



Northumberland County Council

Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 25 September 2023

Annual Update Report for Workforce (2022/23)

Report of Sarah Farrell, Director of Workforce and OD

Cabinet Member: Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader

1. 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 2022/23.
- 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.
- Provide elected members with an overview of the strategic direction for the Council's workforce related matters.
- Provide elected members with an overview of the monitoring and actions taken during the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 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.

2. 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.

3. Links to the Corporate Plan

The Northumberland County Council (NCC) Corporate Plan (2023-26) 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 (Driving Economic Growth, Tackling Inequalities)
- We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for (Tackling Inequalities)
- We want you to achieve and realise your potential (Driving Economic Growth, Tackling Inequalities)
- We want you to love where you live (Driving Economic Growth)
- We want you to have access to the things you need (Tackling Inequalities, Driving Economic Growth, Value for Money)
- We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone (Value for Money)

HR/OD have also published an Annual Governance Statement that is reviewed and updated annually as part of our ongoing governance arrangements.

4. Context

An integral part of the Council's success in delivering high quality services to the population of Northumberland relies upon the effective deployment of the workforce of the Council. This report gives an overview of employment and workforce related issues occurring during 2022/23.

4.1 Current workforce data (as at 31/03/2023)

The Council employs 5,137 staff (headcount) and 4,583.66 FTE – excluding schools.

The number of staff employed in schools by Northumberland County Council is 3973 staff (headcount) and 2573.57 FTE (as at 31/03/23). 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 to which schools may subscribe if they wish.

Labour turnover for 22/23 is 11.47% which has decreased from the previous year (13%). The total figure is lower than the LGA reported average of 14% labour turnover rate nationally (LGA Workforce survey 2021/22¹).

5. Operation and impact of the HR/OD service in 2022/23

5.1 Delivery of the People Strategy (2021-2024)

The current HR/OD People strategy contains 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

¹ Latest available figures through the LGA inform benchmarking reports.

Within each of the 5 strategic themes there are core actions/objectives. These were intended to be the focus of delivery over a four-year period leading up to May 2025. In every aspect of this strategy, corporate values were embedded which were:

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

NCC determined the response to working in a post pandemic environment would be referred to as 'WorkSmart – It's what you do, not where you do it!'

Our strategic aim was to integrate the WorkSmart philosophy throughout every element of the People strategy, ensuring our practices allowed 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.

Human activity is cited as the main cause of climate change, it is 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 the strategy.

In 2022/23 the strategy workstreams have operated as follows:

Workstream 1- Enriched Experience

What have we achieved in 22/23?

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

- Development of a coaching programme.
- Support to 9 Staff Network Groups including LGBT+, Mental Wellbeing, Menopause, Carers, Enable, Race Equality, ASD, Armed Forces and Apprenticeships.
- Staff survey – the previous staff survey was held in 2019, pre-covid, before the most recent survey conducted in October 2022. The Council achieved an 51.78% response rate in 2022. The Executive team agreed a survey plan of full staff survey to be held every 18 months so there is time to take action on responses. In between, shorter pulse surveys will be taken every 6 months to keep track on general feeling of staff.
- Introduction of smarter working guidelines to support staff and allow them to feel engaged wherever they are as part of WorkSmart. County Hall 're-opened' teams in April 2022.
- Staff awards to recognise our excellent people and to publicly demonstrate our pride in the services they deliver.
- Engaged with network groups to get feedback on HR policy when revised
- Corporate Social responsibility – highlighting the ability to volunteer in the community and providing time off work to do so. Highlighted within induction and manager induction.
- Enabled feedback from starters and leavers of the organisation – revised questionnaires to obtain data to illustrate reasons for joining/leaving.

What is there yet 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
- Feed into wellbeing initiatives that will result in greater levels of engagement
- 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 leadership development, mentoring, coaching, apprenticeship programmes and sustainable careers.

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, borne out in public forums like Glass Door
- Better employee metrics like lower turnover, lower sickness rates, better recruitment fill rates
- Our staff 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

Workstream 2 - Health, Wellbeing & Selfcare

What have we achieved in 22/23?

- Continued Ambassador Status from The Better Health @ Work Awards, gaining "continuing excellence" in 2022.
- 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 all health & wellbeing support available:
<https://northumberland365.sharepoint.com/sites/HealthandWellbeing>
- Increased 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 as well as low interest loans from Northumberland Community Bank.
- Partnered with external organisations such as 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.
- Implemented a new H&W offer for Elected Members
- Use of Psychological Wellbeing Co-ordinator by staff to support wellbeing when case is not clinical.
- Achieved Mindful Employer Status for the next two years (2022 –2024),
- Embedded 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, in particular HR policy.
- Built into HR Policy process Health in all Policies to ensure all HR policy provision includes Wellbeing
- Increased Bereavement support using chaplaincy service
- Linked wellbeing with WORKSMART project to support staff having difficulty with change
- Signed of North of Tyne Good work Pledge to ensure work within the organisation promotes wellbeing of staff.
- 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. Set up manager sessions to support staff wellbeing.
- Employability skills standard offer to allow for work experience, pre apprenticeship

What is there yet to achieve?

- To become an exemplar of Health, Wellbeing and Self-care good practice
- To build on the success of campaigns, and promote engagement across the organisation
- Greater focus on wider determinants of wellbeing, promoting positive lifestyle choices and avoiding negative coping strategies such as alcohol & drugs
- Futureproof our provision with a robust digital offer to improve health literacy, equality of access, variety, and innovation.
- Expand our successful Health & Wellbeing Champion structure to further scope and capacity.

What does success look like?

- 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.

Workstream 3 - Planning our People for the Future

What have we achieved in 22/23?

- Review and refresh of required learning
- Increase in virtual training offer, maximising use of e-learning, virtual classroom, and webinar formats

- 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
- Development of virtual face to face recruitment events for apprenticeships
- Developed Staff bank to reduce agency spend
- Established LEAN process for effective administration of virtual and blended learning events, using Learning Together to full potential
- Develop climate change module to support NCC priorities
- Delivery of a recruitment and retention strategy in order to address critical workforce shortages

What is there yet to achieve?

- Development of 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
- Delivery of the recruitment strategy that will address skills shortfall and attract the best talent
- Widening the use of organisational development support within the organisation

What does success look like?

- 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
- Mapping of workforce planning activity against the service planning cycle.
- 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

Workstream 4 - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion for Everyone

What have we achieved in 22/23?

