

## Quarterly Workforce Report

March 2023



### Observations and Exceptions

Previous reports had focussed primarily on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our workforce and service delivery. However with restrictions having been removed for some time, there are other topical challenges facing Wiltshire Council and our workforce that have surfaced. The current job market, central government leadership and policy instability, the cost of living and energy crises could all have an impact on Wiltshire Council and our staff. A cost of living working group was established to monitor and measure the impact and explore what support we can provide our staff (as appropriate).

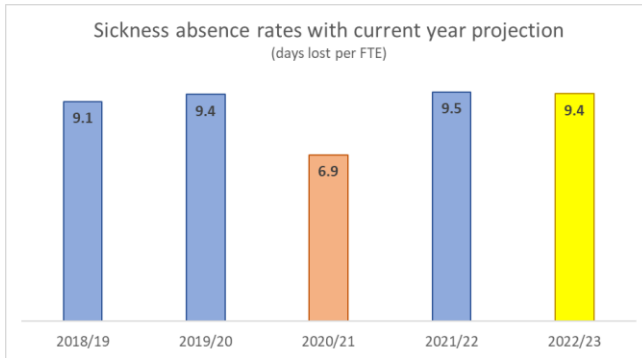
### **SICKNESS ABSENCE**

As mentioned in the previous report, Public Health experts had predicted a significant increase in flu and COVID variants this winter<sup>1</sup>. We can see from the days lost per FTE graph in the long term trends section at the end of this report that both the October – December (Q3) and January – March (Q4) quarters were higher than what we would normally expect in these quarters. Absences relating to cold/flu have seen a significant increase (+287% compared to the July-September 2022 quarter). An increase is expected in these quarters due to the seasonal influences on sickness absence, i.e. more colds/flu during the colder months, however this was a more significant increase than we would normally see based on seasonal influences. The previous two years, excluding the year influenced by COVID and related restrictions on social contact, saw on average an increase of 114%; less than half the increase we saw this quarter (287%). Absences relating to cold/flu in July-September 2022 were slightly lower (around 20% lower) than what we would normally see in this quarter, however this doesn't explain how significantly this increased in Q3 and Q4. When breaking down the reasons further, all absences under the cold/flu umbrella saw an increase, most significant in days lost were cough/cold and infection/virus, however the most significant increase proportionately was flu (+344% compared to the July-September 2022 quarter). This supports the prediction by the Public Health experts. However, unlike flu, absences relating to COVID did not see the increase predicted by the experts, we actually saw a reduction (-39%). This may be due to people not reporting it or falsely assuming it was a cold or other virus, especially given the testing is no longer free for most, and may explain some of the increase cold/flu absences.

However, although we have seen a significant, and higher than normal increase in cold/flu, this doesn't appear to have influenced the overall absence rate over the whole financial year to that extent; as can

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<sup>1</sup> This is due to a lower than usual natural immunity, due to previous COVID restrictions protecting people from flu, and due to a particularly bad winter flu season in the southern hemisphere, particularly in Australia, which experts normally use to predict what may happen in the northern hemisphere ([Why Experts Are Predicting a Bad 2022-2023 Flu Season \(prevention.com\)](#), [Lower than usual natural immunity has experts predicting flu and COVID-19 cases to climb this winter - News \(devon.gov.uk\)](#))

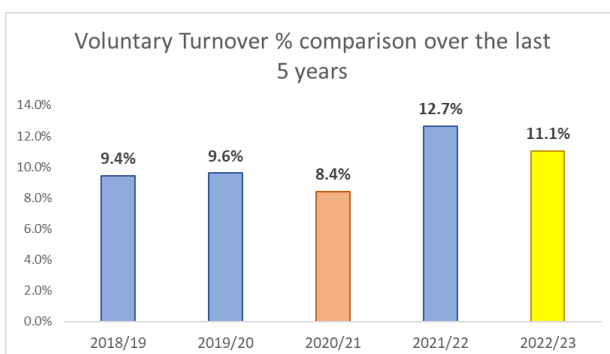


be seen from the graph below. The 2023/23 sickness absence rate (highlighted in yellow) is in line with pre-COVID trends and what we would 'normally' expect. The 2020/21 year highlighted in orange is the financial year influenced significantly by COVID and the government and corporate restrictions on social contact.

