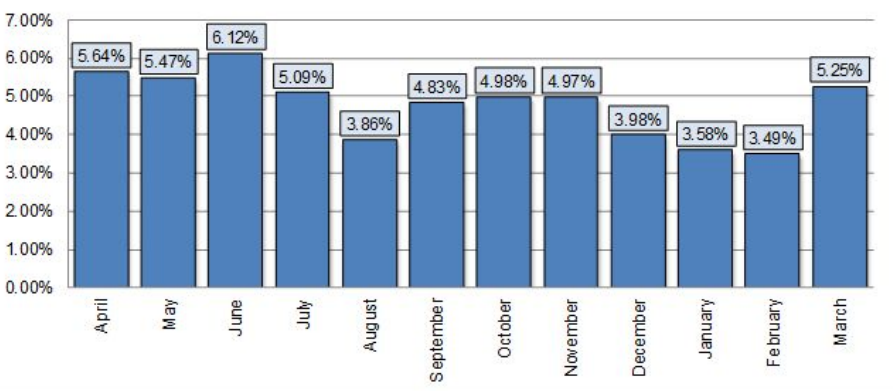
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Month	Estimated Cost per Month
April	£103,587.01
May	£94,959.43
June	£105,744.19
July	£116,409.88
August	£75,462.07
September	£95,843.37
October	£120,498.66
November	£102,317.20
December	£90,490.50
January	£88,909.25
February	£78,591.66
March	£109,008.58

Average Cost per month = £98,484.31  
Total Estimated cost of sickness = £1,181,811.75

Average FTE Days Lost per FTE 12.22  
% Days Lost to Sickness (12 Months) 5.50%  
% Days Lost to Sickness (Month) 5.12%

FTE Lost Days by Directorate Including Cost - Children's Services Directorate - Children's Social Care

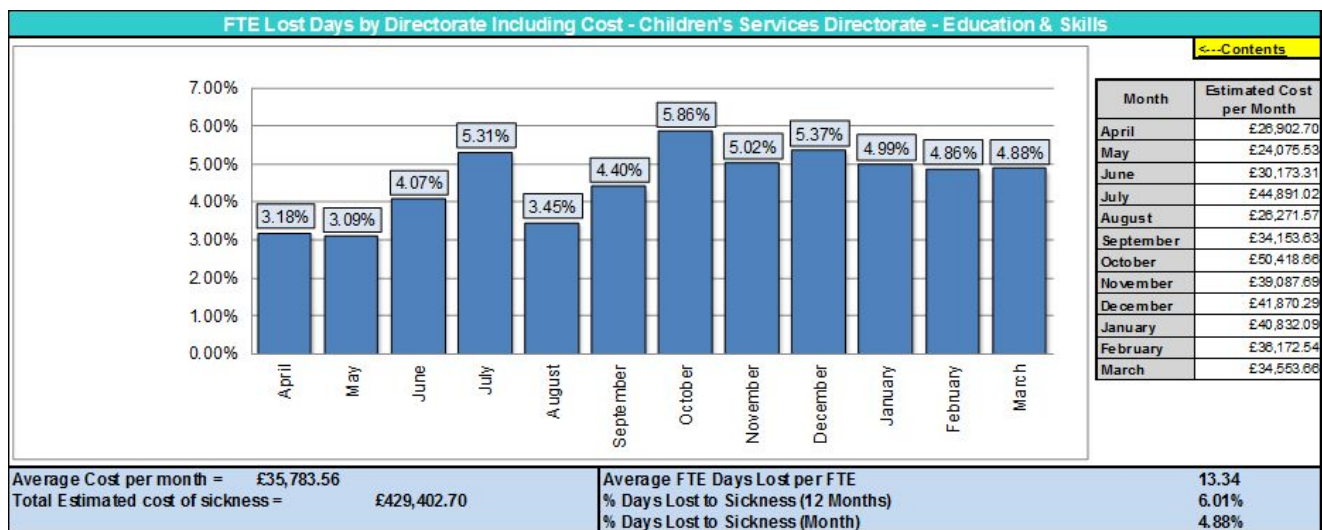


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Month	Estimated Cost per Month
April	£75,236.10
May	£89,525.65
June	£74,228.05
July	£70,628.71
August	£48,461.23
September	£60,815.49
October	£89,357.64
November	£62,428.56
December	£48,279.65
January	£47,727.10
February	£42,113.66
March	£73,244.39

