

# HR & CULTURAL CHANGE – QUARTERLY EMPLOYEE DATA REPORT

## Report by Director of HR and Cultural Change

### RECOMMENDATION

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

### 1. Executive Summary

This report summarises Quarter 4 (Q4) 2025/26 workforce performance against the Our People and Culture Strategy and highlights the main employee trends across the last four quarters.

Q4 also marks the introduction of the new People Insights Dashboard, giving directors and services easier access to workforce data and service-level drilldown. The analysis in this report is underpinned by data from the Council's People Insights dashboard, which has been used as the primary source for workforce information. Relevant insights have been incorporated where appropriate to provide a consistent and evidence based account of performance and trends.

To align People and Finance reporting, Q4 data runs to 21 March 2026 rather than 31 March 2026. This may slightly affect quarter-end comparisons but will provide a more consistent basis for future reporting.

The main points of note arising this quarter are:

- Workforce size has remained broadly stable, with full time equivalent (FTE) at 4,653 for the second consecutive quarter and headcount at around 5,500.
- Turnover has continued to reduce, with rolling 12-month voluntary turnover at 9.36%, below the 11.5% key performance indicator (KPI) target and the seventh consecutive quarter of reduction.
- Agency spend reduced by £1.0m between Q3 and Q4, from £9.1m to £8.1m, although some service pressures remain in specific areas.
- Recruitment performance improved significantly, with average time to hire reducing to 39 days, ahead of the 2026/27 target of 55 days.
- Work on culture, inclusion and employee voice continued through the culture review, engagement pulse survey, UNISON Anti-Racism Charter evidence, and targeted workforce planning activity.
- Absence indicators improved quarter on quarter, with stress and mental health remaining the main reason for absence.
- Apprenticeship activity remains strong, with levy utilisation above target and continued support for both entry routes and career development.

### 2. Strategic Context

The Our People and Culture Strategy sets out the council's ambition to build high-performing, innovative, engaged and agile teams that reflect the communities we serve. Delivery is organised through four pillars: **Attract, Thrive, Grow and Lead**.

During Q4, activity focused on continued work to strengthen capability, widen access to opportunity, and support an inclusive and engaged culture.

## **2.1 Grow**

A standardised workforce planning template was introduced to support a more consistent and strategic approach across services. Roll-out through Strategic People Partners is helping directorates align service planning, workforce risks and future skills needs with corporate priorities.

Oxfordshire County Council has committed to 30 placements for Care Leavers by March 2027. This supports the 'Fairer Oxfordshire' ambition within the strategic plan. The Early Careers team are working in partnership with Children's Services to build a pipeline of engaging opportunities for Care Leavers. The first ten placements continue to be scoped with service areas and will be finalised by the end June. Placements will be for a minimum of 4 weeks, offering Care Leavers the opportunity to gain meaningful work experience and a pathway into further employment. A deep dive update is planned for Informal Cabinet on Care Leavers in July.

## **2.2 Thrive**

A culture review was completed to understand colleague experience and identify strengths and development areas. Its findings are informing the refresh of the Our People and Culture Strategy and helping to target future interventions.

The council also presented a consolidated evidence base against the UNISON Anti-Racism Charter, covering leadership, workforce data, recruitment, learning and inclusive culture. This was well received by the Employers' Joint Consultative Committee.

Pulse survey findings were shared with colleagues and discussed through the Colleague Forum, supporting transparency and informing both corporate and service-level action.

## **2.3 Lead**

A leadership event for the Senior Leadership Team was held in February, focused on the critical leadership challenges colleagues are facing during a period of significant transition. This included a deep dive into the culture review.

The reciprocal mentoring programme continued in Q4. Cohorts 1 and 2 are concluding, with an in-depth evaluation planned to assess the success and impact of the programme. So far, feedback shows the programme is creating early positive impact, particularly in strengthening inclusive leadership awareness and building positive mentoring relationships, while also highlighting the need for clearer progression pathways for Aspiring Leaders. The evaluation will allow for further improvements for cohorts 3 and 4, which will launch in Q1 26/27.

Senior leaders continue to drive organisational redesign, aligned to a clear vision of creating a smaller, more efficient and financially sustainable council. The programme is focused on:

- Reducing workforce size and operating costs, alongside rationalising the council's estate to ensure buildings are used to maximum capacity
- Improving productivity and efficiency through technology, enhancing connectivity with residents and enabling more effective ways of working
- Strengthening partnership working across public services, voluntary and community sectors, reducing reliance on the council as the sole service provider
- Embedding the People and Culture strategy ensuring the workforce is equipped to deliver redesigned services
- Exploring commercial opportunities and alternative delivery models to generate value whilst operating within a defined financial envelope.

- To enable the council to be fit for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The organisation redesign programme delivers a systematic and ongoing transformation approach, and as at the end of Q4 2025/6 has delivered:

- 11 organisation redesign programmes have been completed and have gone live
- 30% of employees have had recently job evaluated roles
- Approximately 44% of roles have been put on the career family framework
- £3.2m of savings have been delivered. Please note some savings are through invest to save initiatives and removing vacant posts
- 35 colleagues have been made redundant or are currently serving their redundancy notice period
- 6 employees have been redeployed into other roles within the council; thus, avoiding redundancies

