

Quarterly Workforce Report

July - September 2020



Observations and exceptions

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact how and where the council and its staff deliver services. During the July – September quarter, nationally we saw the first lockdown ease as numbers testing positive reduced over the summer months, although uncertainty around further restrictions remained.

The council moved from response to recovery phase and commenced planning and implementation of an Organisational Recovery Programme whilst allowing more staff to return to the office for specific business requirements or for wellbeing reasons. However for a large proportion of staff working from home continued during this quarter, evidenced by 82% of staff who responded to the wellbeing survey (conducted at the end of September 2020) identifying that they had been working from home for most or all of their time. As the pandemic continues to require different ways of working, it is critical to continue to monitor the affect on our workforce.

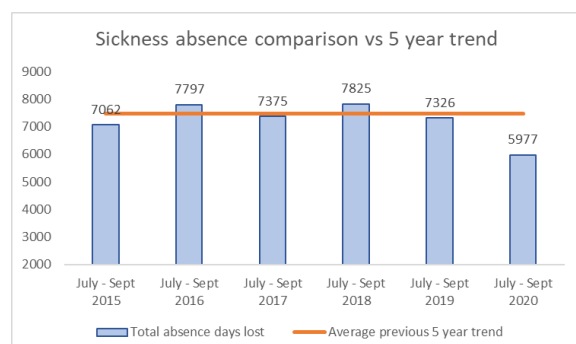
Our records show the coronavirus illness had very little impact on sickness absence this quarter, contributing only 1 absence spanning 3 working days (0.1% of the total absence days lost in the quarter). However during this time new absence codes were introduced to monitor staff who were self-isolating (but where this was not counted as “sickness” absence). Throughout the quarter there were a further 39 staff self-isolating where it impacted their ability to do their job and were therefore unable to work. A further 21 in the quarter were required to self-isolate however were still able to work from home.

These figures compares to 253 days lost in the previous quarter (April – June) which contributed around 4% of total absence - however this is likely to have encompassed all of the different absence reasons covered above.

Through the response phase of the pandemic we were monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on team capacity on a daily basis, and in the July – September quarter only 1% of the workforce were impacted to the point that they weren’t able to perform the duties of their role, and therefore it has had little direct impact.

Although there has been minimal absence impact the response to the wider pandemic appears to have other effect on workforce data. The previous 5 year trend in sickness absence over the July – September quarter has remained fairly stable, however the absence recorded in the July – September 2020 quarter is 20% lower than the average over the previous 5 year trend.

The largest reductions were seen in musculo-skeletal issues, likely linked to reduction or closure of services during this period where manual tasks are most prevalent (e.g. Leisure, Adults Learning Disabilities Provider Services and Passenger Transport). The other area where there was a significant reduction was for stomach related absences, likely linked to the significant number of staff working from home during this period and therefore reduced opportunities for transmission between staff.



This trend has continued from the April – June quarter which saw similar reductions in musculo-skeletal and shorter term virus/flu's. Previous analysis has also shown that staff working from home are less likely to feel the need to take sickness absence for minor illness.

During quarter 1 (April – June) the council saw a significant reduction in stress related absence (-14%). Perhaps not surprisingly, although still of concern, the prevalence of stress related absence appears to have increased at the council in the July – September quarter, returning to a level in line with the normal trend for this quarter (an increase of over 300 absence days - contributing 45% of all absence days lost). Although the figure has returned to a level in line with the normal trend, it is still a marked increase that requires monitoring.

Analysis of the recent wellbeing survey identified almost 2/3rds of staff who responded stated an increase in their workload since the COVID-19 pandemic, with almost 1/3rd stating it has increased 'a lot', this was reinforced by staff stating their single greatest work related concern right now is 'workload'. This may explain the increase in stress related absence, as work-related stress absences had the biggest increase of all the stress related absences compared to the April – June quarter. However there are also other factors that may affect stress related absence that cannot be ignored, 'future uncertainty' was identified as one of the top work related concerns in the wellbeing survey, encompassing themes such as; job security, the financial situation of the council and wider uncertainty surrounding the impacts of COVID-19 and additional restrictions.

At the end of this quarter (running from 28th September to 19th October) the council undertook a second wellbeing survey to understand and identify any continued or additional support required by council staff as they continue to navigate the pandemic and work in a significantly different way, and also understand how initiatives introduced as a result of the first survey in May 2020 have impacted our staff.

As a result of the first survey, Occupational Health put in place processes to distribute over 500 chairs, 300 keyboards and 400 monitors to help create more recognisable and comfortable workstations for staff at home, which appeared to improve the 'physical workspace' of some staff responding.

