

CABINET

25 February 2025

WORKFORCE REPORT & WORKFORCE DATA OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2024 (Q3 2024/25)

Report by Director of HR and Cultural Change

RECOMMENDATION

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

Executive Summary

2. The people who work for Oxfordshire County Council are what makes the organisation so special. Every day, they make millions of moments for thousands of people – bringing lasting change to all the county’s communities. Their professionalism and commitment to delivering high-quality services supports the council’s ambition to become a greener, fairer and healthier county.
3. Together, Oxfordshire County Council is on a journey to Deliver the Future Together and become an Employer of Choice. This ambition is underpinned by the Our People and Culture Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in January 2024. The strategy aims to develop an inclusive and empowering culture, enabling all employees to be the best they can be to deliver excellent services for everyone the council serves.
4. This report provides an overview of the progress towards delivering the Our People and Culture Strategy whilst also reviews the workforce profile for October to December 2024 (Q3 2024/25) including the key workforce trends and other relevant management information and performance indicators (Annexes 1 and 2).

Our people and culture strategy

5. 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:



Our people and culture strategy - Year One progress

6. Within the '**Attract - Attracting, recruiting and retaining talented people**' pillar, highlights include:
 - The establishment of a new in-house Talent Acquisition and Resourcing team.
 - Moving away from using Hampshire's Integrated Business Centre (IBC) for recruitment.
 - Implementing a new Applicant Tracking System.
 - Developing a new Employer Value Proposition and employer brand.
7. Collectively, these initiatives are designed to raise the Council's employer profile, improve the candidate experience, and enhance recruitment success and time to hire. This change has already started to improve recruitment for hard to fill posts. In Adults Social Care, for instance, vacancies being recruited to for operational roles e.g. Social Workers and Occupational Therapists roles have decreased over the last 6 months, from 82.7fte in June 2024 to 46.99fte currently, leading to a reduction in agency spend.
8. Within the '**Thrive - Enabling our people to thrive and perform**' pillar, highlights include:
 - The development of modern, simple-to-follow policies and toolkits which enable a proactive approach to people-related matters and early resolution, as evident in the downward trend in sickness absence.
9. Within the '**Grow - Enabling our people to grow and evolve for the future**' pillar, highlights include:
 - Launching a reciprocal mentoring scheme aimed at improving equality, diversity, and inclusion.
 - Refreshing the 12.3.2 managing for performance tool to ensure alignment with organisational narratives and to ensure that quality conversations between managers and their people are happening consistently.
 - Enhancing the Early Careers offer by expanding the management trainee programme to offer the Chartered Managers Degree Apprenticeship alongside the Local Government Association graduate programme, introducing a work experience scheme and developing a new internship programme.
10. Within the '**Lead - Enabling our people to lead and transform for the future**' pillar, highlights include:
 - Introduction of a range of people management controls to enable the organisation to operate within budget, focusing on agency usage, honorariums, overtime and purchasing annual leave scheme.
 - Engaging a leadership specialist to scope and shape the future work within this pillar.

Progress on a key priority programme under the Our People and Culture Strategy - the Organisation Redesign Programme

11. A key priority under the Our People and Culture Strategy has been the Organisation Redesign Programme, which aims to resize the organisation to deliver our ambitions whilst remaining within budget.

12. This programme is one of a suite of transformation programmes to enable us to Deliver the Future Together and become an employer, partner and place shaper of choice.
13. Organisational Design will help the council realise its bold ambitions and deliver its Strategic Plan for 2023-25 and beyond. Leaders are redesigning the size and shape of the organisation to improve matrix working; reduce hierarchies and silos; and make sure the council has the right roles to deliver its priorities. Setting the organisation up for success and sustainability in this way will also put it in the strongest position to respond to the government's white paper on devolution.
14. The programme will also deliver agreed financial savings. Savings of £1.9m have been achieved from Tiers 2-4, and further phases of the programme will result in implementation of new organisational structures leading to further staffing savings of £5.9m (£2m in 2025/26 and £3.9m in 2026/27), as set out in the budget approved by Council on 11 February 2025.
15. Phase one of Organisation Design (the Tier 2 Director structure) was implemented in July 2024, reducing the number of director roles from 15 to 12 and realigned roles and responsibilities to create capacity for priority areas, reduce duplication and improve collaboration.
16. In December 2024 the Tiers 3 and 4 (Assistant Director, Deputy Director and Head of Service) redesign was implemented reducing posts from 73 to 57 (a reduction of 22%) and achieving a full year financial savings of £1.42m.
17. Phase three of the programme has now commenced, and it will review the size and shape of service areas across the whole organisation. As part of this work, the project will implement consistent role profiles for all employees and a framework which enhances career progression, workforce planning and organisational capacity.

Workforce trends – Apprenticeships

18. During Q3 2024/25 there were a total of 45 new apprenticeship enrolments and the actual spend for Q3 was £362,067. The utilisation of the funds from the apprenticeship levy pot has increased from 74.4% at the end of Q2 2024/25 to 80.1% at the end of Q3 2024/25.