### 3. Workforce composition/headlines

#### 3.1 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and temporary staff across previous fiscal years

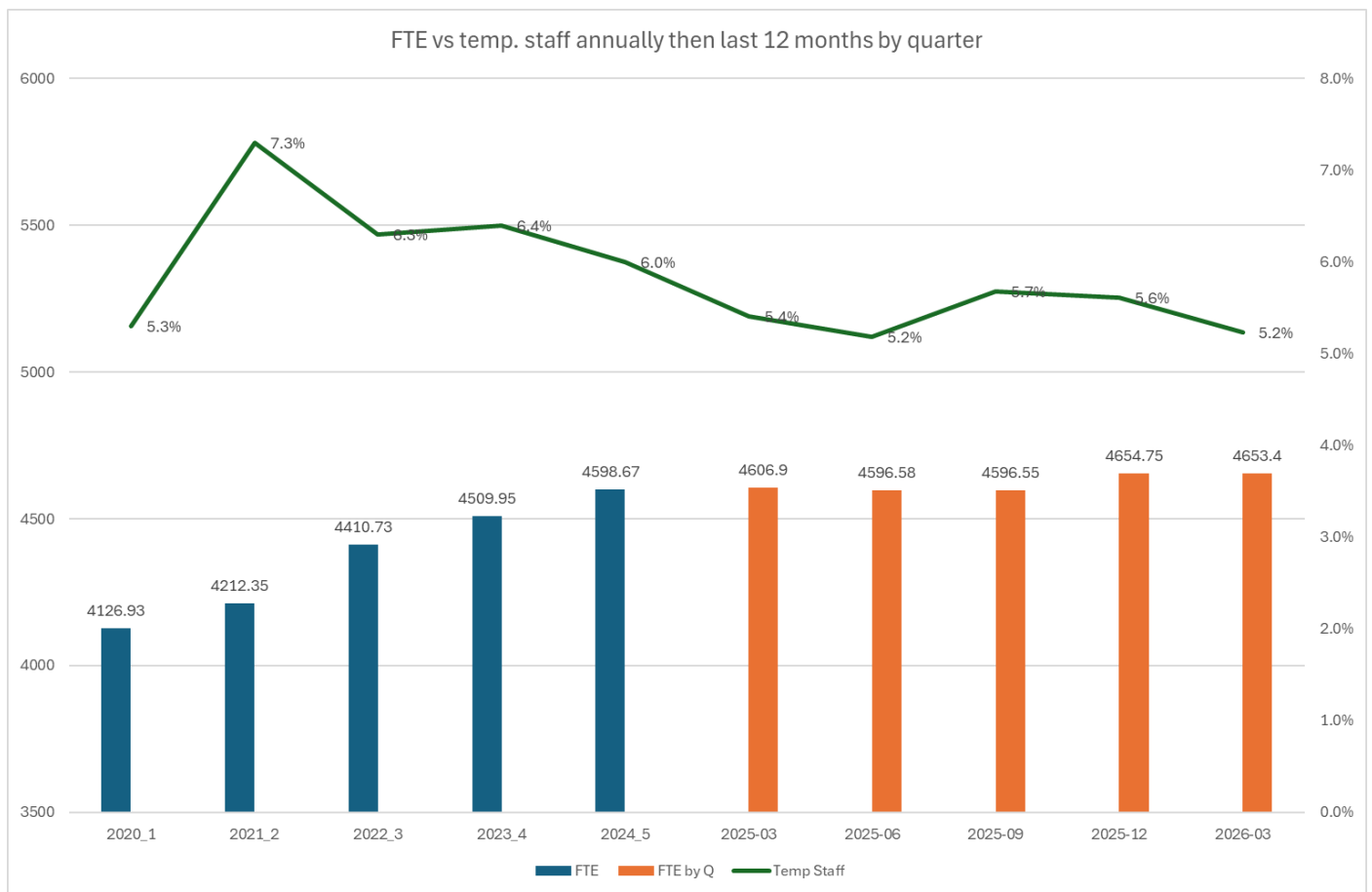


Figure 1: Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and temporary staffing proportion as at Q4 and across previous fiscal years

Overall workforce size has remained stable since Q4 2023, with headcount around 5,500 and FTE around 4,650. Over the same period, the proportion of colleagues on fixed-term contracts has reduced from 6.4% to 5.25% (Figure 1).

It is also important to note that 136 fixed-term colleagues are apprentices, meaning a proportion of temporary roles reflect planned training pathways rather than short-term staffing cover.

Beneath this stable corporate picture, directorate-level changes remain significant and reflect service redesign, recruitment activity and operational demand pressures.

Those Directorates experiencing the most significant proportional or numerical changes include:

- Transformation, Digital and Customer Experience (TDCE) staffing reduced following directorate disbandment through the Redesign programme, with functions redistributed elsewhere.
- Children’s Services increased by around 4%, reflecting successful recruitment to hard-to-fill roles such as social workers.
- Environment & Highways (E&H) increased by 6%, largely due to additional posts in Network Management and related service pressures.