- Establishment and further embedding of staff network groups to create the opportunity for employees with specific lived experiences, and their allies, to have a safe space for open and honest communication. Networks 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
- Cited as one of the best local authorities in the country in the Gender Pay Gap reporting process. The mean gender pay gap in hourly pay as a percentage for NCC is -0.59% which means that the hourly rate for men is 0.59% below the hourly rate for women; in simple terms, women within the organisation get paid narrowly more than men. In 2021/22, the average hourly rate for men was 1.41% greater than women.
- 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

- Developed a high level of employee engagement in response to our wide range of E, D & I campaigns and initiatives e.g., Pride Month, Black History month, LGBTQ+ month, Men's Health and Mental health Weeks to name but a few.
- Delivery of 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

What is there yet to achieve?

- To be considered 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.
- To establish a professional and engaged EDI team working across HR/OD and Public Health and Inequalities.

What does success look like?

- 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

Workstream 5 - Systems Innovation and Automation

What have we achieved in 22/23?

- Progressed in house development of key systems (i.e., Flexi) including further development of electronic recording of bank holidays
- Developed and enhanced links with IT for support on key areas of work
- Deliver a comprehensive e-learning offer. Most learning can now be delivered virtually
- Update of Therefore system for record keeping
- Review of Oracle use with a view to system optimisation
- Designed and developed a new Applicant Tracking System 'Tribepad'.

What is there yet to achieve?

- 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.
- Introduction and development of Tribepad

What does success look like?

- New and improved HR systems introduced and used across all areas of HR activity.
- Better value for money and optimised system use.
- 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
- A happier workforce with lower levels of frustration linked to processes and systems.

5.2 Recognition

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.

During 2022/23 the service has received recognition and praise including:

- Apprentice Of The Year - PPMA 2022
Finalist – Julie Dennitts
- PPMA Rising Star 2022
Highly Commended Ellie Cooper
- CIPD North East Of England Awards 2022
Excellence in Inclusion and Diversity - Shortlisted
- PPMA Excellence In People Management Awards 2022
Work Transformation and Change Initiative – shortlisted
Health & Wellbeing Initiative – shortlisted
Excellence in Service Delivery - shortlisted
- Personnel Today
Change Management – shortlisted
Excellence in Public Sector HR – shortlisted

5.3 Key Projects 2022/23

5.3.1 Living Leader

The Living Leader Programme is a personal leadership programme that has been introduced with the support of the Executive Management team to encourage simple, effective and sustainable leadership. In early 2022 an initial cohort of 14 employees were trained in the programme with a Train the Trainer programme running for 9 staff to cascade through the

organisation. Objectives for the programme are for delegates to experience an increase in self-awareness, to recognise and choose their leadership style, understand principles of successful leadership, develop skills in feedback, personal communication, effective relationships and understand how beliefs impact on behaviours. A dedicated space within County Hall was allocated 2023 and provides a central location for training to take place.

In 2022/23 320 employees were trained through the Living Leader programme. With further licences purchased to allow for continued training cascade in 2023-24.

Directorate	Headcount
Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing	49
Chief Executive Directorate	43
Children, Young People & Education	46
Communities& Business Development Directorate	42
Finance Directorate	59
Fire and Rescue Directorate	6
Planning & Local Services	50
Public Health and Community Services	9
Regeneration Directorate	8
Total	312**

*Please note structure is reflective of that as March 2023

**8 employees have since left NCC

5.3.2 Psychological Well Being Co-ordinator (PWC) role

The PWC role was established in HR/OD during 2022/23. The role was created to assist services in managing individuals with mental wellbeing issues that may reach a clinical intervention threshold. The PWC meets with the individual and provides routes of support, they also provide a report to the relevant manager and then catch up with the individual after 3 months. Feedback has confirmed that this role is welcomed by managers requiring support for staff.

Data for the use of PWC appointments is as follows

Directorate and Service	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	
Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing Directorate Total								12	11	9	11	11	54
Chief Executive Directorate Total								6	3	3	4	6	22
Children, Young People and Education								5	3	4	5	7	24
Place and regeneration								7	5	12	7	9	40

Directorate Total													
Public Health								3	2	2	3	2	12
Transformation and Resources Directorate Total								1	0	0	3	1	5
Grand Total	17	23	32	15	27	26	20	34	24	30	31	36	315

NB data at service level not defined until Nov 22

5.3.3 Flu Vaccinations

Since the COVID 19 pandemic flu vaccines are considered to have increased in perceived significance and importance in order to maintain attendance for staff during the winter season in front facing roles. During 2022/23 there were a total of 29 NCC Flu clinics held in NCC venues throughout the region.

A total of 725 staff attended the NCC clinics which averaged 25 people vaccinated per clinic. A further 435 accessed the NHS hubs for vaccines (via the easy book system) which meant a cumulative total of 1160 staff were vaccinated in 2022/23.

5.3.4 Apprenticeship Campaign

The re-evaluation of our approach to Apprenticeships support in 2022 has produced smaller cohorts that are closely nurtured through their apprenticeship with a view to the service having a role for them following the end of the apprenticeship term. This has reduced the number of apprenticeship cohorts but has allowed NCC to 'grow their own' in a targeted way and with a focus on career pathways. This has also been acknowledged externally with the project winning several external awards that will be highlighted in the 2023-2024 report.

5.3.5 Staff Survey

The first staff survey since 2019 was undertaken using internal systems – further details are given in this report at 6.13 below.

5.3.6 Senior Management Review and Executive Appointments

An assessment centre for the role of Chief Executive took place in October 2022. Subsequent assessment centres for recruitment to the Executive Management team took place in January 2023. All assessment centres were coordinated and facilitated by the HR/OD service.

Following these appointments, the Staffing and Appointments Committee agreed the proposal and resulting appointments to a revised senior management structure in February 2023. Consultation with the affected population took place during February and concluded on 24 March 2023. Implementation of the new structure, supported by HR /OD, took place thereafter.

6.Key Workforce Performance Metrics 2022/23

6.1 Performance Appraisal

During 2022/2023 the final recorded percentage of all staff who had a performance appraisal was 74.64%. This is under the expected level of performance of at least 85% and a decrease from the previous year (86.98%). The appraisal performance indicator has been monitored closely and those managers who did not achieve 85% in 2022/23 have support action plans in

place to ensure that completion rates are met in 2023/24. The HR/OD team are also undertaking a review of the appraisal process with input from colleagues within Policy & Performance and Digital & IT to ensure that any necessary improvements are made and that it remains useful to both employee and manager.

