

AUDIT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8 March 2022

UPDATE ON STAFFING MATTERS 2021

Report of the Human Resources Lead

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that Audit and Resources Committee consider the contents of this report and makes recommendations as it feels necessary.

Summary

This report provides a summary of the key workforce data and analysis over the last 12 months together with an update on the People Strategy.

Focus for Scrutiny

This annual review is a summary of initiatives and practices supported by data analysis with regard to people management. The Committee is asked to note the report and to make any comments or recommendations.

Statutory Powers

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 111 / 112

1 Strategic Implications

This report provides key data, analysis and updates on the Council's workforce and people management practices. The Council recognises the importance of recruiting, developing and retaining a skilled and motivated workforce so it can continue to deliver good quality services and achieve its aspirations. The Council also needs to ensure that it is engaging with its workforce in a way that promotes continuous improvement, innovation and commercial success whilst fulfilling its statutory obligations.

2 Introduction

The format of this report for 2021 will show changes from previous reports following the implementation of the Executive Head structure in early 2021 and the recruitment of 9 Executive Heads and the creation of their respective new Executive areas. It may not be possible therefore to directly compare some of the data with historical

reports. It is also important to note that a lot of HR resources were allocated in 2021 to embedding the new Executive Head structure, updating systems, changing processes and approvals, creating organisational structure charts and revising policies and processes to reflect the new structure.

Improvements have also been made to this report following feedback received at last year's Audit and Resources Committee with additional data and graphics included.

The coronavirus pandemic continues to impact the operation of the Council. A large section of our workforce has continued to work in a hybrid manner throughout 2021, with many largely home-based whilst our customer-facing front line services have continued to work in a traditional manner.

3 Future Ways of Working

Throughout 2020 a number of short staff surveys were circulated to give us a better understanding of the wellbeing of #TeamEBC staff particularly in the context of the pandemic and working from home.

The last survey in November 2020 established that the majority of employees preferred to work in a more hybrid way, with a mix of homeworking and the ability to spend time with their colleagues in the workplace from time to time.

A working group was subsequently formed in 2021 to consider the results of these surveys in relation to future ways of working at Eastleigh. The working group met throughout 2021 to formulate plans and actions. As a result, a more formal trial of hybrid working began in October 2021 for those employees who were largely office-based. This trial enabled employees to work from home and also spend time in the office, either in "open spaces" to work alongside colleagues, or in an area dedicated to team-working (i.e., for teams to book together for team meetings, team collaboration). Due to government regulations and the recommendation to "work from home where you can" in late 2021 this trial was suspended and resumed in late January 2022 in accordance with the revised government advice and guidance. The trial is scheduled to last for a total period of 6 months following which the outcome will be reviewed and will inform the Council's future ways of working.

4 Key Workforce Data

4.1 Total number of staff as at December 2021

- Total head count: 562 (549 Jan 2021)
- Fixed term headcount: 57 (40 Jan 2021)
- Permanent full time equivalent (FTE): 507.03 (461.14 Jan 2021)
- Casual employees 64 (79 Jan 2021)

There has been a small overall increase in our total headcount in the past year. This increase in posts has mostly been in the Planning & Economy executive area and the creation of the Executive Head roles.

There has been an increase in fixed term contract posts specifically within the Planning & Economy executive area, namely, the Employment Hub Manager, Employment Support Officers and Information Officers which are externally funded posts. There was also an increase in Case Management Officer roles and Assistant Countryside Officers.

The majority of the casual employees engaged by the Council work at The Point/Berry Theatres and Itchen Valley Country Park Woodland Café. Due to the seasonal nature of these venues, there will continue to be some requirement to utilise casual staff to manage peaks and troughs in usage throughout the year. There has been a reduction in the overall number of casual workers following a review during the pandemic and following furlough. Steps have been taken to reduce the reliance upon casual workers.