#### 4. Turnover and Workforce Stability

##### Rolling Year Turnover

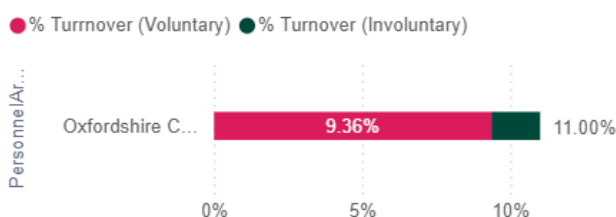


Figure 2: Rolling year voluntary turnover for Oxfordshire County Council

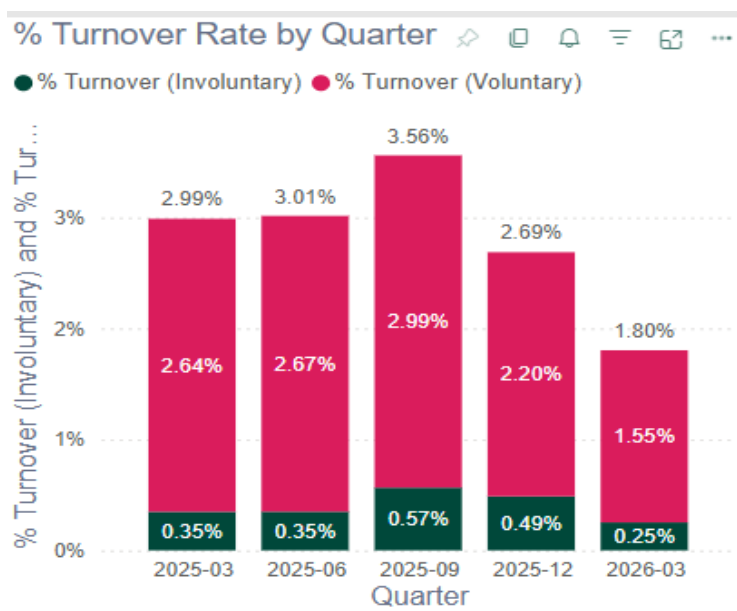


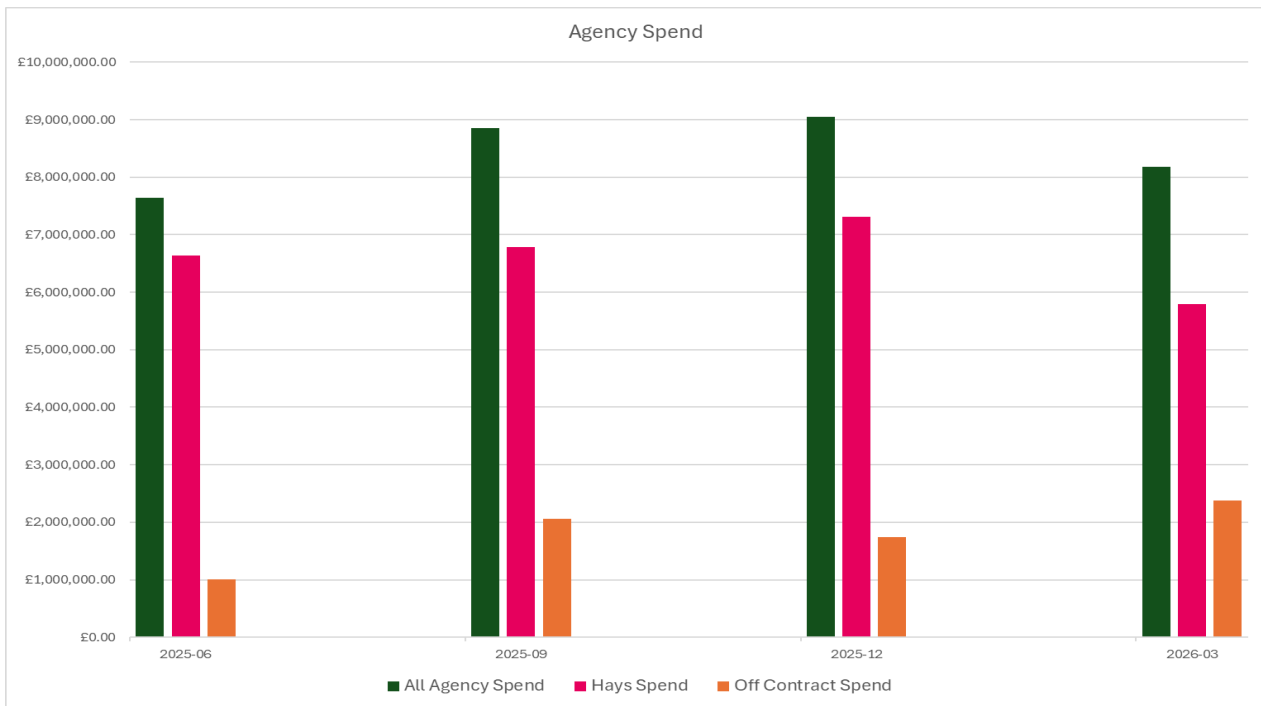
Figure 3: % Turnover by quarter

Overall turnover remains low. At Q4 2025/26, rolling 12-month turnover stands at 9.36% (Figure 2), below the 11.50% KPI target and representing the seventh consecutive quarter of reduction.

Leavers within the first six months of employment fell from 56 in 2024/25 to 51 in 2025/26, suggesting some improvement in induction and early retention. The most common recorded reasons for early leaving were alternative employment, fixed-term contract endings, and health or family commitments.

Work is underway to strengthen exit interview completion and insight quality so that retention action can be more targeted and evidence led.

#### 5. Agency Spend



**Figure 1: Agency spend for 2025\_6.**

Total agency spend decreased by £1.0m between Q3 and Q4 of 2025/26, falling from £9.1m to £8.1m (Figure 4). This reduction reflects a combination of actions taken by the council services to reduce reliance on agency staff, alongside savings measures delivered by Hays in line with the objectives set out in the contract.

The position varies by directorate, reflecting different operational pressures and stages of workforce stabilisation.

- E&H spend has remained broadly stable at around £2.5m, reflecting short-term demand pressures while more sustainable staffing arrangements are developed.
- Legal & Governance (L&G) continues to rely on locum solicitors where recruitment and retention remain difficult; a job evaluation review is underway to support longer-term improvement.
- Customer Experience saw temporary increases over the Christmas period; some roles have since converted to permanent posts, but short-term agency demand is likely to continue into Q1 2026/27.
- Elsewhere, directorates are subject to closer scrutiny of agency use, with a stronger focus on business criticality and value for money.

## 6. Recruitment & Time to Hire

### 6.1 Time to Hire (TTH)

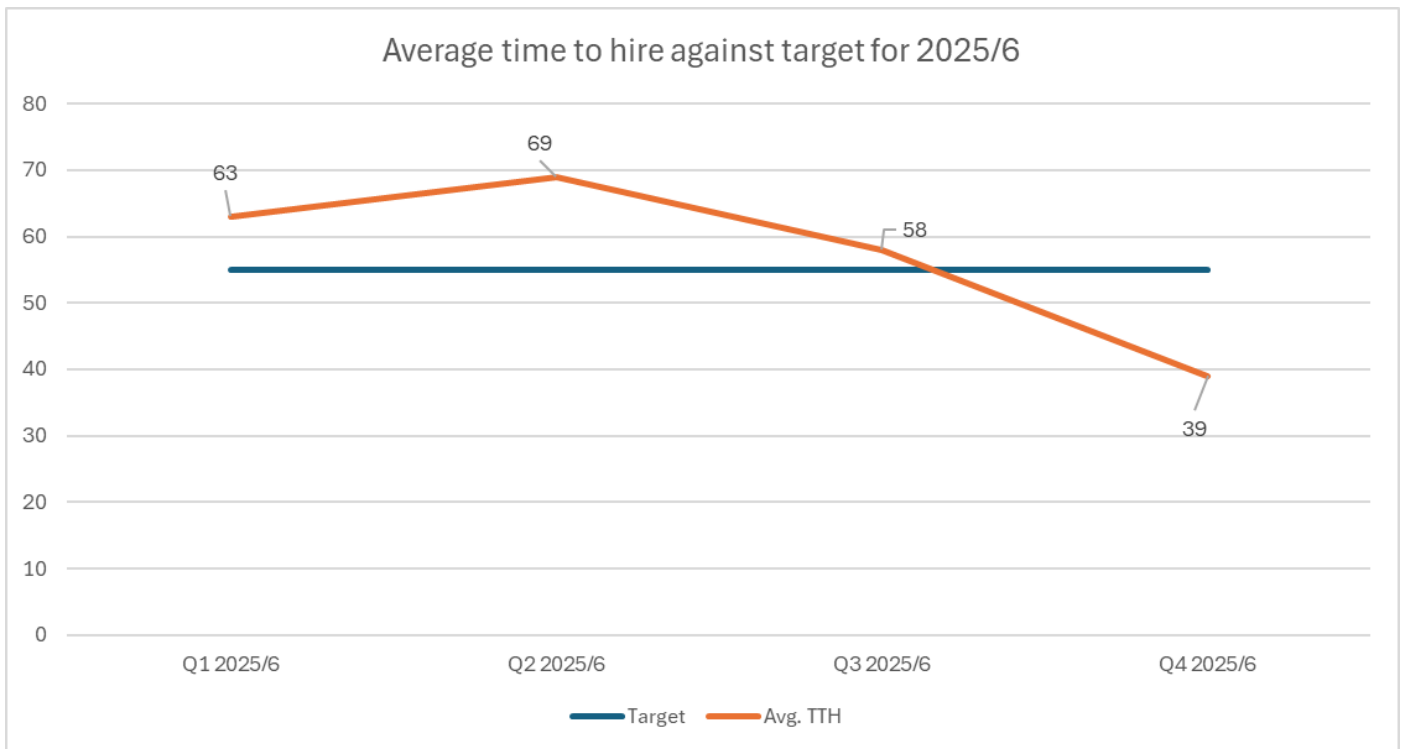


Figure 5 Average time to hire 2025/6

Recruitment performance continued to improve in Q4. Average TTH reduced to 39 days (Figure 5), placing the council ahead of its 2026/27 target of 55 days.

TTH for safeguarding roles improved significantly, falling from 64 to 40 days, while non-safeguarding roles remained stable at 35 days.

This improvement reflects earlier onboarding activity, better hiring manager guidance, improved workflow visibility in Tribepad, the council’s recruitment system and closer working between the Resourcing team and hiring managers.