Stress related absence continues to be the biggest contributor to sickness absence, affecting around 1 in every 4 days lost to sickness. During COVID, Wiltshire Council experienced an increase in depression/anxiety, which has since been in decline. 'Other mental health' experienced the biggest increase this quarter (35%), however this reason does not provide much detail or information. Work related stress has also experienced an increase over the last two quarters (~20%). This increase has primarily been from Adults Social Care who has experienced a 106% increase compared to the July-September 2022 quarter, predominantly in the Emergency Duty Service and Mental Health Team West and were due to 3 long term absences across both teams.

### **Employee Turnover**

Nationally the country is in a candidate-driven job market. In this type of market, jobs are abundant, and top-tier candidates are often scarce and as a result employers have to compete for top talent, making attracting and recruiting the right talent increasingly challenging. COVID and the enforced requirement to work from home has caused technology in this field to improve drastically and quickly, this has meant that remote working and hybrid working is now a standard offering for most companies. This has opened the job market up significantly, with candidates now able to apply for jobs and companies further away than they would normally be comfortable commuting. This is positive for Wiltshire Council as it opens up the potential applicant pool for our vacancies, and we have seen some evidence of this with on average around 2 applicants more per advert between January – March 2023 compared to January – March 2022. However, conversely, the fact that there are more opportunities available, alongside the cost of living crisis, may be causing staff to leave to seek improved financial benefits, especially if they have more bargaining power in the current candidate driven job market. It's difficult to provide any concrete evidence of this at Wiltshire Council as exit questionnaire completion is still low in comparison to all leavers, however Wiltshire Council



have experienced increasing turnover rates over the last two financial years. Historically voluntary turnover at Wiltshire Council has been fairly static, fluctuating closely around 10%. However both the 2021/22 and the 2022/23 financial year are both significantly above this at around 12%, see the graph on the left. In the previous report I had projected, based on the first two quarters of the financial year, another increase in 2022/23 compared to

2021/22. However voluntary turnover rates in the last two quarters (Q3 and Q4) slowed compared to the first two quarters and the rate, although higher than normal, was lower than projected. The yellow bar is the current 2022/23 financial year and the orange bar has been slightly influenced by COVID when there were concerns around job security, a theme that was consistently highlighted in the

Wellbeing and Engagement Survey's at the time. This was also a national problem with furlough policies and the impact on the economy affecting recruitment.

Although external evidence suggests that we are still in a candidate driven labour market, sources such as [People Management](#) and [Sky News](#) state that a report from the Recruitment and Employment Confederations (REC) and KPMG shows that the overall supply of candidates has increased for the first time in more than two years and suggests we may be coming out of this tight labour market. Therefore more candidates and therefore more competition for roles, may somewhat explain this reduction in voluntary turnover, especially given the biggest reductions were in people leaving for the private sector (-40%) and for no reason (-34%). This presents a positive outlook for recruitment and retention at Wiltshire Council, however, this remains an area of focus.

In Q4 Wiltshire Pension Fund (5.3%), Assets (3.4%) and Highways & Transport (3.0%) had the highest voluntary turnover rates. Although only Assets appears to be on an increasing trend. This doesn't appear to be from any particular service, team or role within Assets. Three left for another local authority, all from different teams. None of these completed an exit questionnaire so we have no additional information or insight.

Leaving for another local authority appears to be an increasing trend in the latter two quarters of the 2022/23 financial year. Employees leaving for another local authority in the latest quarter (Jan-March 23) has increased by around 110% compared to the average over the preceding 11 quarters (since the start of the 2020/21 financial year), making this increase significant and something to investigate. The directorates with the highest number of employees leaving for another authority are Leisure and Adult Social Care. This doesn't appear to be from any particular team or role however this is something to monitor in the coming quarters, especially in statutory services and those that have known recruitment issues.

