CABINET – 24 FEBRUARY 2026

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 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 Q3 2025/26 and reviews trends over the last four quarters.

2) **Strategic Context**

a) 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.

b) In Quarter 3, the council made strong progress across the Our People and Culture Programme:
   - The first pulse- style engagement survey introduced a continuous listening model, giving more frequent insight into the employee experience.
   - The Reciprocal Mentoring Scheme expanded successfully, strengthening inclusive leadership and cross- organisational learning.
   - The new HR Advice Desk launched on The Hive, improving transparency, efficiency and user experience when accessing HR support.
   - The council also completed its Culture Review, providing a clear evidence base for future workforce planning.
   - Oxfordshire Connects brought colleagues together in October, reinforcing organisational culture and a shared sense of purpose.

3) **Workforce composition/headlines**

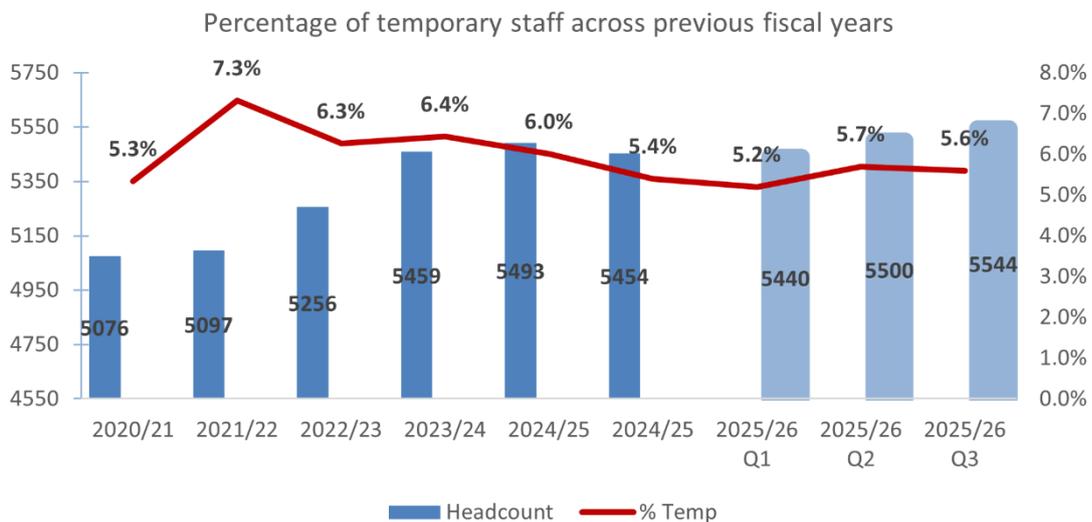a) **Headcount and temporary staff across previous financial years**

Percentage of temporary staff across previous fiscal years

Figure 1 Headcount and temporary staffing proportion as at Q3 across previous financial years.

The percentage of temporarily contracted colleagues (not agency) in early 2021/21 was around 5-6% of contracted headcount and rose noticeably through 2021/22, peaking at just over 7% in Q3 and Q4. Through 2022/23 and 2023/24, temporary staffing then reduced back down between 6% and 6.5%. Temporary staffing percentages have since continued to stay at around 5-6% illustrating the Council's commitment to responsible and strategic resourcing of team structures. This enables the continued delivery of high-quality services and reflects a balanced consideration of financial constraints.

Overall, the trend shows that whilst temporary staffing levels fluctuate, a core proportion is made up of our apprentices demonstrating the Council's commitment to development of staff which speaks to our People and Culture pillar of 'Grow'.

