Wiltshire Council

Bi-annual Workforce Report:

[Data up to and including September 2024]

Observations and exceptions

Wiltshire Council is continuing to deliver the business plan and address key issues within the community, such as cost-of-living pressures, an aging population, new government policies and upcoming local elections, all of which have an impact on the services we deliver and our workforce.

The Council has recently undergone a change with how workforce reports are produced. In September 2023 the Workforce Insight Analyst role moved from HR&OD to the corporate Data & Insight team to provide longer term resilience and improvement in how we gain insight from our workforce data. Since the start of April 2024, Oracle replaced SAP as the system to organise and collate workforce data across the council. As a result, new reporting methodologies have been established across several KPI measures typically presented within council workforce reporting which has created some differences when comparing data from the two systems.

Establishment

Headcount / FTE

Headcount has steadily risen quarter-on-quarter over the last 3 years, dating back to September 2021. This trendline pattern is mirrored by the rise in FTE during this same period, both of which have risen to their highest amount in the most recent quarter (ending September 2024).

A proportion of the growth visible in Headcount and FTE since Mar 2024 is attributable to filled vacancies, and increased grant funding in several services such as Adult Social Care, Environment and Highways & Transport and insourcing Leisure.

Wiltshire Council has a predominantly female workforce, with females comprising 74.0% (3,863) of the total workforce and males comprising 26.1% (1,361) as of September 2024.

The quality assurance process involved in the change from SAP to Oracle has led to the identification of an inconsistency in headcount reporting. This discrepancy is because previously the headcount calculation was based on position count rather than true headcount, as some staff have more than one position. Based on best practice, it has been agreed that the true headcount figure should now be the reported metric and as a result a correction figure of -221 has been historically applied to each SAP position count. The correction figure

is based on the known difference between the previously reported position count (5344) and current agreed headcount (5123) in March 2024.

Headcount and FTE
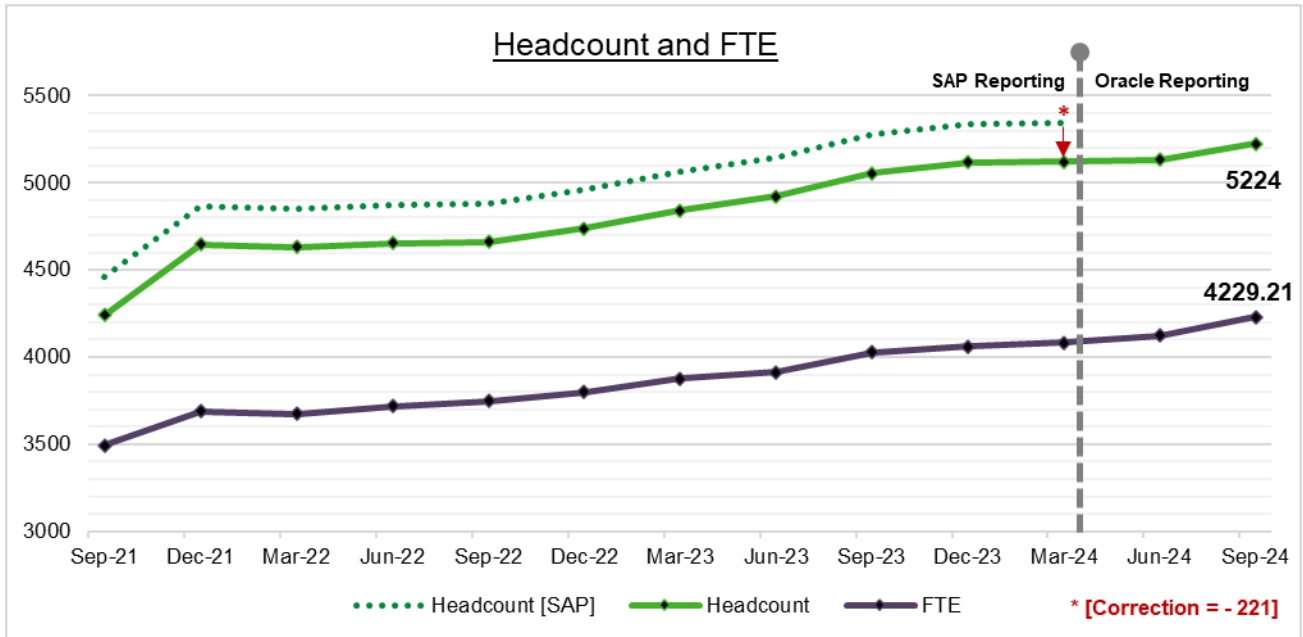
Quarter-Year	Headcount	FTE
Sep-2024	5,224	4229.2
Sep-2023	5,055	4028.1
Sep-2022	4,663	3746.8
Sep-2021	4,241	3494.2