Appraisals required (Headcount)	Appraisals completed. (Headcount)	%	Total remaining (Headcount)	%
5137	3834	74.64%	1303	25.36%

Directorate	End of year % achievement
Adult Services Directorate	87.16%
Chief Exec Directorate	77.09%
Children's Services Directorate	67.46%
Communities and Business Development Directorate	78.76%
Finance Directorate	83.50%
Fire and Rescue	65.36%
Planning and Local Services Directorate	75.82%
Public Health and Community Services Directorate	54.57%
Regeneration Directorate	41.38%

6.2 Statutory and Mandatory Training

An annual Corporate Training Needs Analysis (TNA) for all NCC staff has been undertaken and is monitored for compliance 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 refreshers
- Manual Handling awareness – 3 yearly refreshers
- Safeguarding Adults and Children awareness – 3 yearly refreshers
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – annual refresher
- Fire Safety awareness – annual refresher
- Health and Safety awareness – one off
- Stress Awareness – one off
- FOI, EIR and SAR refresher – annual refresher
- PREVENT awareness or WRAP – one off
- Infection Prevention and Control - one off
- Introduction to Climate Change – one off

In April 2022 the Climate Change training module added to the above 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 has become an annual refresher with extra information regarding FOI, EIR 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 2022/23 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 31/03/23 is outlined below. The compliance target is set at 85% (95% for GDPR and FOI, SAR, EIR).

Performance Appraisal 22/23	Fire Safety Awareness	General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	Equality & Diversity	Manual Handling	Safeguarding Adults and Children	Health and Safety Awareness	Stress Awareness	FOI, SAR & EIR	PREVENT or WRAP	Infection Prevention and Control	Introduction to Climate Change
74.64 %	89.68 %	87.54 %	92.68 %	93.67 %	92.19 %	96.67 %	92.89 %	85.65 %	95.89 %	92.45 %	87.13 %

Any compliance/performance issues are raised by the Director of Workforce and OD with the relevant Head of Service.

A review of all statutory and mandatory training has been undertaken in summer 2023 and a revised programme of activity is planned to be implemented with effect from 1 April 2024.

6.3 Personal and Professional Development

The 'About You' review is now embedded 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 continue to deliver a manager's induction to support newly appointment managers and act as a refresher for longstanding managers. Corporate Induction sessions for new starters continue twice a month. Induction sessions were conducted in an online format during covid but this is to be reviewed and may see reintroduction of face to face sessions.

During 2022/2023 we have re-evaluated our successes with talent management programmes to with a focus on quality rather than quantity, striving towards being an 'employer of choice'.

6.4 Apprenticeships

There are currently just over 650 available apprenticeship standards ranging from Level 1 up to Level 7, 60 different routes are being used within NCC. The Councils Public Service Reporting Percentage of apprenticeship starts excluding schools (both new hires and existing employees) is 2.37%. Public Service Reporting Percentage for maintained schools is 0.48%. The target set is 2.3% so NCC have achieved just above this level (2.37%).

During 2022/2023 we recruited a further 2 cohorts of apprentices. This was before there were restrictions placed on recruitment activity. This pause in recruitment activity allowed us to re-evaluate the numbers NCC would be able to support in following years

Cohorts recruited during 2022/23 include:

- Cohort 6 - 22 new apprentices
- Cohort 7 - 20 new apprentices

Of the 182 employees currently undertaking apprenticeships, levels are made up as follows:

Level 2 = 16%
Level 3 = 43%
Level 4 = 13%
Level 5 = 3%
Level 6 = 17%

Level 7 = 7%

Other activity included:

- Social Worker Apprentices - focus on creating new JD to reflect 'apprentice' post
- Apprenticeship Week 2023 was a great success, we used the 'Skills for Life' theme and worked closely with our colleagues within Communication
- Launched 'Thriving at Work' Campaign, used manager videos talking about having apprentices, upskilling stories from staff, attended events throughout the county, held our own parent & carers information event at County Hall with managers and apprentices, Apprentice takes over twitter for the day and finished with 'selfie Sunday' from apprentices
- Reviewed the processes for recruiting new apprentices and for clear identification of roles suitable to be filled by an apprentice
- Re-evaluated advertising for multiple positions and reasons not being able to recruit
- Recruitment for National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) Cohort - appointed 2 graduates in September 2022. This process is being refined to include senior executive support and organisational wide placement opportunities.

6.5 HR Case Management

The Council's HR Advisers work on a ratio of 1:500 employees currently and the case profiles for 2022/23 are as follows:

No of cases 2022/23	Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing	Chief Executive Directorate	Children, Young People & Education	Place and Regeneration Directorate	Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities Directorate	Transformation and Resources Directorate	Total
Disciplinary Cases	8	6	23	27	3	4	71
Grievance/ Dignity at Work cases	5	4	5	9	3	1	27
Performance Management cases	0	0	2	2	0	0	4
Health & Wellbeing policy cases	RM1 – 106 RM2 – 37 RM3 – 10 RM4 - 4	RM1 – 40 RM2 – 6 RM3 – 0 RM4 - 1	RM1 – 53 RM2 – 11 RM3 – 8 RM4 - 2	RM1 – 158 RM2 – 39 RM3 – 13 RM4 - 7	RM1 – 44 RM2 – 5 RM3 – 2 RM4 - 0	RM1 – 27 RM2 – 6 RM3 – 2 RM4 - 0	RM1 – 428 RM2 – 104 RM3 – 35 RM4 - 14
Total	170	57	104	255	57	40	683

NB

The previous directorate structure in place for this section of the report.

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

'RM' – Review Meeting

A Case Management system was introduced in 2021/22 for HR Operational cases to allow for better recording of cases, input by all parties involved in the case and time management of cases to ensure all cases are dealt with in timely manner.

6.6 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. In 2021/22 we had 2 requests for mediation, one internal that did not lead to a session and an external request from a school which was charged for.

6.7 Coaching

NCC have 33 trained coaches within NCC, 19 of them are presently active taking on assigned clients. In 2022/23 we received 11 nominations for coaching from Council employees that resulted in an average of 3-5 sessions with a coach for career, leadership or personal/professional development. Future provision and direction is being considered as a distinct project under the BEST Talent and Opportunities workstream.

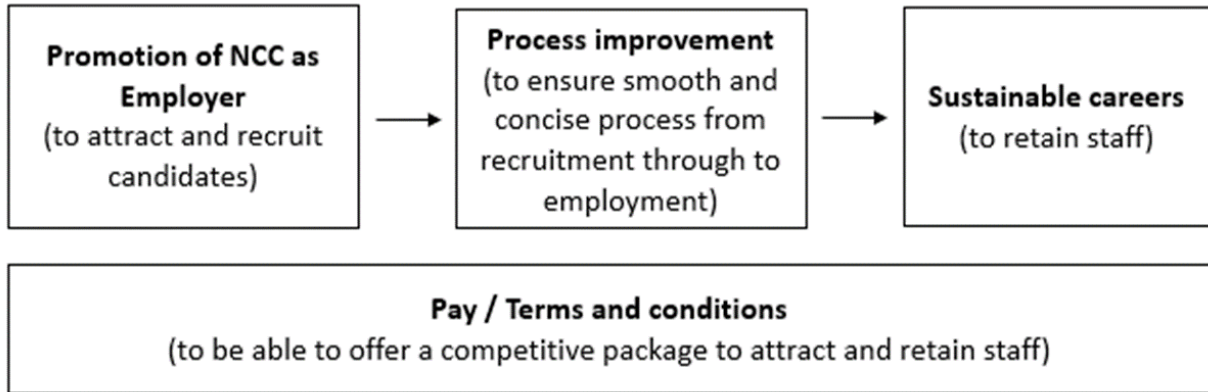
6.8 Recruitment and Retention

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 was established 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. This commenced in early 2023 so the benefits of the work will be shown in the next annual report.
- 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. To improve our processes a new Applicant tracking system (ATS) was purchased to replace the Taleo system. The system did not go live until 2023. Reports of applicant information will be available in the next annual report for 23/24.
- 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. This aligns with BEST principles and will be progressed further in 23/24.