4) Workforce composition/headlines
a. Headcount/FTE

Staffing	All Service Areas			
Employee & Post Details	Q4_24/25	Q1_25/26	Q2_25/26	Q3_25/26
Headcount	5,454	5,440	5,500	5,544
Employee FTE	4,606	4,597	4,617	4,654
No. of PT Staff	2,168	2,156	2,170	2,183
% PT staff	39.8%	39.6%	39.5%	39.4%
Temp Employee	295	282	314	311
% of Temp staff	5.4%	5.2%	5.7%	5.6%

Table 1: Headcount/FTE figures for previous three quarters

As shown in Table 1, the Council's directly employed workforce grew this quarter, with headcount rising from 5,500 to 5,544 and FTE increasing to 4,654. Part-time staff numbers increased to 2,183, though their proportion remained stable at 39.4%, reflecting our commitment to our Agile Working policy. Temporary staff also saw a slight decrease to 311, representing 5.6% of the workforce.

5) Starters & Leavers

Recruitment activity remains steady, with new starters at 160, representing 2.9% of the workforce, and leavers at 141 representing 2.5% of the workforce in Q3 of 2025/26 with most new hires on permanent contracts (83.1%), supporting workforce stability. Children's Services saw the highest intake, reflecting continued investment in critical frontline and hard-to-recruit to roles (See Annex 1).

The overall turnover rate increased marginally from 11.3% to 11.7%. For the rolling 12 months voluntary turnover decreased slightly from 10.0% to 9.9% between Q2 and Q3 2025/26, reflecting a continued improvement and maintaining a value below the Our People & Culture Strategy KPI of 11.5%. A significant reduction in voluntary leavers 149 (Q2 2025/26) to 113 (Q3 2025/26), suggesting an improvement in retention efforts.

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 20 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 ensure that we learn from these early exists, capturing the reasons through exit interviews and surveys to inform continuous improvement.
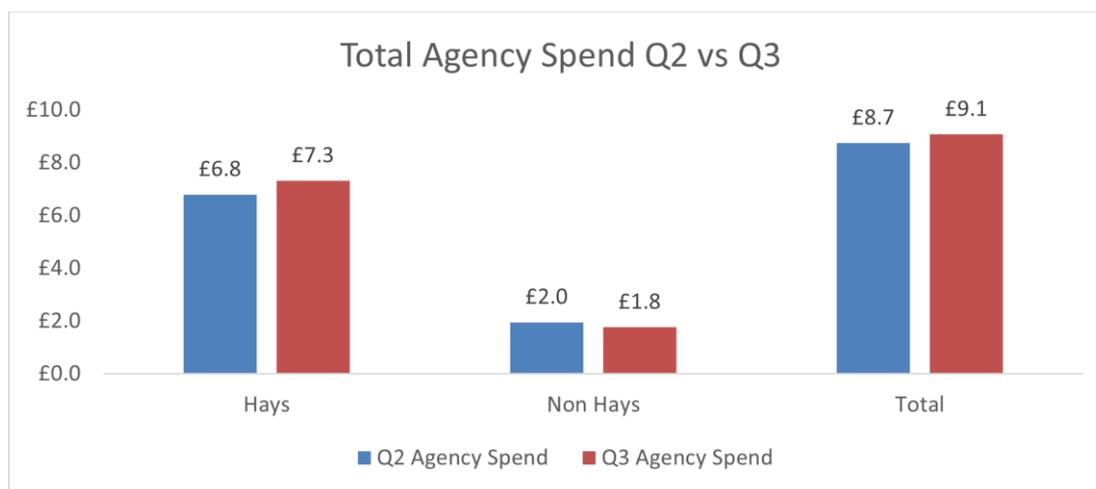
6) **Agency Spend**

Figure 2: Agency Spend (Q2 vs Q3)

In Q3 2025/26, the Council's total agency spend increased to £9.1 million (as seen in Figure 2) up from £8.7 million in Q2 2025/26, an approximate 4% spend increase compared to Q2. This uplift is primarily driven by the continued need to cover roles which are hard to fill due to by national skills shortages. Spend via HAYS, the Council's contracted agency provider, increased slightly to £7.3 million, this reflects off-contract spend being brought onto the Hays framework which allows better visibility and monitoring.

To continue to address agency spend levels a dedicated work group comprising key stakeholders 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.

