Wiltshire Council

Staffing Policy Committee

Biannual workforce report (to September 2023)

Observations and Exceptions

Key challenges to note:

- The dynamic nature of the current job market poses a challenge, requiring strategic foresight and adaptability.
- The current volatility in central government leadership and policy formulation introduces an element of uncertainty.
- The escalating cost of living, coupled with energy crises, presents a multifaceted challenge affecting both our staff and the broader community.

In response to these challenges, the council has developed and published a new workforce strategy, launched succession planning and talent management, have just gone live with a new modern career website which is linked to Oracle, and are developing career graded roles and career progression frameworks for 2024 (amongst other things). The cost of living working group reviewed and refreshed the Councils Flourish intranet site which houses a variety of resources to support staff across the wellbeing spectrum.

1. SICKNESS ABSENCE

Quarter-ending Sep-23

Sickness absence is reported by calculating Sickness days per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees (days/FTE).
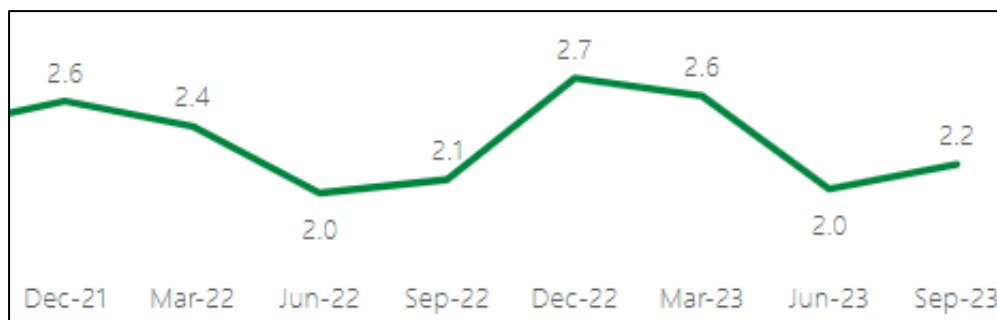
Q2 reports 2.2 days/FTE, which is a minimal increase (+0.1 days/FTE) when compared to Q2 in the previous year.

Economy and regeneration directorate reported the highest sickness at 4.5 days/FTE in Q2 which was largely attributed to stress related sickness (69.2%). This is a small team with a total FTE of 31.5, therefore, the data has been skewed by some longer-term absences and one miss reported absence where the return date did not record on the system, which has

now been corrected. Nothing noted as a concern, but this will continue to be monitored by HR&OD and the service, however, those staff who have had periods of long-term sickness have now returned to work

Stress related absence (work and non-work related) continues to be the biggest contributor to council wide sickness absence, affecting around 1 in every 3 days lost to sickness in Q2 (35.4%). The Council has a number of resources available to support staff and managers including occupational health support.

12-months to Sept-23

12mths to Sept 23 reports 9.5 days/FTE. This is an increase of +0.5 days/FTE days when compared to 12mths to Sept 22, driven by return to norm levels of stress related illnesses which had reported a slight reduction in the previous year.
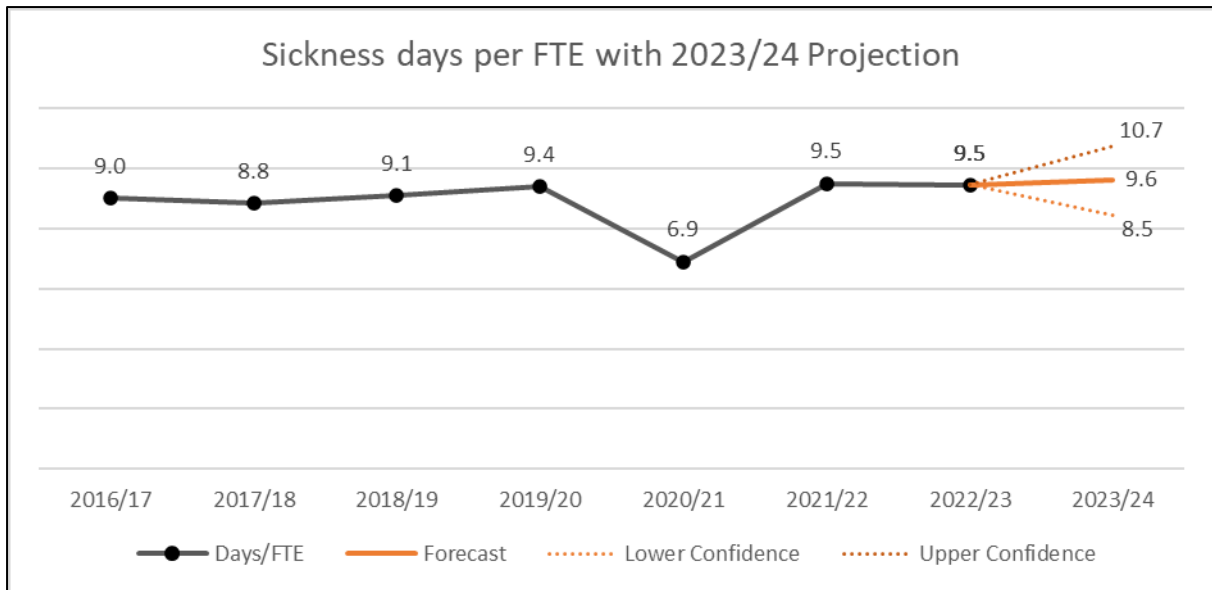
All Sickness
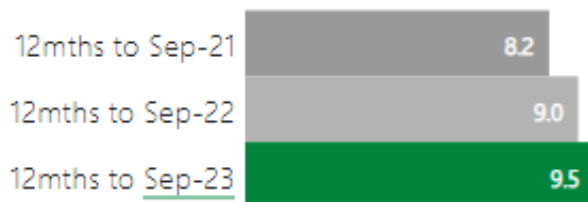
Within the recent 12 months, 33.6% of sickness days lost are attributed to stress related illnesses. This is the largest proportion of categorised illnesses and equates to 3.2 sickness days/FTE across the workforce (up from 2.8 days in the previous 12 months).

