

Cabinet

18 November 2025

HR & CULTURAL CHANGE – QUARTERLY EMPLOYEE DATA REPORT

Report by Director of HR and Cultural Change

RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to note the report.

Executive Summary

1. This report provides an overview of the progress towards delivering the Our People and Culture Strategy (as measured by the achievement of its key performance indicators) and summarises the main employee-related trends for Q2 2025/26.

Our people and culture strategy

2. The vision for the Our People and Culture Strategy is that ‘we develop and maintain high performing, innovative, highly engaged, and agile teams, employing the best people, and reflecting the communities we serve. We nurture an environment that supports diversity, equality, and inclusion, and allows all our employees to bring their whole selves to work to deliver great services for our Oxfordshire residents’. The Strategy focuses on priorities under 4 pillars, ATTRACT, THRIVE, GROW and LEAD:
3. The Council saw a modest increase in its directly employed workforce (from 5440 to 5500) this quarter, both in terms of headcount and full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing levels. This growth reflects a focus on meeting service needs through recruitment to key roles, replacing leavers as quickly as possible and driving campaigns to fill our most difficult to fill roles.
4. Within the workforce profile there is a notable proportion of part-time colleagues (making up 39.45% of workforce) continuing to contribute significantly to service delivery. This demonstrates the Council’s commitment to promoting flexible working, for example, ensuring those returning from maternity leave are supported with a good work-life balance and there is a clear value in retaining expertise to meet operational needs.
5. Recruitment activity remains strong, with more starters (241) than leavers (178) in Q2 of 2025/26 and most new hires on permanent contracts (75.1%), supporting workforce stability. Children’s Services saw the highest intake, reflecting continued investment in frontline roles (See [Annex 1](#)).

Turnover

6. The overall turnover rate decreased from 12% to 11.3%, and voluntary turnover fell from 10.5% to 9.7% between Q1 and Q2 2025/26, reflecting a positive trend that remains below our People and Culture Strategy target of 11.5% set in the People and Culture Strategy.
7. Leavers within the first six months of their contract are monitored to assess the effectiveness of induction processes and role clarity. In 2024/25 there were 56 early leavers, compared to 9 so far in 2025/26. Reasons for leaving during the probation period typically include unsuccessful probation outcomes or personal decisions that the role is not a good fit. In all cases, steps are taken to capture the reasons through exit interview to inform continuous improvement.

Time to Hire

8. As part of our commitment to tracking recruitment performance under the Our People and Culture Strategy, Time to Hire metrics have now been incorporated into our reporting framework. The relevant reports have been built however, data accuracy has been impacted by issues related to rolling recruitment campaigns for difficult to fill roles, which are preventing complete data extraction from the applicant tracking system (ATS). Work is progressing to resolve this with an anticipated timeframe of the Q3 Quarterly Report

Employee demographics

9. In Q2 2025/26, promotions and secondments for colleagues declaring a disability rose to 10%, while those for ethnic minority colleagues dipped slightly to 9%, reflecting both progress in disability inclusion and a small decline in ethnic diversity outcomes.
10. At the end of Q2 2025/26, 67% of Council colleagues were female, a stable trend in workforce gender representation.
11. At the end of Q2 2025/26, 5.3% of colleagues were under 26, showing stability in younger workforce representation, while those over 55 slightly declined from 25.5% to 24.8%, maintaining a steady outlook on potential retirements.
12. The percentage of colleagues at the Council declaring a disability increased from the 8.95% reported last quarter (Q1 2025/2026) to 9.1% at the end of Q2 2025/2026, while this is an increase and signals a positive shift in disclosure and representation, continued monitoring will help determine whether this upward trend is sustained.
13. At the end of Q2 2025/26, the proportion of non-White colleagues employed by the Council declined slightly to 11.4%, down from 12% in Q1, while the rate of non-disclosure of ethnicity increased from 8% to 10.2%. This trend indicates a small reduction in reported workforce diversity and is a recognised gap in declaration rates.
14. To support inclusive workforce planning and ensure accurate representation, further analysis is required to understand the barriers to disclosure and identify actions to improve declaration rates. The continuing work to reduce the rate of non-disclosure of protected characteristics is being supported by a communication and engagement campaign to highlight the importance the Council places on diversity. This focus is to ensure that the workforce is engaged, and the Council is doing everything possible to be an inclusive employer.
15. The average number of sick days per full-time equivalent (FTE) rose year-on-year from 8.83 to 9.0 days, remaining above the Council's target of 8.0 days. This increase highlights the need for continued focus on absence management, wellbeing initiatives, and targeted support to ensure absence is managed well, employees are supported to achieve a sustained return to work. Ongoing work to achieve this is through the use of Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), increased reporting on the reasons for absence and targeted support in areas of high absence.