7) **Recruitment & Time to Hire**

   a) **Background**

The council introduced the Tribepad recruitment system as part of its new resourcing model, moving recruitment ownership in-house and away from the Integrated Business Centre (IBC). Tribepad provides a fully digital, end-to-end recruitment system with automated workflows, stronger reporting, and clearer visibility of the applicant journey, enabling a more efficient, consistent, and user-friendly experience for both applicants and hiring managers. It is now possible to report on Time to Hire data.

Time to Hire (TTH) is calculated as the number of calendar days between the candidate entering Pre-Offer (which is the stage a preferred candidate has been identified, and pre-employment checks begin) and being marked as Hired on Tribepad. Hired is the stage when all onboarding checks have been successfully completed, a contract issued and a start date confirmed. Only applications with final status Hired are included in these statistics. Secondments/IDH (Internal Direct Hires), agency/casual hires, and evergreen roles (continuously open roles or campaigns due to skill shortage areas) are excluded to ensure the KPI reflects genuine recruitment activity and is not distorted by atypical hiring routes.
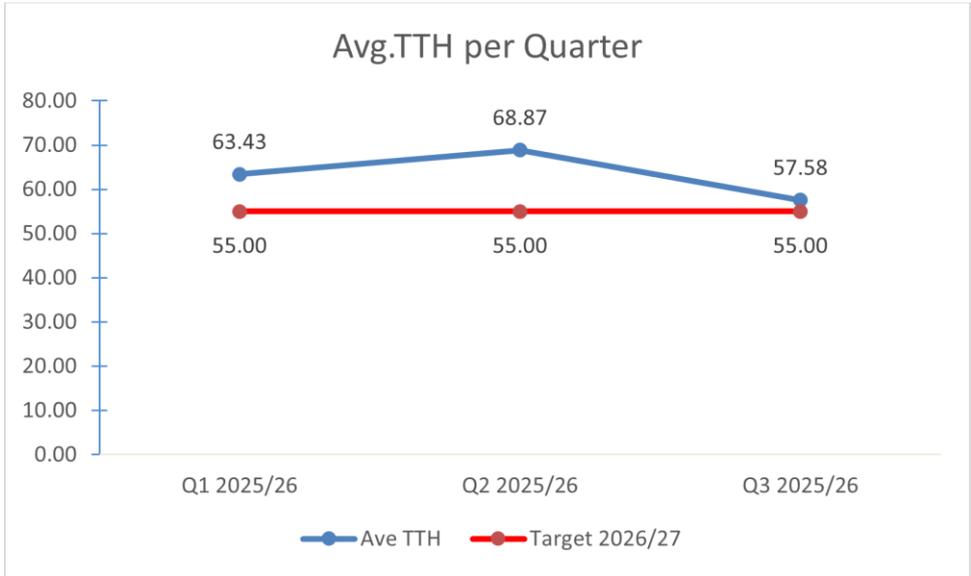
b) Average Time to Hire

Figure 3: Avg. Time to Hire per quarter against 2026/27's target of 55 days.
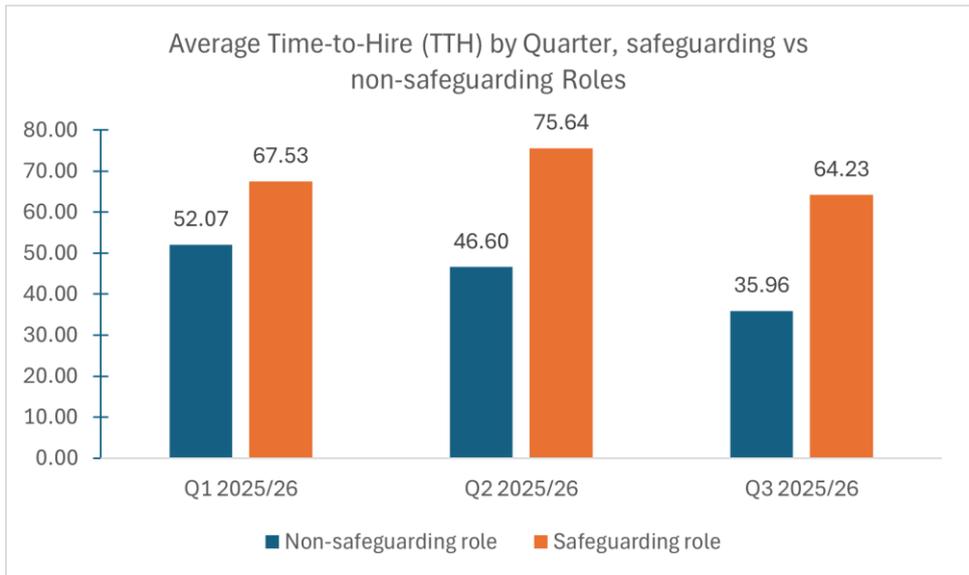

