

Workforce Statistics – 2024/25 Quarter 2



Report to: Personnel Committee

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Executive Summary

A This report provides Harlow Council workforce statistics for Quarter 2 (July 2024 – September 2024) to the Personnel Committee for information and review.

Recommended that the Committee:

- A** Reviews the information and statistics provided at Appendix A and Appendix B. This is the second report of statistical data that is continuing to evolve, it presents the statistical data in a new revised format to reflect the corporate layout style.
- B** Suggests any additional statistics that may be of use for regular reporting.

Reason for decision

- A** Workforce data measures the demographic structure of our employees including staff well-being. Such data allows the committee to review any issues, or potential issues, and receive updates highlighting the actions officers are taking to address these.
- B** The introduction and development of iTrent, Harlow Council's HR and Payroll system, has made it easier to pull together workforce statistics. These statistics provide a source of useful analysis and information regarding the establishment, turnover and leavers, sickness absence and equality data.

- C** This report continues to be developed to aid analysis and identification of any trends and support in understanding matters arising. Working with Business Insight colleagues the statistics have been updated to reflect the corporate layout

Other Options

- A** None.

Background

1. The workforce profile report, at Appendix A, provides commentary and data for Quarter 2 (1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024).
2. This is the second Harlow Council workforce statistical report and brings forward the commitment to analyse data providing comparisons quarter-on-quarter to assist in highlighting any trends emerging throughout the financial year. As this is the second quarter a new workforce stats comparison dashboard has been collated to enable stats across each quarter to be easily compared. This dashboard includes the agency headcount by service, number of employees sick by reason as well as detailing more detailed age metrics as requested.
3. The report provides the following statistics on Quarter 2 (1 July 2024 - 30– September 2024):
 - a) Headcount by Service – including Agency headcount by service
 - b) FTE by Service
 - c) Breakdown of Employee Basis
 - d) Vacancies per Service
 - e) Leavers by reason
 - f) Sickness Absence Occasion (by reason) and number of employees sick by reason
 - g) Sickness Absence Days Lost by Reason
 - h) Sickness Days Lost by Service
 - i) Short-Term and Long-Term sickness days lost by Service
 - j) Employee Gender Profile
 - k) Employee Age Profile (including those age 67 and over)
 - l) Employee Ethnicity Profile
 - m) Ethnicity Profile for Harlow ONS 2021 Census
4. Employee Headcount (401 (up from 399 Q1) and FTE (347.9) (up from 347.74) remained steady in Quarter 2 compared with Quarter 1.

Vacancies per Service

5. Continued close data management led by HR within iTrent alongside liaising with Services and Accountancy has been driven to ensure vacancy data is producing up to date establishment data. The HR team continue to review budgeted vacancies and provide establishment management alongside accountancy. Managers are supported to review vacancies and advertise them as appropriate.
6. In Environment and Planning, as an example, at the end of Quarter 2 there are 12 confirmed current vacancies. Recruitment difficulties are identified by professionals in these sectors of local government.
7. Specifically, according to a recent Royal Town Planning Institute 82% of Local Authority Planners advised that their employer had experienced difficulties when it came to hiring Planners – with 68% respondents suggesting the competitive salaries are a key stumbling block for Local Authorities. The council participated in Essex wide study on recruitment in planning and in addition notes the Pathways to Planning brought forward by the LGA will support when providing further growth opportunities.
8. According to the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) there is a shortage of resources in Environmental Health (EH) with many Local authorities relying on Agency Staff due to an unprecedented demand for services. The CIEH state 56% of Local Authorities report that they have EH vacancies for 6 months or more due to a limitation of fully qualified and experienced Environmental Health Officers. To address this in Harlow internal development is underway including professional training to 'grow our own' in this area.
9. The new applicant section feeding into iTrent from the council's website which was developed to support the online application process went live in Quarter 1, web recruitment is seen as a positive modern measure to support candidates in applying for roles at the council.
10. The council this financial year has commenced some work with Essex County Council in supporting recruitment delivery and assisting in reducing advertising and recruitment costs. HR will continue to explore this alongside awaiting further information (anticipated in Quarter 3) on attracting applicants to careers working in the local government sector to support addressing workforce capacity further.

Leavers

11. Employee turnover in the council is low and dropped from 2.5% in Quarter 1 (10 leavers/ 399 employees) to 1.2% (5 leavers /401 employees) in Quarter 2. Low employee turnover is often seen as an indicator of a healthy and productive workplace, the council remains keen to ensure that innovation continues to grow an example of which is its continued investment in technology and digital transformation – e.g. widescale laptop roll out to staff.

