



Northumberland County Council

Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: July 2022

Annual Update Report for Workforce (2021/22)

Report of the Interim Service Director of HR/OD

Portfolio Member: Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an annual position statement in relation to strategic 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 2021/22.
- 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 basis.
- To provide elected members with an overview of the strategic direction for the Council's workforce related matters as part of the Covid-19 recovery plans for the county as these continue to evolve.
- To provide members with an overview of the monitoring and actions taken during the period from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 in accordance with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy for employees. Members are asked to note that 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 continue to 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 an additional mechanism for staff to raise concerns accordingly.

Links to the Corporate Plan

The Northumberland County Council (NCC) Corporate Plan (2021-24) 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 attract more and better jobs (Thriving)
- We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for (Living)
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential (Learning)
- We want you to love where you live (Enjoying)
- We want you to have access to the things you need (Connecting)
- We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone (How)

HR/OD have also published a Service Statement 2021-2022 that is reviewed and updated annually as part of our ongoing governance arrangements.

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 Executive Leadership Team and provides assurance and accountability in relation to all Workforce matters.

Current Landscape

Moving forward out of the COVID pandemic and towards a new way of working agilely. Support is still available for employees through

- A structured and enhanced health and wellbeing suite of activities and support for staff affected by the pandemic, both within the workplace and those who were working remotely.
- Regular briefings and information held including drop in sessions
- Additional personal protective equipment including obtaining feedback from staff around adequacy and localised supplies
- Personalised risk assessments undertaken for all staff to ensure that managers had individual conversations with staff focused on their health and wellbeing, personal circumstances as well as work related matters
- Through our shared Occupational Health Service early access to vaccines for frontline social care staff.
- Regular drop-in sessions and senior leadership meetings dedicating a significant amount of the agenda to supporting staff.

In the autumn on 2020, an interim HR/OD People Strategy was developed covering a six-month period up to the end of April 2021, this was in recognition of the need for a rationalised focus during this period and, in particular, on staff health and wellbeing. A further wider People Strategy for 2021-2024 is now in place to provide narrative as to

our ambition to continue to be an employer of choice in a post-pandemic era. A copy of the document is attached as an appendix.

Current data

1. The Council currently employs 4,932 staff (headcount) and 4,386.37 FTE (as at 31.03.21) - excluding schools.
2. The number of staff employed in schools by Northumberland County Council is 3984 staff (headcount) and 2563.16 FTE (as at 31.03.21). For the purposes of this report the HR/OD performance only relates to NCC directly employed staff as schools have their own governance structures managed through their governing bodies although the Council makes available a schools HR/OD advisory service which schools may subscribe to if they wish to.
3. Labour turnover for 20/21 is 12.00% which has decreased from the previous year (13.17%) and is likely to be a result of the voluntary redundancy scheme which ran again in 2020/21. The total figure is lower than the LGA reported average of 13.4% labour turnover rate nationally (LGA Workforce survey 2018/19¹).

¹ Note no updated LGA figures are available due to HR benchmarking being on hold.

Workforce Committee

- 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.
- On a monthly basis, Directors or their nominated Senior Manager 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. Directors or their nominated Senior Manager 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.
- Focussed attention continues to be on the key performance indicators with promoting a positive staff experience being another core area of focus. Key performance indicators focused on are e.g., health and wellbeing (including absence management), induction, statutory and mandatory training and appraisal.
- The Workforce Committee also monitors the progress of the HR/OD Strategy.

Update on the Interim Covid-19 HR People Strategy and HR/OD Strategy including WORKSMART

Given the substantial changes that happened due to the pandemic the Director of HR provided an Interim Covid 19 HR People Strategy that spanned 2020 and taking the organisation to the middle of 2021. The short-term strategy provided focus and resilience until May 2021 when the HR /OD service developed a longer-term Workforce Strategy aligned to a revised corporate plan for the future.

The Interim Covid 19 strategy workstreams of

- Engagement and Experience
- Health and Wellbeing
- Managing self and others
- Developing self and others
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Recruitment, Reward and Recognition.

The longer-term strategy replaced above with the following themes and workstreams

- **Enriched Experience**
- **Health, Wellbeing & Selfcare**
- **Planning our People for the Future**
- **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion for Everyone**
- **Systems Innovation and Automation**

Within each of the 5 Strategic Themes there are core actions/objectives. Responsibility for delivery of these actions will be led by the Council's Workforce Committee on behalf of the Executive Team and will be supported by the HR/OD Team. These will be the

focus of delivery over a four-year period leading up to May 2025. In every aspect of this strategy, we will seek to embed our core corporate values which are:

- Residents first
- Excellence and quality
- Respect
- Keeping our communities safe and well

While this strategy is not solely aimed at the council's response to the global Coronavirus Pandemic, it must be recognised that working lives for everyone have changed because of it. Considering this we recognise that this 'natural disruption' has offered us the opportunity to do things differently. As One Council we have collectively decided our response to working in a post pandemic environment will be called:

WorkSmart – It's what you do, not where you do it!

Our strategic aim is to integrate the WorkSmart philosophy throughout every element of this strategy, ensuring our practices allow our staff to have the best working experience, which we believe in turn will have positive impacts on the services we deliver to our local residents.

In 2021 the Council launched a 'Climate Change Action Plan' outlining our commitment to reducing our carbon emissions to net zero by 2030. Human activity is cited as the main cause of climate change, it is therefore fundamentally important that our People strategy seeks to mitigate the environmental impact of our employees' activities. Our strategic aim is to ensure that NCC takes 'a climate conscious approach' to delivery of this strategy.

The HR/OD People Strategy 2021-2025 has been summarised as a one-page document. Appendix 1. This is to aid dissemination/useability and to ensure that the delivery of **WorkSmart** and our core values run through the heart of every key strategic theme.

Enriched Experience

Why is this so important to the organisation, our staff and residents?

Organisations with high levels of staff engagement are consistently shown to be more successful. When we try to ensure that our staff's experience at work is a positive one where they feel fulfilled, motivated and are committed and loyal, we will see higher productivity, lower turnover and lower absence rates. We can face the future with the benefit of a higher degree of certainty, if we're a great employer we're more likely to be able to attract, grow and retain talent.

What have we achieved?

The Council has invested heavily in engaging staff. Some initiatives and work practices include:

- Development of a Staff Engagement toolkit
- Coaching and mentoring programme. We have a network of 45 trained coaches and 32 mentors

- Support 9 Staff Network Groups including LGBT+, Mental Wellbeing, Menopause, Carers, Enable, Race Equality, ASD, Armed Forces and Apprenticeships.
- Established a Staff Engagement function
- Regular staff surveys throughout the Covid pandemic to cover wellbeing and risk assessment. The Council achieved an 80.5% response rate in 2019 and is due to move forward with a Staff survey in late 2022.
- Development of Smarter working guidelines to support staff and allow them to feel engaged wherever they are
- Staff awards to recognise our excellent people and to publicly demonstrate our pride in the services they deliver.

What advanced/new thinking is emerging in this area?

The Covid-19 global pandemic moved the goal posts for the working environment, the types of work that our staff do and what staff want from the Council as their employer. There is likely to be an increased focus on employee engagement and how the Council communicates and engages with a more dispersed workforce operating outside of 'traditional' working environments, especially those who might opt to work from home, away from colleagues.

What are we aiming to achieve?

Whilst we have made excellent progress in engaging our workforce there are areas that we can always improve upon and develop.

We are trying to achieve:

- Continue to progress positive outcomes from staff survey action plans
- Respond appropriately and proactively to staff survey results including working with staff survey action plan lead officers, assist directors and heads of service in delivering positive change and deliver action plan workshops with specific teams involving all staff in a 'safe space' to deliver improvement through consultation
- Create better relationships with our hard-to-reach groups
- Greater utilisation and further expansion of our established network groups
- Improve employee satisfaction scores
- Rollout of **#WorkSmart** and smarter working guidelines to support our staff in the post-pandemic landscape
- Feed into wellbeing initiatives that will result in greater levels of engagement
- Involve staff in designing and setting HR policy
- Try to encourage staff to feel a sense of belonging to the Council. We want staff to want to do their best for the Council
- Become an employer that invests in our staff, creating commitment and loyalty
- Effective recruitment and development of future employees and leaders through mentoring coaching and our expanded apprenticeship programme.

What does success look like?

Employee engagement is a difficult metric to measure. However, in achieving our objectives we would expect to see:

- A boost to our employee satisfaction scores
- Digitisation and improved accessibility for all employees
- Employees talking positively about the Council, and this is borne out in public forums like Glass Door

- Better employee metrics like lower turnover, lower sickness rates, better recruitment fill rates
- Our staff to feel positive about their own development and look for opportunities to advance and grow
- Staff who want to innovate and create. Engaged employees come forward with suggestions and improvements
- A successful 'grow your own' programme that invests in the development of key staff at all levels.
- Engaging effectively with our employees at every stage of the employment journey from induction to exit.
- Create an environment where employees feel safe, empowered, cared about and able to speak up and challenge
- Employees are satisfied with their employee benefit package and their terms and conditions

Key objectives for this workstream are:

Objective(s)
To plan & deliver a pulse approach to staff survey and employee feedback
Develop and deliver a WorkSmart #TNLand communication and delivery plan including branding identity
Deliver a seamless close to the NHS Trust partnership
Deliver a forward-thinking refresh of NCC T's & C's
Expand Coaching and Mentoring culture
Technology for All to enhance experience
Enhance digital communication channels
Full scale evaluation of Staff survey data to date to embed people centred culture

Health, Wellbeing & Selfcare

Why is this so important to the organisation, our staff and residents?

Organisations that invest in employee wellbeing observe increased resilience, better employee engagement, reduced sickness absence and higher performance and productivity. Encouraging employees to lead a healthier life, take the best care of themselves and really focus on their personal wellbeing not only benefits them as individuals but also benefits the Council and our residents. Caring and investing in employee wellbeing has impact on employees' productivity and, in turn, delivers the best value for residents. Residents receive better service from employees who are healthy, motivated and engaged.

Sickness absence, one of the most significant employee costs, can be minimised by taking proactive steps to safeguard workforce resilience. Mental health costs employers in the UK between £33 billion and £42 billion a year (*Thriving at Work: The Independent Review of Mental Health and Employers*). If the Council were able to reduce sickness absence by a mere 1%, up £1 million savings could be made in a year.