Workforce demographics

Although Headcount has risen steadily over the last three years, the proportional split of ages within the workforce has remained relatively consistent.
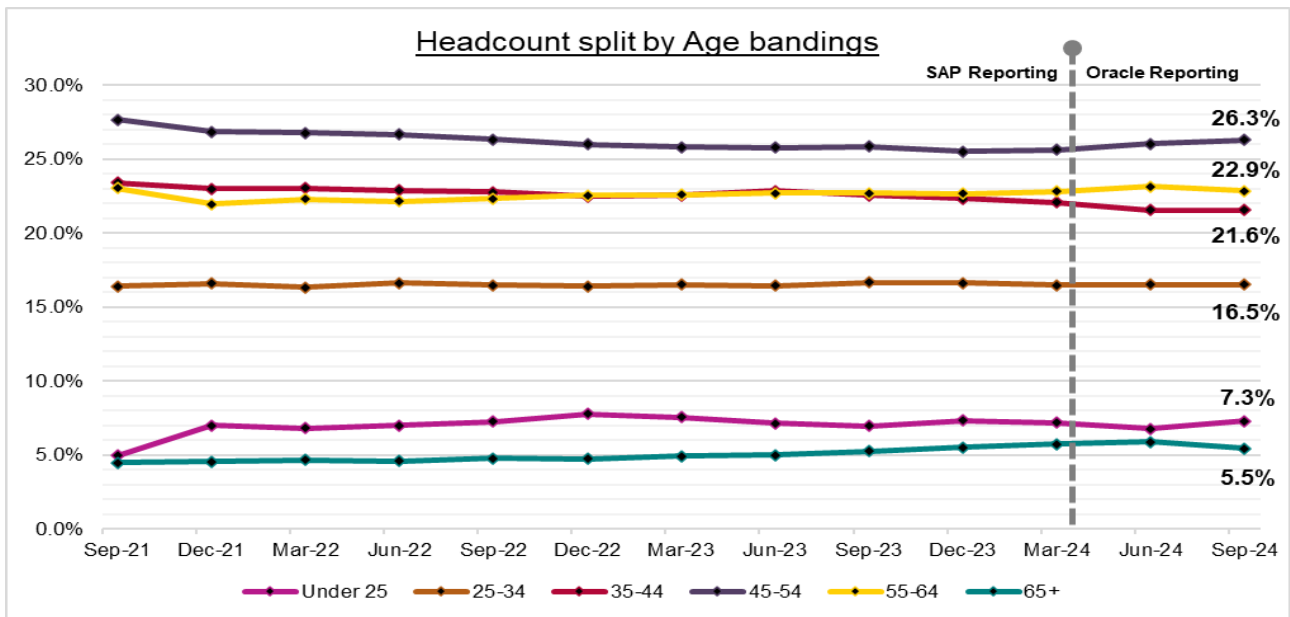

The proportional split of grade bands also remains largely consistent. (Note: the 'other' key contains several anomalous grade bands such as apprenticeship positions, TUPE transferred positions and Soulbury positions)
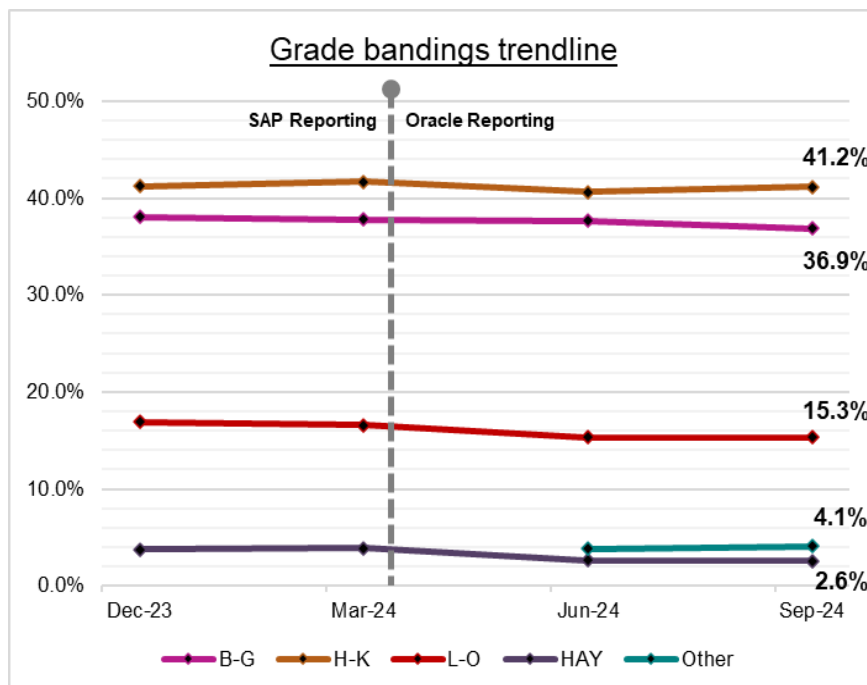
Salary costs and budget

Permanent salary costs from Oracle are the sum of gross pay made to employees on an annual or variable salary basis per quarter.