Average Cost per month = £61,837.12  
Total Estimated cost of sickness = £742,045.43

Average FTE Days Lost per FTE 11.70  
% Days Lost to Sickness (12 Months) 5.27%  
% Days Lost to Sickness (Month) 5.25%



Work is ongoing to promote wellbeing with staff with the key health and wellbeing initiatives for 2019/20 remain the same as 2018/19 identified as:

- Mental health
- Musculoskeletal
- Healthy lifestyle

Information is analysed to ensure that each directorate further understands their sickness absence information with FTE lost days by Directorate information and the associated costs being provided to managers and the Workforce Committee on a monthly basis. This is being further analysed to include a true picture of long and short term absences over a longer period of time for each employee and service area.

### Sickness Absence costs comparative 2019/20

	Absence costs 2020	Absence costs 2019	Ave days lost 2020	Ave days lost 2019	% days lost to sickness 2020	% days lost to sickness 2019
Total NCC	£4,029,494.78	£4,146,812	10.60	11.36	4.77%	5.12
Finance	£398,138.98	£572,328	6.94	14.56	3.13%	6.56
Fire & Rescue	£150,188.20	£363,414	5.73	10.11	2.58%	4.55
HR & OD	£351,752.29	£193,065	9.68	4.29	4.36%	1.93
Place	£1,089,157.92	£1,065,872	15.02	12.17	6.76%	5.48
Regeneration, Commercial & Economy	£200,731.45	£149,331	4.08	9.38	1.84%	4.22

Adult Services	£592,788.77	£754,719	16.20	17.87	7.30%	8.02
Children's Services	£1,181,811.75	£330,692	12.22	10.35	5.50%	4.66

### Sickness Absence Benchmarking - Average Lost FTE Days per FTE

From last year's Cabinet Report recommendations were to include benchmarking data from other unitary authorities. Northumberland compared with all English Unitary Authorities. The latest benchmarking data we are able to access is that of 2018/19.

Year	Northumberland	Minimum for All English unitary authorities	Mean for All English unitary authorities	Maximum for All English unitary authorities
2018/19	11.2	5.4	10.1	13.1

*Northumberland compared with CIPFA 'Nearest Neighbours'*

Year	Northumberland	Minimum for Northumberland CIPFA nearest neighbours	Mean for Northumberland CIPFA nearest neighbours	Maximum for Northumberland CIPFA nearest neighbours
2018/19	11.2	9.3	12.2	14.3

Northumberland CIPFA nearest neighbours include the following Local Authorities: East Riding of Yorkshire, Sefton, Wirral, Durham, Isle of Wight, North Tyneside, Shropshire, Redcar and Cleveland, Cornwall, Torbay, Barnsley, Rotherham, Calderdale, St. Helens.

*Northumberland compared with North East Local Authorities*

Year	Northumberland	Gateshead	Cumbria	Durham	Carlisle	Newcastle upon Tyne	North Tyneside
2018/19	11.2	-	25.3	12.6	-	12.9	11.8

The data is collected through the Local Government Workforce Survey. The annual survey is conducted by LGA Research and Information. The survey is sent to all heads of human resources in England between June and September. Please note the response rate of this survey varies from year to year.

The benchmarking data provides evidence we have the lowest absence rate from those reported in 2018/19 in the region, and near the mean of all unitary authorities.

## Agency Staffing

Numbers of agency staffing are regularly reviewed by the Workforce Committee with usage and reliance on agency staffing reducing throughout the Council during 2019/20. We have worked with local authority colleagues across the region to ensure we set standardised frameworks and agreed rates, particularly for challenging areas such as social workers etc which has proved very positive for the North East in managing the challenges that agency staffing costs and quality pose.

Monitoring of agency staffing and overtime has commenced in granular detail across directorates and further work needs to be done to address this work locally by directorate. Moving forward the organisation is looking to set up an Internal Staffing Bank to reduce the requirement for agency workers, offer staff the opportunity to register for work at any department/area within the Council (dependent upon their skills and experience) and this will ensure we have a more flexible workforce and reduce existing costs. This work will be progressed through 2020/21.