What we have achieved:

The Council has dedicated resource committed solely to the provision of health and wellbeing initiatives and work practices. Through this programme of work, we have achieved:

- Received Ambassador Status from The Better Health @ Work Awards, out of 452 organisations we were one of only two selected to have Ambassador status. In 2022 we are striving for "continuing excellence" as we pursue the award for our 11th consecutive year.
- Established virtual initiatives through Facebook and other virtual platforms (Staff Virtual Sports & Social Club, Calm Space, Big Sing, Buddy Scheme, Long Covid support, CEV/Shielding Drop in, Instructor live, Mental Wellbeing Surgeries for Line Managers & Staff Photography, Gardening, Climate Change & Netball Clubs). These provide a space for employees to interact with their colleagues, away from 'work', to have light relief, fun, as well as a hugely welcomed 'safe space.' They are supported by Senior Management who have recognised the important value they add to the organisation.
- Created our staff Health & wellbeing Portal on SharePoint so that staff can easily access health & wellbeing support:
<https://northumberland365.sharepoint.com/sites/HealthandWellbeing>
- Raised awareness of financial wellbeing support, and other resources that staff may not have accessed previously such as couch to financial fitness, budget calculators & direct support pathway to CAB.
- Conducted Personal Risk Assessments for all employees throughout the pandemic, undertaken in June 2020, refreshed in February 2021
- Conducted pulse survey regarding return to work using the WORKSMART branding
- Partnered with MIND, NUFC Foundation, Northumbria Healthcare, Occupational Health and gambling/ alcohol experts to provide wide range of activities, events and challenges, alongside tips and techniques, and innovative tools and resources to support staff.

- Worked with specific service areas to provide bespoke H&W opportunities within Team meetings and Wellbeing themed sessions including Mental Wellbeing Training for Line Managers, Laughter Yoga & Mindfulness.
- Campaigned to raise awareness - Men's Health Week, Carers Week, Mental Health Awareness, International Women's Day and Money Talks Week.
- Ran 4 "Own Brand" campaigns throughout the year all linked to WorkSmart. New Year, New You, Spring into Summer, Thrive@Autumn and Winter Winners to provide recognised activities that staff can engage with to improve H&W.
- Achieved Prior to CV19 85.8% rated the council 7 or above of taking staff health and wellbeing seriously, this has increased by 4.2% to 90% because of the pandemic.
- Implemented a new H&W offer for Elected Members including Health assured, Access to H&W portal & ongoing support.
- Expanded H&W team to include Psychological Wellbeing Co-ordinator & H&W Apprentice to further future proof & improve our H&W offer to staff.
- Achieved Mindful Employer Status for the next two years (2022 –2024), nominated for (2022) and won (2021) PPMA Excellence in Health & wellbeing Award.

What advanced/new thinking is emerging in this area?

The Covid-19 global pandemic has taught employers that unexpected and impactful situations can arise with little warning and that it is more important than ever that employees are resilient physically, mentally (and financially).

- Interest in mental health increased during the pandemic. Working conditions changed massively and this created additional stress and anxiety. Working from home blurred the lines between working / home environments and in some cases has caused 'burnout'.
- Work / Life balance is a crucial factor for employees.
Regional/ national research indicates:
 - 64% now want to split working time between home and office (North East Chamber of Commerce).
 - 50%+ enjoy a better work life balance, had more time for personal activities, and feel more able to juggle demands of home and work (IWFM National Survey)
- Organisation should focus on prevention. Rather than intervene when it might be too late. Instead, prevention should be the starting point. Preventative measures might include mental health training for measures, flexible workspaces to suit all needs, health check and immunisation offers, encouraging higher levels of activity, healthy lifestyle advice
- Financial wellness means a reduction in money-related stress. Financial stress can cause employees to become absent.

What are we aiming to achieve?

By building on our previous successes and progress to date, using the People Strategy we are trying to achieve:

- To become an exemplar of Health, Wellbeing and Self-care good practice as we move forward to recovery.
- To build on the success of campaigns, and promote engagement across the organisation

- Embed Health in All Policies (HIAP) – in partnership with Public Health, Workforce Committee, and external partners. Support positive health impact across all policies and decision making
- Highlight the importance of the role team managers play in supporting H, WB & SC across the workforce. Actively support, enable, and engage with managers to ensure they feel empowered to support their teams.
- Enhanced “support pathway to recovery” – greater focus on wider determinants of wellbeing, promoting positive lifestyle choices and avoiding negative coping strategies such as alcohol & drugs
- Increased capacity to build on successes with additional roles - Psychological Wellbeing Officer and H&WB Apprentice
- Development of a Financial wellbeing strategy to promote good financial wellbeing, raising awareness and support for those facing financial difficulties in our partnership working with external agencies such as Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Gamble aware and NCB (Northumberland Community Bank).
- Futureproof our H&W provision with a robust digital H&W offer to improve health literacy, equality of access, variety, and innovation.
- Expand our successful Health & Wellbeing Champion structure to further scope and capacity.

What success will look like:

In achieving our objectives, we would expect to see:

- A Health, Wellbeing and Self-care offer which promotes, supports, and provides access to health and wellbeing equally to all our staff.
- Prioritisation of mental wellbeing and focus on a supportive recovery, improving resilience and practising self-care
- Health driven positive policies with a key focus on wellbeing, equality, and diversity
- Increased positive ratings, via staff survey, of how our workforce view their own health and wellbeing, evidenced by reduced sickness levels.
- Improved levels of staff engagement, increased awareness, and recognition of the importance of Health, Wellbeing and Self-care across all services within the council
- Improved/stable sickness absence rates.

Key objectives for this workstream are:

Objective(s)
To develop a health in all policies approach to all procedures
To build and expand upon current welfare campaigns
To build a post CV-19 staff support pathway focussing on drugs and alcohol and psychological input.
To enhance and widen the health & wellbeing resource – aligned to business needs
Embed selfcare culture across the organisation
Significant improvements in how the workforce rate their own health and wellbeing.

Planning our People for the Future

Why is this so important to the organisation, our staff and residents?

Effective workforce planning will enable the council to ensure that we secure a highly skilled, proactive, adaptable, and responsive workforce who are equipped, enabled, and supported to deliver high quality services to meet the evolving needs of the organisation, our staff, and our residents. Planning our people means we will ensure we take a proactive approach to recruitment and retention of our staff. We want to attract the best and make it attractive for them to stay with us. Through planning we can identify the skills required now and over time and train our workforce to be ready and deliver. Through succession planning we can chart progression paths and build in service resilience. The greater our service resilience the better service we can deliver to residents. Our strategy aims to ensure our people enjoy their work and giving excellent service, they are well trained and committed to their future with the Council.

What we have achieved previously:

As a service we have led the way in working agilely, thinking progressively and adapting to change. We have quickly learnt how to embrace and employ innovative technologies and virtual tools to maintain a positive learning environment and ensure effective HR/OD support for staff in an uncertain and changing landscape. We have shared this knowledge with the workforce to enable them to adapt their own service-delivery.

Our successes have included:

- Review and refresh of required learning
- Development of Covid helpline to support staff and managers with a consistent response to staffing issues and urgent queries.
- Increase in virtual training offer, maximising use of e-learning, virtual classroom, and webinar formats
- Development of support process for virtual response to staff's individual health needs impacted by Covid.
- Development of Smarter Working guidance for staff and managers responding to more agile staff working arrangements
- Development of manager induction training and HR Policy into Practice Briefings for Managers
- Delivery of Virtual Leadership Summit
- Development of virtual recruitment events for apprenticeships

What advanced/new thinking is emerging in this area

Workforce planning is widely discussed as being of increasing importance in terms of the future of work and an area that is seeing considerable evolution. New thinking in this area includes:

- Introducing hybrid ways of working, i.e., blended training, smarter working arrangements. Understanding that one size does not fit all (the unique circumstance of each employee is likely to affect their working arrangements).
- Creating partnerships and making the most of effective collaboration with community and voluntary sector to deliver the right services for local needs
- Creating internal links and fostering positive relationships between different services involved in the workforce planning process to gain greater engagement. In this approach HR shifts from enforcer to 'facilitator' of workforce planning. HR should invite the right people to the table and facilitate the right conversations.

- Understanding skills data to support career paths and boost the potential for internal movement is increasingly important.
- Ensure AI is factored into future workforce planning. Technology is changing the landscape of work and job roles will inevitably change.

What are we aiming to achieve:

As a future focused endeavor, we will use the People Strategy to achieve:

- Talent management and progression pathways linking to succession planning, apprenticeships, training and continuing professional development.
- Matching the skills and equipping our workforce for the evolving landscape of service delivery
- Ensuring that our hybrid working is fit for purpose
- Developing and delivering a recruitment strategy that will address skills shortfall and attract the best talent

What success will look like:

In achieving our objectives, we would expect to see:

- A future proof workforce to ensure excellence and quality in service delivery
- A plan/do/review model embedded to assess the impact and effectiveness of new workforce initiatives
- A whole-organisation approach to our learning and development provision, ensuring effective spend through centralisation of the training budgets.
- An effective process of identification of training needs through supervision, appraisal and service planning (Golden Thread) matched with environment-scanning to ensure staff are prepared for impact of national, regional and local initiatives

Key objectives for this workstream are:

Objective(s)
Creation of a succession planning dashboard
Undertake a post CV-19 workforce planning/ redesign exercise
Redesign of internal apprenticeship programme
Development of Staff bank to reduce agency spend
Implementation of talent pathways using the data built above
Development of learning catalogue aligned to appraisal needs
Continued development of learning technologies to enhance quality and efficiencies in support of the WorkSmart approach

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion for Everyone

Why is this so important to the organisation, our staff and residents?

Employer that welcome employees of all backgrounds benefit from being able to tap into a range of skills and ideas. Different people bring different perspectives, ideas and abilities. By employing a diverse workforce, the Council can be progressive, solve problems and innovate.

In addition, NCC has a statutory duty under the Equality Act to recognise the needs of its employees in relation to the 9 protected characteristics. We have a responsibility to prevent discrimination and our aim is to improve the chances, experiences and daily lives of people who work for us or who access our services. Whilst we acknowledge our duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act, we have ambition to go beyond the legislation, we want to positively celebrate diversity and we aspire to establish a reputation as a truly inclusive employer and a brand which incorporates our values. To be the best organisation we need the best employees, so we need to reach out and be fully inclusive in our practices. If we get it right for the most vulnerable members of our workforce, we get it right for everyone.

What we have achieved previously

Equality, diversity and inclusion as an imperative has gained an increasing prominence within the Council. We have:

- Established 9 staff network groups which create the opportunity for employees with specific lived experiences, and their allies, to have a safe space for open and honest communication. They provide support and create a platform to share ideas and feedback to the organisation. The organisation listens to this feedback and the work of the network groups is endorsed and supported at the highest level of the organisation. The network groups contribute to the development of employment policies through commenting on policies pre-policy sub-group
- Trained internal workplace mentors to provide reverse mentoring around lived experience with a view to matching managers to mentors to increase organisational cultural awareness
- Become the second highest ranked local authority in the 2019/20 Stonewall Index and will continue our improvement journey working with local organisations
- Been cited as one of the best local authorities in the country in the Gender Pay Gap reporting process and have implemented action plans to further close the gap
- Developed our recruitment processes to encourage applications from diverse groups, and we have a guaranteed interview scheme for applicants with disabilities and are participating in a regional recruitment event to increase applicants from disabled and BAME communities
- Been nominated and short-listed for several ED&I awards both regionally and nationally (e.g., PPMA, CiPD etc.)
- Ensured that all employees have equal access to development opportunities and provide learning which supports different learning styles and approaches
- Adapted a wide range of our learning to virtual delivery ensuring access for employees working in various locations and/or with different working patterns as well as refining our ED&I training programmes to reflect current best practice

- Achieved a high percentage response to our recent staff surveys with no evidence that employees with protected characteristics did not engage or are experiencing significant disadvantage
- Developed a high level of employee engagement in response to our wide range of E, D & I campaigns and initiatives e.g., Northumberland Pride and Pride Month, Black History month, LGBTQ+ month, Men's Health and Mental health Weeks to name but a few.