4.2 Turnover

Employee turnover refers to the percentage of employees who leave the organisation and are replaced by new employees. Whilst some turnover is good, if turnover is too high there is an increased adverse impact on costs, stability, training requirements, knowledge management and management time.

Overall Turnover (1 Jan 2021 – 31 December 2021)	
Voluntary	14.8%
Voluntary Over two years' service	9.8%
Involuntary	1.3%

The voluntary turnover rate for EBC was 14.8% in 2021. This relates to those who have resigned. If involuntary leavers are included, this rate is 16.1%. Involuntary leavers refers to those who have left for reasons such as redundancy, end of fixed term contract or by dismissal for any reason. The majority of voluntary turnover is amongst staff with over two years' service. The average years of service for voluntary was 7 years and involuntary was 10 years.

Turnover rates in the UK historically average around 15%. The latest data from Xpert HR which is based on data from a survey taken in 2020 showed an annual turnover rate of around 14.6%. In comparison, the average public sector turnover rate is 15.8% according to XpertHR/Survey analysis (2 November 2021).

As a result, largely of the coronavirus pandemic, "The Great Resignation" (also known as "the big quit") is an economic trend that began in early 2021 and describes the phenomenon where record numbers of employees leave their jobs having re-evaluated their careers. Organisations are faced with having to navigate the ripple effects of the pandemic and re-evaluate options to retain talent. The job market is exceptionally buoyant and employers are seeing the strain of high volumes of vacancies and supply of resources not meeting demand. Eastleigh is not alone in finding it increasingly difficult to recruit in some areas and our turnover rates are beginning to increase.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that from June to August 2021, there continued to be a large growth in job vacancies available (249,000 above pandemic levels from Jan – March 2021). The number of job vacancies in June to August 2021 was 1,034,000, which is the first-time vacancies have risen over 1 million since records began. The Chartered Institute of Personal and Development (CIPD) also found that recruitment intentions are set to increase in all sectors in 2021, so there is increased competition for recruiting workforce and retaining staff.

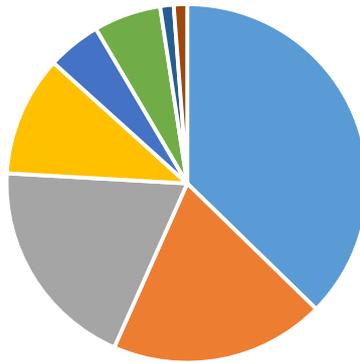
The graph below shows our turnover broken down by Executive area in 2021 which confirms the highest turnover is within Planning & Economy. It is commonly known that there is a skills shortage in the economy which in turn leads to pressure on salaries and increasingly competitive salaries being offered by our competitors to attract qualified and experienced staff.



4.3 Leavers by Reason

For 2021, there were a total of 83 leavers across the Council, compared to 52 leavers in 2020. Leavers' information is shown within the chart and table below: -

Leaver by reason - voluntary (1 Jan 21- 31 Dec 21)



- Career Opportunities
- Retirement
- Less Stress or Travel
- Change of career path
- End of contract
- Performance
- Personal
- Other

Leaver by reason - voluntary 01/01/2021- 31/12/2021	Number
Career Opportunities	31
Change of career path	16
Personal	16
Retirement	9
End of contract	5
Other	4
Less Stress or Travel	1
Performance	1
Total	83

The main reason for leaving was due to career opportunities which amounted to 31 leavers. This ties in with the ONS results regarding the influx and large increase in job vacancies within the market.