Permanent salary costs
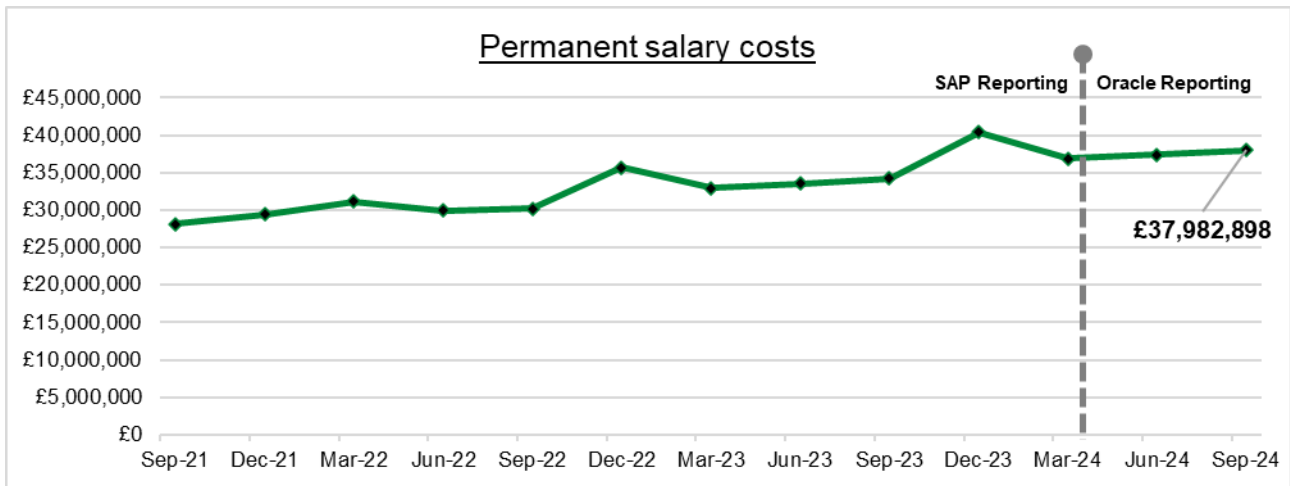
The marginal increasing trend seen in headcount is reflected in permanent staffing costs as seen in chart above. The biggest influence in staffing costs is the pay award. Employees received the negotiated pay award in November 2023 which was backdated to April 2023. This explains the spike in the October to December 23 quarter due to staff receiving their backdated pay and subsequent reduction in the January to March 24 quarter returns to what is the new normal cost.

The total cost of permanent salaries amounted to £152.7 million between October 2023 and September 2024, a 12.0% rise on the previous 12-month period (£136.4 million). This increase is largely due to leisure staff being transferred into the council.

Agency costs

The table below details agency spend by quarter for the 12 months to 30 September 2024, broken down by directorate. Overall costs dropped by -21.86% between the first and last quarters shown, with 6 out of the 12 directorates reducing costs in that period.

Directorate	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Total
Families & Children's Services	£524,607	£362,014	£395,165	£365,004	£1,646,790
Adult Social Care	£360,476	£355,160	£334,907	£294,217	£1,344,760
Planning	£170,721	£137,371	£133,506	£135,530	£577,128
Legal and Governance	£155,833	£87,769	£67,272	£37,895	£348,769
Highways and Transport	£31,825	£54,981	£65,482	£90,328	£242,616
Transformation	£0	£65,989	£110,020	£48,122	£224,131

Directorate	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Total
Education and Skills	£45,761	£72,032	£25,555	£22,059	**£165,407**
Finance	£11,318	£22,758	£73,398	£41,084	**£148,558**
Commissioning	£41,902	£55,071	£0	£0	**£96,973**
HR & OD	£9,675	£20,486	£29,540	£14,683	**£74,384**
Assets	£0	£0	£44,386	£13,055	**£57,441**
Leisure, Culture & Communities	£6,954	£0	£0	£0	**£6,954**
Total	**£1,359,072**	**£1,233,631**	**£1,279,231**	**£1,061,977**	**£4,933,911**

Although agency costs are up by 8.29% from the previous year, recent quarters are showing a downward trend, as seen in the graph below. This is in part due to an ongoing review by HR&OD with the business to reduce reliance longer term.
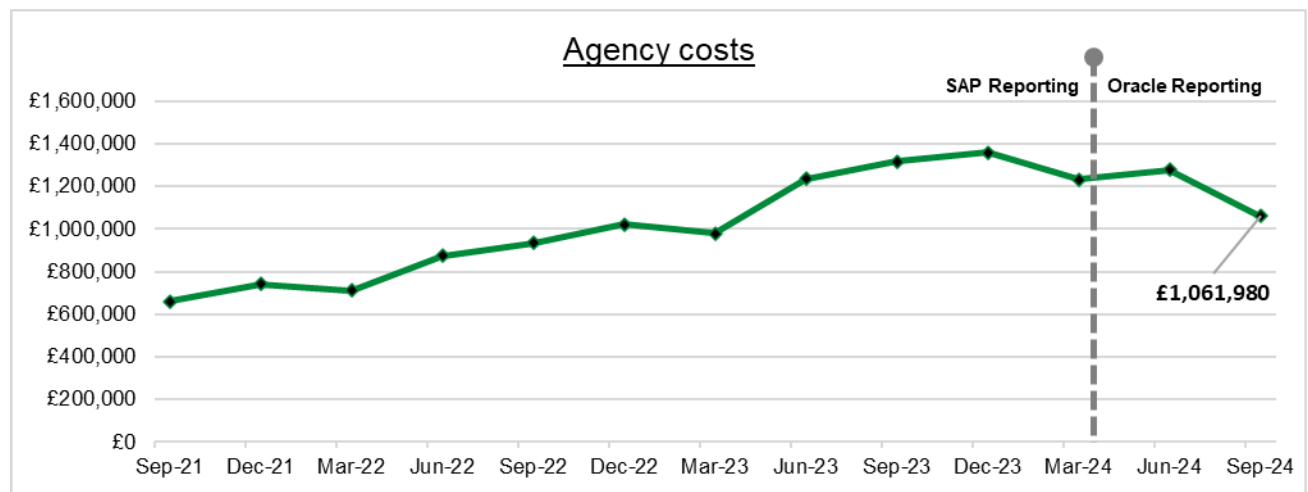
The council faces significant challenges in recruiting qualified professionals for hard-to-fill roles, particularly experienced social workers, occupational therapists', engineers, and planners. A national shortage of skilled workers in these areas makes it difficult to maintain a stable and effective workforce. As a result, the council often relies on agency workers to fill these crucial positions.