What advanced/new thinking is emerging in this area?

Increasingly organisations recognise the advantages of promoting and practicing good equality diversity and inclusion. Latest developments in this area include:

- Advancing technologies in recruitment and selection which provide hiring managers with new tools and increased confidence to try out different recruitment and selection approaches and campaigns - adopting new flexible working patterns that could facilitate applicants who live outside the area could increase the diversity of our workforce
- Bystander Training – empowering employees to address and prevent harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Providing employees with the right knowledge, tools and motivation to intervene in a safe way
- The Power of Storytelling – making issues real for people by sharing examples of lived experience
- The Power of Staff Networks to help shape and influence organisational culture is increasingly being recognised
- Conscious bias – there has been emphasis on unconscious bias training in recent years however organisations are more comfortable now and prepared to tackle conscious bias. It would be a positive move to begin the conversation and raise the profile of this issue.

What are we aiming to achieve?

In developing our equality diversity and inclusion offer we hope:

- To be the best and most inclusive employer
- To attract talent from outside of our region and recognise the importance of employing a representative workforce
- To have systems and policies in place that enable and support our ambitions
- To ensure equality for all – recognising that we are all different but are also all equal
- To attract, retain and develop the best staff regardless of background, race, ability/disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, etc.

What success will look like:

In achieving our objectives, we would expect to see:

- Our senior management teams reflect the demographic spread of our staff groups and act as clear visible role models
- Employees talk passionately around how they 'fit' within the organisation and how they have been supported to be their best selves
- Sense of belonging – increased satisfaction reported through staff surveys, increased employee retention and reduced sickness absence and evidence of equitable staff development
- All employee groups have access to the same communication tools and feedback channels and feel empowered to use them

- We have robust demographic data and information that tells us who our staff are, and that people are open and confident to share this info.
- Staff have confidence to raise concerns and trust that they can do this in confidence – building a culture of acceptance and trust
- Managers are conveyors of our inclusive culture and show accountability and think Equality First
- We have a clear place for employees to go for advice, guidance and support and a clear process in place to hear and respond to their concerns

Key objectives for this workstream are:

Objective(s)
To develop an “E, D & I in all policies” approach
Build on current E, D & I campaigns
To develop a comprehensive inclusive recruitment process
Expand and operationalise the work of the network groups
NCC to be recognised both locally and nationally as a leading inclusive employer
To improve staff engagement experience within minority groups
Demonstrate our commitment through transparent data publication

Systems Innovation and Automation

Why is this so important to the organisation, our staff and residents?

HR systems assist the Council in managing people, information and processes. When they work well, HR systems should help both managers and employees work efficiently while reducing errors, streamline processes, ensuring compliance and increasing productivity. The Council has, for several years, been reliant on systems that have been obtained as part of a 'one size fits all' system that have required a large amount of customisation to make them operational for the Council, and in some cases, we have been using systems that are not fit for purpose. Many processes have historically needed to be aligned to 'fit' the system, this does not usually support the best workflow or user experience and is a key aim of this strategic theme. System inefficiency impacts all services and work processes, it is therefore fundamental to delivering value for money for residents that systems are rationalised and improved. Increased use of digital technology to streamline processes will reduce frustration and create capacity for creativity and innovation. Whilst the focus is on HR/OD systems the benefits will be experienced organisation wide. The aim is that managers and employees can access everything electronically and with ease, from anywhere. Applicants for jobs should have a first-rate experience via a recruitment portal, and e-learning should be accessible, informative and engaging. Other areas such as payroll will also be included in any refresh to enable them to deliver a better service for employees and reduce time-consuming administrative processes.

What we have achieved previously:

Despite progress being dictated by delivery contracts and associated timescales we have:

- Developed and enhanced links with IT for support on key areas of work
- Progressed in house development of key systems (i.e., Flexi)
- Removed numerous paper-based processes to make processes quicker and smoother
- Secured buy in and involvement from services to understand what they want and need
- Deliver a comprehensive e-learning offer. All learning can now be delivered virtually

What advanced/new thinking is emerging in this area:

As the way we work evolves, the way we manage our workforce must evolve to keep pace. To meet the needs of a modern workplace, organisations must invest in new technology to both improve the employee experience and drive efficiency. Latest developments in this area include:

- Digital solutions to enable remote working. Remote working is now seen as the 'norm' for all areas, this would have been difficult to gain buy in for in a pre-covid world
- Development of Robotic Process Automation to remove the need for employees to undertake repetitive, mundane tasks
- Digital solutions for traditional office processes. Paper use is becoming increasingly obsolete
- An increase in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- In person activities are now delivered virtually using technology. Online training and learning, virtual meetings and conferences are now all commonly undertaken online

What are we aiming to achieve:

We will use the People Strategy to deliver:

- Improved systems and access for all
- Better efficiencies in processes
- Easy access, in both directions, between managers and staff through better communication channels
- Better working experience through modern, more efficient systems, reducing time spent on tasks and removing the need to duplicate information
- Better, easier to understand information and reporting functionality
- Improved reputation for attracting new employees and through greater efficiencies, improved reputation and delivery of services for residents
- Inclusivity in reaching all staffing groups
- Cost savings – buying the right products first time that work how they are needed to, or if they can't be found, developing our own in-house solutions.

What success will look like

In achieving our objectives, we would expect to see:

- New and improved HR systems introduced and used across all areas of HR activity
- Improved reporting in real time to allow managers to make timely and well-informed people management decisions
- Attraction of high-quality candidates and the ability to make sound recruitment decisions
- More engagement with all levels of staff (visible in higher scores in staff survey)
- Higher responsiveness
- Greater productivity and less time wasted
- Greater efficiency. Employees will accumulate high levels of flexi because they are able to complete work more in a timelier way
- A happier workforce with lower levels of frustration linked to processes and systems.

Key objectives for this workstream are:

Objective(s)
To review all current recruitment practices
Deliver a streamlined onboarding process
Deliver efficiencies in records management
Develop and maintain SharePoint as a single point of information
Review agile technology needs
To design and implement a one-stop employee portal

HR Function and Structure

The HR/OD team has been reconfigured and flexed to support service need and talent management development opportunities throughout the last twelve months and this has included individuals working in different roles and departments as needed.

Locally, regionally and nationally, the Council's HR/OD team is known for excellent leadership, knowledge and skills and our management support to our HR Schools Team within Northumberland continues with North Tyneside Council which provides significant strength to the service. The Council's HR/OD team regularly share best practice at professional conferences and with colleagues also.

The services awards and accolades this year include:

Apprentice of the Year - PPMA 2021

Finalist – Megan Mitchell

CIPD North East of England Awards 2021

Excellence in Inclusivity & Diversity (shortlisted finalist)

Excellence & Positive Impact (shortlisted finalist)

Excellence in Leadership (shortlisted finalist)

PPMA Excellence in People Management Awards 2021

Public Sector Team of the Year (HR/OD Team) - (shortlisted finalist)

Best Employer & TU Partnership - Winner

Best Health & Wellbeing Initiative – Winner

Best Inclusion & Diversity Programme/Initiative - (shortlisted finalist)

Best Talent Programme - (shortlisted finalist)

Key Performance Metrics

Learning and Development Performance

Performance Appraisal

During 2021/2022 the final recorded % of all staff who had a performance appraisal was 86.98%. This is over the expected level of performance of at least 85% and an increase from the previous year (81.08%). The appraisal performance indicator has been monitored closely and those managers who have not achieved 85% have remedial action plans in place to ensure that this is achieved for 2022/23. The HR/OD team are also undertaking a review of the appraisal process itself to ensure that any necessary improvements are made and that it remains useful to both employee and manager.

Need (Headcount)	Number completed. (Headcount)	%	Total remaining (Headcount)	%
4932	4290	86.98	642	13.02

Directorate	End of year % achievement
Adult Services Directorate	90.69%
Chief Exec Directorate	92.98%
Children's Services Directorate	88.91%
Communities and Business Development Directorate	88.29%
Finance Directorate	93.82%
Fire and Rescue	90.83%
Planning and Local Services Directorate	76.55%
Public Health and Community Services Directorate	81.36%
Regeneration Directorate	90.75%

Statutory and Mandatory Training

An annual Corporate Training Needs Analysis (TNA) has been developed for all Northumberland County Council staff which is monitored for compliance directly by the Workforce Committee to ensure that staff are offered and complete the necessary and relevant training to keep them safe in the workplace.

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 Adults awareness – 3 yearly refresher
- Safeguarding Children 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

From 2022 there will also be a Climate Change training module added to the above 11 core subjects that all employees are required to undertake as a one-off course to align with Carbon Neutral agenda. Information Governance modules have been updated to reflect the needs of the organisation to comply with governance legislation and from 2022 will become an annual refresher with extra information regarding FOI and Subject Access information.

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 2021/22 we had a 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 31.3.21 is outlined below.

Performance Appraisal 21/22	Fire Safety Awareness	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	Equality & Diversity	Manual Handling	Safeguarding Adults and Children	Health and Safety Awareness	Stress Awareness	FOI & Subject Access	PREVENT or WRAP	Infection Prevention and Control
86.98%	87.79 %	85.54 %	93.03 %	91.89 %	92.09%	96.86 %	91.24 %	92.15 %	95.70 %	91.26%

Any compliance/performance issues are raised by the Interim Service Director of Human Resources with the relevant Head of Service.

Personal and Professional Development

The 'About You Review' has been well received across the organisation and we have continued to use this for appraisal to allow managers to have a meaningful conversation with their employees. HR/OD developed and implemented a Manager's Induction to support newly appointment managers and acted as a refresher for longstanding managers. Additional induction sessions were provided to support managers who Tupe'd into NCC to help them to navigate our systems, processes and policies. Corporate Induction sessions for new starters continue twice a month.