Alongside the Occupational health service, the Council has introduced mental health advocates of which we have 34 trained and a further 4 being trained. A number of these are very active with newsletters, and activities to support staff, with some leading to formal referrals to the OH services. The Council has resources available on HR Direct to support staff and managers with wellbeing. As Oracle embeds within the Council, further work will be undertaken to review the trends and identify any further steps the council needs to take.

Sickness absence - Fiscal Year Projection

Sickness absence has remained consistent in the 2022/23 fiscal year, with an average of 9.5 days per full-time equivalent (FTE). This stability aligns with historical patterns, except for the 2020/21 fiscal year, which was notably affected by governmental and corporate restrictions on social contact as result of Covid.

Sickness days per FTE with 2023/24 Projection

9.0	8.8	9.1	9.4	6.9	9.5	9.5	10.7 / 9.6 / 8.5
2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24

Legend: Days/FTE — Forecast — Lower Confidence — Upper Confidence

2023/24 projects between 8.5 and 10.7 days, based on forecast of Q3 and Q4 from 2 years historical data points at 95% confidence.

2. Employee Turnover

In the current national job market, there has been a trend toward a candidate-driven environment where job opportunities are abundant (although recent anecdotal data seems to suggest this is tailing off), and top-tier candidates are relatively scarce. The impact of COVID-19 and the shift to remote work has rapidly advanced technology, making remote and hybrid work options commonplace. This has broadened the job market, allowing candidates to apply for positions beyond their usual commuting range. Wiltshire Council has observed a positive effect, with an increase of approximately 2 applicants per job advertisement between January and March 2023 compared to the same period in 2022 which in part can be attributed to the Councils recruitment and social media strategy having greater reach and penetration, promoting our opportunities.

Increased job opportunities which can be worked flexibly, coupled with the ongoing cost of living crisis, may lead some staff to pursue better financial benefits, particularly when they have increased bargaining power in a candidate-driven market. While concrete evidence is challenging to provide due to low completion rates of exit questionnaires at Wiltshire Council, the organization has seen a rise in turnover rates over the past two financial years. With the introduction of a leaver journey within Oracle in April 2024 we anticipate a higher rate of exit interview completion which will enable better analysis of reasons for leaving and perception of the Council which can feed into engagement actions. The Council will continue to review the factors contributing to employee turnover.

Historically voluntary turnover at Wiltshire Council has been relatively stable, fluctuating closely around 10%. 2021/22 reported a reduction likely due to the pandemics impact on recruitment and unease within the job market.

Voluntary Turnover % with 2023/24 projection
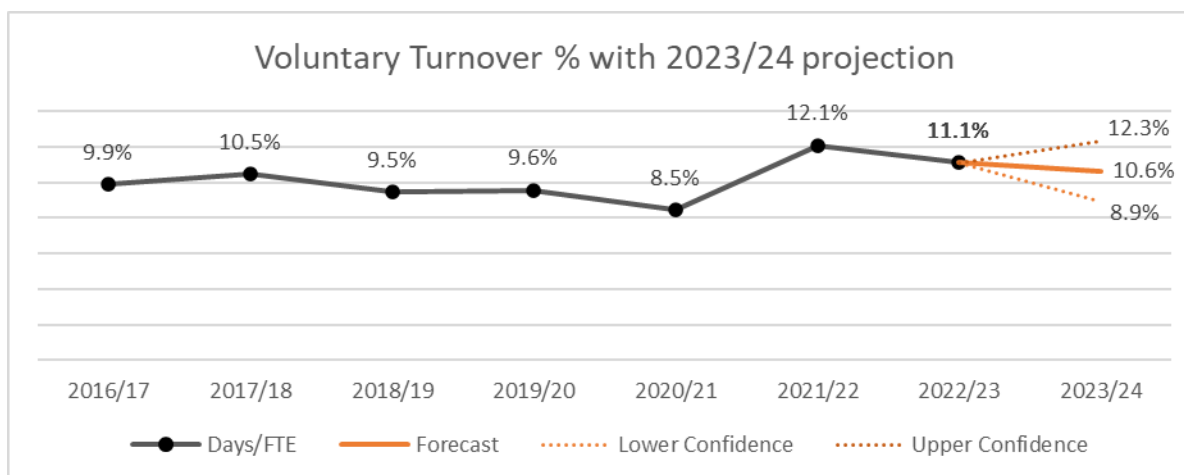
Since the pandemic voluntary turnover has increased. This may be in part due to the more buoyant recruitment market and it is possible that employees delayed leaving during the pandemic until job markets returned to usual practice. 2022/23 continues to report some increase in activity from pre-covid days, albeit closer to the pre-covid norm.

The 2023/24 forecast anticipates a range between 8.9% and 12.3%, with 95% confidence. Upon examining discrete quarterly data points (see Fig 2.4), the latest four quarters suggest a newfound stability. Considering the impact of the pandemic, it is probable that the previous increase was a result of exceptional circumstances. Therefore, the current stability may signal a return to the norm, implying a valid expectation for the 2023/24 rate to be closer to the lower forecasted bound than the upper.

While external evidence indicates that the labour market remains candidate-driven, recent reports from sources such as People Management and Sky News, citing a study by the Recruitment and Employment Confederations (REC) and KPMG, suggest an increase in the overall supply of candidates for the first time in over two years. This shift may signal a move away from the tight labour market conditions. The rise in candidate supply could contribute to the observed reduction in voluntary turnover, particularly as the most significant decreases were in individuals leaving for the private sector (-40%) and without a specified reason (-34%). This shift presents a positive outlook for recruitment and retention efforts at Wiltshire Council, although it remains an area of continued focus.

In the second quarter (Q2), the overall voluntary turnover stands at 2.5%. Within the directorates, Leisure, Culture, and Communities have reported the highest voluntary turnover per FTE at 4.9%, which is notably 2.4 percentage points above the organisational average. This increase is attributed to a significant number of leavers in Leisure Operations, a pattern consistent with the standard turnover for this service over the past two years.