Figure 4 Quarterly TTH safeguarding and non-safeguarding roles.

A new Time to Hire (TTH) KPI has been introduced as of Q3 2025/26, following a full year of operating the Tribepad recruitment system, to strengthen insight into our recruitment performance. The first quarter of operation involved some overlap of systems, so for accuracy of trending, figures are only reported from the beginning of fiscal year 2025/6.

For 2026/27, the council have set a target to achieve an average TTH of 55 days or lower, measured from Pre-Offer to Onboarding Completed. TTH is influenced by process variables, particularly for safeguarding and regulated roles that require additional checks and referencing, which can legitimately extend timelines. Whilst overall the council are just outside our target TTH (Figure 3), when separated out, the non-safeguarding roles TTH is better than target and has improved since moving to Tribepad (Figure 4). This target will therefore be monitored regularly and reviewed annually, with a view to reducing it over time, but always with appropriate service level context to ensure fair expectations and to reflect the differing complexity of hiring across the organisation.

Average TTH peaked in Q2 2025/26 at 69 days, before improving significantly in Q3, falling to 56 days across directorates, Q3 2025/26 TTH values varied considerably from 16 to 80 days, with roles requiring the most extensive safeguarding and compliance checks, particularly in Children's Services and Adult Social Care, showing the longest hiring timelines due to the complexity of pre-employment vetting.

During Q3, the council delivered a marked improvement in THH, driven by a focused effort from the Resourcing Team to understand the root causes of delays and embed more consistent processes. Key actions included progressing onboarding checks, targeting delays within Children's Services and Adult Social Care, sharing best practice from hiring managers in high-performing directorates, and aligning resourcing officers with services to support them and ease bottlenecks. Enhanced candidate monitoring has also strengthened the onboarding journey Increased stakeholder engagement, with recruitment processes designed alongside users, has further supported these improvements by ensuring approaches are efficient and focused on the needs of the services.

8) **Workforce Diversity & Inclusion**

   a) **Key D&I Metrics**

   In Q3 2025/26, promotions and secondments for colleagues identifying as ethnic minority rose 3.0% to 12.9% (12-month average – 10.7%), while those awarded to those declaring a disability dipped by 0.7% to 9.3% but is above the 12-month average of 7.6% reflecting ongoing progress in ethnic diversity and disability inclusion.

   At the end of Q3 2025/26, 66.8% of Council colleagues were female, a stable trend in workforce gender representation.

   At the end of Q3 2025/26, 5.2% of colleagues were under 26 a slight dip from 5.4% (Q2 2025/26), showing stability in younger workforce representation, while colleagues aged over 55 within the workforce increased slightly from 24.8% to 25.1%, maintaining a stable risk against potential retirements.

   The percentage of colleagues at the Council declaring a disability increased from the 9.1% reported last quarter (Q2 2025/2026) to 9.5% at the end of Q3 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.