During 2021/2022 the Council has continued to successfully deliver several initiatives to support the talent management and development alongside local initiatives by each department and these are:

- Over 600 Apprenticeships Standards are available from levels 1 – 7, 78 different routes are being used within NCC. The Council's Public Service Duty (PSD) is set to have 2.3% of the workforce as apprentices and currently the Council's figure is 1.74% of the workforce who are apprentices. This figure is lower due to covid and limited recruitment.
- During 2021/2022 we had 2 further cohorts of recruitment and targeted recruitment for the Children's Residential Workforce.
 - Cohort 4 introduced 25 new apprentices to the council.

- Cohort 5 advertised for 60 positions however due to current market pressures only managed to secure 28 apprentices a further factor being reviewed is the apprenticeship wage level.
- The Children’s Residential Workforce recruitment has allowed 9 apprentices to join the units and to be supported to complete a Level 4 apprenticeship.
- Apprenticeship Week 2021 was well supported, working closely with colleagues within Communications to produce a Northumberland based Campaign. We had a TV advert which went live simultaneously as we launched our apprenticeship vacancies, the advert had a vast number of views. Face-to-face events were also held alongside a virtual apprenticeship event. The virtual event saw a reduction in interest against the face to face event. The Comms Team provided an excellent media campaign gaining a great amount of attention, sadly did not generate the desired number of applications.
- We have taken 2 National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) graduates into Northumberland, placements have been in Digital Inclusion, HR/Recruitment and the Policy Team. We are also looking to recruit from Cohort 24.
- 13 of our Level 7 Senior Leaders Master Degree Apprenticeship passed their apprenticeship with merits and distinctions, and we are continuing to support a further 11 employees on their level 7 journey.
- The 9 employees on the level 6 Chartered Management Institute (CMI) - apprenticeship are entering through the gateway progress and awaiting to complete their End Point Assessment.

Case Management

The Council’s HR Advisers work on a ratio of 1:410 employees currently and the case profiles for 2020/2021 are as follows:

No of cases 2020/2021	Chief Executives	Finance	Fire and Rescue	Communities & Business Development	Planning and Local Services	Public Health and Community Services	Adult Services	Children’s Services	Total
Disciplinary Cases	0	5	1	0	16	3	6	8	39
Grievance/ Dignity at Work cases	0	3	0	1	1	1	3	2	11

Health & Wellbeing policy cases	Review 1 – 19 Review 2 – 1	RM1 – 86 RM2 – 25 RM3 – 5 RM4 - 4	RM1 – 55 RM2 -5 RM3 – 7 RM4 - 1	RM1 – 61 RM2 – 25 RM3 – 5 RM4 - 1	RM1 - 125 RM2 – 19 RM3 - 5 RM4 - 3	RM1 – 84 RM2 – 14 RM3 – 14 RM4 - 4	RM1 – 218 RM2 – 55 RM3 – 43 RM4 - 8	RM1 – 171 RM2 – 67 RM3 – 14 RM4 - 2	RM1 – 824 RM2 – 207 RM3 – 93 RM4 - 23
Total	20	128	69	93	169	120	333	264	1196

Please note the Health and Wellbeing policy follows a 4 Review Hearing process – numbers are broken down into the relevant review stages 1-4.

Mediation

NCC mediation supports local resolution before progressing to formal processes. Our mediation offer is a confidential and voluntary process which brings together employees who are experiencing problems in a work-based relationship. Mediation is offered as a service by employee volunteers who are accredited, trained mediators. NCC currently has 20 fully trained mediators from both HR and other services across the council. Since January 2020 the mediation service has worked closely with the mediation service in the Northumbria NHS Foundation Trust and has jointly financed refresher training in March 2020. Our cohort of trained coaches have received 17 nominations for coaching from Council employees that result in an average of 3-5 sessions with a coach for career, leadership or personal/professional development coaching in 2021/2022.

Key Projects in 2021/2022

TUPE transfer from NHS

- For several years, the Council worked in partnership with the local NHS Trust, Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHCT), to deliver integrated health and social care in Northumberland.
- In March 2021 it was announced that the formal partnership agreement would end on 30 September 2021 and on 1 October 2021 **c900** employees would be affected. In July 2021 it was confirmed that certain services would transfer to Harrogate NHS Trust. The remaining **650** Adult Social Care employees would TUPE transfer to the Council, increasing overall headcount by approximately 15%.
- To achieve this, we formulated a series of comprehensive safe day 1 plans ensuring operational continuity and support to staff in the lead up to the transfer. The scale of the change made the transferring staff feel vulnerable, particularly because they were moving to a unknown entity in the Council.
- We undertook to reassure staff. One of the biggest concerns was that NHS terms were more favourable. To show how this was simply untrue, an exercise to compare T&Cs was undertaken and a published commitment made that no employee would be at detriment because of the transfer. A substantial job evaluation (JE) exercise was undertaken to evaluate all transferring roles under

the Council's JE scheme. 76 posts were identified for evaluation and HR worked with Trade Union (TU) colleagues to facilitate the JE panels.

- A personalised welcome letter, including JE outcomes, was issued to all employees shortly before the transfer. This provided transferring staff with reassurance that their T&Cs were protected and all the relevant information that they needed, so that, if they wished to, they could adopt NCC T&Cs from day 1. The Council engaged at an early stage with both sets of TUs. The Lead HR Representative attended NHCT organised TU partnership meetings to address queries, concerns and provide reassurance.
- To facilitate open and effective communication and to support staff, we set up a dedicated email inbox, Yammer site and telephone hotline. We ensured that all enquiries were promptly responded to. Newsletters and FAQs were published on a dedicated website that also included other regularly updated content.
- Tailored induction and drop-in sessions were delivered including HR Q&As, corporate / management induction, health and wellbeing, staff network and learning drop-ins. This set of actions proved a powerful tool in engaging with staff directly so that they felt supported and listened to and were assured that we understood how significant a change this represented to staff on an individual and personal level. This close working relationship was clearly apparent across the two respective HR departments.
- The transfer became a whole team effort as the transfer date approached and transfer related work ramped up. To support this, operational priorities were reconfigured, and key resource was co-opted to the project delivery team. All participants, regardless of the type or size of their contribution, played a key role in delivering a successful transfer and we are immensely proud of the dedication and commitment demonstrated by every team member.
- Feedback from transferring staff has been positive and gratitude has been expressed to all support services but particularly HR for the huge effort that went into supporting them to 'land safely'. A third of those that transferred have already adopted the Council's terms and conditions. Staff have embraced Council values, begun to integrate, and have fully availed themselves of benefits and employee-focused initiatives that the council offers.

WorkSmart Pack Distribution

The reaction across every one of our services to the 'new ways of working' caused by the Coronavirus Pandemic, has been unprecedented. Staff pulled together to ensure that residents are looked after and were able to contact us; to receive regular, often essential, services; to feel cared for and about; and to be safe in their homes and environments. Our Leadership Team felt very strongly that it was important to acknowledge this effort and the adjustments staff have made to do their jobs from wherever they've needed to (homes, other offices, different buildings, coffee shops, libraries, depots, even cars!), and alongside other rewards and recognition, commissioned the creation of the **WorkSmart Pack** with the intention of supporting staff to work in an agile way.

These are packs of equipment to enable staff to work from anywhere, and includes:

- a laptop case and mouse-mat
- notebook and pen

- water bottle
- facemask
- hand gel
- beanie hat

(All branded to emphasise our *#TeamNorthumberland* ethos)

Working in the 5th largest and the most rural county in England gave a challenge to distribute packs to the **4700** staff involved was a mammoth undertaking.

The **HR/OD Business Team** were responsible for planning, organising and managing each element of the complex logistics involved in this project, alongside a very tight timescale. The Communications Team publicised the rewards in mid-November, and the wish from Leadership was to have these packs to staff by the Christmas break. As many staff were working from either home or a different base, and those homes or workplaces are spread right across the county, it was important to offer everyone the option of collecting their packs from somewhere convenient. The Business Team wrote to all staff to gather the information needed to ensure staff received the pack in the easiest way possible:

- Preferred collection site –
- A colleague or manager who might be able to collect on their behalf
- Their managers contact details in case we needed anything
- The size of hoodie they would like

Once we had the numbers, we could then appreciate the volume of people who wanted to collect from each place. Considering that there was just 2 full weeks before Christmas to issue the packs to as many people as possible, we needed to balance the numbers of collection against staff availability to manage the issue of packs, and to maintain a Covid safe environment it was essential that the collection times were staggered. We emailed all staff individually, and gave them an allocated group date, time and collection point coordinated by team (where possible) – the purpose of this was so that they were able to liaise between themselves to organise a bulk collection if that worked better for them.

Lists of names, times, details were prepared, along with the bulk deliveries of hoodies and packs for each location, and staff from across the organisation helped to get these delivered out to various sites from Berwick to Hexham; some came in vans, and large SUVs, and some came in small family cars -- it's amazing how many boxes you can get in a mini-clubman!

The logistics plan resulted in the arrangement and management of:

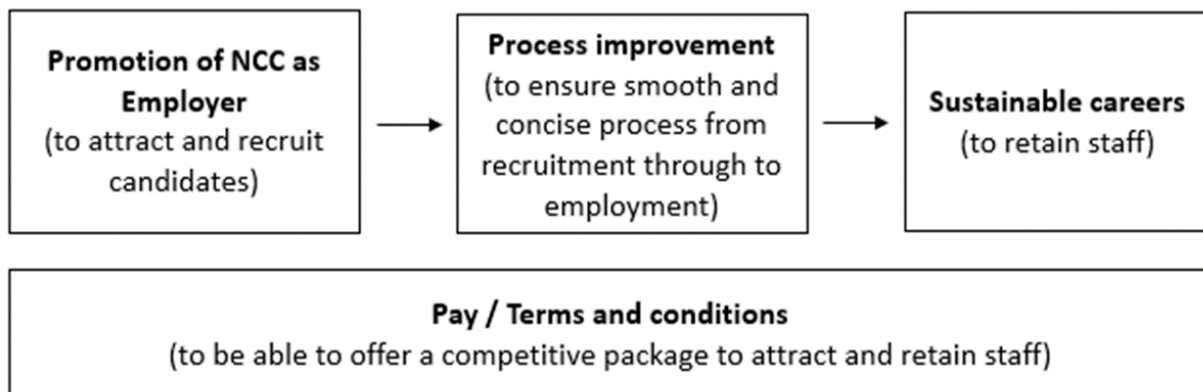
- **57 separate collection points,**
- **Between 12 and 1700 individual collections at sites**
- **Allocated collection slots spread over 2 weeks**

This could not have been achieved in such a small period without the collaboration of many different teams across the organisation.