The second largest reason for leaving was change of career path and personal reasons with both categories where there were 16 leavers for each category. This again supports the sentiments above around “The Great Resignation”

Number of voluntary leavers by executive area for the period 1 Jan 2021 – 31 December 2021	
Executive area	Number of Voluntary Leavers
Assets	10
Corporate	1
Customer Care	23
Environment	2
Finance and Housing	1
Governance	4
Health and Wellbeing	11
Neighbourhood Services	19
Organisational Development	5
Planning and Economy	7
Total	83

We continue to work to understand the reasons for staff leaving, through our exit interview and questionnaire process. This is not a mandatory process although the majority of staff are willing to voluntarily engage through either completing a questionnaire and/or attending an interview with a member of the HR team. These interviews and questionnaires give us a valuable insight into the reasons for leaving as well as gauging general satisfaction with Eastleigh Borough Council as an employer. Their feedback is reviewed and considered, especially by the Resourcing project team and helps us to formulate and revise our HR policies and practices.

The internal apprenticeship programme and the corporate professional qualification initiative will help to address our aim to “grow our own” talent and offer career development opportunities within the Council.

The two other main reasons for leaving in 2021 were “personal” and “change of career path”. This reflects the national trend arising from the pandemic where employees have reflected on their personal situations and reconsidered their career options.

Staff retention is regularly monitored and reported on as a key performance indicator as part of the Corporate Performance framework.

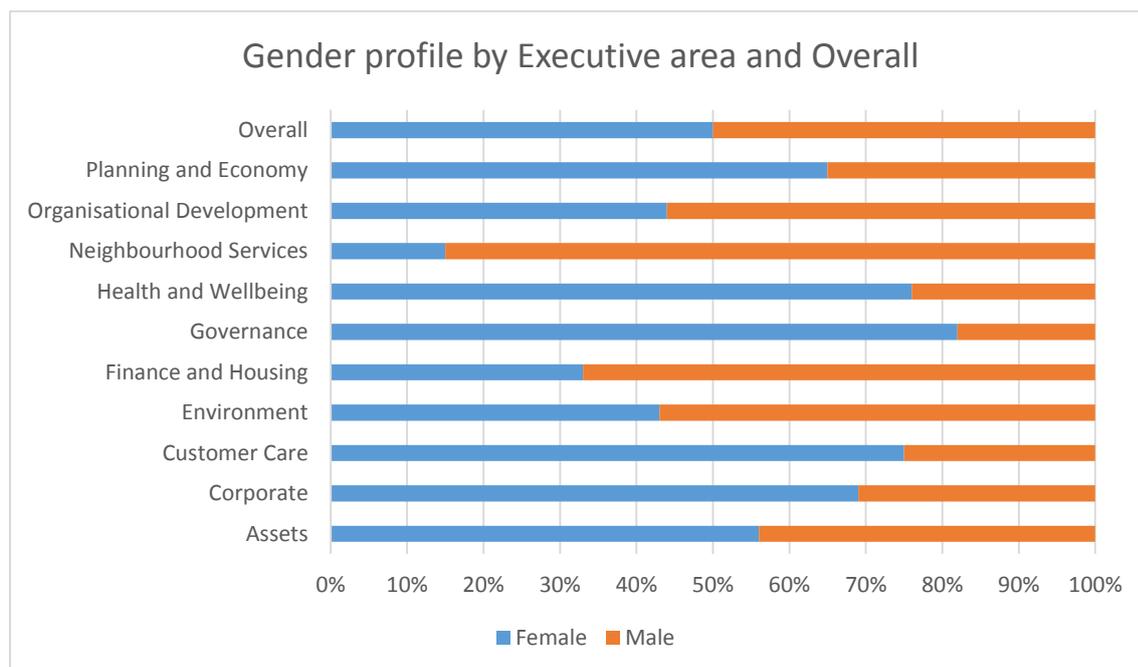
5 Workforce Profile as of December 2021

5.1 Gender profile (all employees)

Female = 50% (same as in 2020)

Male = 50% (same as in 2020)

The table below shows the gender profile broken down by executive area:



Executive area	Female	Male
Assets	56%	44%
Corporate	69%	31%
Customer Care	75%	25%
Environment	43%	57%
Finance and Housing	33%	67%
Governance	82%	18%
Health and Wellbeing	76%	24%
Neighbourhood Services	15%	85%
Organisational Development	44%	56%
Planning and Economy	65%	35%
Overall	50%	50%