12. All voluntary leavers are asked to complete an exit questionnaire to help the council identify any improvements it could make e.g. to its policies and practices. The exit questionnaire is now available on iTrent – this easier form should assist leavers in quickly responding to the questionnaire and is hoped will assist in increasing take up in providing exit information. The questionnaires are returned to HR with leavers being asked whether their feedback can be shared with their manager.
13. An annual turnover report will be completed after Quarter 4 to provide a more in-depth analysis of turnover data for the year - considering April 2024 to March 2025 and will explore the reasons employees are leaving allowing HR to support retention by identifying trends and making pro-active steps, where appropriate.

Sickness

14. Whilst the number of leavers halved in Quarter 2 down to 5 from 10 in Quarter 1, sickness days lost saw a 35% increase from Quarter 1 with 26.6% of the workforce having at least one day sick during Quarter 2. The increase in sickness absence in Quarter 2 is against the general trend for absence which often reduces in the summer months however this will continue with closer monitoring in Quarter 3 supported by the updated new Sickness Policy (approved at the last Personnel Committee) which will assist with both the management of sickness absence alongside continuing to provide support to employees
15. The most common reason for sickness absence during Quarter 2 was cold, cough and flu with 40 occasions taking place in the quarter across 35 employees. It is noted that the absence for this reason doubled since Quarter 1. Some viruses are even more common in summer than in the winter, in addition it is recognised that seasonal allergies can sometimes be mistaken for a summer cold or flu. Immunity to common cold viruses is short-lived so each season, our immune systems have as to adapt. In the Autumn the council provides staff aged under 65 (where a free NHS flu jab is not provided) with the opportunity to access a free flu vaccination (via vouchers) for use at Boots pharmacies, this will continue to be offered in Quarter 3.
16. The council continues to offer support to employees experiencing health problems/medical conditions via Occupational Health which includes those affected by absence. Occupational Health Service referrals can be made at any time under the new sickness policy by line managers, training for which was delivered after the September Personnel Committee. A referral is an effective mechanism to ascertain the health and well-being of employees which can assist both the council and the employee. It can also be an effective support mechanism for employees.
17. Employees who report that they are experiencing workplace stress, are supported by management to undertake a workplace stress assessment to provide support. We currently have a pool of 18 certified Mental Health First Aiders who have regular refresher training, the next refresher training takes place in Quarter 3. The Mental Health First

Aiders role includes recognising the symptoms of Mental Health, provide support and signposting to relevant agencies/organisations. Further information on Mental Health First Aiders is available on Kaonet [Looking-after-your-mental-health](#).

18. Following the Personnel Committee request to consider providing more categories for stress statistic recording (work related/ personal), this development will be a new feature in the system in April 2025. Measurement of current reporting is mid-year for effective monitoring it is not recommended to split values part way through a statistical measuring year. HR will review the whole list of absence reasons that are recorded in the system for consistency.
19. HR undertake physical and mental health medical referrals to our contracted Occupational Health provider to seek advice and guidance from medical professionals on several services such as supporting to new starters, making the right reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, to assist in meeting our health and safety duties, when an employee has been off sick for a long time or is returning to work after sickness absence.
20. In addition, access to counselling (this is known to significantly reduce absenteeism by addressing the root causes of stress, anxiety, and burnout) and GP recommended physio (this helps to restore movement and function when someone is affected by injury, illness or disability in the workplace) are available where recommended via contracted providers.

Issues/Proposals

21. The statistical data has been further developed in Quarter 2 to harness the corporate data look and feel more.
22. Within Quarter 3 this is to be further developed to include comparatives from across the public sector, and other local authorities where possible, for workforce information and census information to ensure that as an employer we are representative of the make-up of our town.
23. The data provided in the dashboards should be viewed as work in progress as we continue with further workforce profiling at Harlow Council with more detailed statistical analysis
24. The Committee are invited to suggest and request alternatives, amendments and additions to the data that can then be provided on a quarterly basis going forward.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

The Council is required to publish specified information relating to the gender pay gap in addition to requirements to publish proportionate equality information. The Public Sector Equality Duty is a continuing one. The production and review of statistics as contained in this report assists with ensuring that the Council is meeting and furthering its equality duties.

Climate Change

None

Finance

No direct financial implications arising from this report

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Governance

Other than to ensure that all statistical data is collated and reported in strict accordance with data protection principles, there are no direct legal implications associated with the consideration of this report.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Workforce Statistics Quarter 2 - 2024/2025

Appendix B – Workforce Statistics Comparison (Q1/Q2 2024/2025).

Background Papers

None

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None