Planning is proving challenging and there is a continuous need to use agency. In a survey of England's district councils, the 'District Councils' Network' found that 84% of planning departments were struggling to recruit and retain staff due to shortages of skills available in the market. Shortages of workforce for this sector is thought to be caused by strained budgets

and the ability to match private sector salaries, alongside a general national shortage within this expertise.

Over the past six months, we have successfully converted seven agency workers into permanent roles within the council in the following service areas: Planning, HR&OD, Adult Social Care, Legal and Highways. If we had continued to engage these workers through agencies, the estimated total cost would have been £574,787. However, by converting them, we have achieved a savings of £282,759.

Vacancies / recruitment

According to the Local Government workforce data survey in 2021 it was reported that 78% of councils had experienced difficulties with recruitment and retention. In August 2024 this has reportedly risen to 94%.

Over the past 12 months, the council has faced both opportunities and challenges in navigating the evolving labour market. Key areas of concern include social care, planning, highways and transport, education and legal services due to factors such as national shortages and private sector pay. It is anticipated that these areas will continue to prove challenging, but the council should also anticipate potential recruitment challenges in the environmental sector given the rapid growth in this sector.

Recruitment and retention trends have been significantly influenced by broader national issues such as the cost-of-living crisis, a competitive job market, national shortages and shifts in candidate expectations. To address these challenges, we are working with services on longer term workforce planning and plans to address skills shortages now and in the future such as "growing our own" talent, partnering with universities for student placements, succession planning, upskilling apprenticeships and we continue to enhance our digital recruitment campaigns and strengthen our employer branding, positioning Wiltshire Council as an employer of choice whilst also focusing on attracting under 25's, a more diverse talent pool and emerging talent.

Increasing the attraction and retention of under 25s, particularly in those areas where there are none, will be a corporate equality, diversity, and inclusion priority in the updated 2025 Inclusion Strategy. Some examples on how this could be driven are through use of apprenticeships, T-level placements, work experience and challenge days. There is also a focus on succession planning for business-critical roles where there is an aging workforce.

An in-depth analysis of the recruitment challenges for Children's and Adult social workers revealed that 83% of councils are having difficulty hiring for children's services, while 71% face similar challenges for adult services. In addition to these roles, the council also faces significant challenges in recruiting occupational therapists and support workers. These shortages highlight the need for targeted strategies to attract and retain skilled professionals across these critical service areas.

The table below details unfilled advertised vacancies, positions filled and average time to hire (TTH) in working days for the 6 months to 30 September 2024.

|	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24
Unfilled advertised vacancies	34	32	44	56	72	69
Positions filled	68	86	102	69	54	17
Average TTH in working days (SLA is 30 days for regular roles and 90 days for hard to fill roles)	28.1	30.3	34.6	34.6	33.3	35.9

Apprenticeships

There are currently 221 staff undertaking apprenticeships from Level 2 – Level 7, of these:

- 188 are Wiltshire Council apprentices
- 37 are new start apprentices
- 151 are upskilling apprentices
- 38 are in Wiltshire Maintained schools.

The council has paid £575,949.54 into the apprenticeship levy in the last 6 months, and has spent £344,764 on training staff, as well as transferring £16,818 to support training in SMEs within Wiltshire.

Funds enter the Digital apprenticeship service (DAS) every month and expire 24 months after they enter the DAS. The unspent funds are transferred to the government to provide apprenticeship funding for SME's.