### **Finance and salary costs**

The financial health of the organisation remains a topic high on the agenda, especially with the new prime minister proposing to reintroduce austerity measures. Since the spike in headcount due to the TUPE transfer of Places Leisure in October 2021, the council headcount has been on a slight increasing trend. This has somewhat been reflected in the permanent staffing costs trend, however the biggest influence on the staffing costs is the pay award. In November 2022 employees received a pay award of £1,925 on all pay points for eligible NJC and HAY staff, which was backdated to April 2022. This explains the spike in the October – December 22 quarter and the subsequent reduction in the January – March 23 quarter (contrary to the increase in headcount) in the permanent staffing costs graph in the long term trends section at the end of this report. Backdating this pay award to April 2022 inflated the October – December 2022 cost as staff received the additional pay for 8 months, whilst the reduction in the January – March 23 quarter has returned to what will be the new normal cost.

Agency costs are something to continue to monitor. Although, as can be seen from the long term graphs at the end of this report, agency costs and use are still significantly lower than in the past, it has been on an increasing trend which continued into the October – December 2022 quarter, however has reduced slightly in the latest January – March 23 quarter. 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.

### WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS



Current quarter	<b>5063</b>
Oct-Dec 22	<b>4961</b>
July-Sept 22	<b>4884</b>
Apr-June 22	<b>4876</b>



FTE

Current quarter	<b>3877.4</b>
Oct-Dec 22	<b>3797.8</b>
July-Sept 22	<b>3746.8</b>
Apr-June 22	<b>3717.5</b>



Disability

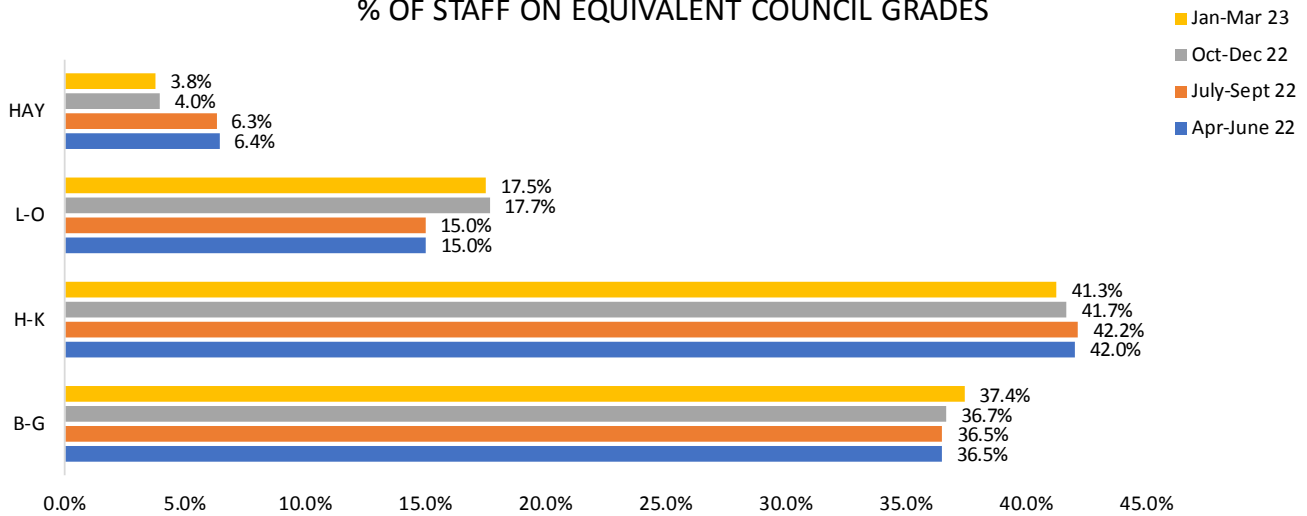
Current quarter	<b>10.4%</b>
Oct-Dec 22	<b>10.0%</b>
July-Sept 22	<b>8.0%</b>
Apr-June 22	<b>8.4%</b>