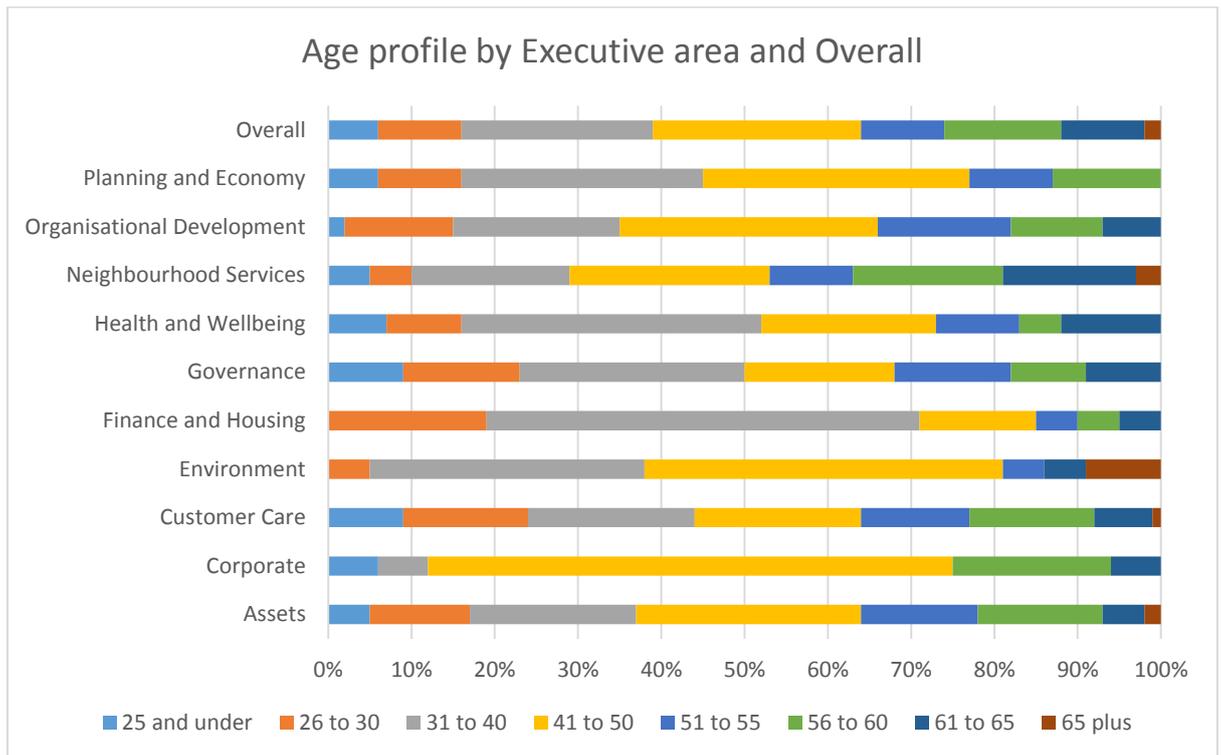
The gender split across the Council is very well balanced as it has been in previous years. There is a higher percentage of males compared to females in some of the lower paid roles within the Council, largely due to the demographic within Neighbourhood Services (i.e., Waste and StreetScene) operational teams. The Council produces an annual Gender Pay Gap Report for submission to the Government and it is available on the Council's website. The Council has historically shown a positive gender pay gap in favour of female staff which is further evidence of the Council's commitment to equality, fairness and inclusion.