Recruitment and Retention

Towards the end of the 2021/22 period, it became apparent that there were several service areas across the council suffering significant pressures due to not being able to attract and secure applicants for their vacant roles and/or losing staff to external competitors. A task and finish group has now been established and will seek to address the challenges faced by the Council across 4 workstreams:

- Promotion of NCC as Employer - To attract candidates we need to effectively promote ourselves as an employer of choice. We need to be able to use effective methods and techniques to draw candidates to us and 'sell' our proposition.
- Process improvement - To attract and engage candidates we need to have a smooth, concise process with the candidate at the centre. Our processes need to be simple, efficient, responsive and intuitive. We need to understand the user experience and learn from best practice across other organisations.
- Sustainable careers - To attract and retain staff NCC should offer opportunities for rewarding and sustainable careers that benefit both the individual and the organisation. Attention should be particularly focused on sustainability in hard to recruit to areas and developing talent / skill as an internal resource.
- Pay / Terms and conditions - To be able to attract and retain staff, NCC need to ensure that they offer as competitive employment package as possible. NCC need to be able to respond to shifts in market value for skills whilst maintaining equality and fairness but also ensuring affordability and value for money.



Workstream Leads have been appointed and input from stakeholders across all services will assist in the delivery of objectives. We have also been fortunate enough to have secured specialist assistance to provide strategic recruitment expertise.

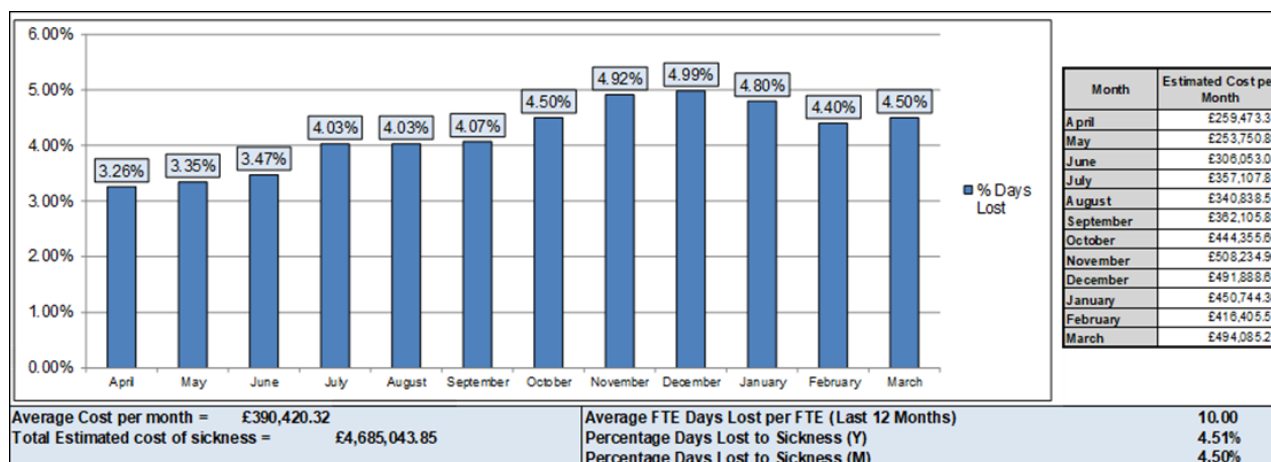
Sickness Absence

Sickness absence for 2021/22 had an annual cost of £4.68m which compared to the previous year 2020/2021 (£3.02m) is an increase of £1.62m. The average number of FTE lost days per FTE for 2021/22 is 10.00 which compared to the previous year 2020/21 (FTE lost days per FTE were 8.03) is an increase of 1.97 days per FTE. The Council has always had an ambitious aim to achieve a sickness absence level of 7.5 days per FTE. Part of the reason for the increase in sickness absence is the increase in

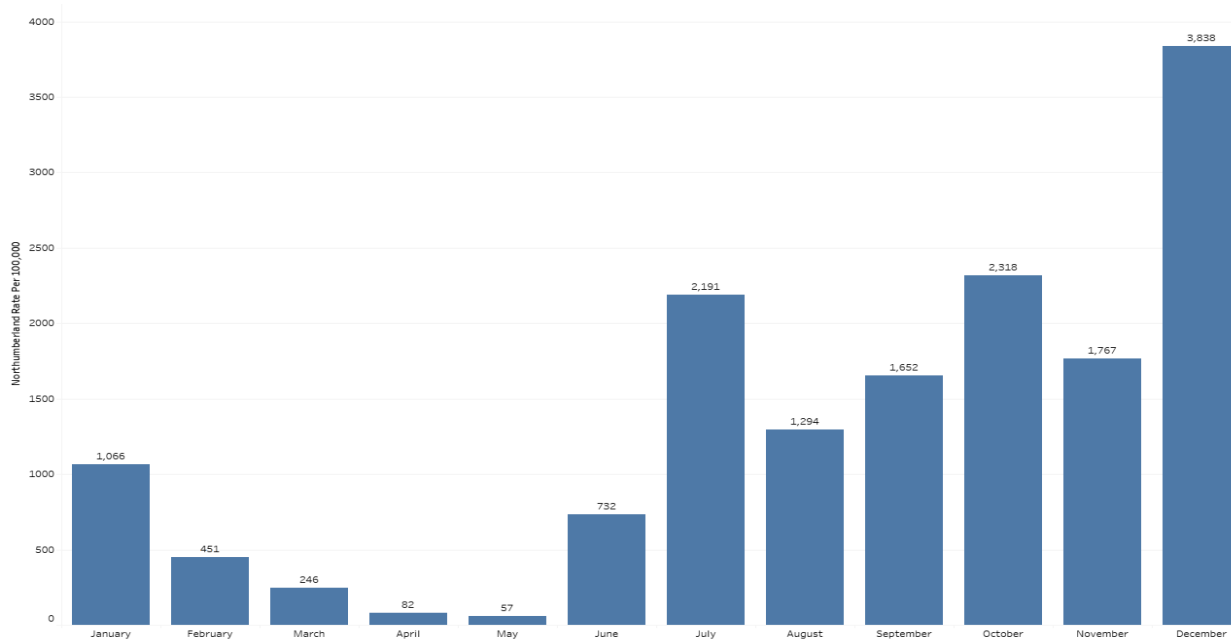
headcount due to the transfer of staff from Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust in October 2021 which has significantly increased absence levels within Adult Services.

The WFC report highlights specific trends and areas with high absence levels in each service area. Departments are supported to understand their own data and areas discussed to look at how they can best deal with reducing absence. Mental health support is now part of the health and wellbeing process through the routine use of Wellbeing Action Plans and Stress risk Assessments for employees. A Psychological Wellbeing Coordinator has been appointed to in December 2021 to support employees facing difficulties that might not require clinical medical support. Questions for managers are included in the supervision proforma to record all aspects of an individual's wellbeing by the manager on a regular basis.

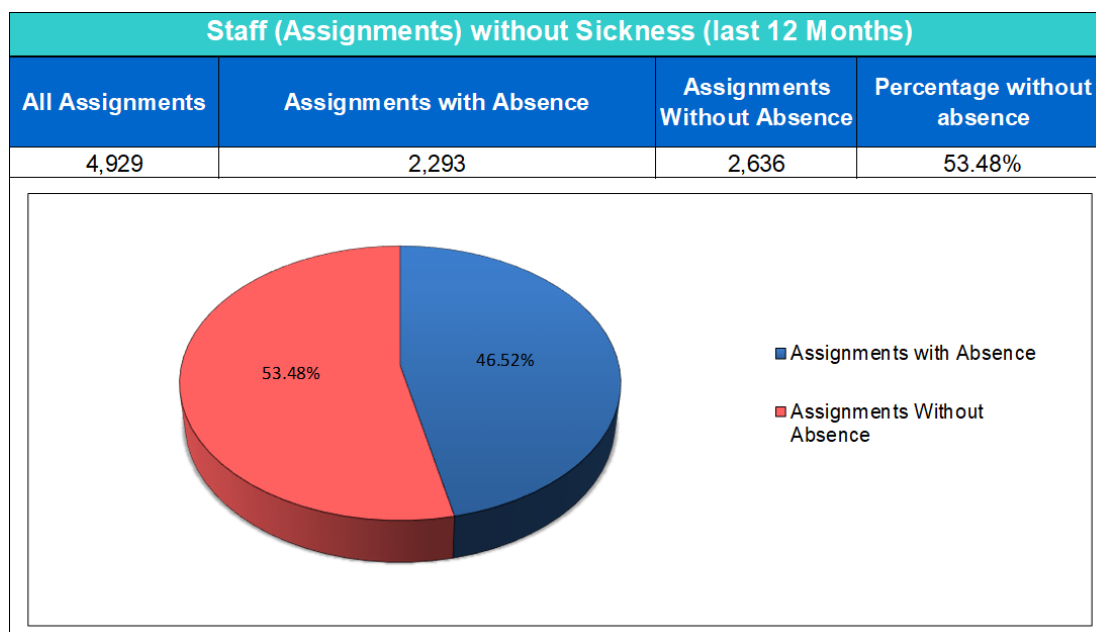
Organisational summary view of sickness absence



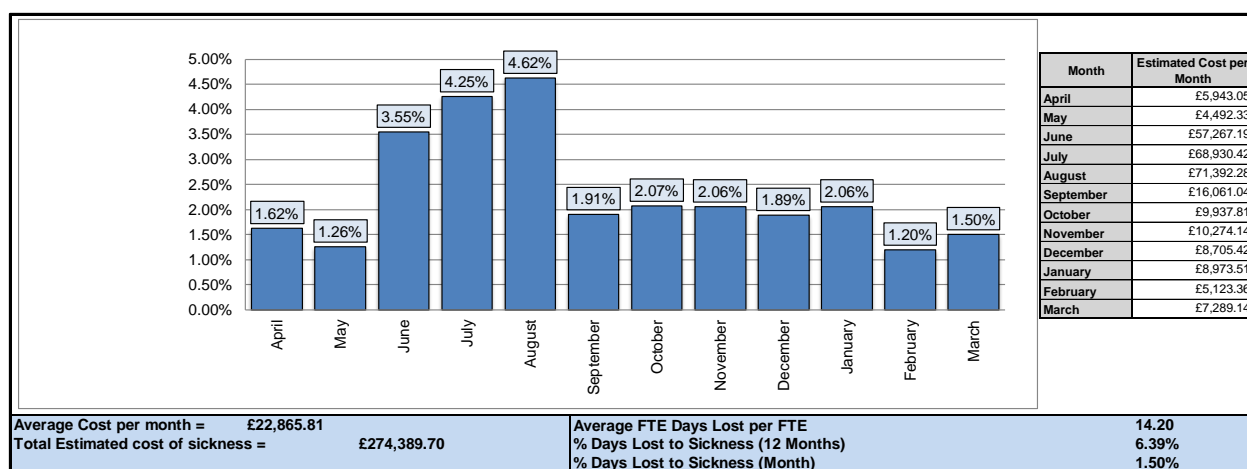
To give some context the rate of COVID infection within Northumberland over a similar time is shown below.