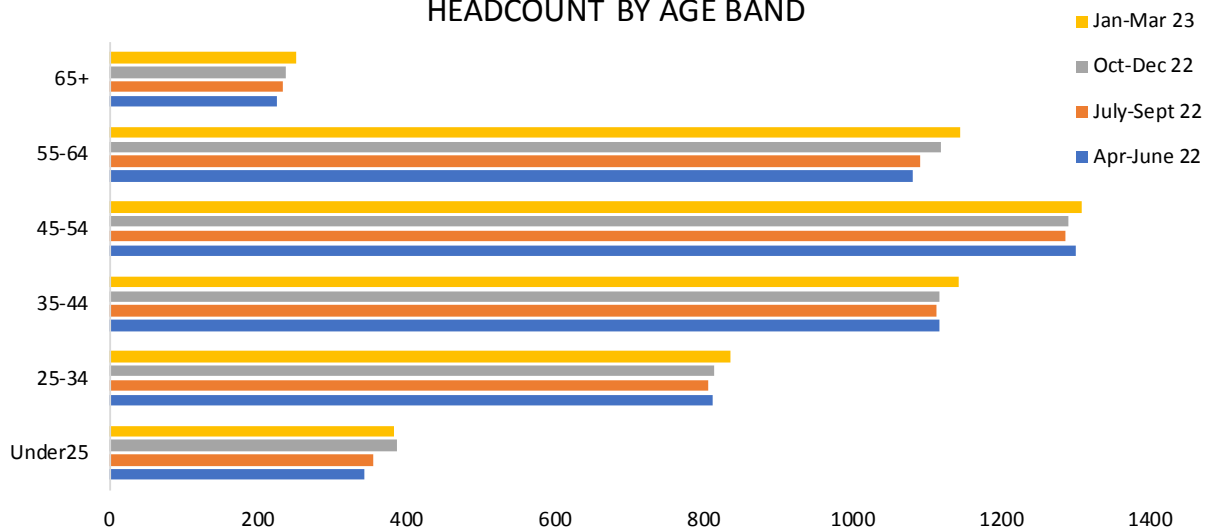
Ethnicity (BME)

Current quarter	<b>4.5%</b>
Oct-Dec 22	<b>4.5%</b>
July-Sept 22	<b>4.3%</b>
Apr-June 22	<b>3.9%</b>

### % OF STAFF ON EQUIVALENT COUNCIL GRADES



### HEADCOUNT BY AGE BAND



# SICKNESS ABSENCE

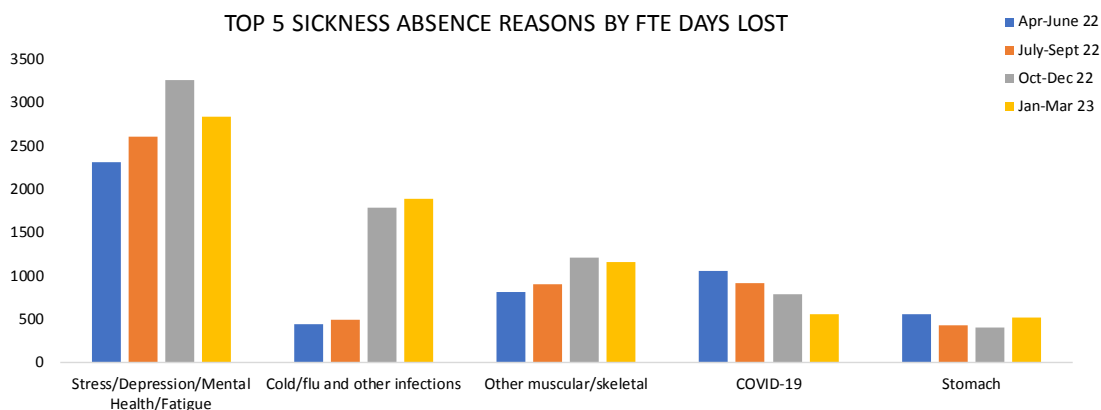
Working days lost per FTE for directorate