Whilst "Resignation to alternative employer, not local authority' is the most frequent reason for leaving (33.3%), there is no evidence of an increasing trend when reviewing reasons for departure over the previous 3-years.

3. Finance and salary costs

Q2 reports a workforce headcount of 5,276, an increase of 131 (+2.5%) when compared to Q1. This has been the 6th consecutive quarter to report an increase, with an accumulated increase of 422 (+8.7%) from Mar-22. (Fig 2.1a) For additional context, FTE count for Q2 is 4033.6; whilst this follows a similar trend to headcount (Fig 2.1b), the increase is steeper with growth of 9.8% reported (+358.5 FTE). This is in line with the Councils budgeted establishment that reflects an FTE headcount of 4,429.   Recent work as part of the Oracle implementation to improve establishment management confirmed this position (as at October 2023) and the

Q2 headcount is within the establishment level. Further work as part of Oracle to improve establishment management reporting and insight is ongoing.

The recent 12mths to Sep-23 reports year on year increase of 392 staff members (+7.4%) driven primarily by growth in Aging & Living Well and Highways & Transport.

Aging and Living Well has seen an increase in headcount due to successful recruitment campaigns driven by grant incentive payments. There was a 50% vacancy rate and therefore this increase is due to budgeted roles being filled.

There has been a significant increase in Highways and Transport due to an increase the passenger transport team. Silverwood school required an additional 60 passenger transport assistants, and following a successful recruitment campaign, most roles have been filled.

Other services where there has been an increase in headcount are:

- Reablement and Wiltshire Support at Home - successful recruitment campaigns driven by grant incentive payment have supported in vacant positions, already budgeted in the establishment, being filled.
- Social Workers and Occupational Therapists within Adult Social Care – successful implementation of market supplements have filled vacant positions within budgeted establishment.
- Leisure Operations – insource of some Places Leisure staff, this will increase as more staff are transferred over to Wiltshire Council contracts and Places leisure staff fill existing Wiltshire Council leisure vacancies
- Education and Skills – additional grant funding for fixed term contract project specific roles.

Permanent salary costs report at £34.2m for the most recent quarter and have been on an upward trajectory since Sep-19. This aligns closely with FTE growth (see Fig. 2.6), indicating that the rise in salary costs is predominantly attributed to the growth in FTE's. The noticeable spike in the chart is a result of the backdated pay award granted to employees in Nov-22.

As can be seen from the long-term graphs at the end of this report (Fig 2.7), whilst agency costs and use are still significantly lower than prior to the pandemic, it has been on an increasing trend which strengthened into Q1 and continued into Q2. These costs continue to be predominantly from the social care directorates and is primarily due to the current job market, however as sources suggest, the outlook is slightly more positive for the job market and its impact on recruitment, which may result in our need and reliance on agency staff to reduce. The HR business partners, alongside the Talent Acquisition Consultant for the area, are working with the services to explore possible recruitment and retention strategies, and we review our agency workers monthly.
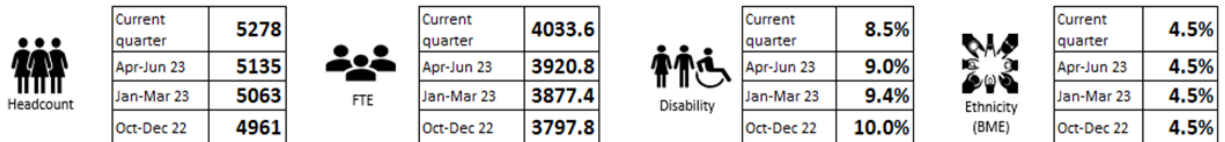
4. **Advisory Cases**

Q2 reports the highest number of disciplinary cases within the previous 4-years at 5.3 cases per 1,000 FTE (Fig 2.8), totalling 14 cases within the quarter.