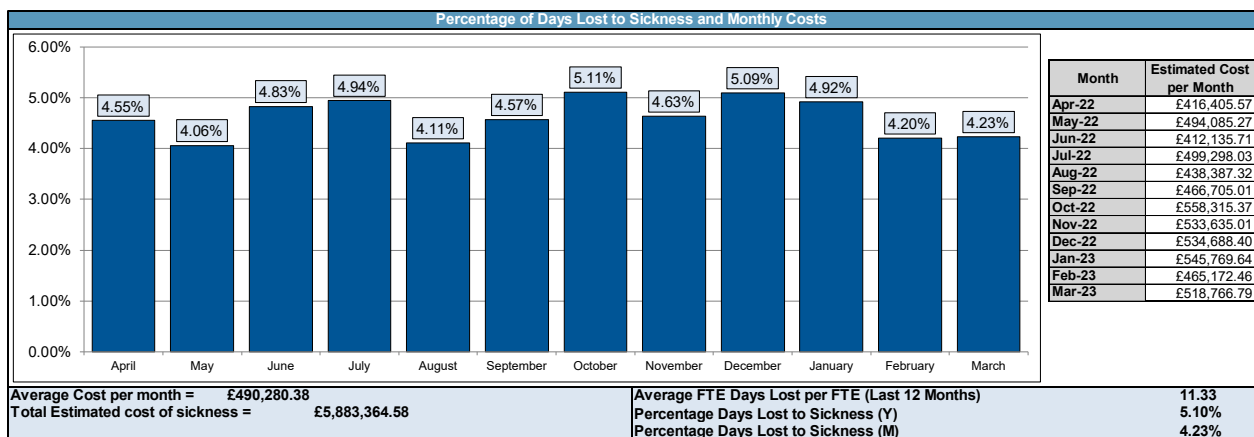
- Pay / Terms and conditions - To be able to attract and retain staff, NCC need to ensure that they offer as competitive employment package as possible. NCC need to be able to respond to shifts in market value for skills whilst maintaining equality and fairness but also ensuring affordability and value for money. This workstream aligns with BEST Value for money principles and will be progressed further in 23/24.



The ‘Promotion of NCC as an employer’ and ‘Process Improvement’ projects have now been fully delivered. The ‘Sustainable Careers’ project and the refocused ‘Reward and Recognition’ project were formally adopted under the BEST Talent and Opportunities workstream in Summer 2023 and at this point the Recruitment and Retention programme was closed.

6.9 Sickness Absence

Sickness absence for 2022/23 had an annual cost of £5.88m which compared to the previous year 2021/22 (£4.68m) is an increase of £1.20m. The average number of FTE lost days per FTE for 2021/22 is 11.33 which compared to the previous year 2021/22 (FTE lost days per FTE were 10.00) is an increase of 1.33 days per FTE. The Council maintains an ambitious aim to achieve a sickness absence level of 7.5 days per FTE.

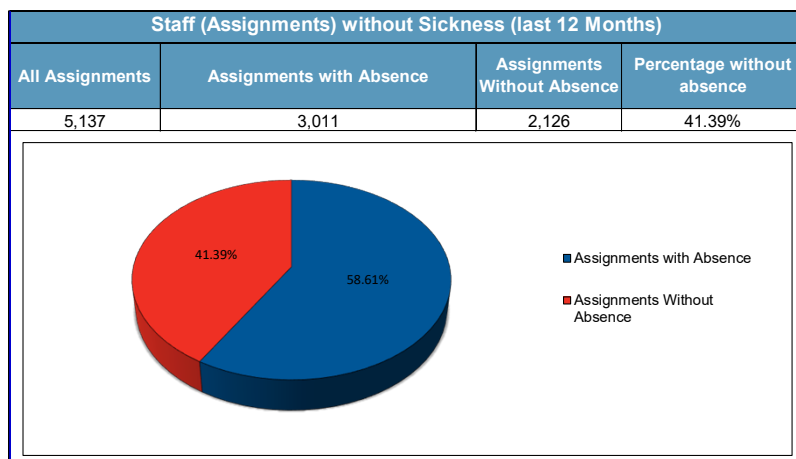


The report highlights specific trends and areas with high absence levels in each service area. Departments are supported to understand their own data and areas discussed to look at how they can best deal with reducing absence. Mental health support is now part of the health and wellbeing process through the routine use of Wellbeing Action Plans and Stress risk

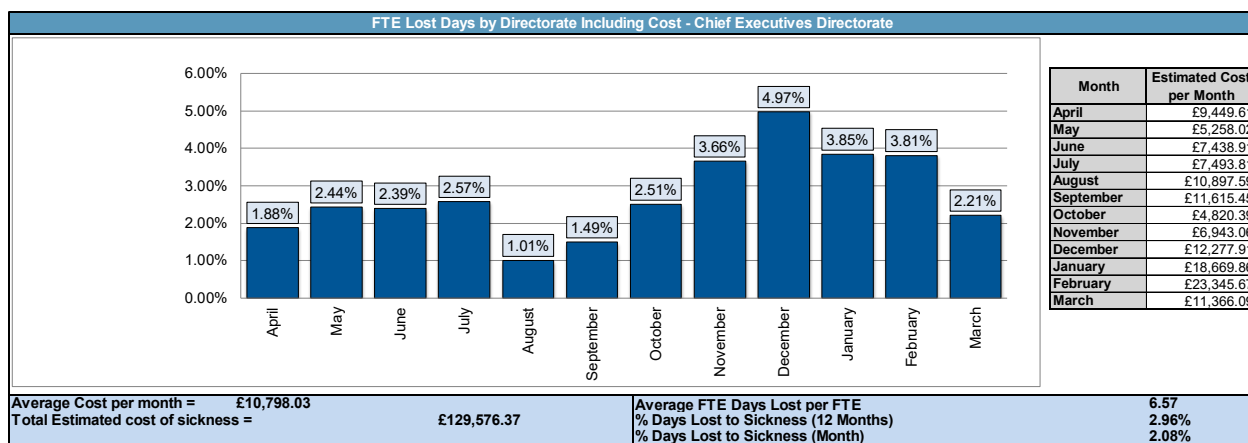
Assessments for employees. A Psychological Wellbeing Coordinator has been in place since December 2021 to support employees facing difficulties that might not require clinical medical support. Questions for managers are included in the supervision proforma to record all aspects of an individual's wellbeing by the manager on a regular basis.