Workforce trends – Full Time Equivalent

19. In terms of directly employed colleagues (i.e. workforce excluding agency workers), the Council's FTE (Full time equivalent) figure has decreased from 4,656.19 to 4,654.79 FTE (which equates to 5,493 people) in Q3. Further details are shown in Annex 2.
20. There were 130 new starters in the last quarter, and 135 leavers. The last time the council has had a decrease in snapshot headcount and FTE figures was Q1 2021-22.
21. The new starter data shows a number of small trends, and these are mostly positive, such the filling of (various) hard-to-fill roles as a result of successful campaigns – e.g. 17 firefighters and various posts in Children's Services – this is the service area that has had the highest proportion of new starters – 42 out of the 130 new starters in Q3.
22. Mostly, though, the data shows a wide variance amongst the new joiners - the new employees started in a wide variety of roles and across many different teams in the

organisation. The 130 new starters joined 12 Service Areas (previously referred to as directorates), and within those, 89 separate Organisational Units, in 72 different roles (based on their job titles).

Workforce trends – agency spend

23. The Council changed its contingent labour provider from Comensura to HAYS, starting in November 2024, therefore agency spend data for Q3 2024/25 in this report is based on information obtained from HAYS. The change of provider was successful, but involved a slightly different way of reporting on agency spend. Considering that the HAYS way of reporting will now continue, it is suggested that the 2024/25 Q3 figures will now become the baseline.
24. Agency spend via the council's agreed provider (now HAYS) decreased quarter on quarter, from £6.86m to £6.82m, despite the inclusion of the Statement of Work spend. The overall trend in agency spend is a decrease in the last 2 years, (Annex 2).
25. In terms of the length of agency bookings, there has been a noticeable shortening of booking durations year on year, (Annex 2) which is a positive trend.
26. Q3 2024/25 has also seen a reduction in the off contract (i.e. not via a provider of agency workers) agency spend, from £1.5m in Q2 to £0.57m in Q3 (Annex 1), and there has been a longer-term trend where this type of spend, while fluctuating quarter to quarter, has seen an overall reduction (Annex 2).
27. The highest agency spend in Q3 continues to remain in Children's Services, Adult Services, Environment and Highways, Law and Governance and Property (Annex 2).

Workforce trends – Turnover

28. Voluntary annual turnover at the council has decreased from 12.4% to 11.7%, a positive trend towards our People and Culture Strategy KPI target of 11.5% p.a.
29. Involuntary annual turnover has increased from 2.3% to 2.5%.
30. The top five reasons why colleagues leave the organisation are: to move to alternative employment (including other local government organisations), retirement, family commitments and moving away/emigrating. Further details are shown in Annex 2.

Workforce trends - Sickness Absence

31. The sickness absence rate in the rolling 12-month period has decreased from 8.8 days absence per FTE in Q2 2024/25 to 8.6 days absence per FTE in Q3 2024/25. This is a positive overall trend towards the target of 8 days sickness absence per year per FTE as set in the Our People and Culture Strategy, and it is believed to be a result of the Council's recent investment made into the Employment Relations team supporting managers with managing attendance.
32. There has been a small increase in the quarterly sickness absence recorded in Q3 2024/25 compared to Q2 2024/25. This increase is consistent with the long-standing trend where there is a regular increase in sickness absence in Q3 each year, due to increases in viral infections.
33. However, notwithstanding the slight increase from Q2 2024/25 to Q3 2024/25, there is a decrease in sickness absence rate when comparing Q3 2024/25 and the same

period last year (Q3 2023/24) - the percentage of working hours lost due to sickness per quarter dropped from 4.98% in Q3 2023/24 to 4.54% in Q3 2024/25.

Workforce trends - Diversity profile

34. Gender - the majority of colleagues at the Council continue to be female – 66%, which is in line with the overall national trend in Local Government. In Q3 there has been a slight increase in the proportion of promotions/secondments awarded to female colleagues versus male colleagues, the split has changed from 57% female/43% male in Q2, to 60% female/ 40% male in Q3, showing a greater move towards a more proportionate rate of promotion/secondment to the gender split of the workforce.
35. Age - 6% of the Council's workforce were under 26 at the end of Q3, no change since the end of Q2.
36. Ethnicity - There is a positive trend in terms of the percentage of colleagues declaring as being from an ethnic minority background, with the figure increasing steadily from 9.44% in March 2023, the figure now stands at 11.3% currently (the council's target of 12.25%).
37. Disability - the percentage of council colleagues declaring a disability has increased steadily over the last 5 years from 6.06% as of 31 March 2023 to 8.7% as of 31 December 2024.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

38. Equality and inclusion implications are considered across all our workstreams.

Sustainability Implications

39. There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

40. There are no risk management issues arising from this report.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

41. The Our People and Culture Strategy referred to in this report directly underpins the Council's ambition to become an Employer of Choice.

Financial Implications

42. The level of agency expenditure was a contributory factor in the year end service area overspend for both 2022/23 and 2023/24. On-going focus through the Our People and Culture Strategy is required so that costs can be managed within agreed service areas budgets for 2024/25.

Comments checked by:

Ian Dyson, Director of Commercial and Financial Services

Legal Implications

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

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Staff Implications

44. Staff implications are considered across all our workstreams and covered in this report.

Cherie Cuthbertson

Director of HR and Cultural Change

Annexes:

ANNEX 1 Quarterly workforce dashboard Q3 2024-2025

ANNEX 2 Quarterly workforce dashboard - additional data Q3 2024-2025

Background papers: Nil

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23 January 2025