Agency Spend

16. In Q2 2025/26, the Council's total agency spend increased to £8.7 million (see [Annex 1](#)) up from £7.6 million in Q1. This rise was primarily driven by a sharp increase in off-contract spend, linked to the timing of invoice payments for May and June. Spend via HAYS, the Council's contracted agency provider, also rose slightly to £6.79 million, reflecting a reliance on temporary staffing to fill hard-to-recruit roles, particularly within larger service areas.
17. Year-on-year, total agency spend saw a modest increase from £8.35 million, with Children's Services, Environment and Highways, Adult Social Services, and Law and Governance remaining the highest spend areas. To address this trend, a dedicated focus group comprising key stakeholders from HR and Corporate Commissioning (HR&CC) has been established. This group is actively exploring targeted

interventions to reduce off-contract spend, strengthen workforce planning, and improve recruitment outcomes in high-demand areas.

Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Levy utilisation

18. In Q2 2025/26, the Council enrolled 42 new apprenticeships, with 21 colleagues successfully completing their programmes, bringing the total number of active apprentices to 347. This reflects continued investment in workforce development and skills growth across services.
19. While quarterly spend decreased slightly to £322,428, Apprenticeship Levy utilisation rose to 93.5%, up from 93.4% in Q1, and significantly higher than 74.4% in Q2 last year. This demonstrates strong year-on-year progress in both levy optimisation and apprenticeship engagement, supporting the Council's long-term workforce sustainability and talent pipeline.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

20. Equality, diversity, and inclusion considerations are embedded across all Council workstreams, ensuring that policies, practices, and workforce decisions are assessed for their impact on underrepresented and protected groups. This approach supports our legal duties and strategic commitment to fostering a fair and inclusive organisation.

Sustainability Implications

21. A review of the activities and data presented in this report has identified no direct sustainability implications at this time. The Council remains committed to embedding environmental and socially sustainable principles across its workforce planning and operational practices, and any future developments with potential impact will be assessed accordingly.

Risk Management

22. A review of the data and activities outlined in this report has identified no immediate risk management concerns. The Council continues to monitor workforce-related risks through established governance processes, ensuring that any emerging issues, such as recruitment challenges, agency spend, or absence trends are escalated and addressed in line with corporate risk protocols.

Financial Implications

23. Were necessary, the financial implications of an increase in agency expenditure will be reflected in the Business Management and Monitoring Reports to Cabinet and Directors will need to ensure that they manage within their staffing budgets.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Office

Legal Implications

24. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
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Staff Implications

25. Staff implications have been considered across all relevant workstreams and are reflected throughout this report. Key areas include workforce growth, recruitment trends, agency reliance, absence management, and apprenticeship engagement. These factors collectively inform our approach to workforce planning, service delivery, and organisational resilience.