6.9.1 Organisational summary view of sickness absence

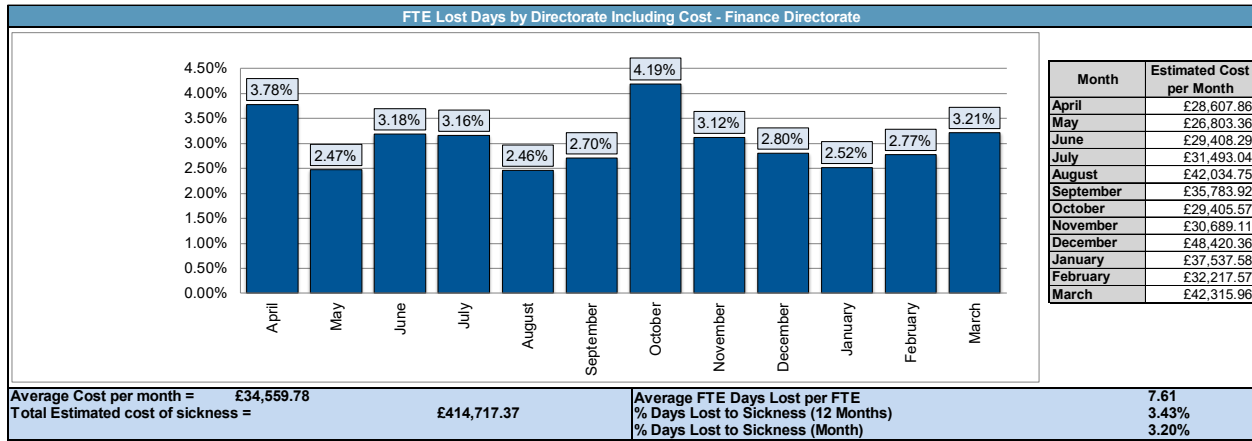
The cost of sickness absence by Directorate (see tables below) similarly shows the greatest areas being Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing and Place and Regeneration where the headcount is significantly higher. It is recognised that 58% of all staff assignments have had some absence due to sickness during the last twelve months (as outlined below) which is the greater than the previous year.