The introduction of IR35 legislation has given rise to agencies wishing to engage to negotiate rates and this has afforded us the opportunity to transfer some agency workers from agency rates to NCC fixed term contracts which is cost efficient and provides more stability within the workforce.

## Fixed Term Contracts

Fixed term contracts are now monitored monthly by the Workforce Committee using a RAG rating so there is notice for those that are due to come to an end immediately and those that are longer term. All fixed term contracts and honoraria have an end date so that they are regularly reviewed.

	Non-Apprentice Contracts				Apprentice Contracts			
	Contracts with no expiry date	Contracts Expired	Contracts Expired in next 3 months	Contracts Expired in after 3 months	Contracts with no expiry date	Contracts Expired	Contracts Expired in next 3 months	Contracts Expired in after 3 months
NCC Total as at 31 March 2020	2	13	80	180	0	5	33	79

## Equality and Diversity

Work is ongoing to actively promote and recruit further E&D Allies amongst the workforce and the Council's LGBT, Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic, Menopause and Andropause and Carers Network groups which are run jointly with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and continue to be well represented.

The Council has re-entered the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and has successfully achieved an entry in the top 100 at 34th place overall is one of the highest local authorities in the country within the rankings which is an excellent achievement.

This has been a significant increase from 86th position in 2019 and our highest position to date.

The Council now supports Northumberland Pride celebrations that have been in Alnwick and will move to Morpeth in the future. Along with this a programme of work has been undertaken by the Equalities & Diversity Lead to support LGBT+ inclusion, Patrick Price who is the equality lead across the Trust and Council continues to work with equality allies to make the organisation more inclusive.

The Council has produced its Gender Pay Gap Report and during 2018/19 had one of the lowest Gender Pay Gaps within public sector organisations across the region. The Council's Gender Pay Gap report is now published on the Council's website

### **Staff Survey Data**

The Staff Survey has produced a record 80.5 % return for a full census survey which is an excellent result, and an increase of 9.5% from 2018 and 19.5% increase since 2016. Picker Institute were the provider of the survey in 2019 and there have been challenges with them regarding their analysis of the data and having this provided back to the Council in a timely manner. The findings have been shared with service leads and staff and teams are now action planning on the findings. Our usual approach of communication with staff has been varied due to the COVID 19 pandemic however we are continuing with a different style of corporate communication updates about the outcomes.

Key themes of the responses are :-

- Satisfied with extent organisation values my work has increased 10% in the last 12 months and 17% in the past 4 years
- Staff are feeling more valued by the organisation particularly after their appraisal, however there is some work to be done around using appraisals to improve how staff do their job.
- An 11% increase on staff believing that the council cares and takes positive action on staff well being.
- An increase of 4% in the last 12 months (11% in the last 4 years) of staff saying they would recommend the council as a place to work.
- We need to work on communications between teams themselves, between teams and senior/exec teams to support staff to meet the council objectives.

Financial wellbeing has been included in the survey for the second year, and a significant proportion of staff have concerns in this area. The Health and Wellbeing Coordinator works with external to provide support for financial matters and NCC has a working arrangement with Northumberland Community Bank to allow low interest loans to employees to help change their circumstances. It is proven that financial wellbeing has a strong link with the health and well being of individuals.

### **Achievements**

The Council has been shortlisted for several national awards

## **Municipal Journal (MJ) Awards 2019**

Workforce Transformation

## **PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards 2020**

Public Sector Team of the Year

Best Creative Concept

Best Employer & TU partnership

Rising Star Award

## **LGC Awards 2020**

Diversity & Inclusion

## **National Apprenticeship Awards 2019**

National Apprenticeship of the Year Winner 2019

## **North East CIPD Awards 2019**

Kelly Angus received Inspirational Practitioner Award 2019

## **Whistleblowing Report 2019/20**

The Council has for a number of years had a Whistleblowing Policy however this was reviewed formally in 2018 and relaunched across the organisation. The Council introduced Safecall in August 2017. In 2018-19 and 2019-20, Safecall was one of the main methods used for the reporting of whistleblowing complaints.