The graph below illustrates how much the council paid into the levy, how much was spent on apprenticeship training, how much was transferred to SME's and how much was sunset and paid back to the government in 23/24.
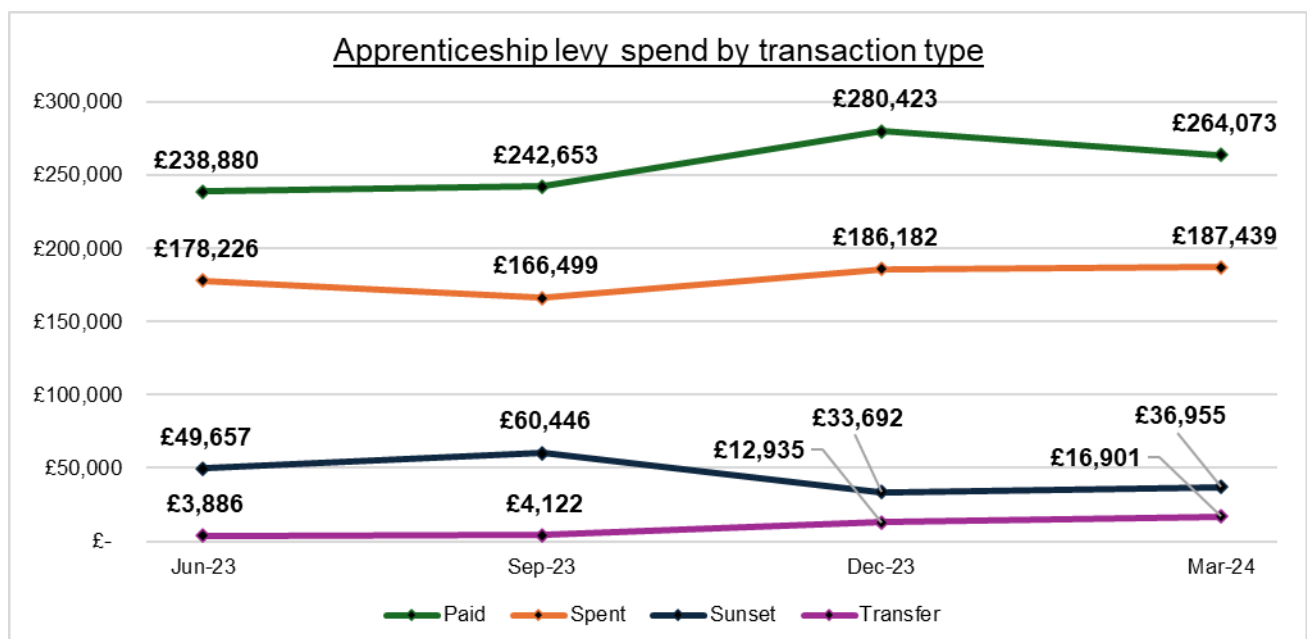
Sickness absence

The introduction of the Oracle system has brought a change to the way FTE is calculated for the working days lost per FTE metric, moving from a static end of quarter figure to an average of a period start and period end.
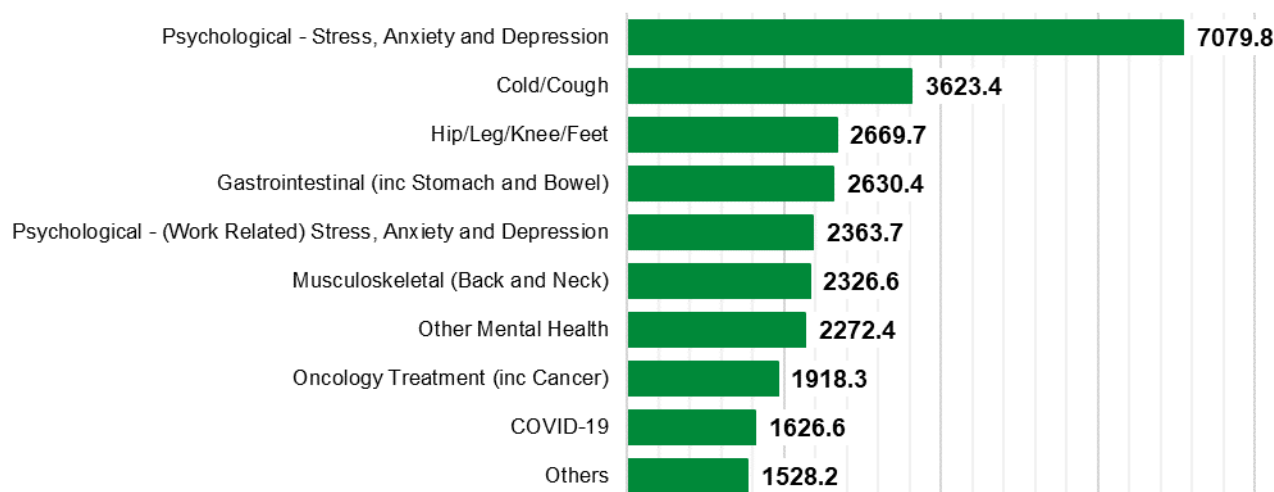
We can see from the days lost per full-time equivalent (FTE) graph below that the July to September (Q2) was higher than what we would normally expect to see in this quarter, and this is being investigated.