   At the end of Q3 2025/26, the proportion of non-white colleagues employed by the Council increased slightly to 11.6%, from 11.4% in Q1, while the rate of non-disclosure of ethnicity increased from 10.2% to 10.7%. This trend indicates a small increment in reported workforce diversity and is a recognised gap in declaration rates.
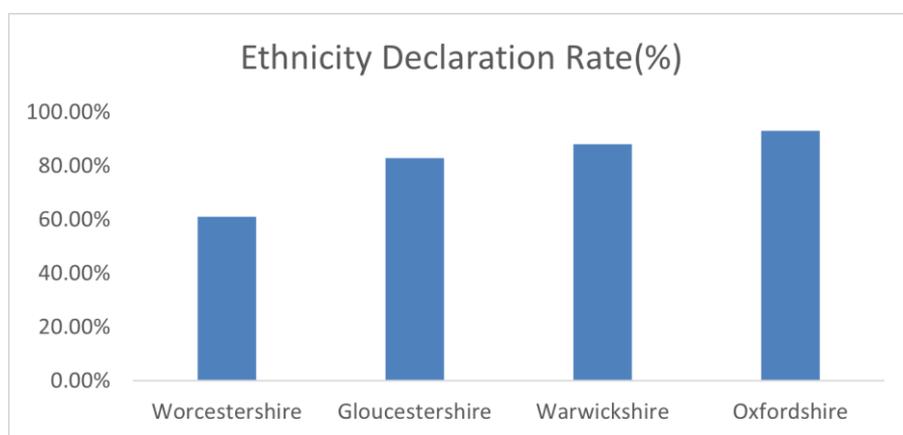

Figure 5: OCC vs counties similar in size. Data source: SEE

As of Q3 2025/26, the council's ethnicity declaration rate is 89.3%. This is similar to Q2 2025/26 at 89.8%, we are well above the national benchmarking mean of 81.3% and as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, indicating the council is still in a strong position compared to peers**.**

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.

b) 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.

9) Attendance, Wellbeing & Employee Experience

a) Absence

i) Sickness Reasons
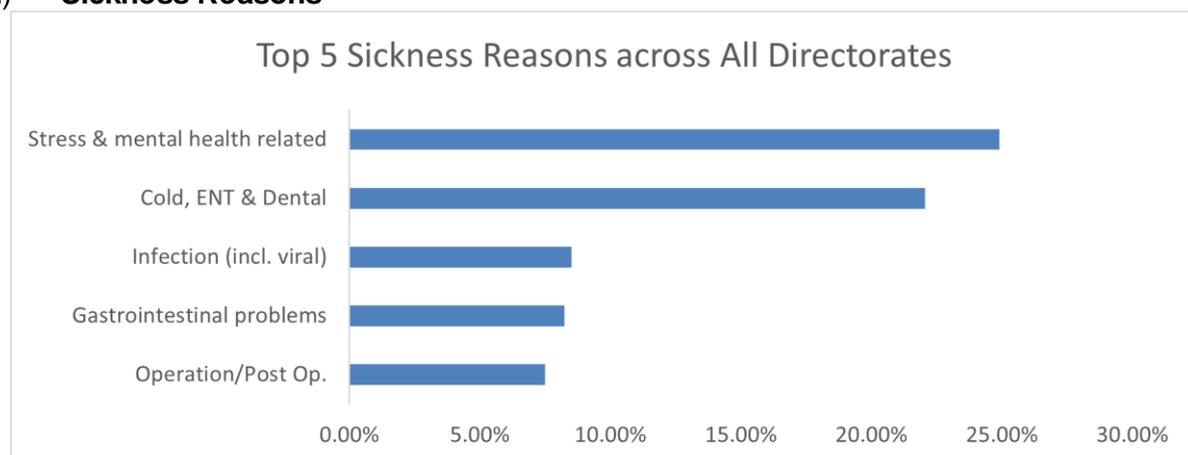
Figure 6: Top 5 Sickness Reasons Across Directorates. Data Source: IBC – OCC's HR system.