This is not driven by any single directorate, it is a scattered accumulation across the organisation with no noticeable trends/themes. This will be something to monitor in the next quarter to ascertain whether there are any underlying trends or reasons.
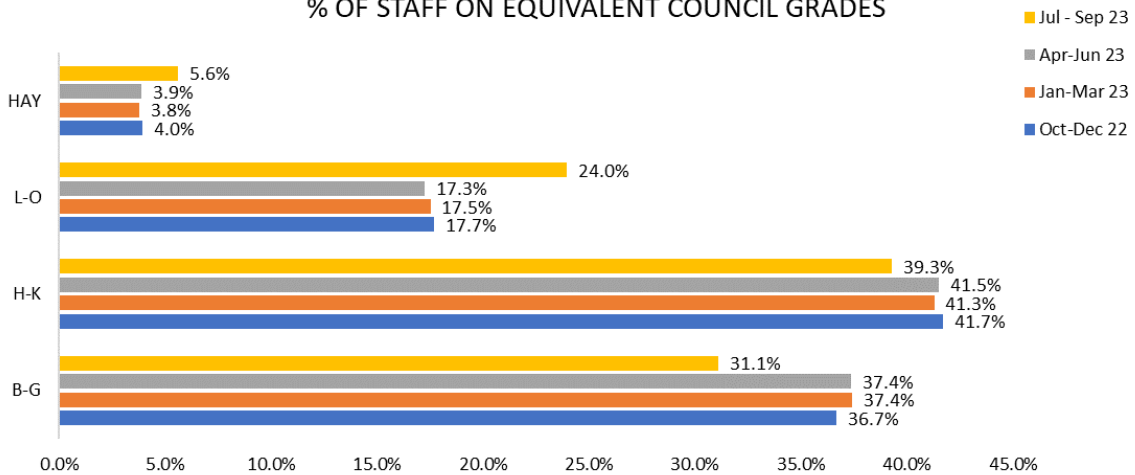
1.QUARTERLY WORKFORCE MEASURES
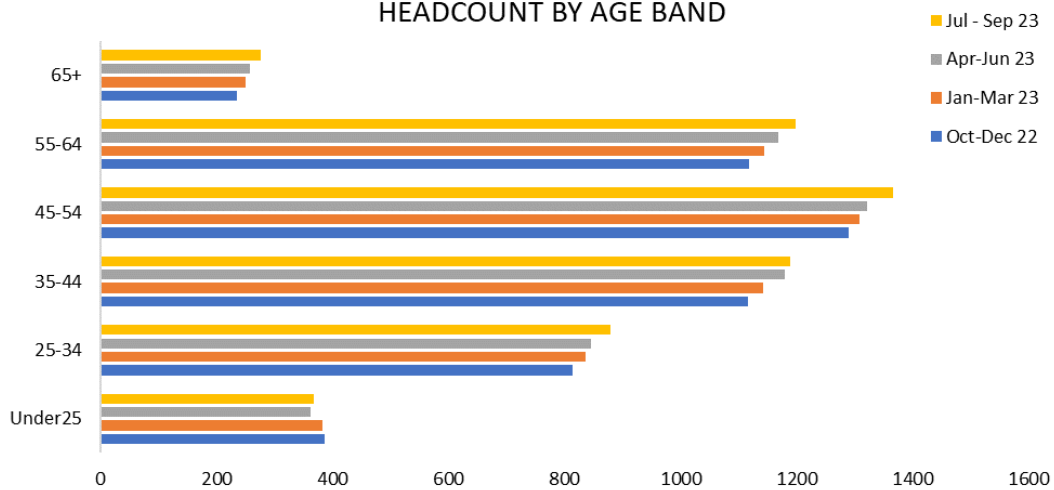
Quarter End September 2023
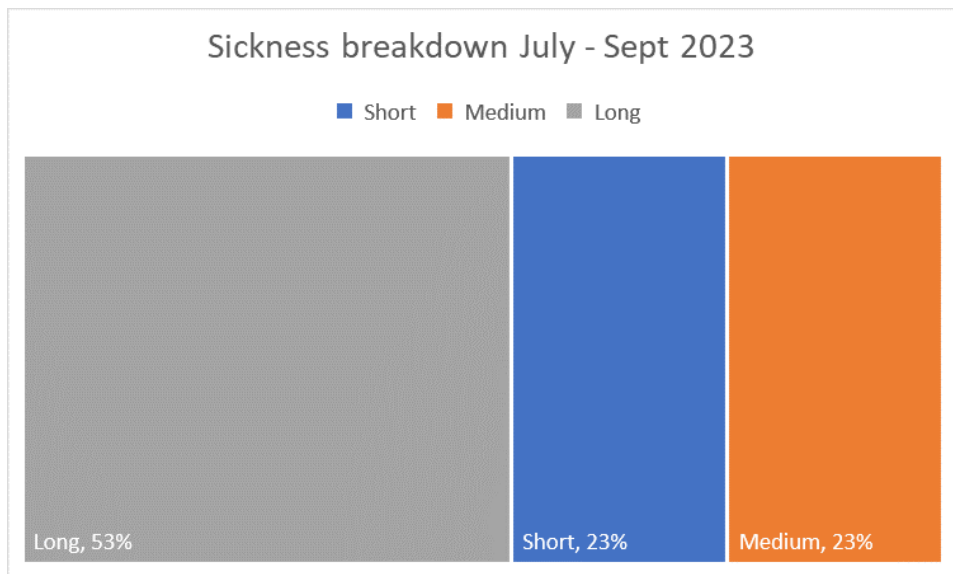
WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

Headcount	
Current quarter	5278
Apr-Jun 23	5135
Jan-Mar 23	5063
Oct-Dec 22	4961

FTE	
Current quarter	4033.6
Apr-Jun 23	3920.8
Jan-Mar 23	3877.4
Oct-Dec 22	3797.8

Disability	
Current quarter	8.5%
Apr-Jun 23	9.0%
Jan-Mar 23	9.4%
Oct-Dec 22	10.0%

Ethnicity (BME)	
Current quarter	4.5%
Apr-Jun 23	4.5%
Jan-Mar 23	4.5%
Oct-Dec 22	4.5%

% OF STAFF ON EQUIVALENT COUNCIL GRADES

Legend: Jul - Sep 23, Apr-Jun 23, Jan-Mar 23, Oct-Dec 22

HAY
- Jul - Sep 23: 5.6%
- Apr-Jun 23: 3.9%
- Jan-Mar 23: 3.8%
- Oct-Dec 22: 4.0%

L-O
- Jul - Sep 23: 24.0%
- Apr-Jun 23: 17.3%
- Jan-Mar 23: 17.5%
- Oct-Dec 22: 17.7%

H-K
- Jul - Sep 23: 39.3%
- Apr-Jun 23: 41.5%
- Jan-Mar 23: 41.3%
- Oct-Dec 22: 41.7%

B-G
- Jul - Sep 23: 31.1%
- Apr-Jun 23: 37.4%
- Jan-Mar 23: 37.4%
- Oct-Dec 22: 36.7%

HEADCOUNT BY AGE BAND

Legend: Jul - Sep 23, Apr-Jun 23, Jan-Mar 23, Oct-Dec 22

Age bands: 65+, 55-64, 45-54, 35-44, 25-34, Under25

SICKNESS ABSENCE

TOP 5 SICKNESS ABSENCE REASONS BY FTE DAYS LOST

Legend: Oct-Dec 22, Jan-Mar 23, Apr-Jun 23, Jul-Sep 23

Categories: Stress/Depression/Mental Health/Fatigue, Cold/flu and other infections, Other muscular/skeletal, COVID-19, Stomach

Sickness breakdown July - Sept 2023

Legend: Short, Medium, Long

Long, 53%   Short, 23%   Medium, 23%

TURNOVER

Leavers under 25 years old		
Current quarter		12
Apr-Jun 23		16
Jan-Mar 23		13
Oct-Dec 22		8

Leavers with less than 1 years' service		
Current quarter		34
Apr-Jun 23		30
Jan-Mar 23		21
Oct-Dec 22		26