Cherie Cuthbertson

Director of HR and Cultural Change

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Taiwo Alabi

23/10/202

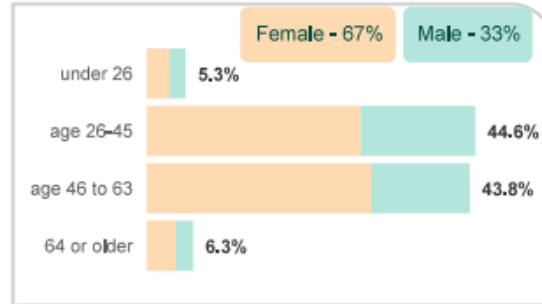
Our workforce - Q2 25/26

At the end of Q2 25/26, we had **5500** (4616.5 fte) people, an increase of 60 employees from last quarter. Of these **342** were apprentices, which accounted for **6.2%** of directorate workforce. During Q2 25/26, there were **427** agency workers, compared to 415 workers in last quarter. Of those 427 workers, **363** were active at the end of the quarter.

Headcount as at 31 March in the past 5 years

2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
5087	5116	5310	5378	5454

Gender and Age



Sickness

9.0 days were lost per employee to sickness in the past 4 quarters ending Q2 25/26

Top 3 Reasons - Q2 25/26

- 36.2%** Stress & mental health related
- 10.2%** Operation/Post Op.
- 7.9%** Cold, ENT & Dental

4.6 days per fte were lost to **long term** sickness. Long term absence accounted for **52%** of all sick days in the past 12 months.

3.0 days per fte were lost to **stress** related sickness. Stress related absence accounted for **33%** of all sick days in the past 12 months.

Length of Service



Annual Turnover Rate

12.1%	13.0%	13.6%	3.0%
2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Number of starters left within the first 6 months			
62	45	56	9
2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26

Promotions/Secondment

418 prom/acting up/secondment in last 12 mths

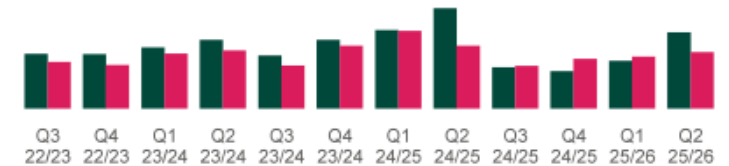
- 61%** are female
- 39%** are male
- 10%** are declared with a disability
- 9%** are ethnic minorities

Starters

We had **241** starters in Q2 25/26, **20%** of these were under 26. New starters account for **4.4%** of total workforce

Leavers

We had **178** leavers in Q2 25/26, **10%** of these were under 26. Leavers account for **3.2%** of total workforce



Contact HR with any questions

Apprentice & agency spend →

Apprenticeship - celebrate our success

During Q1 we had 42 new apprentices enrol and saw 21 apprentices successfully completed their training in Q2 25/26.

In May there was outstanding success for our apprentices and our Early Careers team at this year's Enterprise Oxfordshire Annual Apprenticeship Awards, held at the iconic Blenheim Palace. We were proud to be shortlisted in three major categories:

- Special Recognition Award
 - Advanced Apprentice of the Year
 - Large Apprenticeship Employer
- One of our apprentices took home three awards! Our Early Careers Team also received a Highly Commended mention in the Large Apprenticeship Employer category



No. of apprentices on programme - end of Q2 25/26

347

Split by new apprentices vs CPD

% new apprentice

26.8%

% doing CPD

73.2%

actual spend on apprenticeship by quarter



Number of new apprentices enrolled in Q2 25/26

42

Split by new apprentices vs CPD

% new apprentice

45.2%

% doing CPD

54.8%

In Q2 25/26 there were

Completions

21

Withdrawals

5

Agency Spend

Agency spend via HAYS in Q2 25/26 was **£6,788,832**, which has gone up compared to the spend in the last quarter at **£6,631,105**

Please note from Q3 2024-25 spend via HAYS included Statement of Work (SoW). This spend was not included in the previous quarters

Comensura/HAYS spend by quarter

Q3 22/23	Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24
6.94M	7.28M	6.65M	7.04M
Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25
6.73M	7.01M	6.94M	6.86M
Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26	Q2 25/26
6.82M	6.55M	6.63M	6.79M

Off contract spend by quarter

Q3 22/23	Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24
3.53M	3.43M	1.76M	2.55M
Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25
1.69M	2.09M	1.05M	1.50M
Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26	Q2 25/26
1.74M	1.68M	978.88K	1.95M