Hiring manager feedback also suggests Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) return timescales have improved following integration of the DBS process with Tribepad.

## 6.2 Vacancy controls and Redeployment

The vacancy approval process is now embedded in Tribepad, enabling visibility of recruitment requests and improving vacancy management.

This has also strengthened redeployment during organisational redesign. In Q4, six employees were successfully redeployed, reducing redundancy risk and avoiding unnecessary external recruitment.

## 7. Workforce Diversity & Inclusion (D&I)

### 7.1 Key D&I Metrics

#### Age profile

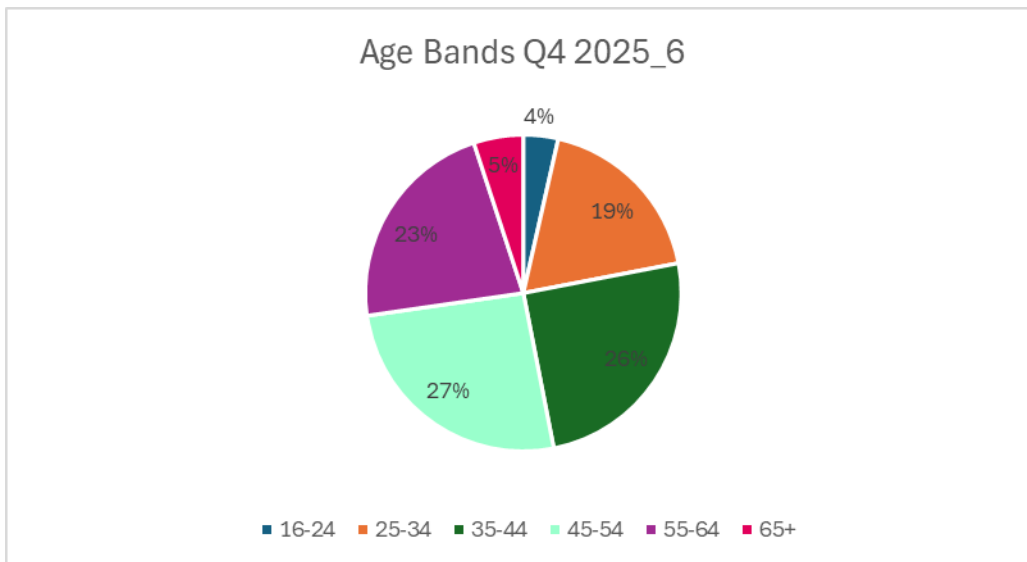


Figure 2: age bands by percentage of whole council

The age profile has remained stable over the last 12 months (Figure 6). Around one-third of the workforce is aged 55+, while around one-quarter is aged 16–34, highlighting both succession risks and opportunities for knowledge transfer.

Continued focus on attracting and retaining younger entrants remains important to strengthen succession and workforce resilience.

### Gender composition

The overall gender profile remains stable. E&H, Information & Communications Technology (ICT) and Fire & Community Safety continue to be more male dominated, although the proportion of women in E&H has increased from 35% to 40% over the last year.

### Ethnicity

Ethnicity proportions have remained broadly stable over the past year. The proportion of colleagues from non-white ethnic groups increased marginally from 11.6% to 11.7%, remaining below the Oxfordshire Census benchmark of 14.4%.

Ethnicity declaration rates reduced slightly to 88.9% but remain above national benchmarks.

Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) reporting, Race Action Plans and UNISON Race Charter activity continue to support improvement in reporting levels.

### Disability

Disability declaration rates among employees have had a small improvement from 9.1% in Q2 25/26 to 9.9% by end Q4 25/26

In Q4 there were 6,271 completed applications for jobs with a recorded disability declaration, a completion rate of 86.8%. Of these, 7.5% declared a disability, 77.3% declared no disability, 2.0% preferred not to say, and 13.2% gave no response.

The level of no response and prefer not to say answers highlights an opportunity to do further work to strengthen confidence, transparency and completion.

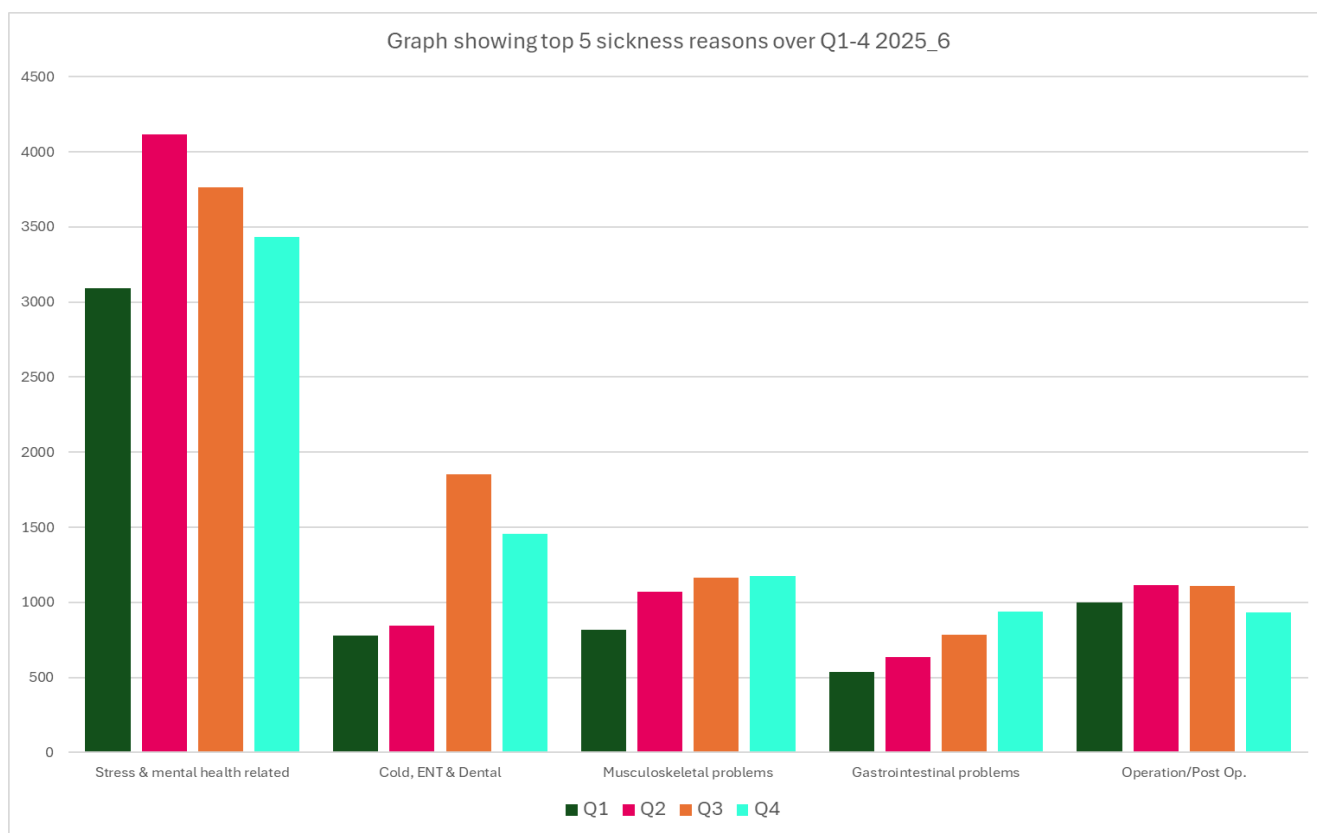
Disability outcomes in recruitment will continue to be monitored. The current declaration rate in recruitment remains below the reported workforce level, indicating a need for continued focus on inclusive recruitment and confidence in disclosure.