Safecall is an external company which provides a helpline and promotional materials to support staff to raise concerns either anonymously or directly and staff or members of the public can contact Safecall via email or by telephone directly. Safecall's advisors are trained individuals with many of them being ex-police officers. This process has been made more robust by ensuring that monthly meetings are held with the Strategic HR Lead and the Monitoring Officer. The total costs payable to Safecall during 2019-20 were £4,331.00, based on £0.95 per head.

## **Whistleblowing Data during 2019-20**

During 2019-20 there were 22 issues/allegations reported in line with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

<b>Service</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Category of Allegation</b>	<b>Current Status of Allegation</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Local Services	Anonymous letter	Bullying	Closed	Training and management action
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Safecall	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	Recommendations made



Local Services	Safecall	Management of GDPR issue	Closed	Recommendations made
Council Wide	Whistleblowing with External Auditors	Information of a whistleblowing nature relating to Senior Managers and Advance Northumberland.	Closed	No action required
Finance	Telephone contact with HR	Allegations of drug dealing	Closed	No further information
HR/OD	Telephone contact with HR	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	Recommendations made
Education & Skills	Formal whistleblowing (form)	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	Recommendations made
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Ongoing complaint	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	Recommendations made
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Formal whistleblowing	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	Recommendations made
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Safecall	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	Recommendations made
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Letter to CEO	Bullying	Closed	Training and management action
Finance & Customer Services	Email to Service Director	Bullying	Closed	Formal disciplinary investigation
Planning	Formal whistleblowing	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	No action required
Education & Skills	Safecall	Employment practices/ behaviours	Closed	Formal disciplinary investigation
Education & Skills	Exit questionnaire	Employment practices/ Behaviours	Closed	No action required
Property Services	Anonymous letter	Employment practices/ Behaviours	Closed	No action required
Local Services	Staff survey	Employment practices/ Behaviours	Closed	No action required
Adults/ Children's/	Safecall	Data protection breach	Closed	Recommendations made

Schools				
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Exit Questionnaire	Employment practices/ Behaviours (health & safety of staff)	Closed	No action required
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Exit Questionnaire	Employment practices/ Behaviours (health & safety of staff)	Closed	Recommendations made
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Safecall	Employment practices/ Behaviours	Closed	No action required
Adults/ Children's/ Schools	Letter to CEO	Bullying	Closed	Formal disciplinary investigation

The source of referrals were as follows:

Directorate	Number of referrals
Local Services/Place	3
Adults, Children's, Education	13
Property	1
Council wide	1
HR/OD	1
Finance & Customer Services	2
Planning	1
Total:	22

Format of referral:

Format	Number
Other	11
Form	3
Safecall	5
Exit Questionnaire	3
Total:	22

Nature of referral:

Nature of referral:	Number
Bullying	4
Employment Practices/Behaviours	14
Allegation of drug dealing	1
GDPR Issues	2
General whistleblowing allegation	1
Total:	22

Outcomes from referral:

Outcome	Number
Informal Resolution	0
Recommendation made	9
Training and Management Action	2
No action required	8
Formal investigation	3
Total:	22

### Whistleblowing Correlation with the Staff Survey Data

The Staff Survey data suggests that there are some areas where further work is required around reporting bullying and harassment, both from service users and staff on staff and confidence in raising concerns where there has been a near miss or error. This is mostly due to categorisation of concerns and being clear what bullying and harassment is, what action that employees can take and where they can seek support.

There will continue to be ongoing awareness raised as part of the action planning to assist with encouraging staff to raise concerns to promote transparency and openness.