In addition, although working from home comes with limitations, the survey results indicate that generally staff would like to continue working from home more often, with over 2/3rds only wanting to come back into a council office 2 days a week or less, and with over a quarter stating that they would be happy to attend only for essential meetings (i.e. less than once a week).

However social isolation continues to be an issue for staff, although as mentioned above due to large proportions not wishing to return to the office in the same manner as pre-COVID, it appears returning to an office will do little to alleviate the feeling of social isolation suggesting there are wider implications of this. Whilst communication with colleagues and not feeling part of the organisation have both increased as an issue in the most recent survey, it appears there is some improvement required in both our formal and informal communication with our staff from managers and corporate communications, and these increased issues may be associated with staff feeling more isolated.

The result of the survey have been shared corporately, and directors have been provided with their own directorate reports to discuss with their management teams. The results of the survey, together with relevant workforce information is being used to inform the work of a number of workstreams under the Organisational Recovery Programme. A copy of the wellbeing survey results from October can be found in Appendix 1.

Advisory cases have increased this quarter compared to the April – June quarter, especially for formal Absence and Health cases which increased to 132 new cases this quarter (+38 cases) although this is not as high as pre-COVID trends, and there have been 8 new grievance cases this quarter (+6 cases). The increase in formal Absence and Health cases are partly due to managers referring staff to Occupational Health as part of normal day to day business, but also may have been lower last quarter due to staff being furloughed. However, it appears the potential impact of COVID-19 on stress related absence may have also caused this increase in referrals as a number relate to anxiety and mental health.

The impact of COVID on the financial situation of the council continues to be cited by staff as one of their greatest work related concerns and is also a key driver for improvements being led under the

Organisational Recovery programme. The council has introduced several initiatives in order to improve the situation, including addressing the spend on agency staff, through prohibiting contract extensions for agency staff introduced in early June. This has resulted in a reduction in agency spend of 38.3% (-£592k) from the previous quarter, and a reduction of almost £1m since the October – December 2019 quarter, and now sits at around £950k a quarter. The largest reduction was seen in Access & Reablement (-£126k), followed by IT (-£122k). There has been a real concerted and collaborative effort between HR and these services to permanently resource the agency roles that have ended. In addition to this, as a result of the pandemic, certain IT projects have been ceased meaning the services of agency staff deployed to these projects are no longer required. With such scrutiny over the council's finances, the increase in permanent staffing costs may appear to be a concern, however in September council staff received a pay award of 2.75% across all NJC (grades B – O) and HAY grades and backdated to April, were this pay award not agreed the permanent wage bill would have reduced by around 2%.