## 7.2 Equality & Inclusion Implications

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.

## 8. Attendance, Wellbeing & Employee Experience

### 8.1 Sickness Absence



*Figure 7: Top 5 sickness comparison across Oxfordshire County Council*

Figure 7 shows that stress and mental health remain the largest contributors to sickness absence in 2025/26, but levels are reducing. Cold and ENT (Ear, nose & throat) related absence has also fallen despite the winter period, suggesting a more positive direction of travel.

### 8.2 Sickness Data Trends

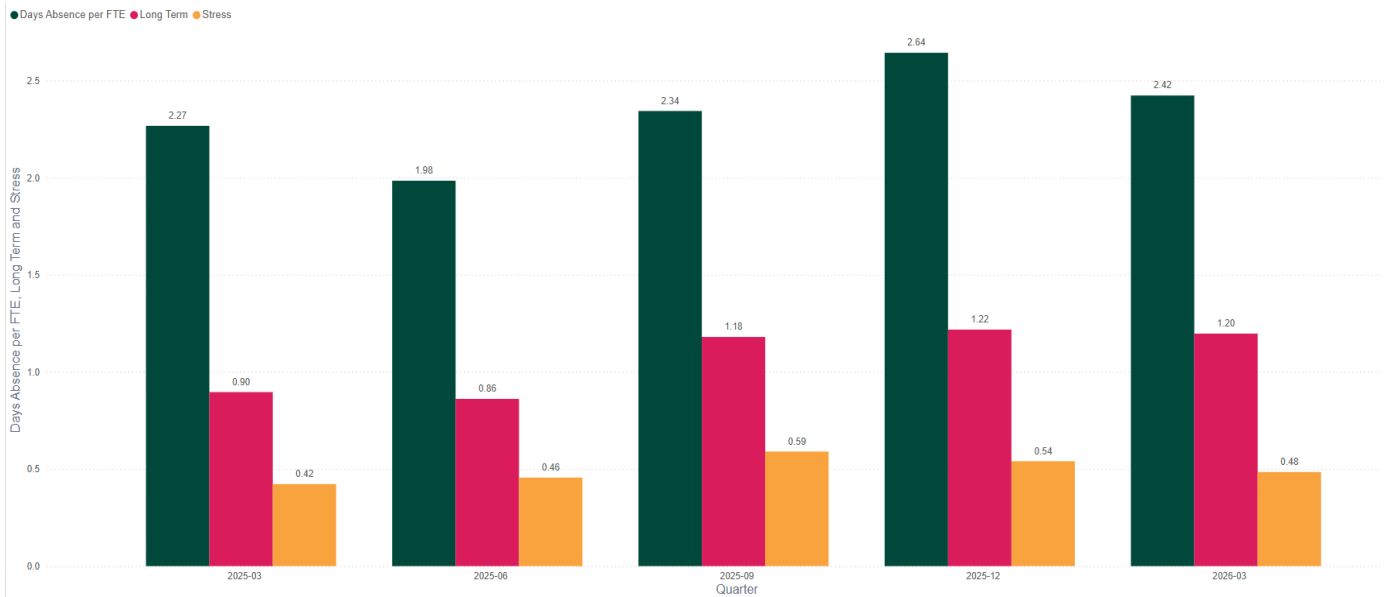


Figure 8: FTE Days absence: total, long-term, stress by quarter.

Figure 8 shows that total sickness, long-term absence and stress absence all reduced from Q3 to Q4. Although still above the same point last year, the quarter-on-quarter trend is positive and is not uniform across all directorates.

## 9. Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Levy utilisation

Apprenticeship activity remains strong, supporting both entry routes and continuing professional development. Since Q2 2017/18, 561 apprenticeships have been completed, including 49 completions in Q4.

Apprenticeship Levy utilisation remains above the 65% target at over 90% (Figure 9), demonstrating continued commitment to capability building and workforce resilience.

Use of the Apprenticeship Levy remains strong. Spend consistently exceeds the **65% target**, with current utilisation at over 90%. Pointing towards the continued commitment to maintain the dedication to apprenticeships – which speaks to earlier in this report and developing knowledge/skills transfer and resilience.

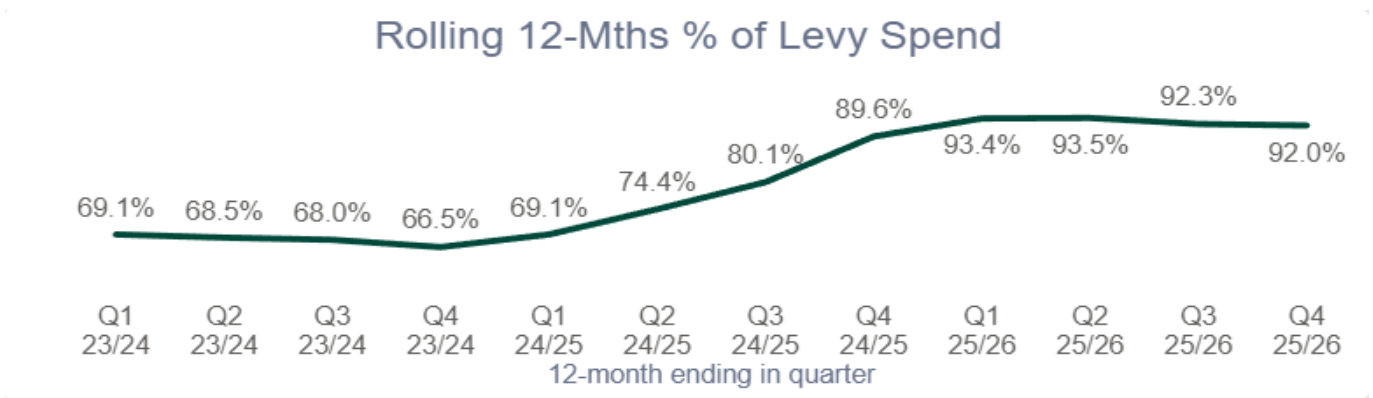


Figure 9: Apprenticeship Levy spend

There are currently 310 apprentices enrolled across the council, of whom 225 are permanent employees undertaking continuous professional development (CPD) and 85 are on fixed-term apprenticeship contracts (Figure 10).