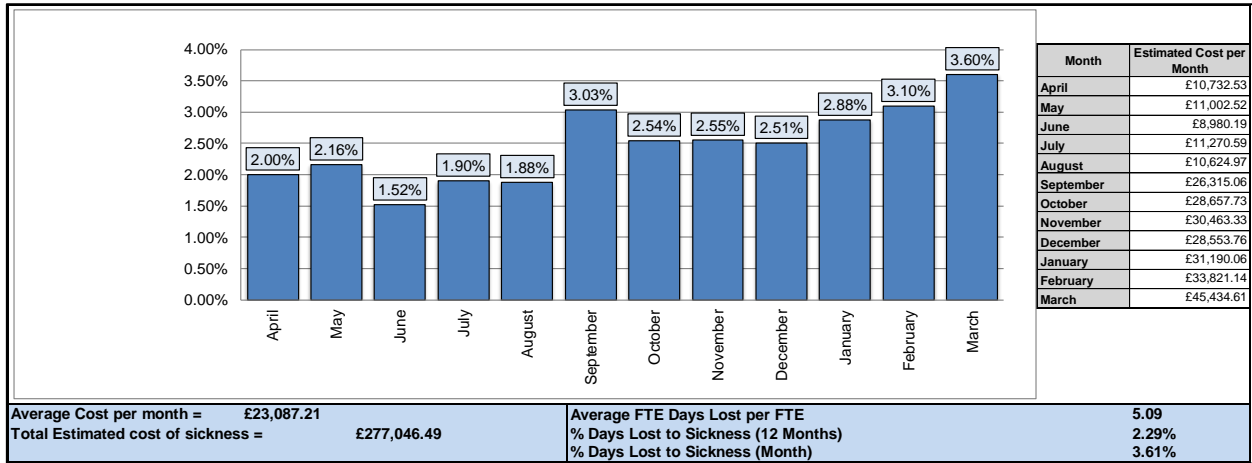
The cost of sickness absence by Directorate (see tables below) similarly shows the greatest areas being Adult Services, Planning and Local Services and Public Health and Community Services where the headcount is significantly higher. It is recognised that 47% of all staff assignments have had some absence due to sickness during the last twelve months (as outlined below) which is the same as the previous year.



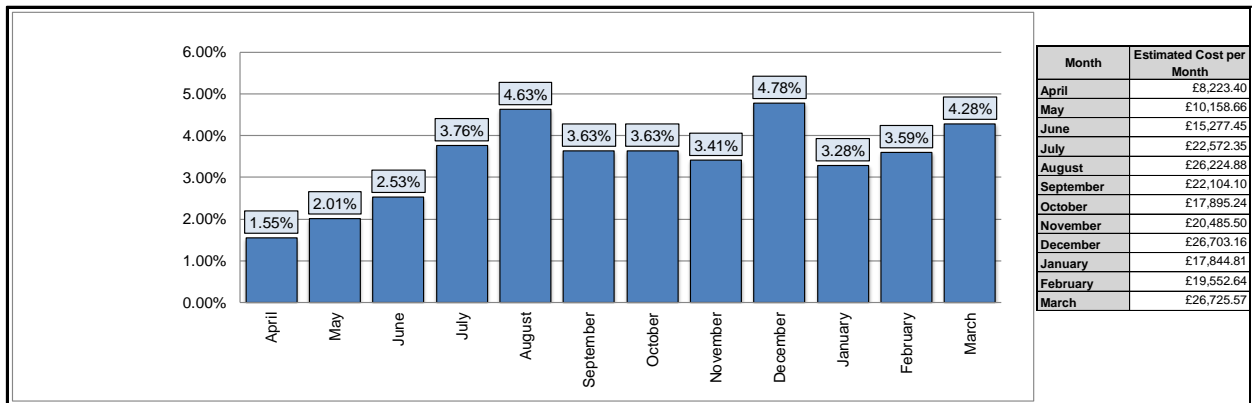
Chief Executive Directorate



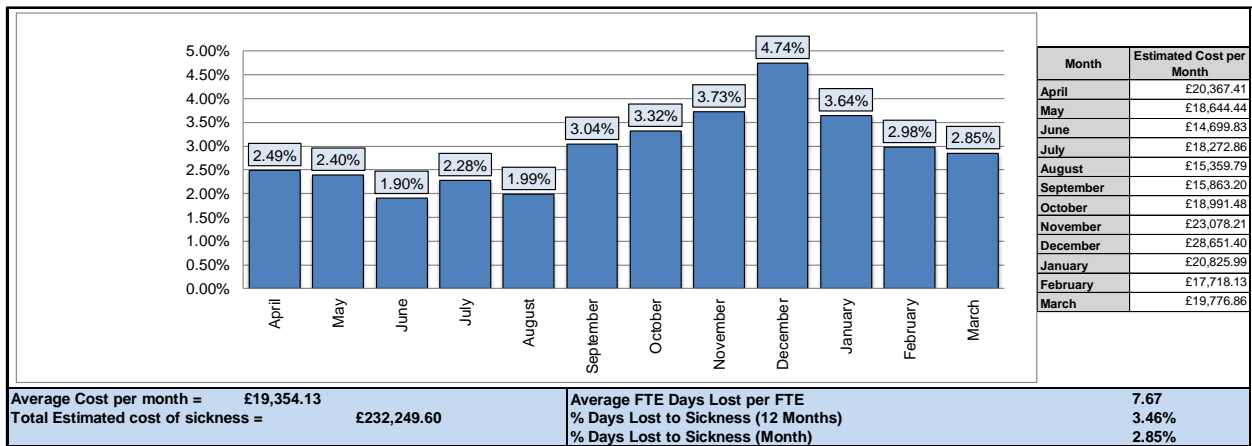
Finance Directorate



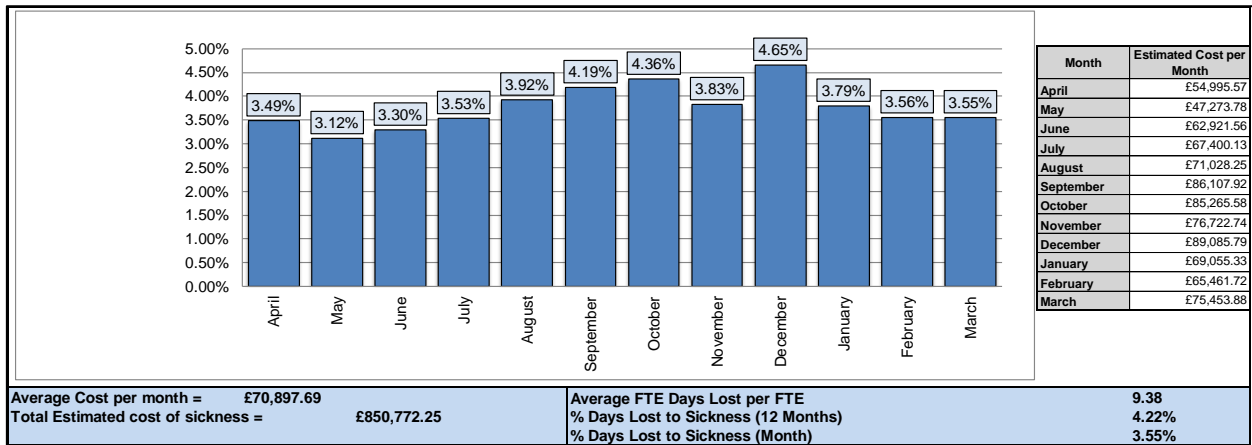
Fire and Rescue



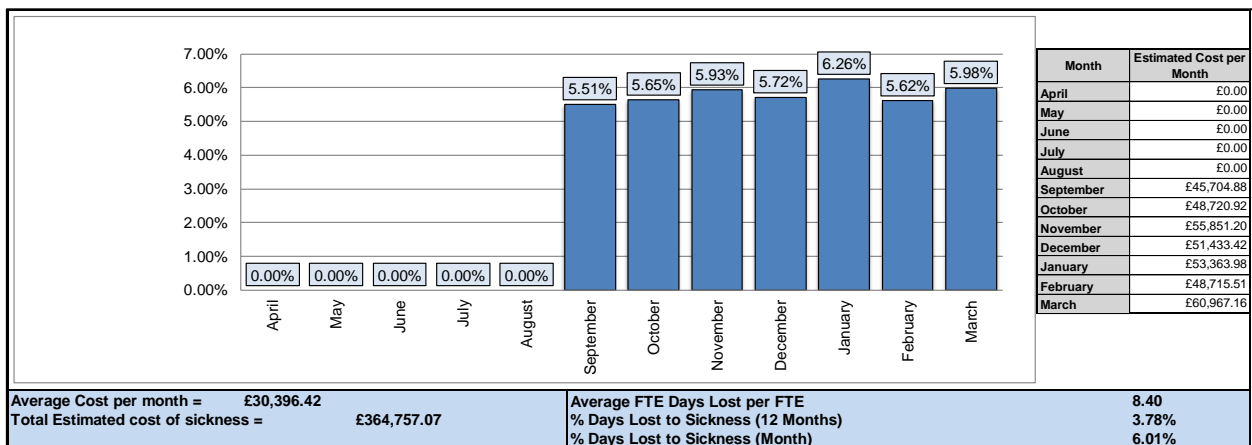
Communities and Business Development Directorate



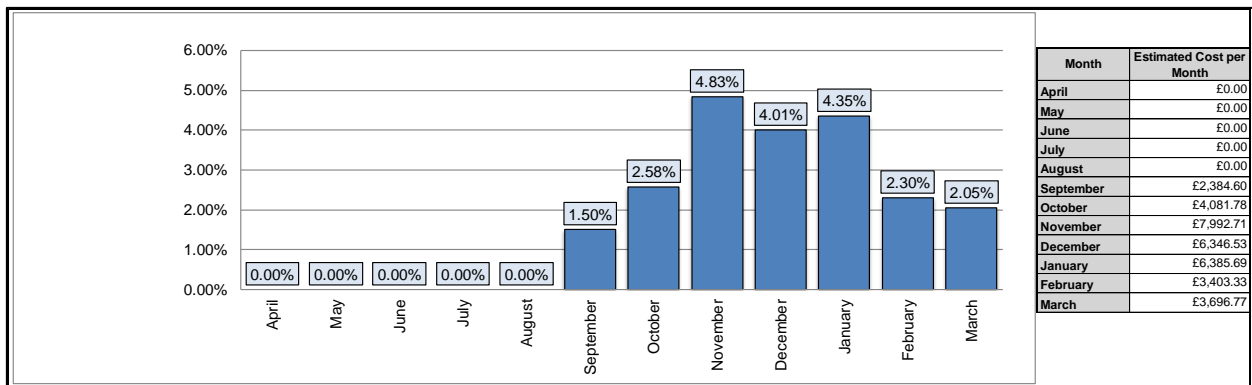
Planning and Local Services Directorate



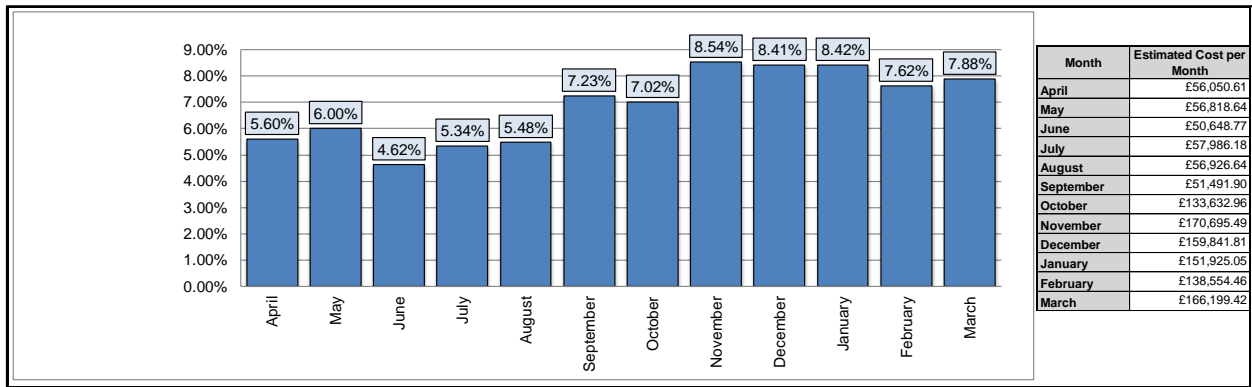
Public Health and Community Services Directorate