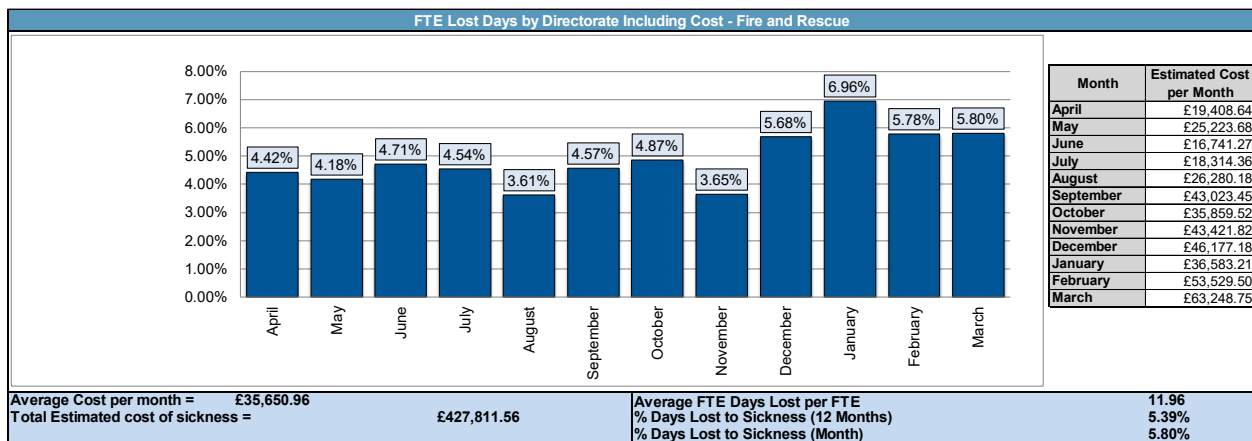
6.9.1.1 Chief Executive Directorate



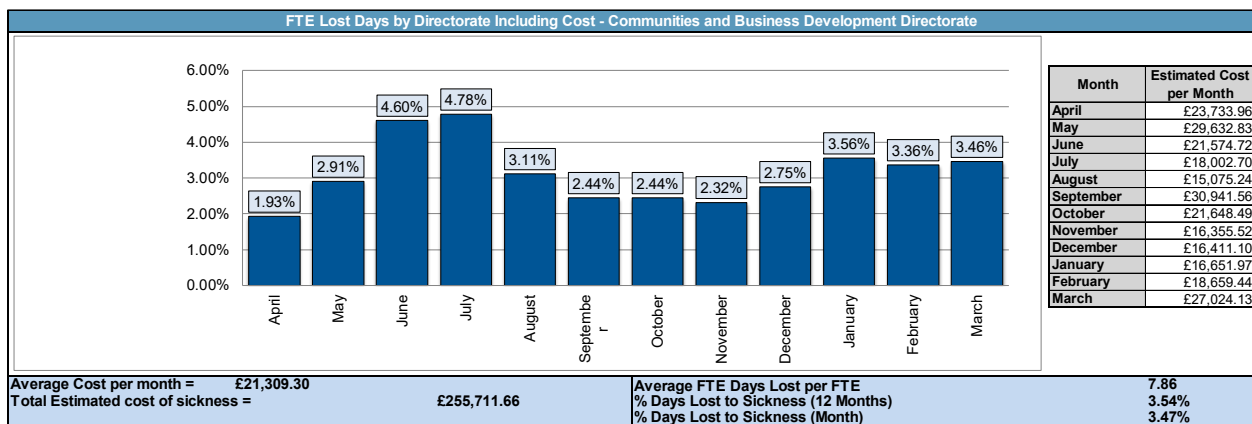
6.9.1.2 Finance Directorate



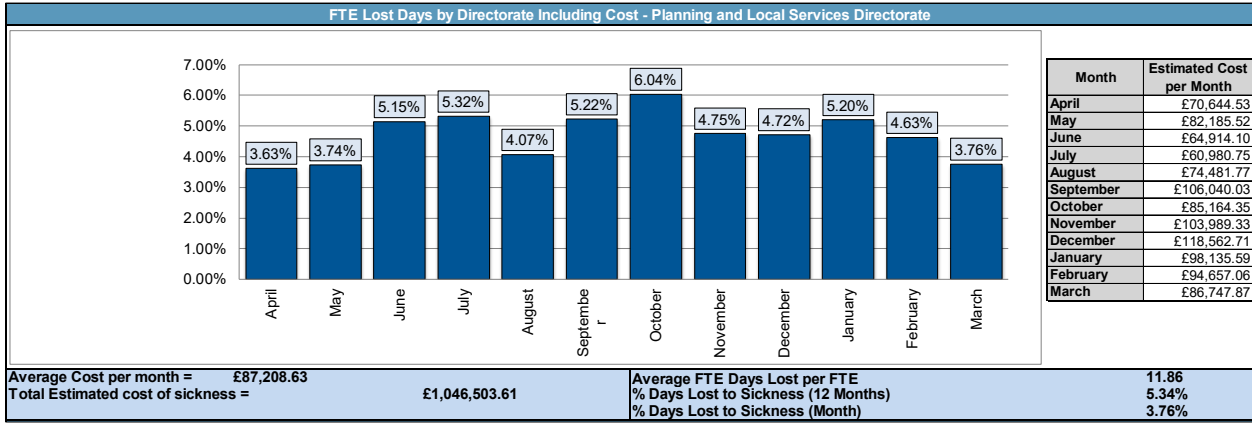
6.9.1.3 Fire and Rescue



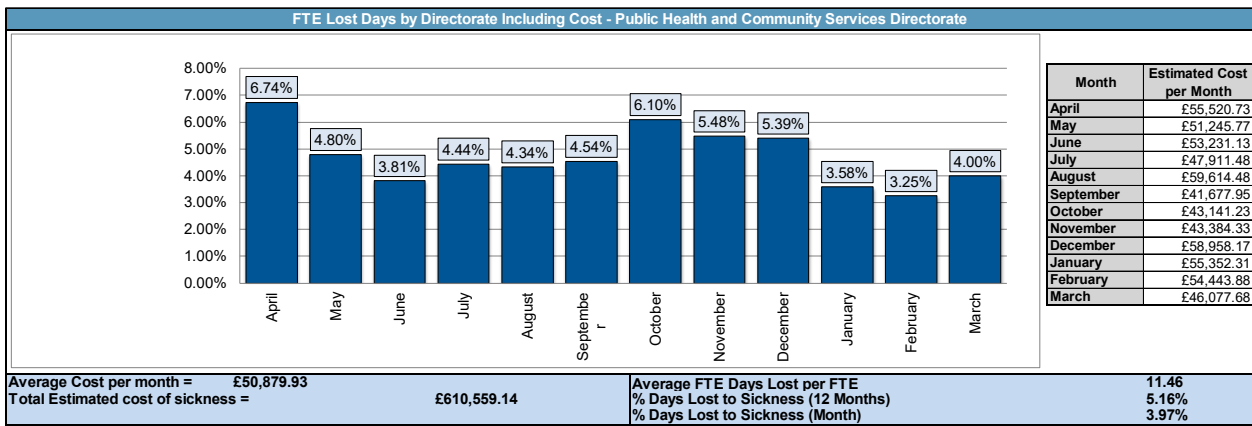
6.9.1.4 Communities and Business Development Directorate



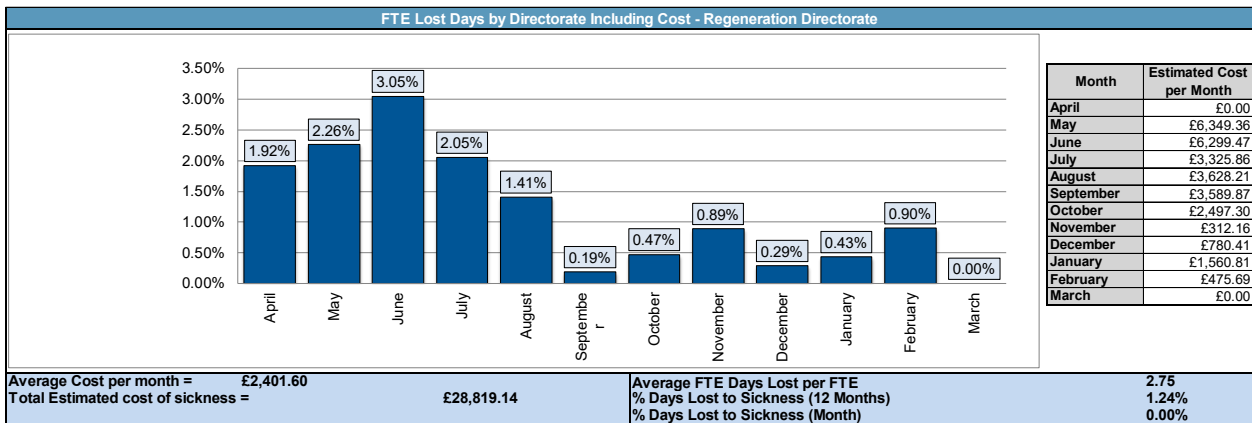
6.9.1.5 Planning and Local Services Directorate



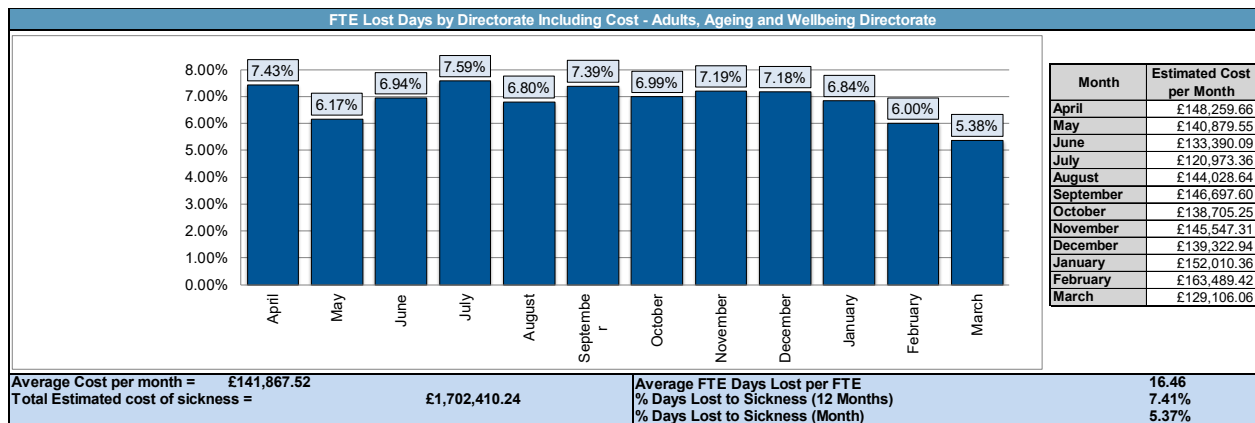
6.9.1.6 Public Health and Community Services Directorate