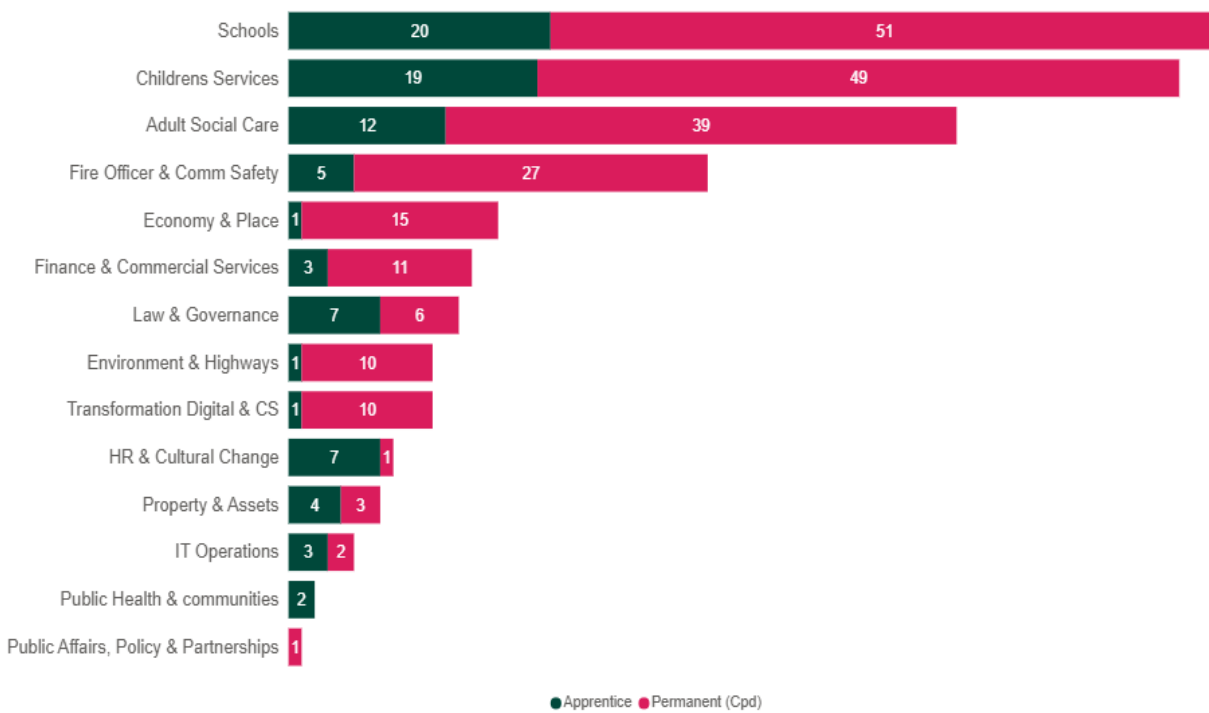


Figure 3: Distribution of apprenticeships in Oxfordshire County Council

Examples of impact across directorates include:

- **Finance & Commercial Services (FCS)**, apprenticeships have supported firefighters to progress into management roles (Levels 3 and 5). These programmes are now concluding, and alternative development routes will be required going forward.
- **Environment & Place (E&P) and E&H**, apprenticeships support professional development in specialist roles such as planning and engineering.
- **ICT**, all four graduates from the most recent cohort have been retained in permanent roles, with plans to recruit a new cohort following redesign aligned to the next academic year.

In Q4 2025/26, 26 apprentices enrolled, with most being existing employees undertaking apprenticeships to support their development, alongside 4 new starters.

- The cohort had a broadly balanced gender split and representation across a wide age range, showing apprenticeships continue to support development at different career stages.
- The distribution of new apprenticeship starts across services is shown in Figure 11.
- Most Q4 starters were existing employees using apprenticeships for career development rather than new entry roles.

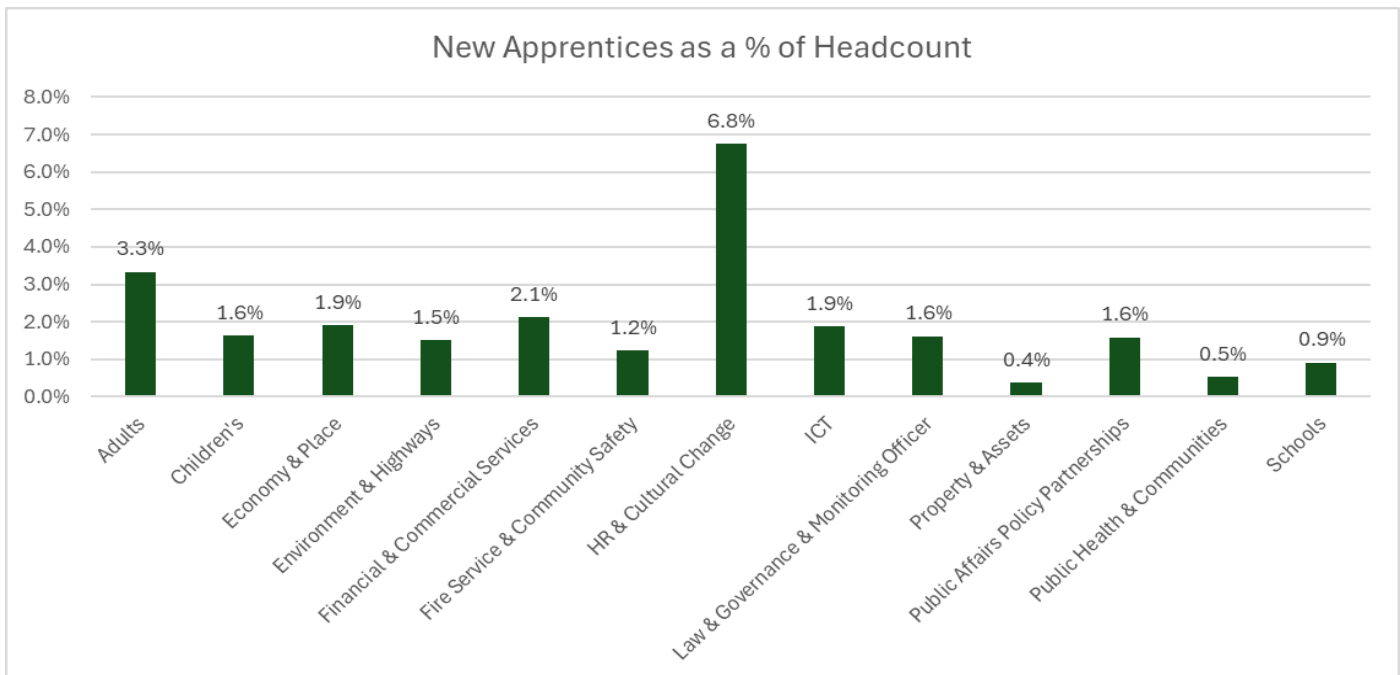


Figure 11: New apprentice numbers as a percentage of directorate headcount.