Workforce Demographics



Current quarter	4610
Apr-Jun	4680
Jan-Mar	4723
Oct-Dec	4787



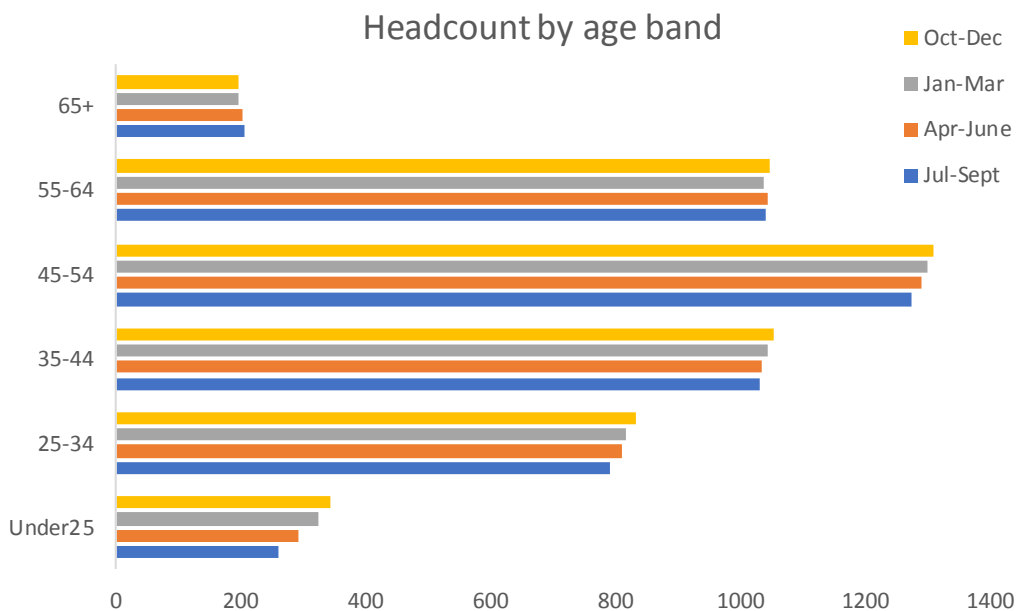
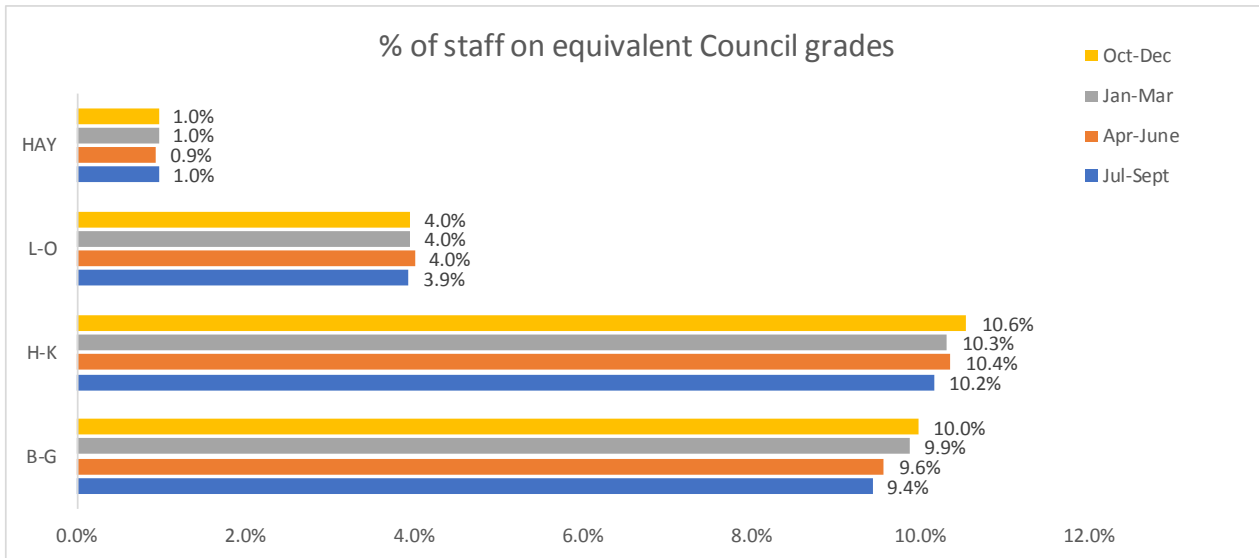
Current quarter	3496.3
Apr-Jun	3545.7
Jan-Mar	3560.8
Oct-Dec	3571.5



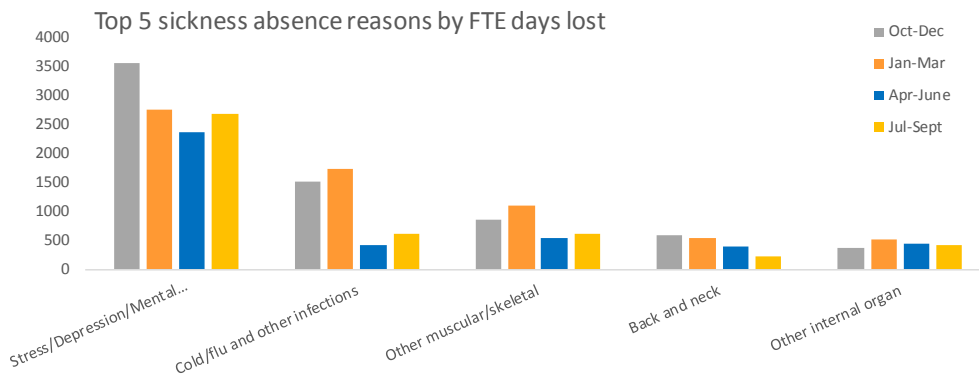
Current quarter	8.0%
Apr-Jun	8.1%
Jan-Mar	8.2%
Oct-Dec	8.5%



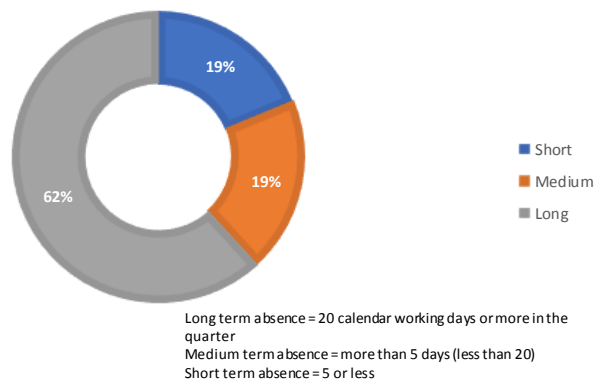
Current quarter	3.0%
Apr-Jun	3.0%
Jan-Mar	3.0%
Oct-Dec	2.9%