Jan-Mar 23

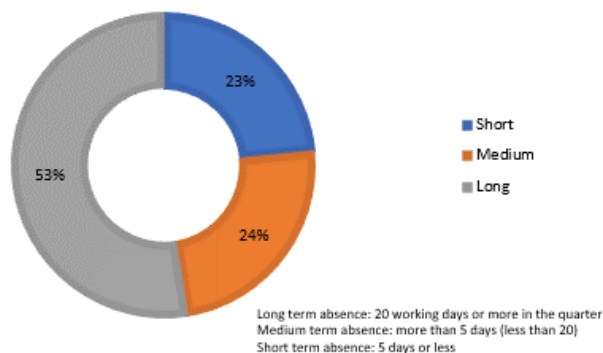
**2.6**

↓ a decrease from last quarter (2.7)

TOP 5 SICKNESS ABSENCE REASONS BY FTE DAYS LOST



SICKNESS ABSENCE BREAKDOWN JAN - MARCH 2023



# TURNOVER

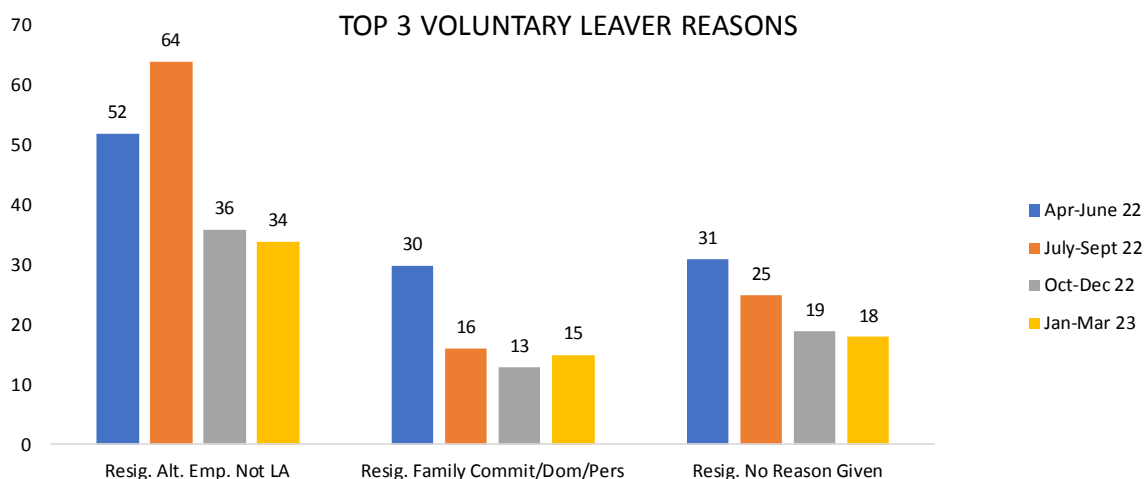
Leavers under 25 years old

Current quarter	<b>13</b>
Oct-Dec 22	<b>8</b>
July-Sept 22	<b>15</b>
Apr-June 22	<b>14</b>

Leavers with less than 1 years' service

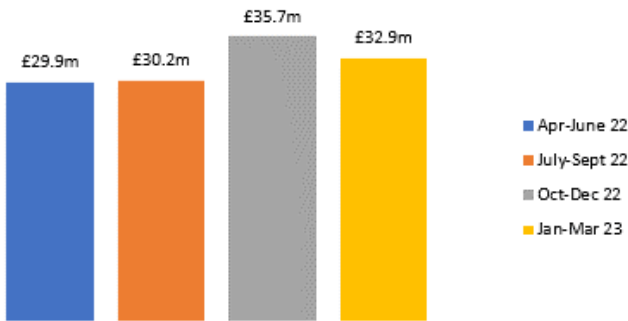
Current quarter	<b>21</b>
Oct-Dec 22	<b>26</b>
July-Sept 22	<b>38</b>
Apr-June 22	<b>29</b>