## 10. Sustainability Implications

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.

## 11. Risk Management

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.

## 12. Financial Implications

Costs related to agency staff have contributed to the year - end overspend for services summarised in the Provisional Outturn Report for 2025/26 elsewhere on the agenda. Where relevant on-going pressures arising from challenges with recruitment to specific roles, including those within Legal and Governance, for example, were considered as part of the Budget & Business Planning Process for 2026/27.

Continuing focus is required so that services manage staffing expenditure within agreed budgets in 2026/27 and over the medium term when further savings will be required.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

### **13. Legal Implications**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer  
Anita.Bradley@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

### **14. Staff Implications**

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:** Nathan Phillips

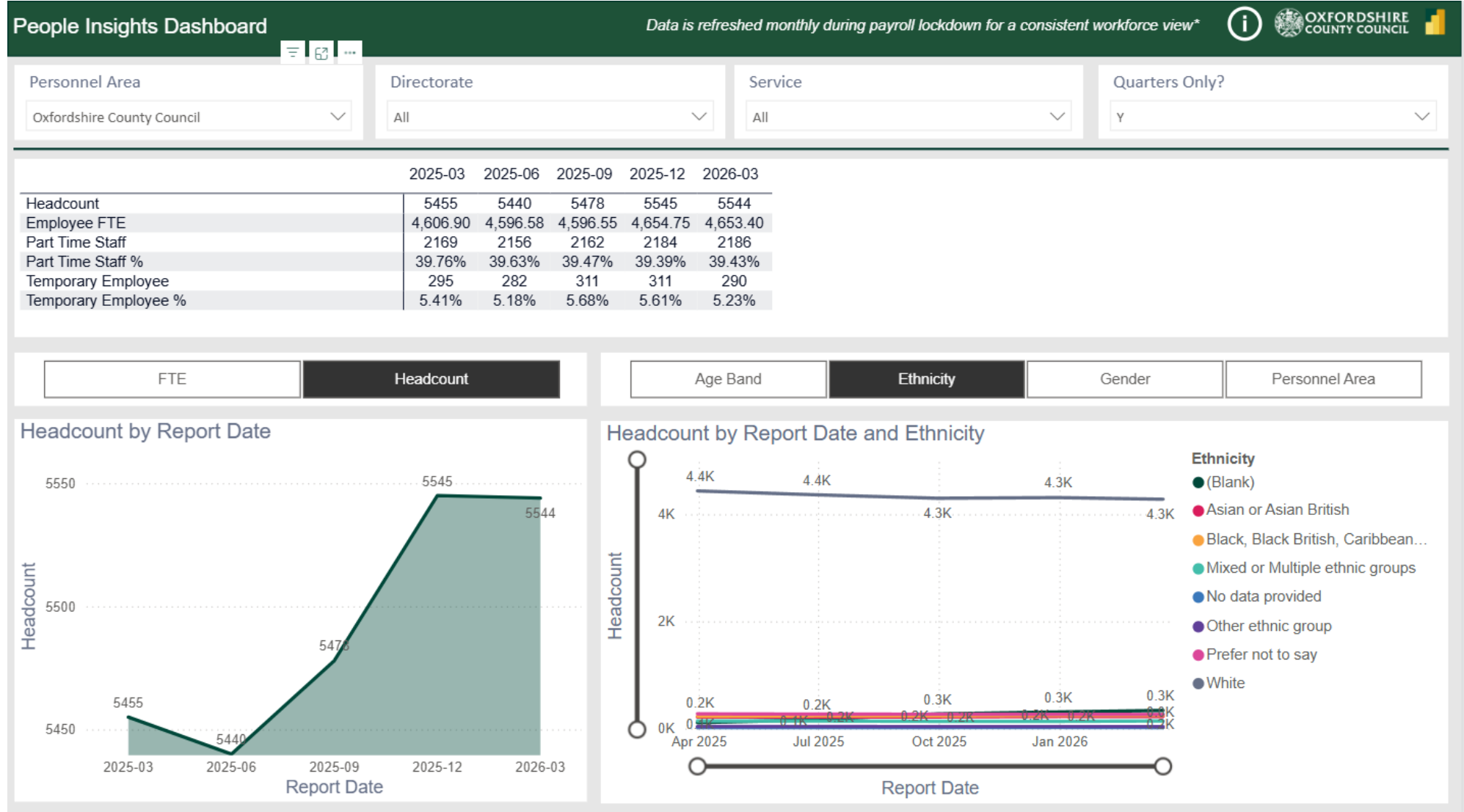


Figure 12 Snapshot of the People & Insight Dashboard (Headcount view)

Personnel Area: 
 Directorate: 
 Service: 
 Quarters Only?:

	2025-01	2025-02	2025-03	2025-04	2025-05	2025-06	2025-07	2025-08	2025-09	2025-10	2025-11	2025-12	2026-01	2026-02
Headcount	5505	5441	5455	5436	5441	5440	5448	5453	5478	5523	5465	5545	5521	5541
Employee FTE	4,646.19	4,598.64	4,606.90	4,598.67	4,597.55	4,596.58	4,606.15	4,610.41	4,596.55	4,638.63	4,580.01	4,654.75	4,636.20	4,652.54
Part Time Staff	2201	2159	2169	2150	2157	2156	2158	2161	2162	2173	2175	2184	2174	2185
Part Time Staff %	39.98%	39.68%	39.76%	39.55%	39.64%	39.63%	39.61%	39.63%	39.47%	39.34%	39.80%	39.39%	39.38%	39.43%
Temporary Employee	309	297	295	283	284	282	290	292	311	316	313	311	303	284
Temporary Employee %	5.61%	5.46%	5.41%	5.21%	5.22%	5.18%	5.32%	5.35%	5.68%	5.72%	5.73%	5.61%	5.49%	5.13%