Top 5 sickness reasons across all directorates can be seen in Figure 6, stress and mental health alongside cold/ENT & dental issues remain the dominant sickness causes. These highlight the need for targeted mental health support and cold/flu prevention measures across all service areas.

ii) Sickness Data Trends

The average number of sick days per full-time equivalent (FTE) increased year-on-year from 9.1 to 9.2 days, remaining above the Council's target of 8.0 days. As of Q2 2025/26, the year-on-year increment was 0.17 days and 0.10 days for Q3 2025/26. Although above the Council's target, there is continued improvement in the year-on-year figures. There has been 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.

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to achieving the Thrive at Work accreditation by embedding health, wellbeing, and inclusive practices across leadership and culture, policies and

procedures, learning and development, and health promotion. To support this, the council are reviewing Occupational Health provision and developing a new intranet-based Wellbeing Hub alongside an integrated engagement plan to improve support accessibility.

10) **Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Levy utilisation**

In Q3 2025/26, the Council enrolled 29 new apprenticeships, with 5 colleagues successfully completing their programmes (2 in Law and Gov, 1 each in Children's services, ICT and Property & Assets), bringing the total number of active apprentices to 367. This reflects continued investment in workforce development and skills growth across services.
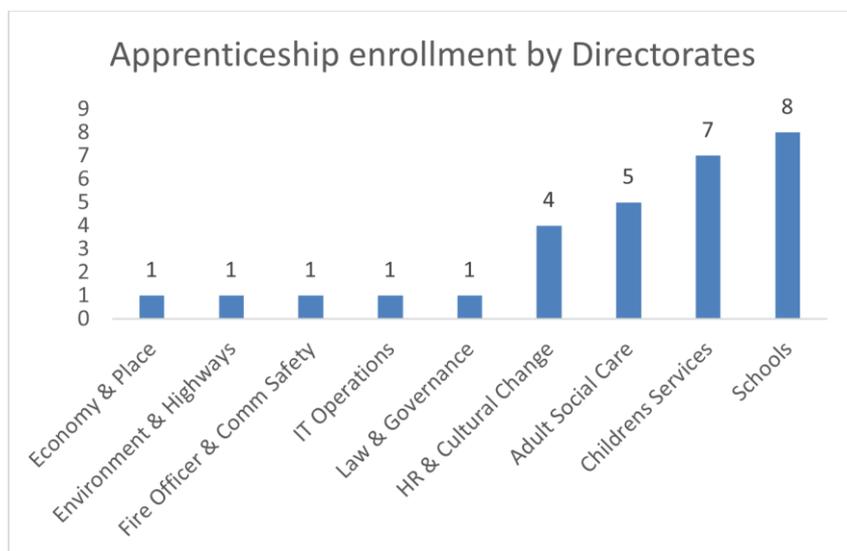
Figure 7: Q3 Apprenticeship Enrolments by Directorates

While quarterly spend decreased slightly to £378,422, Apprenticeship Levy utilisation remains strong at 92.3% in Q3 2025/26, reflecting a continued upward trend from 68.0% 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.

11) **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.

12) **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.

13) **Financial Implications**

The financial implications of the increase in agency expenditure will be reflected in the forecast service expenditure set out in the Business Management and Monitoring Reports to Cabinet and the Provisional Outturn Report which will set out the position at the end of the financial year.

Where there is a forecast overspend as a result of additional agency expenditure this needs to be managed within the wider budget. Where there are on-going pressures as a result of challenges with recruitment to specific roles these have been considered as part of the Budget & Business Planning Process for 2026/27.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