TOP 3 VOLUNTARY LEAVER REASONS

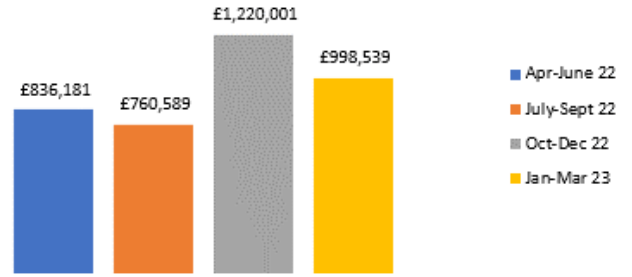


# EMPLOYEE COSTS

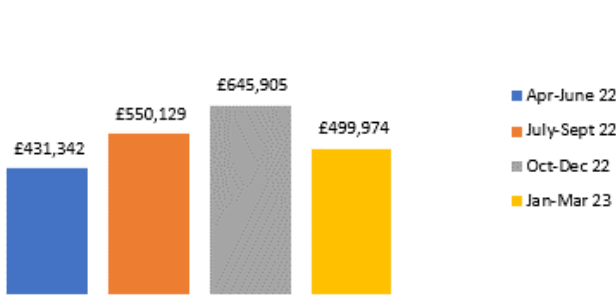
PERMANENT EMPLOYEE SALARY COSTS



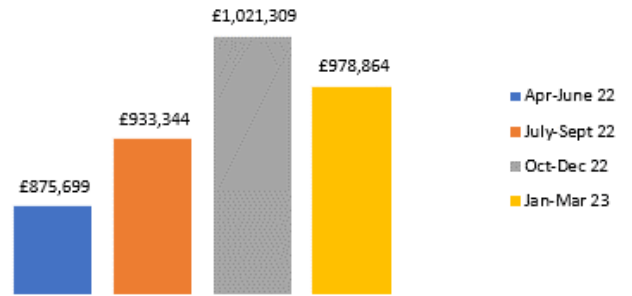
SICKNESS ABSENCE COSTS



CASUAL EMPLOYEE SALARY COSTS



AGENCY COSTS



# ADVISORY CASES

Disciplinary

	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Current quarter	18	5
Oct-Dec 22	13	-5
July-Sept 22	18	5
Apr-June 22	13	-6

Absence & Health

	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Current quarter	167	16
Oct-Dec 22	151	43
July-Sept 22	108	-22
Apr-June 22	130	11

Grievance

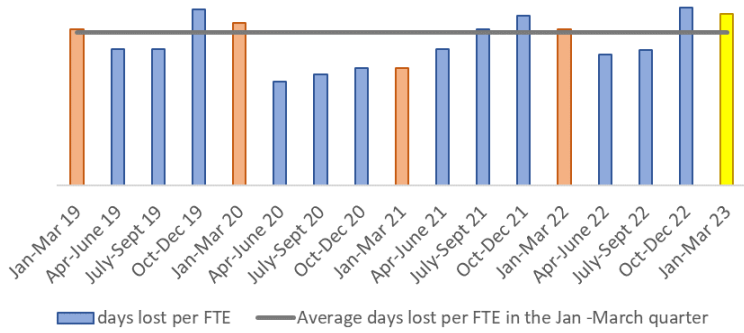
	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Current quarter	12	6
Oct-Dec 22	6	1
July-Sept 22	5	2
Apr-June 22	3	-5