TOP 3 VOLUNTARY LEAVER REASONS

EMPLOYEE COSTS

PERMANENT EMPLOYEE SALARY COSTS

SICKNESS ABSENCE COSTS

CASUAL EMPLOYEE SALARY COSTS
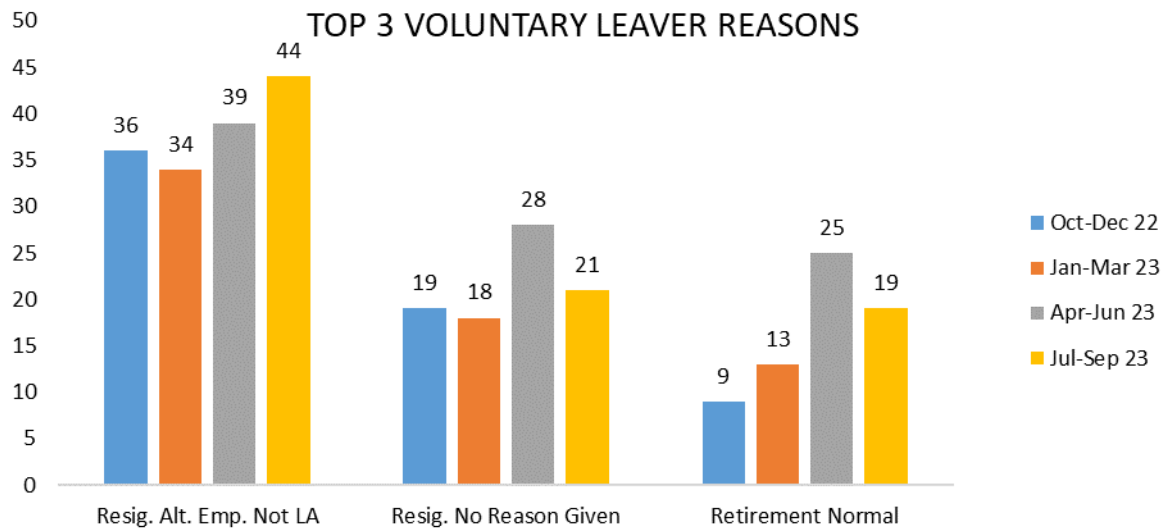
AGENCY COSTS
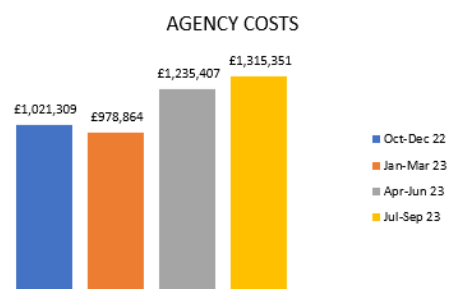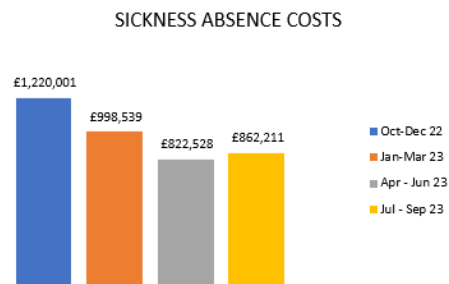
ADVISORY CASES

Disciplinary

Quarter	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Jul-Sept 23	28	14
Apr-June 23	14	-4
Jan-Mar 23	18	5
Oct-Dec 22	13	-5

Absence & Health

Quarter	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Jul-Sept 23	146	5
Apr-June 23	141	-26
Jan-Mar 23	167	16
Oct-Dec 22	151	43

Grievance

Quarter	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Jul-Sept 23	7	1
Apr-June 23	6	-6
Jan-Mar 23	12	6
Oct-Dec 22	6	1

Performance

Quarter	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Jul-Sept 23	4	-1
Apr-June 23	5	-3
Jan-Mar 23	8	6
Oct-Dec 22	2	-1