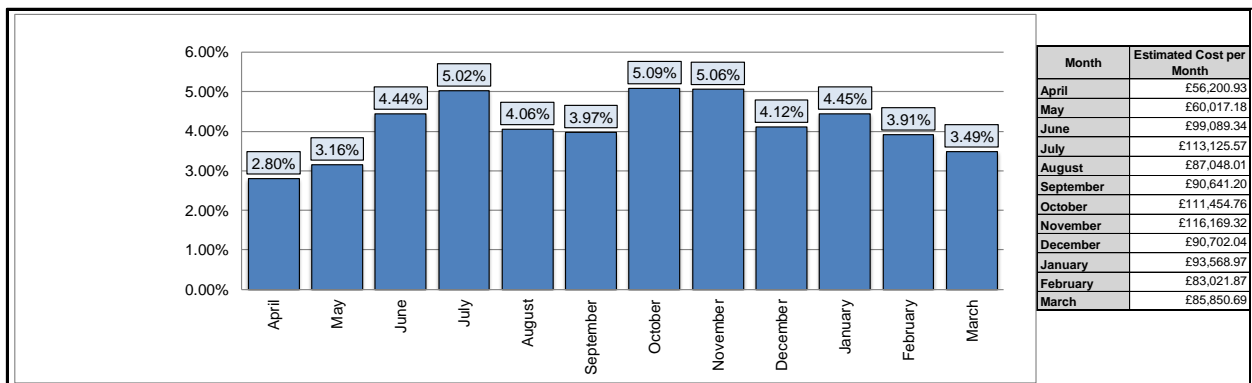
Regeneration Directorate



Adult Services Directorate



Children's Services Directorate



Work is ongoing to promote wellbeing with staff as we progressed through the Covid 19 pandemic and relevant lockdown periods. Outside of these parameters the key health and wellbeing focus remains as:

- Mental health
- Musculoskeletal
- Healthy lifestyle
- Financial wellbeing

	*Absence costs 2021/22	Absence costs	Ave days lost per FTE 21/22	Ave days lost per FTE 20/21	% days lost to sickness 21/22	% days lost to sickness 20/21
Adult Services Directorate	£1,250,771.94	£575,915.17	14.28	11.64	6.43%	5.24%
Chief Exec Directorate	£274,389.70	£18,416.28	14.20	1.02	6.39%	0.46%
Children's Services Directorate	£1,086,889.88	£728,939.76	5.09	7.49	2.29%	3.37%
Communities and Business Development Directorate	£232,249.60	n/a	7.67	n/a	3.46%	n/a
Finance Directorate	£277,046.49	£315,634.70	5.09	13.05	2.29%	5.88%
Fire and Rescue	£233,767.76	£170,086.90	8.72	6.89	3.93%	3.11%
Planning and Local Services Directorate	£850,772.25	£591,091.79	7.67	8.01	3.46%	3.61%
Public Health and Community Services Directorate	£364,757.07	n/a	9.38	n/a	4.22%	n/a
Regeneration Directorate	£34,291.42	n/a	4.44	n/a	2.00%	n/a

Sickness Absence costs comparative 2021/22

* In September 2021 the Directorate structure of the Council changed and direct comparisons with the previous financial year are not possible.

Sickness Absence Benchmarking - Average Lost FTE Days per FTE

Previous year's Cabinet Report recommendations were to include benchmarking data from other unitary authorities and Northumberland compared with all English Unitary Authorities. However, the latest benchmarking data we can access is that of 2020/21².

Year	Northumberland	Minimum for All English unitary authorities	Mean for All English unitary authorities	Maximum for All English unitary authorities
2021/22	10.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
2020/21	8.03	N/A	7.9	N/A

² due to COVID-19 LGA HR benchmarking has been on hold since Q3 19/20 the figures in the report are the latest available figures the LGA have published.

2018/19	11.2	5.4	10.1	13.1
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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
2021/22	10.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
2020/21	8.03	7.1	10.20	14.1
2018/19	11.2	9.3	12.2	14.3

Northumberland CIPFA nearest neighbours include the following Local Authorities: East Riding of Yorkshire, Wirral, Isle of Wight, Barnsley, Wakefield, Rotherham, Dudley and St. Helens.

The data for previous years does show we are running at the lower end of the results compared to others.

The Personal Risk Assessment exercise that began in June 2020 and was refreshed in February 2021 provided managerial advice and guidance to those service areas where employees had rated themselves low (1-5) on the wellbeing scale of 1-10. We continued with another COVID survey in Feb 2022 and the results were positive in views of wellbeing and support from employees.

	January 2021	January 2022
Overall NCC Staff Completion Rate	35.9%	34.6%
'Communication between the executive leaders and staff is effective'		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly Agree/Agree • Neutral • Disagree / Strongly Disagree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 84.8% • 13.3% • 1.9% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 77.3% • 20% • 2.7%
'Have Found the Chief Executives Bulleting Useful' - Yes / To some extent	98.8%	97.7%
How would you rate your mental wellbeing		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 or below • 5 or 6 • 7+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11.1% • 24.6% • 64.2% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.7% • 16.8% • 76.5%
In the last month, I have NOT looked forward to work - agree	26.4%	25%
In the last month, I have felt enthusiastic about my job - disagree	8.5%	5%
In the last month, time has passed quickly - disagree	8.5%	5%

In the last month, I have been able to provide the service I aspire to - Yes	68.4%	70.6%
Do you feel supported by your line manager? - No	1.84%	1.37%

HR/OD Helpline

While the HR/OD function has operated a helpline for several years, during the pandemic resources were re-arranged putting in place a rota within the team to expand capacity during periods where government announcements were rapidly evolving. This enabled the team to provide calm and reassurance to staff and managers who were struggling with work-based queries. All calls and advice were initially logged to identify any common themes and frequently asked questions were updated daily with organisational decisions against each individual query throughout the pandemic and periods of lockdown.

Number of calls received through 2021/22:

Directorate	Number of calls
Adult Services Directorate	296
Chief Exec Directorate	28
Children's Services Directorate	224
Communities and Business Development Directorate	65
Finance Directorate	108
Fire and Rescue	3
Planning and Local Services Directorate	193
Public Health and Community Services Directorate	97
Regeneration Directorate	12
Total	1026

COVID-19 Hotline

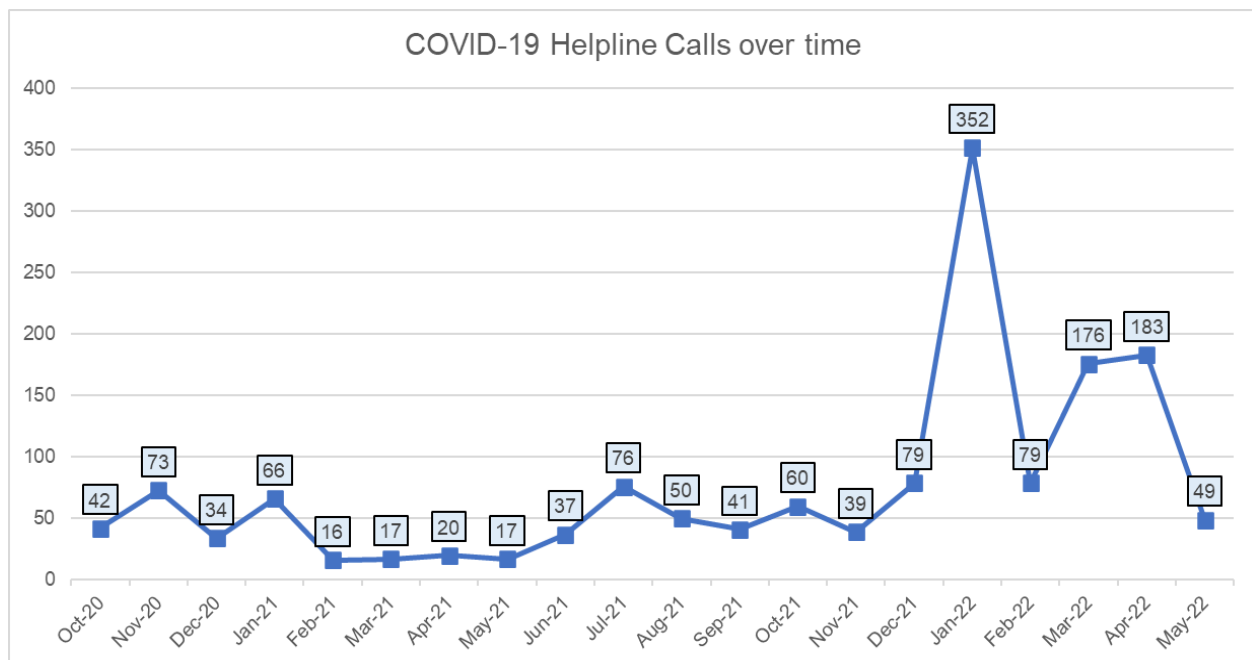
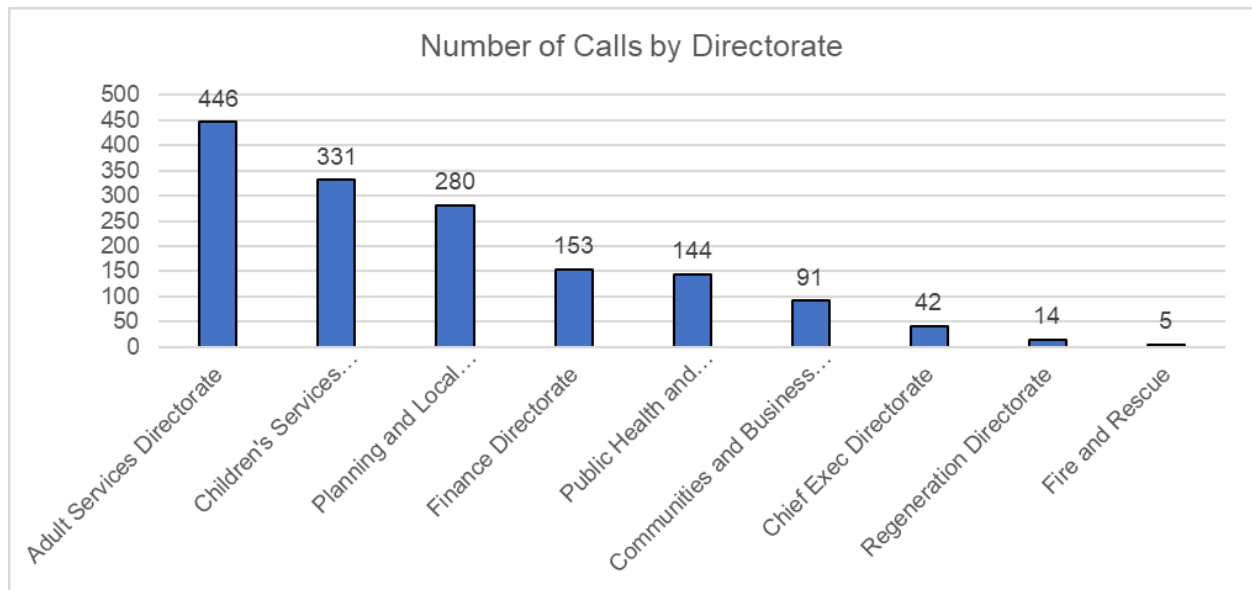
During the second wave of the pandemic the HR/OD team worked with colleagues from Public Health in setting up a COVID-19 Hotline. Members of the HR/OD team were trained in how to deal with workplace outbreaks and took responsibility for always manning the hotline.