Improving Work Performance

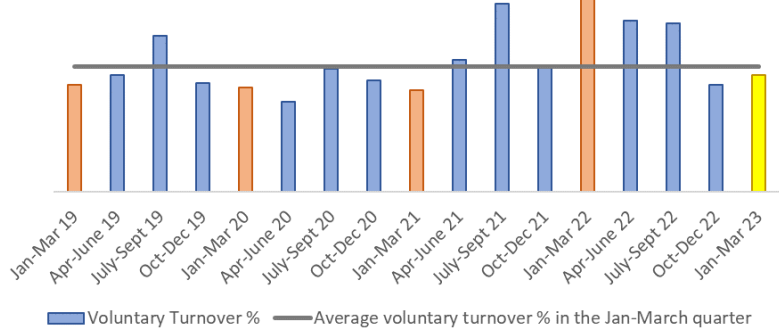
	New cases this quarter	Variance from previous quarter
Current quarter	8	6
Oct-Dec 22	2	-1
July-Sept 22	3	1
Apr-June 22	2	0

# LONG TERM TRENDS

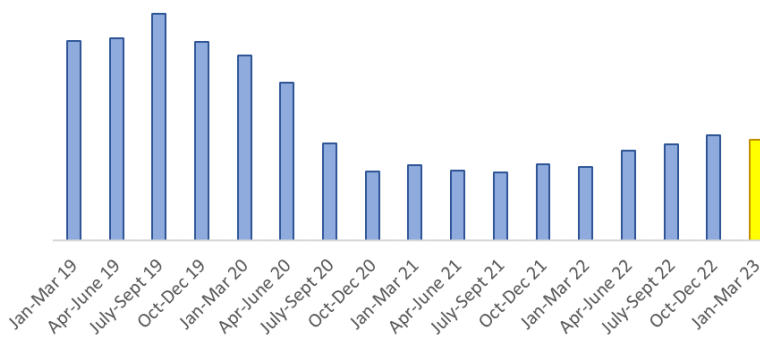
### Days lost per FTE over the last 4 years



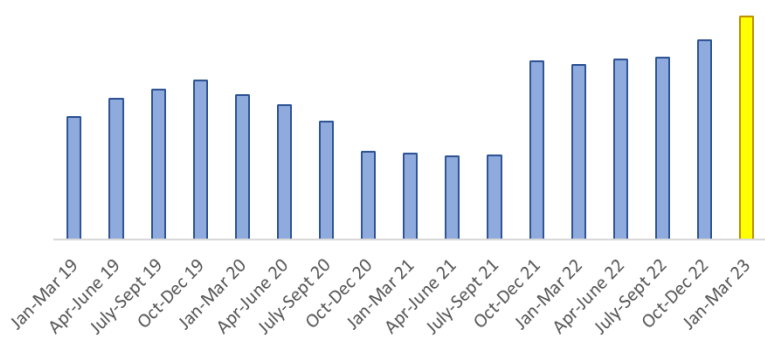
### Voluntary Turnover % over the last 4 years



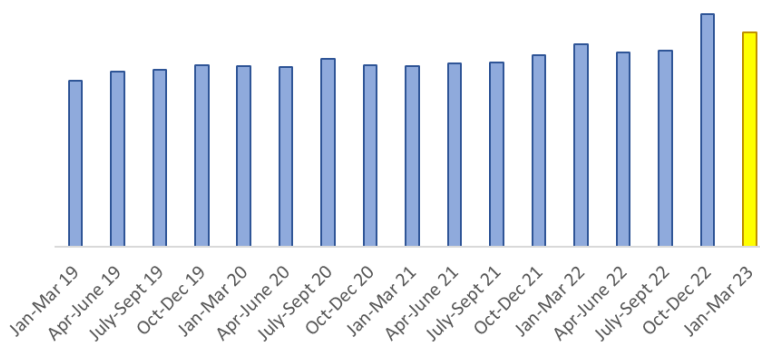
### Agency spend over the last 4 years



### Headcount change over the last 4 years



### Permanent staffing cost change over the last 4 years



### Disciplinary and Grievance cases per 1000 employees over last 4 years