Fig 2.1a – Headcount Trend

Headcount; by quarter end over 4-years

Fig 2.1b FTE Trend

FTE; by quarter end over 4-years
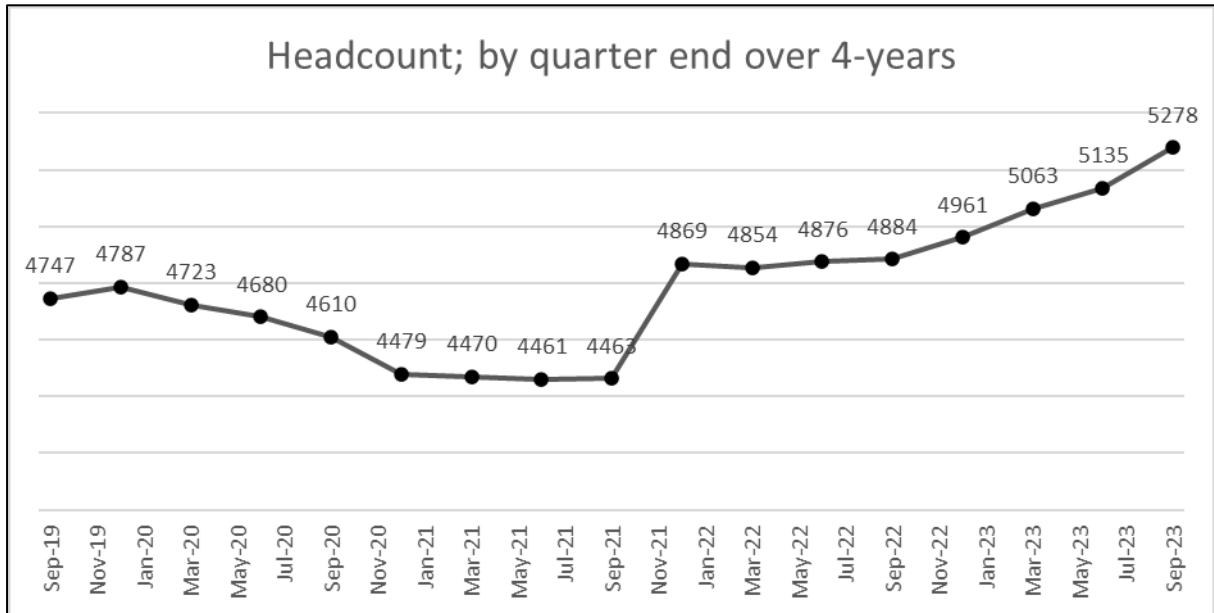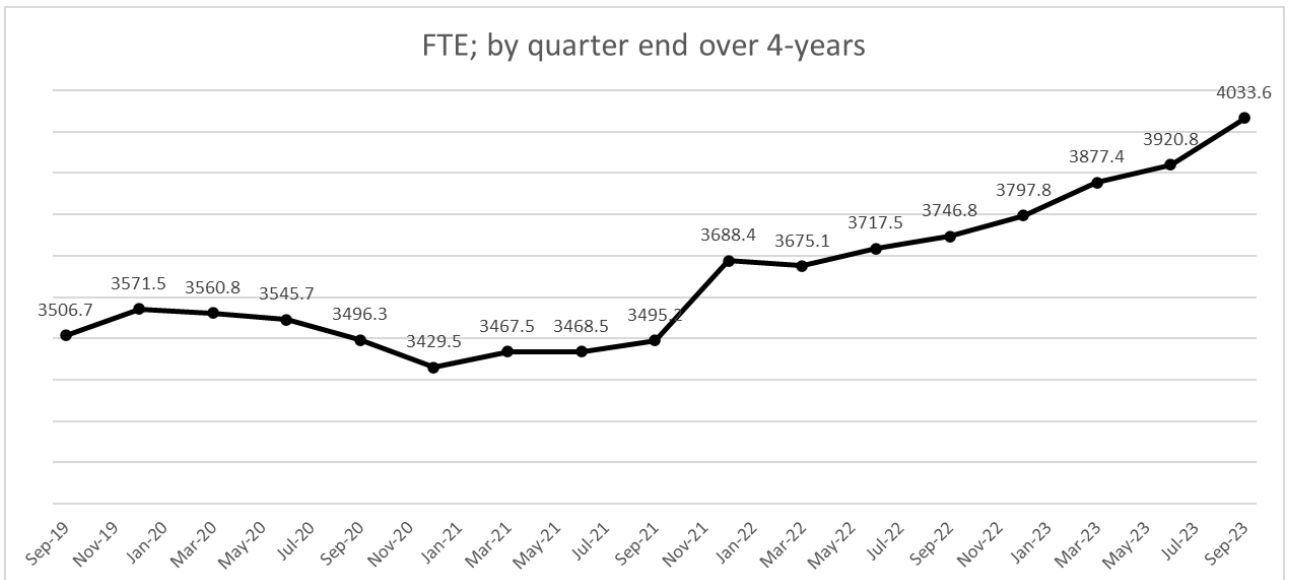
Fig 2.2 - % of FTE workforce in management roles

% of managers (FTE); by quarter end over 4-years
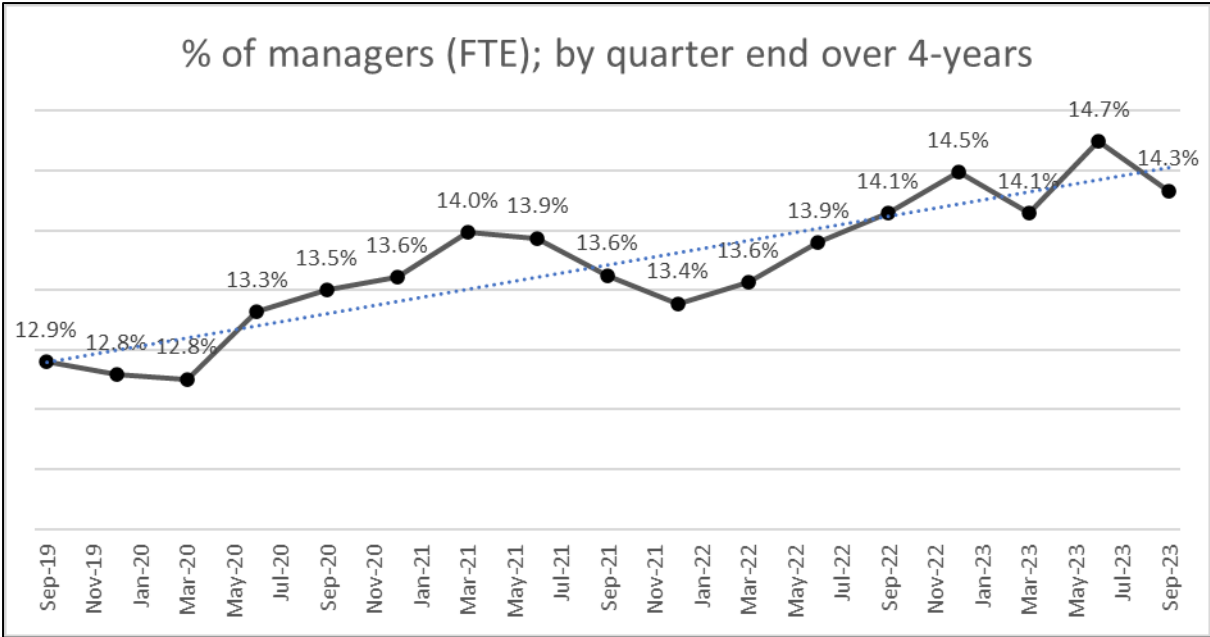
Fig 2.3 – Sickness days lost pet FTE – 4-years