## Staff Survey Information

Below refers to questions and answers that have been taken from the 2019 staff survey:

		Total	
		N	%
14. If you were concerned about an unsafe working practice, would you know how to report it?	Yes	2831	86.6%
	No	208	6.4%
	Don't know	231	7.1%
	Total	3270	100.0%

		Total	
		N	%
15. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about unsafe working practice? a. I would feel secure raising concerns about an unsafe working practice.	Strongly disagree	113	3.5%
	Disagree	137	4.2%
	Neither agree nor disagree	399	12.2%
	Agree	1631	49.8%
	Strongly agree	994	30.4%
	Total	3274	100.0%

		Total	
		N	%
15. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about unsafe working practice? b. I am confident that the Organisation would address my concern.	Strongly disagree	129	4.0%
	Disagree	211	6.5%
	Neither agree nor disagree	813	24.9%
	Agree	1419	43.5%
	Strongly agree	693	21.2%
	Total	3265	100.0%

Below is the councils average % of staff reporting a positive answer with a comparison from previous years response. It is important to note that the question descriptor was altered this year, to include data breaches and reputational damage and we believe this is why there has been a slight reduction in the results.

Description	2019	2018	2017	2016
In the last month, I have not seen any errors, near misses, or incidents, including data breaches that could have hurt or been detrimental to staff.	88.0%	88.4%	88.0%	86.5%
In the last month, I have not seen any errors, near misses, or incidents, including data breaches that could have hurt or been detrimental to customers/service users/residents.	90.2%	92.2%	92.0%	90.4%
In the last month, I have not seen any errors, near misses, or incidents, including data breaches that could have hurt or been detrimental to organisational reputation.	90.4%	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*
Last error/near miss/incident that could have hurt or been detrimental to either staff, customers/service users/residents, or the Organisation's reputation was reported.	82.8%	77.2%	74.0%	N/A
Would know how to report unsafe working practices.	93.2%	92.6%	85.0%	86.2%
Would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe working practice.	80.2%	83.5%	82.0%	83.2%
Would feel confident that organisation would address concern.	64.7%	61.3%	60.0%	59.8%

\* New question, no score for this question as it was not asked in this survey.

Over 93% of staff reported that they would know how to report unsafe working practices, this has been a steady increase over the past years.

It is disappointing to see that there has been a decrease in the amount of staff who stated that they would feel secure in raising concerns about unsafe working practice, this has decreased by 3.2% this year, however, there has been an increase in the amount of staff who feel confident that the Council would address the concern. This may be due to the change in question text, as in previous years, feedback from staff survey representatives was that these questions related to health and safety and may not be applicable to all staff. We are confident that the results this year include all staff as staff could make the link to their role and the error/near miss of data breaches or reputational damage.

As a council we still need to work on improving these scores and will look at using corporate communication methods to tell a story to staff of real life scenarios and how as an organisation we learnt from these, promoting a clear and transparent process and encouraging culture. Work will commence on this during 20/21.

## Conclusions of report

There has been significant work progressed within 2019/20 within the HR/OD team however there is still much to achieve and work continues on regularly refreshing the HR/OD Strategy.

In regards to Whistleblowing, there are themes related to expectations and employment practices/behaviours which include support, supervision and also systems and

processes. Results from a staff survey show that there is still some work to do to encourage staff to report errors and near misses and that these are of importance. As part of the staff survey, bespoke action plans are developed for each service. Services will be asked to focus on encouraging staff to report concerns and to share feedback from whistleblowing to promote openness, transparency and learning from the error/near miss.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations are:

- Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report.
- Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee receive an annual update of this report for every financial year
- Note the whistleblowing data that is contained in the report and the ongoing work to promote a safe environment for staff to raise concerns through various mechanisms across the Council.
- Support the continued use of Safecall across the Council as a mechanism for staff to raise concerns accordingly.

### **Implications arising from this report**

Policy	None
Finance and value for money	The workforce is of significant cost to the Council and therefore it is essential that the workforce performs well to ensure that the Council achieves value for money in relation to service provision.
Legal	There are legal implications for the Council if employment practices are not in line with the law and best practice.
Procurement	None.
Human Resources	As included within the report.
Property	None.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	All HR policies and procedures are subject to an equality impact assessment.
Risk Assessment	Risks relating to the ongoing health and wellbeing of staff are managed locally.
Crime & Disorder	None.
Customer Consideration	Improved staff performance will impact on the quality of customer experiences.
Carbon reduction	None.
Wards	All.

Report sign off.

*Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:*

	initials
Finance Officer	
Monitoring Officer/Legal	LH
Human Resources	NO
Executive Director	Kelly Angus
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Oliver

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