Sickness Absence



Sickness absence breakdown July - Sept 2020



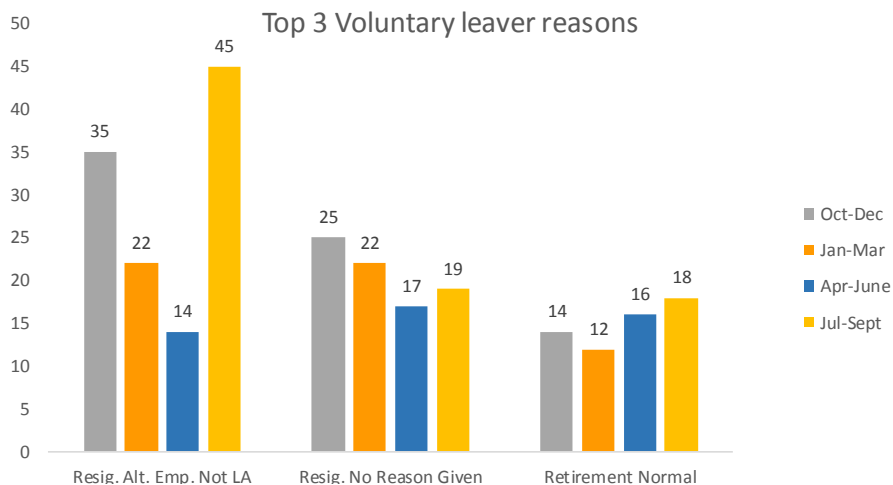
Turnover

**Leavers
'under 25
years old'**

Current quarter	18
Apr-June	13
Jan-Mar	15
Oct-Dec	11

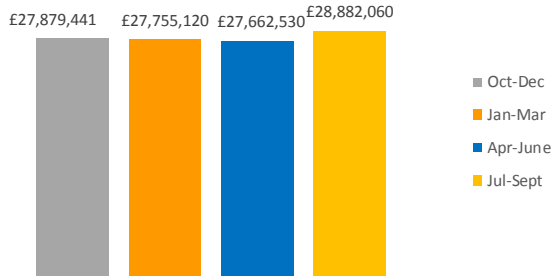
**Leavers
with less
than 1 years
service**

Current quarter	14
Apr-June	14
Jan-Mar	22
Oct-Dec	17

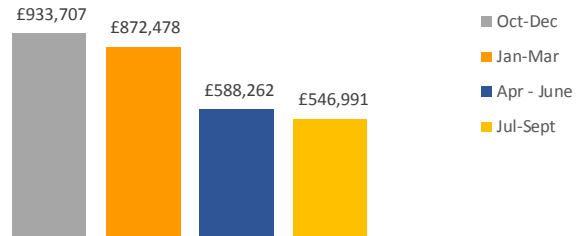


Employee costs

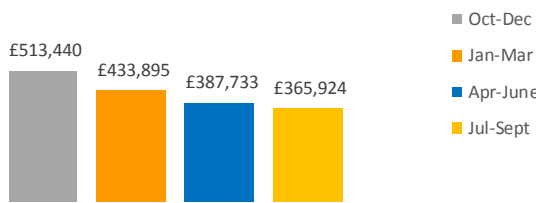
Permanent employee salary costs



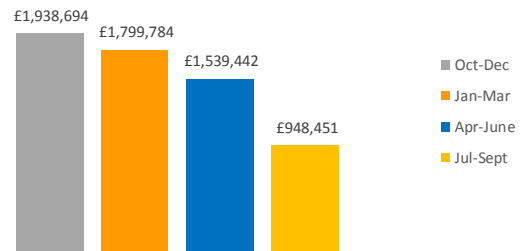
Sickness Absence Costs



Casual employee salary costs



Agency Costs



Advisory Cases

Disciplinarys

	new cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Oct-Dec	15	
Jan-Mar	10	-5
Apr - Jun	12	2
Current Quarter	10	-2

Absence & Health

	new cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
	176	
	169	-7
	94	-75
	132	38

Grievances

	new cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
	6	
	6	0
	2	-4
	8	6

Improving work Performance

	new cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
	4	
	8	4
	2	-6
	4	2