Days lost per FTE; previous 4yrs
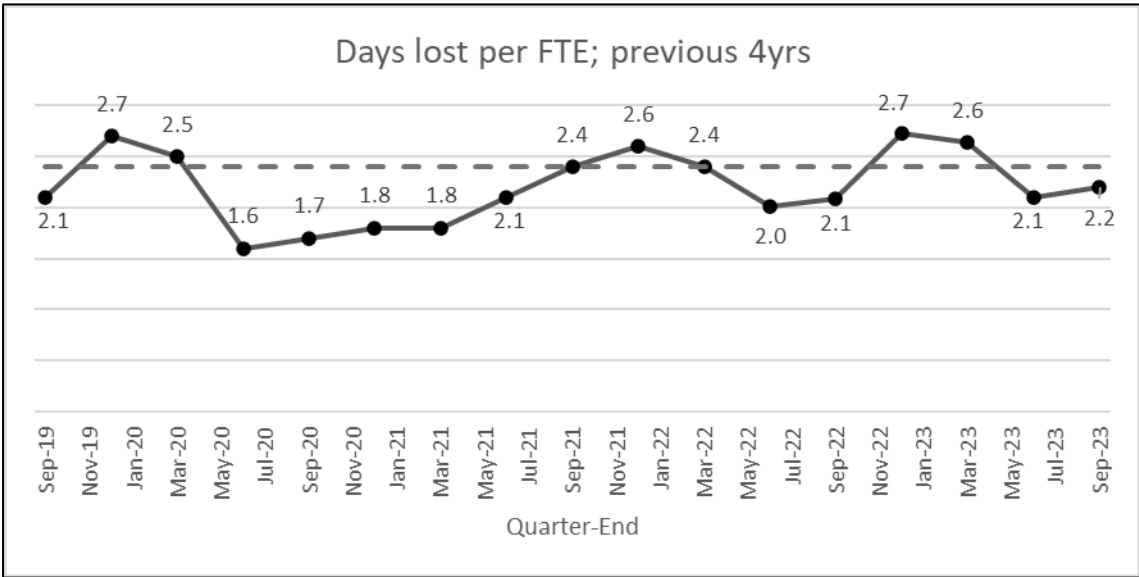
Fig 2.4 Voluntary Turnover – 4yrs

Voluntary Turnover % over the last 4 years

- Voluntary Turnover %
- - - Average voluntary turnover % in the Jan-March quarter
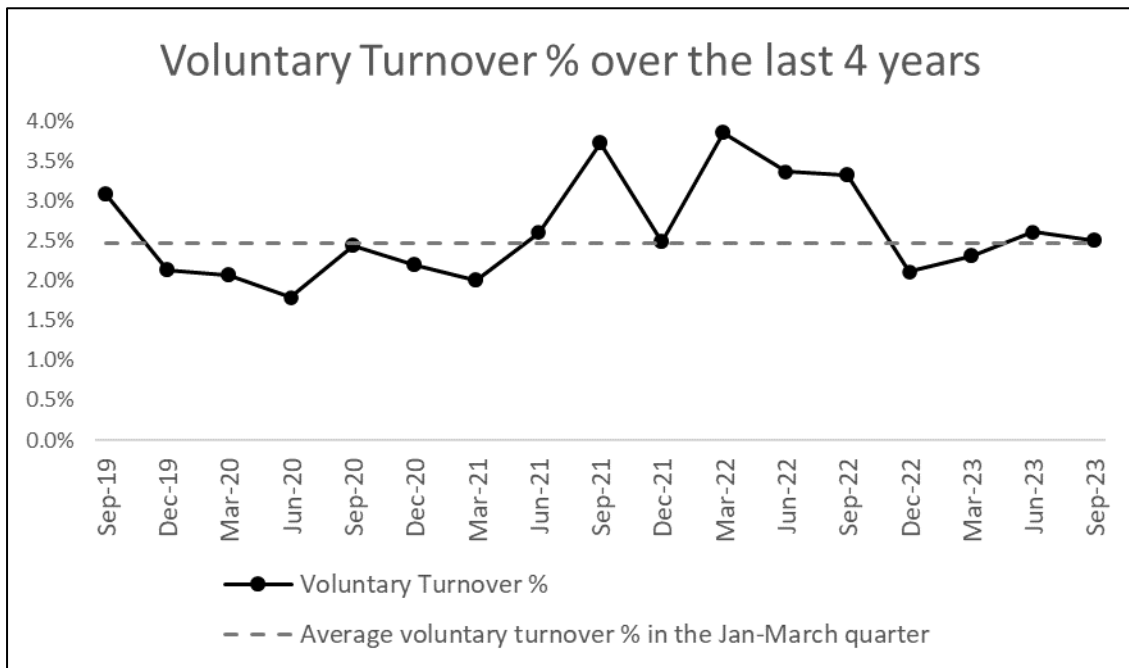
Fig 2.5 Perm staffing costs: 4yrs