Working days lost per FTE

Average working days lost per FTE
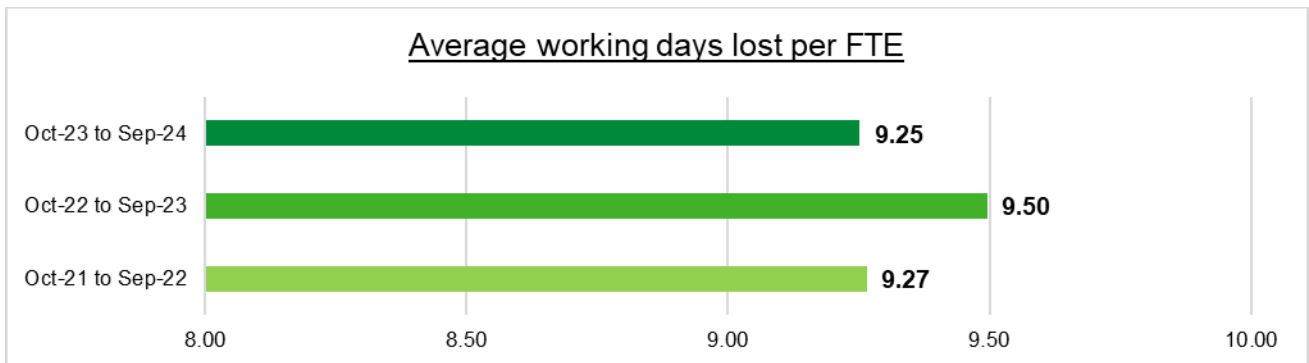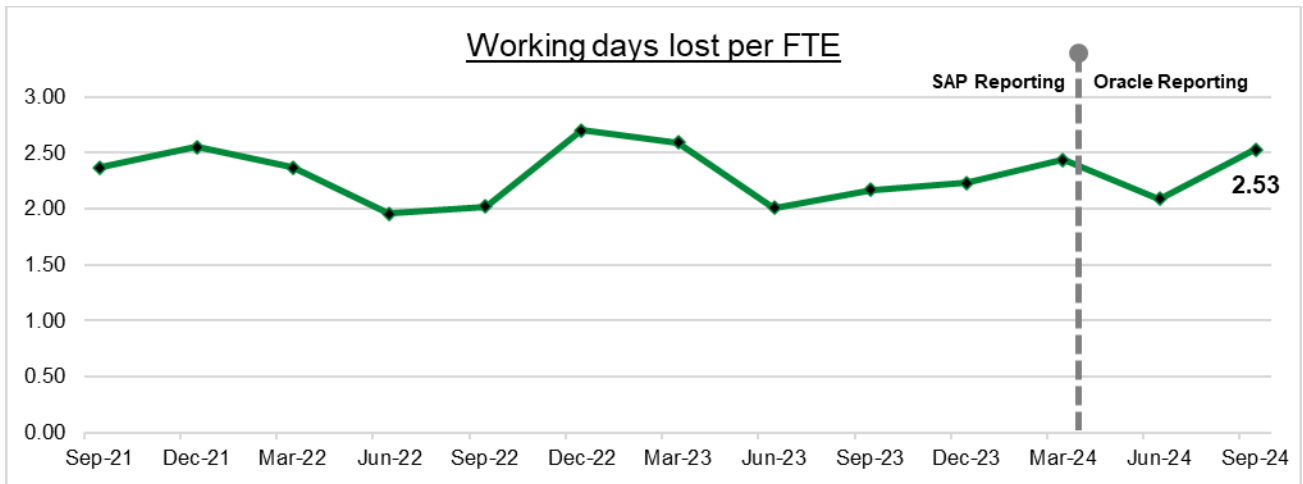
Although we have seen a rise in number of days lost per FTE in the most recent quarter, this has not affected the average working days lost per FTE in comparison with previous years.

Mental health and stress-related absences continue to be the biggest contributor to sickness absence, accounting for 31% all days lost in the 12 months to 30 September 2024 and remain three of the top ten reasons for working days lost, as seen in the chart below. The total number of working days lost due to all stress/mental health related absences reduced by -1.14% when compared to the same period for the previous year to Sep-23.

Top 10 reasons for working days lost (Year to Sep-24)

| Reason	Working days lost
Psychological - Stress, Anxiety and Depression	7079.8
Cold/Cough	3623.4
Hip/Leg/Knee/Feet	2669.7
Gastrointestinal (inc Stomach and Bowel)	2630.4
Psychological - (Work Related) Stress, Anxiety and Depression	2363.7
Musculoskeletal (Back and Neck)	2326.6
Other Mental Health	2272.4
Oncology Treatment (inc Cancer)	1918.3
COVID-19	1626.6
Others	1528.2

When analysing these absence reasons further, the most significant change in working days lost since the last SPC report can be attributed to 'COVID-19' (+138%, rising from 291 days lost in the quarter ending Mar-24 to 693 days in the quarter ending Sep-24); 'gastrointestinal (inc. stomach and bowel)' (+67%), and 'others' (+56%).

The Directorates whose average annual working days lost per FTE is higher than the overall council figure of 9.25 days for the year to September 2024 are:

- Commissioning = 15.12 days,
- Adult Social Care (DASS) - 14.64 days, and
- Transformation & Business Change - 12.62 days.