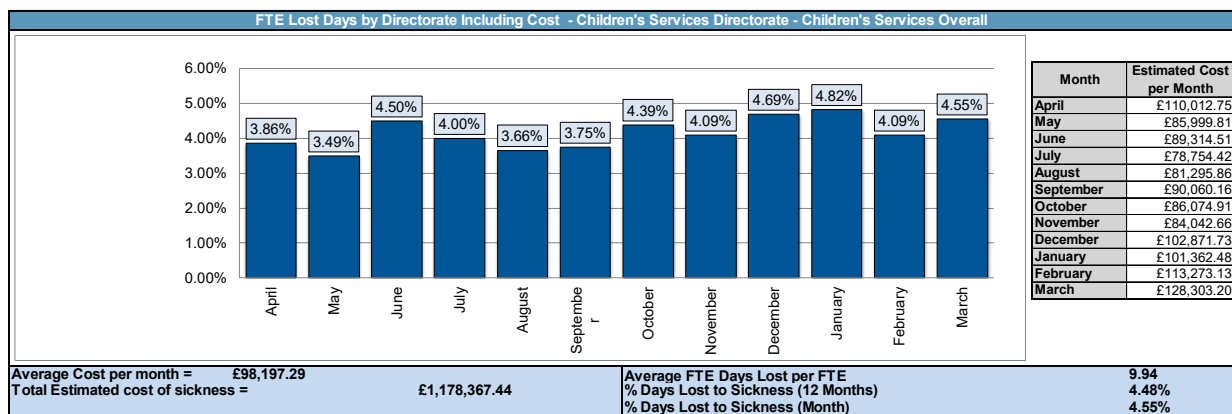
6.9.1.7 Regeneration Directorate



6.9.1.8 Adult's, Ageing and Wellbeing Directorate



6.9.1.9 Children's Services Directorate



6.9.2 Sickness Absence Costs

6.9.3 Sickness Absence Benchmarking - Average Lost FTE Days per FTE

Directorate	Absence costs 22/23	Absence costs 21/22	Ave days lost per FTE 22/23	Ave days lost per FTE 21/22	% days lost to sickness 22/23	% days lost to sickness 21/22
Adult Services	£1,702,410.24	£1,250,771.94	16.46	14.28	7.41%	6.43%
Chief Exec	£129,576.37	£274,389.70	6.98	14.20	2.21	6.39%
Children's Services	£1,178,367.44	£1,086,889.88	9.94	5.09	4.48%	2.29%
Communities and Business Development	£255,711.66	£232,249.60	7.96	7.67	3.47%	3.46%
Finance Directorate	£414,717.37	£277,046.49	7.61	5.09	3.43	2.29%
Fire and Rescue	£427,811.56	£233,767.76	11.96	8.72	5.39%	3.93%
Planning and Local Services	£1,046,503.61	£850,772.25	11.86	7.67	5.34%	3.46%
Public Health and Community Services	£610,559.14	£364,757.07	11.46	9.38	5.16%	4.22%
Regeneration	£28,819.14	£34,291.42	2.75	4.44	1.24%	2.00%

Recommendations arising from the previous year's Cabinet Report were to include benchmarking data from other unitary authorities so that Northumberland could be compared with all English Unitary Authorities. However, the most recent benchmarking data we can access is that of 2021/22².

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	7.7	N/A
2020/21	8.03	N/A	7.9	N/A
2018/19	11.2	5.4	10.1	13.1

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.

Northumberland compared with CIPFA 'Nearest Neighbours'³

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	13.3	N/A
2020/21	8.03	7.1	10.20	14.1
2018/19	11.2	9.3	12.2	14.3

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 Northumberland data is towards the lower end of results compared to other authorities.

6.10 HR/OD Helpline

The HR/OD function has operated a helpline for several years to support service areas with workforce queries. The Business Support team are the first point of contact for employees and managers if they are unsure who to contact. We have a supply of FAQs available for staff online with the main topics of enquiry being General HR policy or procedure queries, Learning Together support and financial queries.

Number of enquiries received throughout 2022/23

Directorate	Number of calls	Number of emails	Total enquiries
HR Enquiries	1649	18042	19691
L & OD Enquiries	497	8297	8794
Finance Related enquiries	0	1113	1113
Total	2146	27452	29598

6.11 Agency Staffing and Staff bank

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.

The Internal Staffing Bank is now embedded 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.

Table to show staff bank activity 2022/23

No. of temporary staffing requests	2021/22	2022/23
Staff Bank	111	131
Agency	490	356

Staff Bank Spend 2022/23		
Directorate	Bank Staff Count	Bank Spend
Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing	35	£244,160
Chief Exec	11	£43,527
Children, Young People and Education	18	£72,300
Fire and Rescue	1	£9,935
Place and Regeneration	47	£335,365
Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities	23	£133,584

Transformation and Resources	12	£90,667
Total	147	£929,537

Agency Spend 2022/23		
Directorate	Agency Staff Count	Agency Spend
Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing	9	£212,735
Chief Exec	2	£102,348
Children, Young People and Education	180	£1,466,294
Fire and Rescue	10	£124,129
Place and Regeneration	196	£2,727,601
Transformation and Resources	5	£121,856
Total	402	£4,754,963

6.12 Fixed Term Contracts

Fixed term contracts are monitored and included in Manager data giving end dates. All fixed term contracts and honoraria must have an end date so payroll will action them in good time. Managers are notified through the Oracle system when a fixed term end date is approaching to prompt action by the manager.

6.13 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, Carers Network, Armed Forces and Apprentice Network. 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.

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.

6.14 Staff Survey Data

The Staff Survey was undertaken in October 2022; the first survey since 2019. Picker Institute were the provider of the survey in 2019 and following some challenges with the quality of the data analysis, it was decided to use an in-house system. This allowed us to have complete control of the information asked for and responses received. The system used is Citizen Space and during 2022 the HR/OD service ensured use of the tool met Data and Information Governance requirements. Communications were issued from September 2022 onwards with the emphasis on anonymisation of responses, as this had been raised with previous surveys. The Engagement team worked with service working groups to meet monthly to coordinate longer-range actions and to understand results of surveys including the Pulse surveys conducted through the COVID period. The staff survey had a **51.87%** response rate. Whilst this is a lower completion rate than in 2019, general feedback was that staff did not feel pressured to respond but did so of their own free will. Data was reported to the Executive Management team and the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) and cascaded to all services through Working Groups Representatives and Heads of Service for their own specific data so that they could build their own action plans.