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

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.
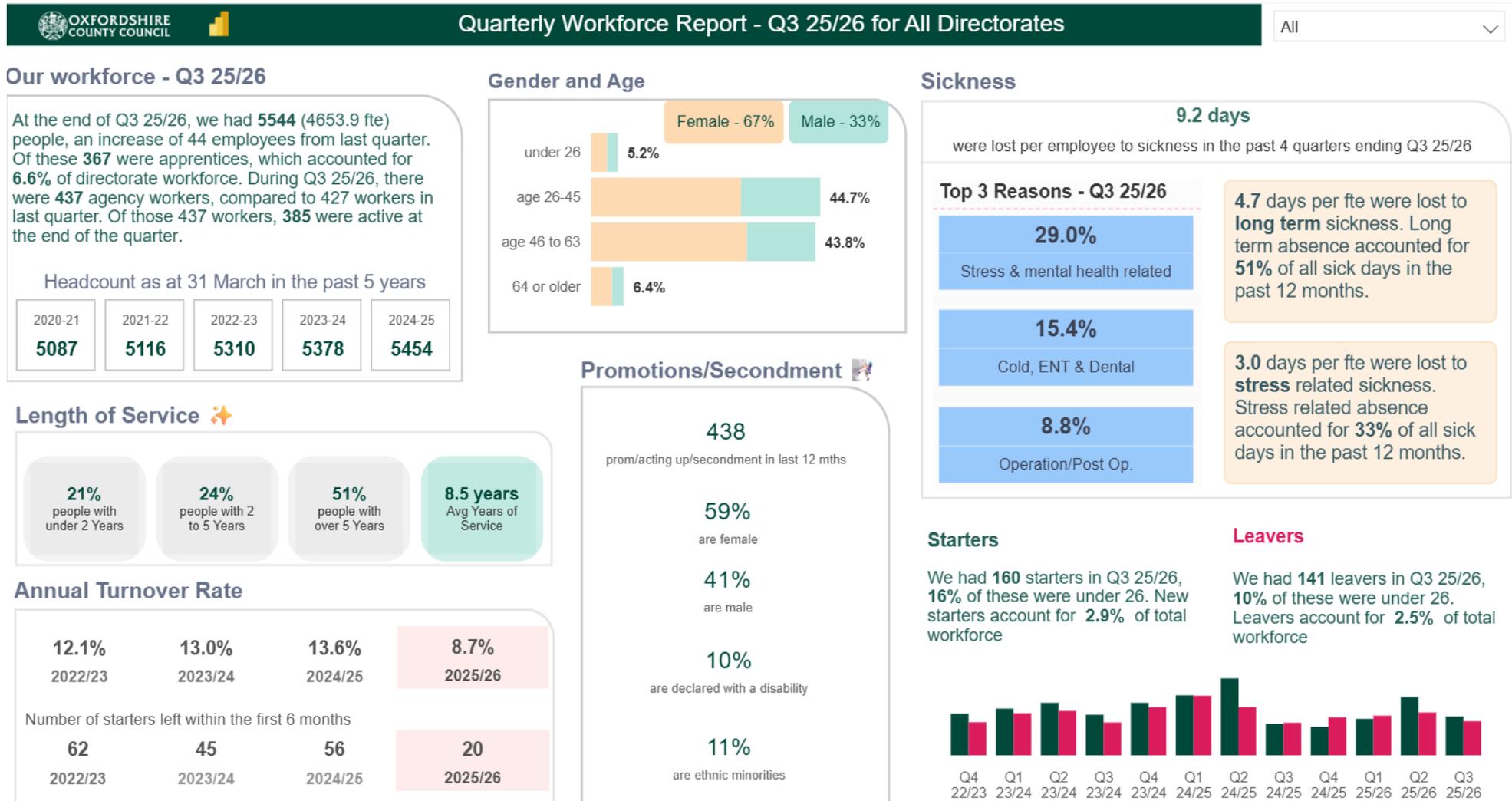
Cherie Cuthbertson
Director of HR and Cultural Change

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Taiwo Alabi
15/01/202

Figure 8 - Q3 Quarterly Workforce Dashboard.