Permanent Staffing Costs; by quarter end over 4-years

£27,223,548
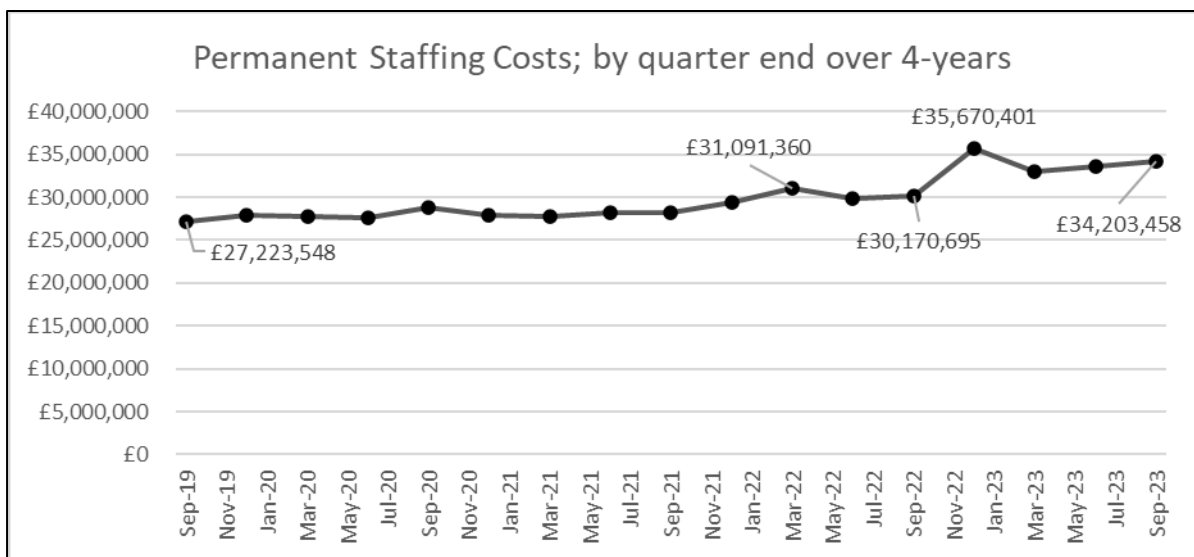£31,091,360
£35,670,401
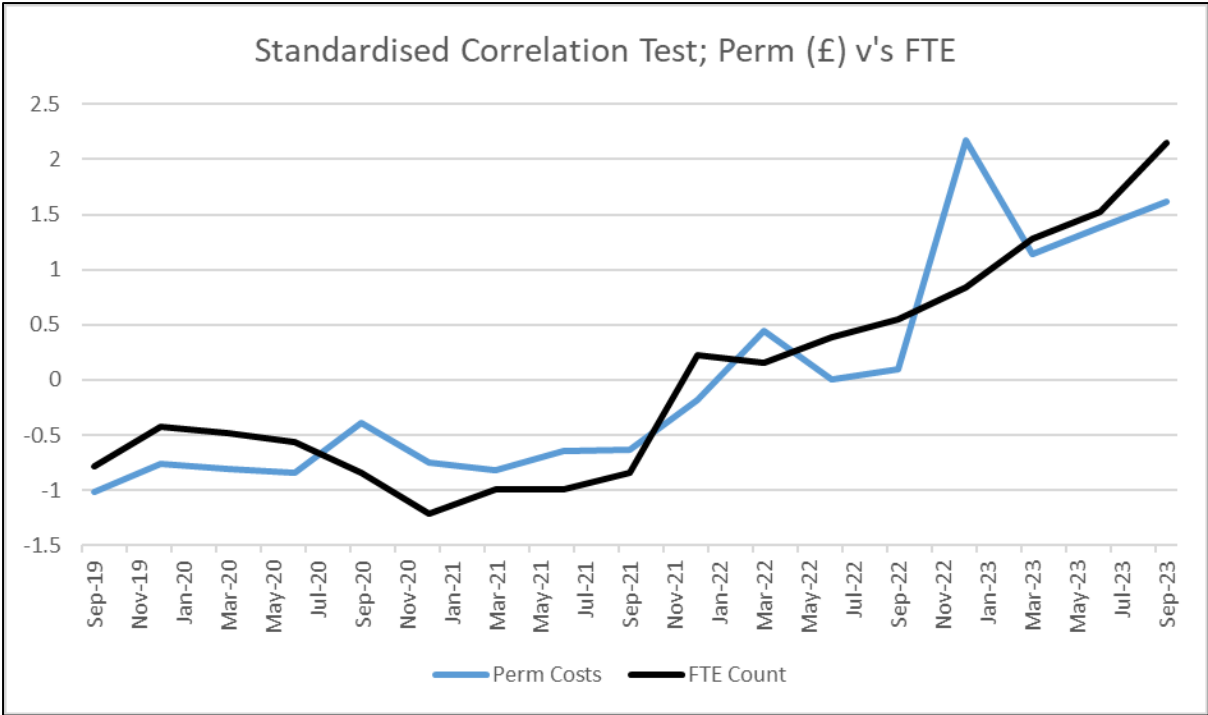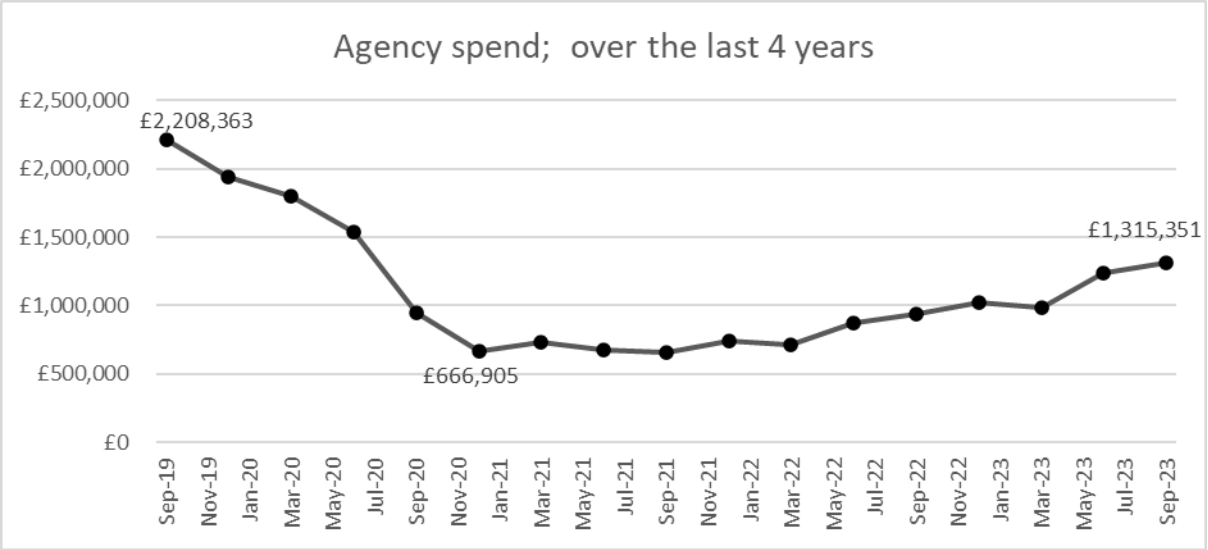£30,170,695
£34,203,458

Fig 2.6 Perm cost v's FTE

Fig 2.7 Agency Costs

Fig 2.8 Disciplinary & Grievance per 1000 employees – 4-yrs

Disciplinary and Grievance cases per 1000 employees over last 4 years

— Grievance cases per 1000   — Disciplinary cases per 1000