To ensure that all actions were appropriately taken when the possibility of a workplace outbreak occurred the following measures were put into place:

- Ascertained if the case was symptomatic or confirmed positive, if so, appropriate advice was given regarding the individual and their family about testing and isolation periods.
- Discussed with manager when they had last been at work, who they had been working with and where, then determining if 'contact' under the PHE definitions had occurred.
- If yes, any other employees that had been in contact were sent home and told to isolate for the relevant time-period.

- If no, but other employees had been in the same workplace at the same time, those employees were written to and told they did not need to isolate to try and ease any concerns.
- Occasionally, there were causes for concern in terms of employees not adhering to social distancing and/or wearing suitable PPE and those issues were addressed via management intervention.
- The location of cases was monitored and if there were more than 2 cases in the same workplace in quick succession, a review was undertaken between HR, Public Health, Health and Safety and Public Protection to determine if any further action was needed.

From its inception in on 9 October 2020 to the time of writing, the hotline has fielded 1056 phone calls. Graphs below demonstrate the breakdown of when the peak times of daily rates of calls were, and from which directorates per month.



Agency Staffing

Numbers of agency staffing are regularly reviewed by the Workforce Committee. We continue to work 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 positive for the Northeast in managing the challenges that agency staffing costs and quality pose.

An Internal Staffing Bank now running 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) to ensure we build a more flexible workforce and reduce existing costs over time. The Staff Bank was started in late 2020 and progression of work was hindered by the restrictions of the pandemic. Work will continue to take place to ensure the use of the staff bank has been explored before authorisation to use agency is approved.

No. of temporary staffing requests	2020/21	2021/22
Staff Bank	12	111
Agency	596	490

Staff Bank Spend 2021/22			
Directorate	Bank Staff Count	Sum of Hours Claimed	Sum of Total Oncosts (+21%)
Adults and Children's Services	29	4992.56	£76,344.40
Communities/Business Development	17	4697.34	£63,170.12
Corporate Governance	1	88.16	£1,130.36
Finance	3	287.66	£3,650.13
HR/OD and People Services	5	777.98	£12,797.70
Planning and Local Services	7	922.55	£12,485.99
Public Health and Housing	1	745.07	£9,182.20
Total	63	12511.31	£178,760.90

Agency Spend 2021/22		
Directorate	Agency Staff Count	Sum of Total Cost
Adult Services	3	£72,842
Childrens Services	21	£404,502
Corporate Resources	20	£377,494
Corporate Services	1	£4,061
Health and Wellbeing	160	£1,619,963
Housing Services	76	£1,319,311
Local Services	72	£1,707,476
Neighbourhood Services	1	£46,051
Total	354	£5,551,700

A review of agency use has been commissioned and is being delivered by the Council's Innovation and Improvement service. This review seeks to understand the extent and cost of use of agency staff and will make recommendations on how spend can be reduced and greater self-sufficiency can be achieved. An assessment of the viability and cost effectiveness of the Staff Bank will form part of the review.

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 end immediately and those that are longer term. All fixed term contracts and honoraria have an end date so that they are regularly reviewed.

Equality and Diversity

The Council has very well-established staff networks LGBT, Enable Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic, Menopause, Mental Health and Carers Network groups. Two new network groups have been set up Armed Forces Network to support those employees that have been in Armed forces and Apprentice Network to provide a space for apprentices to meet others and lessen isolation. The network groups contribute actively to the development of a more inclusive culture by commenting on policy, leading on a broad range of ED&I campaigns working closely with Communications staff and contributing to positive staff engagement.

Several the network groups have been trained to be mentors for lived experience and will be integrated into the councils' mentoring and coaching offer to give staff access to the lived experience of staff with one or more protected characteristic.

The Council has produced its Gender Pay Gap Report and continues to have 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 alongside other documents that demonstrate the council's position in relation to ED&I.

Staff Survey Data

The Staff Survey was last undertaken in 2019. Picker Institute were the provider of the survey in 2019 and given some challenges with the quality of the data analysis, the Council decided to introduce quarterly COVID-19 surveys to replace the annual staff survey throughout the pandemic. The department action plan working groups continue to meet monthly to continue with the longer-range actions and to understand results of the shorter surveys. Moving forward HR/OD propose to provide the first staff survey in 2022 since 2019 using in house processes and data analysis. Timescales will be every 18 months to allow for actions from surveys to be undertaken by services. During the 18-month period two short surveys 6 months apart will be undertaken with focussed themes to get an understanding of workforce feelings particularly regarding wellbeing.

Living Leader

The Living Leader Programme is a personal leadership programme that has been bought in with Executive Team support to encourage simple, effective and sustainable

leadership. An initial cohort of 14 employees have been trained in the programme with a Train the Trainer programme running for 9 staff to cascade through the organisation.

As this is a licensed programme 564 licenses will be supported at a variety of levels throughout the organisation. Initial training has taken place during January to March 2022 with the cohort of Trainers being fully trained by July 2022. Objectives for the programme will be increase of self-awareness, recognise, and choose Leadership style, understand principles of successful leadership, develop skills in feedback, personal communication, effective relationships and understand how beliefs impact on behaviours.

Whistleblowing Report 2021/2022

The Whistleblowing Policy was reviewed, and the revised policy was ratified and launched across the council in April 2022. This policy is now called, 'Raising Concerns at Work.' One of the main differences to the revised policy is that concerns raised by elected members will not be dealt with under this policy and any concerns involving the conduct of elected members should be referred to the Monitoring Officer.

Safecall still remains an important platform for staff to raise concerns at work however over the past year, the main method used for reporting these concerns are by letters or emails that have been sent to the Chief Executive.

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. The use of Safecall is advertised every week with the council's weekly communication bulletin. Safecall's advisors are trained individuals with many of them being ex-police officers. The total costs payable to Safecall during 2021/2022 were £4,073.60, for 4288 employees based on £0.95 per head.

Whistleblowing Data during 2021/22

During 2021/2022 there were 10 (down from 26 in the previous year) issues/allegations reported in line with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

Service	Raised through which process	Allegation / Issue	Open/Closed	Outcome
Planning and Local Services	Other	Breach of Policies	Closed	No action required
Planning and Local Services	Formal Whistleblowing	General whistleblowing allegations	Closed	Informal Resolution
Adults, Children's, Education	Other	Discrimination	Closed	Informal Resolution
Planning and Local Services	Safecall	Bullying	Closed	Informal Resolution
Public Health and Community Services	Other	Bullying	Closed	Investigated through Dignity at Work process

Adults, Children's, Education	Other	General whistleblowing allegations	Closed	No action required
Property Services	Other	Employment Practices/Behaviours	Closed	No action required
Adults, Children's, Education	Other	General whistleblowing allegations	Closed	No action required
Adults, Children's, Education	Other	Bullying	Open	Ongoing
Planning and Local Services	Safecall	Bullying	Closed	Recommendation made

The source of referrals were as follows:

Directorate	Number of referrals
Adults, Children's, Education	4
Planning and Local Services	4
Property Services	1
Public Health and Community Services	1
Total:	10

Format of referral:

Format	Number
Formal Whistleblowing	1
Other	7
Safecall	2
Total:	10

Nature of referral:

Nature of referral:	Number
Breach of Policy	1
Bullying	4

Employment Practices/Behaviours	1
Discrimination	1
General Whistleblowing Allegation	3
Total:	10

Outcomes from referral:

Outcome	Number
Informal Resolution	3
No action required	4
Recommendation made	6
Training and Management Action	2
Ongoing – Outcome TBC	1
Total:	10

Whistleblowing Policy

The Whistleblowing Policy has always had a policy of investigating any concerns that are raised by staff. The revised policy launched in April 2022 has been amended to reflect these changes.

Conclusions of report

There has been significant work progressed and achieved despite and due to the Coronavirus pandemic during 2021/22 within the HR/OD team during what has been a difficult year for staff. The notable achievements of personalised risk assessments, the changes to the way that staff work and are being managed is a testament to the excellent workforce and quality HR/OD service that the Council provides. There have also been significant projects undertaken such as the transfer of 600 staff into NCC.

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 continue to 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 an additional mechanism for staff to raise concerns accordingly.

Implications arising from this report

Policy	All workforce actions need to be in line with government covid-19 regulations and guidelines.
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	The <i>WorkSmart</i> project has implications for the use and functionality of the building's estate going forward.
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 and both Strategic and Operational Risk registers are in operation
Crime & Disorder	None.
Customer Consideration	Improved staff performance will impact on the quality of customer experiences.

Carbon reduction	WorkSmart and home working during the pandemic has positive environmental impacts as does the introduction of specific training for Climate Change.
Wards	All.

Report sign off.

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

	initials
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Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Bingal
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