Timescales moving forward will be every 18 months to allow for actions arising from surveys to be undertaken by services and corporately. During the 18-month period, two short pulse surveys, 6 months apart, will be undertaken with focussed themes in order to get an understanding of workforce feelings, particularly regarding wellbeing.

6.14.1 Highlights of the survey - Areas of Significant Improvement

Qu	Description	2019	2022
Q74a	Often/always look forward to going to work	59%	71%
Q80b	I am able to make suggestions to improve the work of my team/department	75%	91.47%
Q80c	I am able to make improvements happen in my area of work	59%	81.22%
Q83a	Team members have a set of shared objectives.	74%	91.66%
Q84a	Satisfied with recognition for good work.	62%	84.74%
Q84b	Satisfied with support from immediate management.	78%	91.78%
Q108c	Immediate manager gives clear feedback on my work.	74%	93.69%
Q108f	Immediate manager takes a positive interest in my health and wellbeing.	78%	92.96%
Q110	Communication between senior management and staff is effective.	49%	77.74%
Q11b	Senior managers act on staff feedback.	41%	73.72%

In general, the responses showed the organisation scoring a lot higher than in pre COVID surveys.

6.14.2 Highlights of the survey - Areas of concern

Qu	Description	2019	2022
Q131	For those staff who have benefitted from these elements in their role I feel positive about the following aspects of Worksmart - Autonomy - Good use of office space - Not having to go back to my base/depot like I used to	53% 46% 50%	25.25% 17.48% 22.95%
Q63	What level of financial difficulty have you experienced due to the rise in the cost of living during the last 6 months?	79% No difficulty	15.76% No difficulty
	Have you experienced harassment , bullying or verbal abuse Yes – From Colleagues Yes – From Managers Yes – From Residents	Not asked Not asked Not asked	4.09% 3.71% 16.68%

Further work and action has been undertaken since the survey in regard to the concerning feedback on external abuse especially in frontline service.

6.15 Whistleblowing

The Whistleblowing Policy was reviewed, and the revised policy 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 2022/2023 were £6,252.00, for 4962 employees based on £1.05 per head.

6.15.1 Whistleblowing Data

During 2022/2023 there were 9 (down from 10 in the previous year) issues/allegations reported in line with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

Service	Referral format	Allegation / Issue	Open / Closed	Outcome
Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities	Email	Bullying	Closed	Investigated through Disciplinary process
Adults, Ageing and Welling	Safecall	Bullying	Closed	No action required
Children, Young People and Education	Safecall	Bullying	Closed	Performance Management initiated
Adults, Ageing and Welling	Safecall	Inappropriate Behaviour	Closed	Investigated through Disciplinary process
Adults, Ageing and Welling	Safecall	Inappropriate Behaviour	Closed	No action required
Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities	Email	Bullying	Closed	No action required
Place and Regeneration	Letter	Bullying	Closed	Training and management action
Place and Regeneration	Email	Theft	Closed	No action required
Adults, Ageing and Welling	Letter	Employment Practices / Behaviours	Closed	Informal management actions

The source of referrals were as follows:

Directorate	Number of referrals
Adults, Ageing and Welling	4

Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities	2
Children, Young People and Education	1
Place and Regeneration	2
Total:	9

Format of referral:

Format	Number
Other (letters and emails)	5
Safecall	4
Total:	9

Nature of referral:

Nature of referral:	Number
Bullying	5
Employment Practices/Behaviours	1
Theft	1
Inappropriate Behaviour	2
Total:	9

Outcomes from referral:

Outcome	Number
Investigated through Disciplinary process	2
Informal Resolution	1
No action required	4
Performance Management	1
Training and Management Action	1
Total:	9

7. Performance, monitoring and Governance

7.1 Due to content duplication, data improvement and low participation levels, Workforce Committee was disbanded in January 2023. Compliance is now monitored and maintained as follows:

- Monthly highlight reports concerning all workforce activity to Executive Management team.
- Dynamic and timely access to improved management data empowers manager to monitor and identify patterns of activity and make interventions as appropriate.
- Overview data at organisational level is distributed to the senior management population to allow KPI monitoring and cross-council comparison. This data is discussed at directorate level and intervention is supported by the operational HR team.
- Best practice, corporate issues impacting the workforce and development activities feature instead on the agendas of the pre-existing, well-established monthly Corporate Briefing and Leadership and management sessions.

7.2 All HR policies are developed and reviewed in accordance with a schedule maintained and administered by HR/OD. HR policy development activity takes place in conjunction between HR/OD and recognised trade unions, senior managers and network groups before final ratification at JCC.

7.3 Policies are published and readily accessible on the HR sharepoint site accessible via the staff intranet 'The Beat'

8. Future Objectives and Opportunities for HR/OD

8.1 Strategy

During 2022/2023 actions from the workstreams of the 21/24 People Strategy continued to be delivered by HR/OD. However, there has been a significant recent period of change and it has therefore been identified that a revised strategy will be defined in 2023. This is due to:

- BEST and associated new ways of working
- A refreshed corporate plan
- A structured approach to service planning and corporate performance management
- Review of working arrangements and worksmart

Many aspects of the previous people strategy will carry forward to the revised people strategy.

8.2 HR Function and Structure

The HR/OD operating model will be examined to ensure optimised efficiency and to structurally align to the new people strategy and transformed ways of working brought about by BEST. To this end, a full-service review by the Strategic Change team within Transformation and Resources commenced in summer 2023.

The HR/OD team has flexed to support service need and organisational development throughout the last twelve months, and this has included individuals working in different roles and departments as needed. The leadership of the service changed when Leanne Furnell left NCC in October 2022. Existing members of the HR management team covered responsibilities until permanent appointment was made to the role of Director of Workforce and OD in February 2023.

With effect from November 2024, a new Head of Service role – ‘Head of OD’ has been created using transformation funding. Through this, it is anticipated that the service will better support the organisation with increased expertise and capacity in Learning and Development, Change Management, Leadership Development, Culture and will bring closer strategic alignment of OD activities.

Key partnerships, contracts and systems will be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and delivering high quality whilst achieving value for money.

9. Conclusions of report

This report demonstrates the extensive range and scope of HR/OD activity during the period 2022/23.

Despite a period of significant change, HR/OD have maintained a consistently high level of service and in some areas demonstrable improvement in performance has been observed.

10. 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 whistleblowing concerns.

Implications arising from this report

Policy	All workforce actions need to be in line with government 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 efficiently 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.
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 experience.
Carbon reduction	WorkSmart and home working 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:

Role	Name
Finance Officer	Jan Willis
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Neil Masson obo Stephen Gerrard
Human Resources	Sarah Farrell
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