The HR Business Partners are working with these services to analyse the data and put action plans in place where possible to reduce sickness absence levels. They are attending service SMTs and making sure that the profile of sickness absence is raised and discussed with the aim of reducing the absence levels.

Sickness costs have fluctuated between £1.13m and £1.26m in the last four quarters to end September 2024, as shown in the chart below. The sickness costs are higher than what we would typically expect according to the forecasted trend line and is being investigated but is likely to be attributable to the change in process with the move from SAP to Oracle. Further communications and training are planned to support managers.

Sickness costs

SAP Reporting | Oracle Reporting

£1,163,580

£930,057

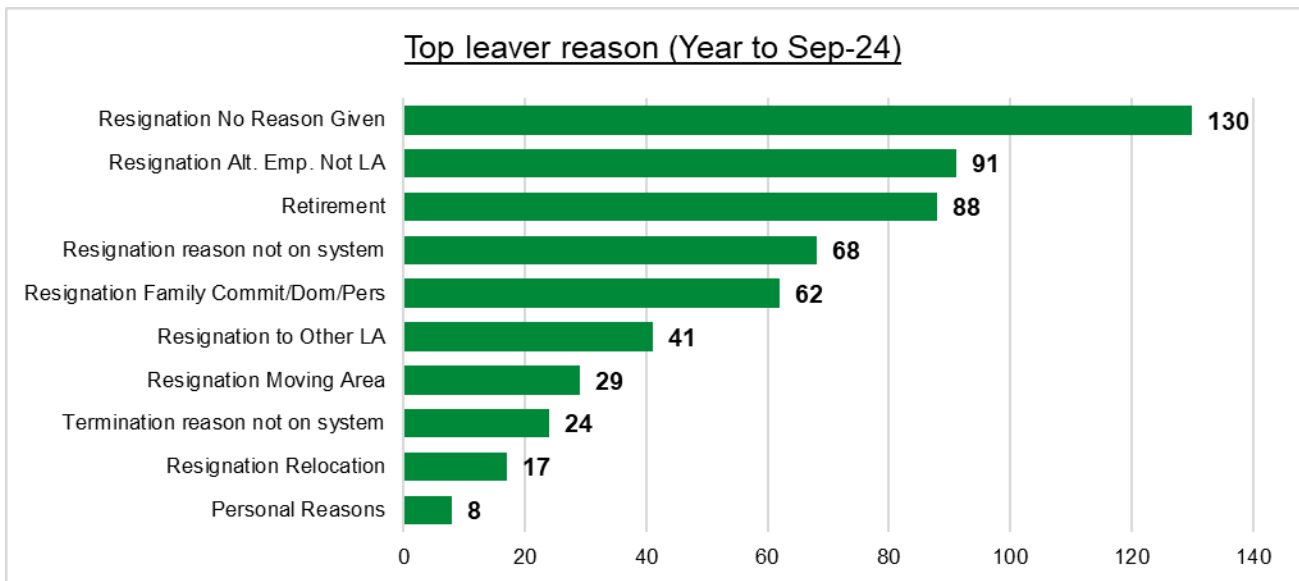Actual Costs ····· Forecasted Costs
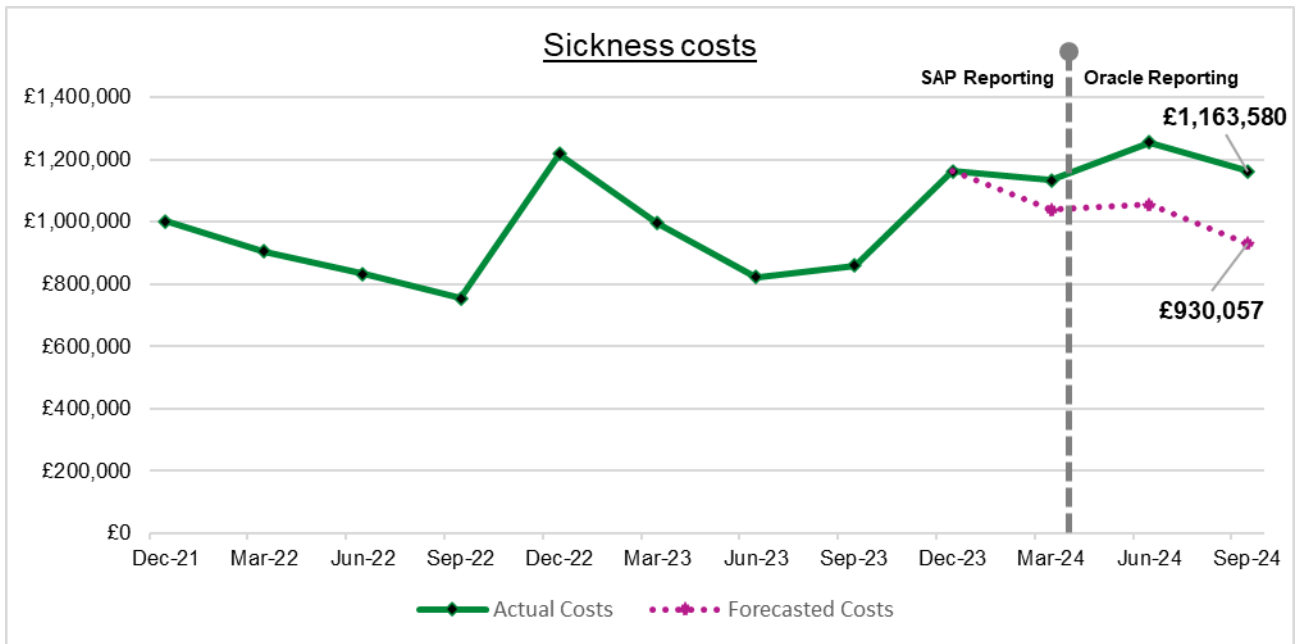
Turnover