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Quarterly Workforce Report - Q3 25/26 for All Directorates

All ▼

Our workforce - Q3 25/26

At the end of Q3 25/26, we had **5544** (4653.9 fte) people, an increase of 44 employees from last quarter. Of these **367** were apprentices, which accounted for **6.6%** of directorate workforce. During Q3 25/26, there were **437** agency workers, compared to 427 workers in last quarter. Of those 437 workers, **385** 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**

Length of Service ✨

21% people with under 2 Years	**24%** people with 2 to 5 Years	**51%** people with over 5 Years	**8.5 years** Avg Years of Service

Annual Turnover Rate

12.1% 2022/23	**13.0%** 2023/24	**13.6%** 2024/25	**8.7%** 2025/26

Number of starters left within the first 6 months

62 2022/23	**45** 2023/24	**56** 2024/25	**20** 2025/26

Gender and Age

Female - 67%   Male - 33%

under 26	5.2%
age 26-45	44.7%
age 46 to 63	43.8%
64 or older	6.4%

Promotions/Secondment 🏃

438
prom/acting up/secondment in last 12 mths

59%
are female

41%
are male

10%
are declared with a disability

11%
are ethnic minorities

Sickness

9.2 days
were lost per employee to sickness in the past 4 quarters ending Q3 25/26

Top 3 Reasons - Q3 25/26

| **29.0%** Stress & mental health related |
| **15.4%** Cold, ENT & Dental |
| **8.8%** Operation/Post Op. |

4.7 days per fte were lost to **long term** sickness. Long term absence accounted for **51%** 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.

Starters

We had **160** starters in Q3 25/26, **16%** of these were under 26. New starters account for **2.9%** of total workforce

Leavers

We had **141** leavers in Q3 25/26, **10%** of these were under 26. Leavers account for **2.5%** of total workforce

Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24	Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26	Q2 25/26	Q3 25/26

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[1] Annual turnover is shown as quarter to year (turnover figures are representative of turnover for quarters one, two and three of 2025/26), figure provided within the report is a rolling 12-month turnover figure.

Apprentice and agency spend - Q3 25/26 for All Directorates

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

All ▼

Apprenticeship - celebrate our success

During Q3 we had **29** new apprentices enrol and saw **5** apprentices successfully completed their training in Q3 25/26.

We are now in a good position where we are close to spending the maximum levy allocation of approximately £1.4 million per year. The pause will allow us to:
- Confirm the organisation's priorities for apprenticeship investment
- Develop a refreshed early careers strategy
- Redesign our apprenticeship approach to ensure it is sustainable, targeted, and impactful
- Work closely with services during organisational redesign identifying how apprenticeships and early careers pathways can be embedded to meet future skills needs and address recruitment challenges
- Implement a robust governance structure for apprenticeship application and enrolment to ensure suitability, alignment with strategic priorities, and effective use of levy funding.

No. of apprentices on programme - end of Q3 25/26

367

Split by new apprentices vs CPD

% new apprentice	% doing CPD
27.0%	**73.0%**

actual spend on apprenticeship by quarter

216K · 261K · 223K · 299K · 308K · 362K · 369K · 368K · 322K · 378K

Q2 23/24 · Q3 23/24 · Q4 23/24 · Q1 24/25 · Q2 24/25 · Q3 24/25 · Q4 24/25 · Q1 25/26 · Q2 25/26 · Q3 25/26

Number of new apprentices enrolled in Q3 25/26

29

Split by new apprentices vs CPD

% new apprentice	% doing CPD
31.0%	**69.0%**

In Q3 25/26 there were

Completions	Withdrawals
5	**3**

Agency Spend

Agency spend via HAYS in Q3 25/26 was **£7,309,581,** which has gone up compared to the spend in the last quarter at **£6,788,832**
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

Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24
7.28M	6.65M	7.04M	6.73M
Q4 23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25
7.01M	6.94M	6.86M	6.91M
Q4 24/25	Q1 25/26	Q2 25/26	Q3 25/26
6.55M	6.63M	6.79M	7.31M

Off contract spend by quarter

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

Figure 9 - Q3 agency and apprenticeship spend dashboard