FTE | Headcount | Age Band | Ethnicity | Gender | Personnel Area

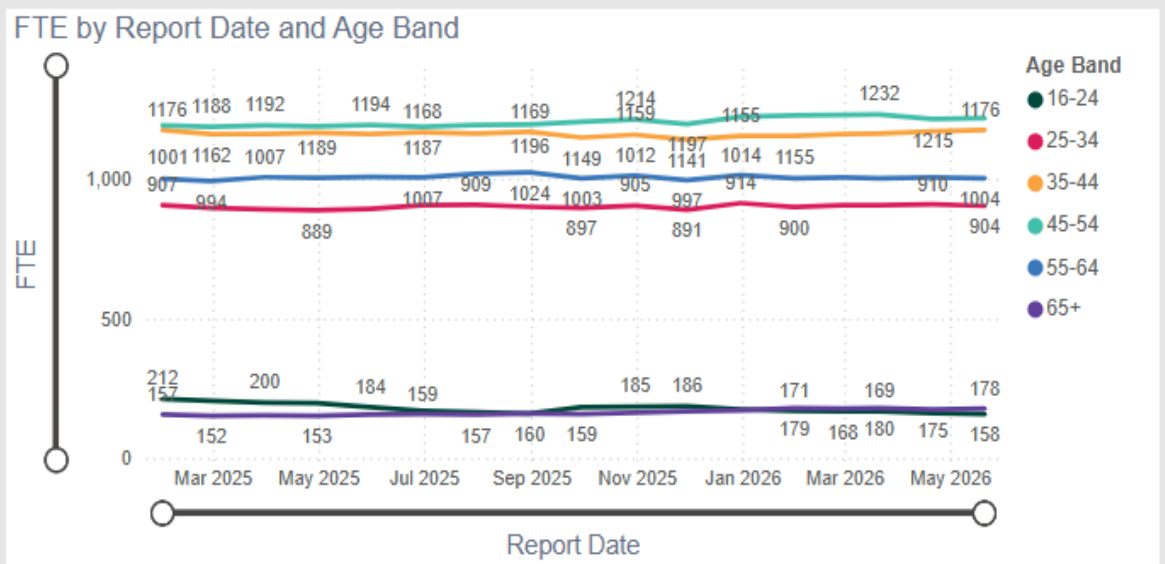
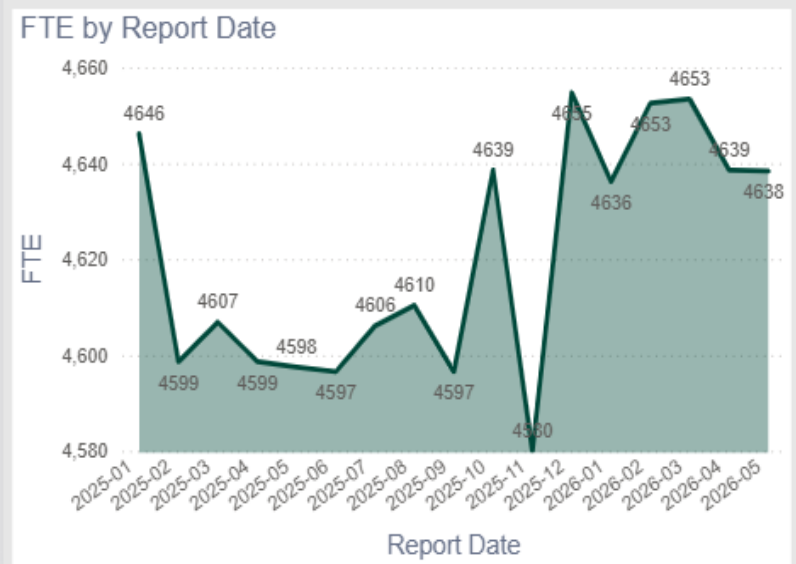


Figure 13 Snapshot of the People & Insight Dashboard (FTE view)

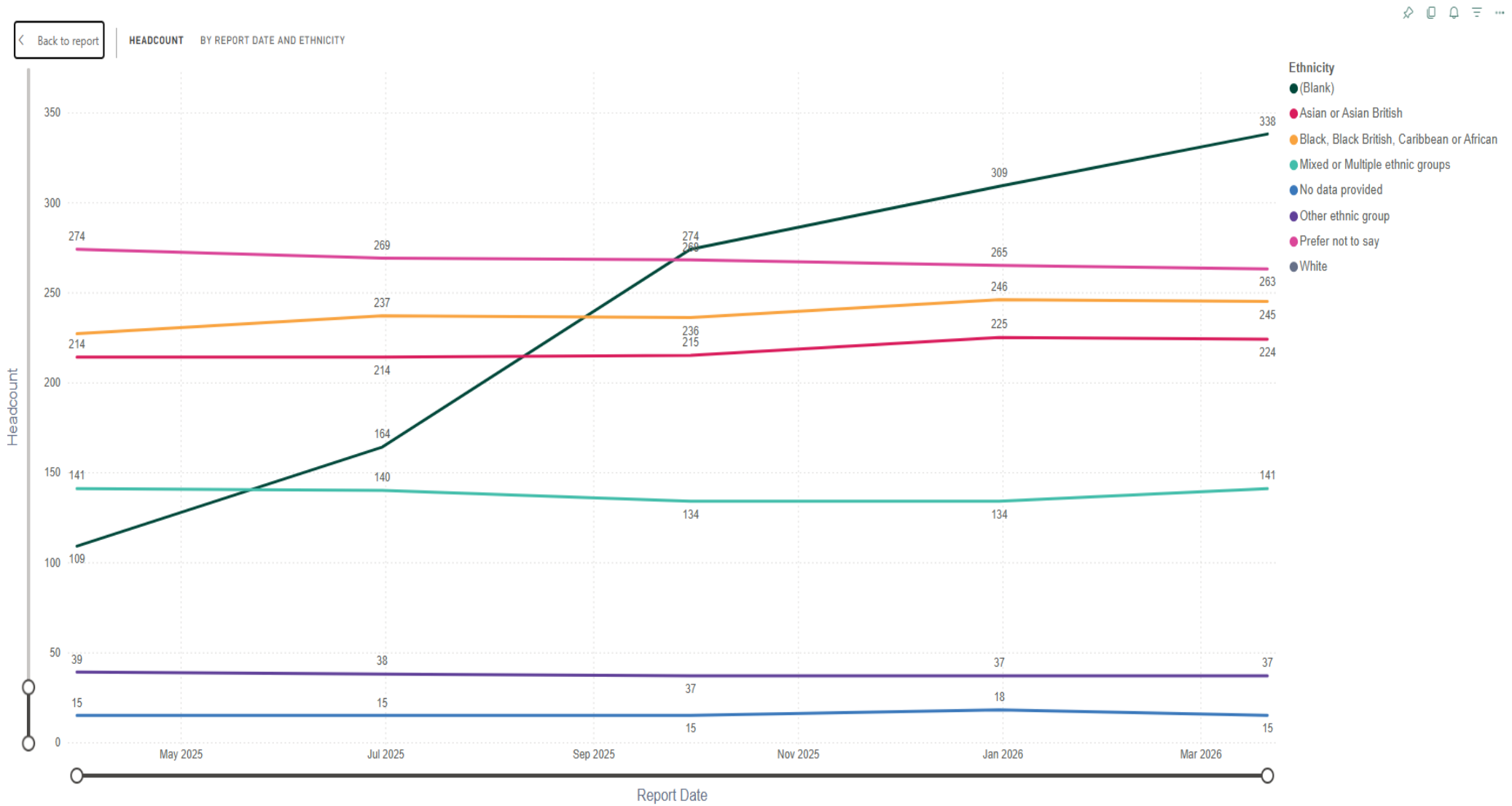


Figure 4 Focussed view of the ethnicity chart shown in Figure 12