Voluntary Turnover on a quarterly basis has fluctuated between 3.7% and 2.1% over the last three years. With exception to these outliers, quarterly voluntary turnover has generally remained around the 2.5% mark for most of the last two years, however, there was a spike in the quarter to Jun 24 of 3.3%.

Voluntary turnover

SAP Reporting | Oracle Reporting

3.3%

2.9%
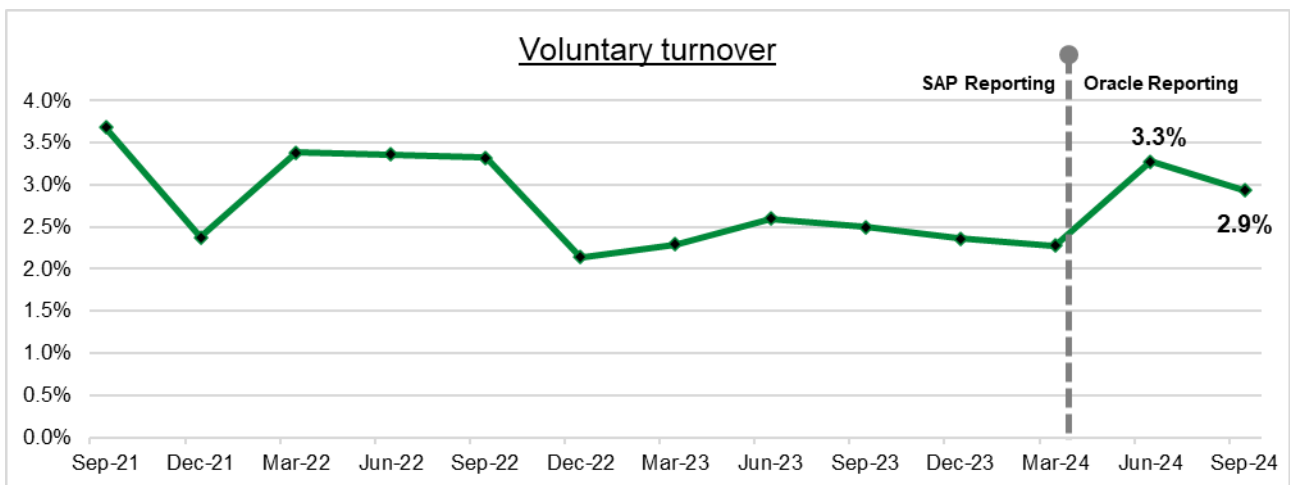
The HR&OD directorate has seen largest volume of turnover of any Directorate within the council since the start of April 2024, rising to 6.0% in the quarter ending in Jun-24 and 6.7% for the quarter ending in Sep-24. This is primarily due to many staff retiring following the implementation of Oracle. The next largest volume of quarterly turnover is experienced by the Transformation and Business change directorate, reaching 5.5% in the quarter ending in Jun-24. In contrast, the Planning directorate has experienced the lowest volume of turnover since the start of April 2024 at just 2.89% across both quarters combined (compared to a council average of 6.2% across both quarters).

There are data quality issues in Oracle with some leaver reasons not yet recorded, however, work is underway to address this.

Top leaver reason (Year to Sep-24)

Reason	Value
Resignation No Reason Given	130
Resignation Alt. Emp. Not LA	91
Retirement	88
Resignation reason not on system	68
Resignation Family Commit/Dom/Pers	62
Resignation to Other LA	41
Resignation Moving Area	29
Termination reason not on system	24
Resignation Relocation	17
Personal Reasons	8

HR Advisory

The table below shows the number of active cases at the end of the quarter per case type, for the last four quarters,

Case type	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24
Absence/Attendance	109	118	52	45
Improving Work Performance	4	7	12	21
Disciplinary	19	29	23	39
Grievance	10	12	8	3

There is a significant decrease in active cases relating to absence/attendance between March 2024 and June 2024, this is due to a data cleansing exercise that the team undertook to ensure that inactive cases were formally closed on the data management system in preparation for the commencement of the new data management system.

The HR Advisory team have commenced a data and insight journey with the aims that they are able to report on a breadth of measures in the future. The insight and evidence that is extracted will support in informing initiatives within the team with an aim to ensuring our process and procedures remain effective and efficient or identify where there are opportunities for improvement. This will support with targeted intervention either on a Council wide or service specific basis.

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Tamsin Kielb

Director HROD