5.2 Age profile

25 and under	= 6%
26 to 30	= 10%
31 to 40	= 23%
41 to 50	= 25%
51 to 55	= 10%

56 to 60	= 14%
61 to 65	= 10%
65 plus	= 2%

The table below shows the age breakdown by executive area:



Executive area	25 and under	26 to 30	31 to 40	41 to 50	51 to 55	56 to 60	61 to 65	65 plus
Assets	5%	12%	20%	27%	14%	15%	5%	2%
Corporate	6%	0%	6%	63%	0%	19%	6%	0%
Customer Care	9%	15%	20%	20%	13%	15%	7%	1%
Environment	0%	5%	33%	43%	5%	0%	5%	9%
Finance and Housing	0%	19%	52%	14%	5%	5%	5%	0%
Governance	9%	14%	27%	18%	14%	9%	9%	0%
Health and Wellbeing	7%	9%	36%	21%	10%	5%	12%	0%

Neighbourhood Services	5%	5%	19%	24%	10%	18%	16%	3%
Organisational Development	2%	13%	20%	31%	16%	11%	7%	0%

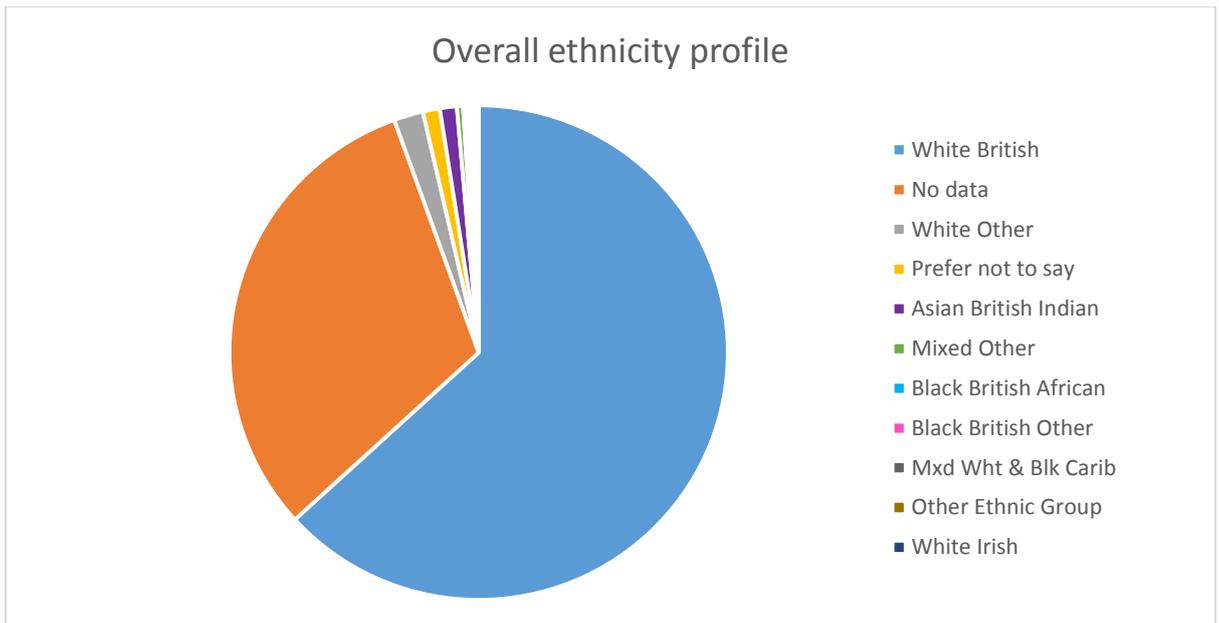
The above tables show that the Council has a large proportion of its workforce aged 56 and over. As part of the Resourcing project this matter will be considered in terms of creating succession planning strategies.

5.3 Ethnicity Profile (where the data is recorded)

2.2% (1.5% in 2021) of employees are recorded as being from an ethnic minority background.

These rates have increased due to an exercise undertaken in 2021 to encourage employees to record and report this data on their personal records within our HR/Payroll system. 31% of employees have decided not to report this data.

The graphic below shows the ethnicity breakdown for Council employees (where this information is recorded):



5.4 Disability Profile (where the data is recorded)

4% (1.5% in 2021) of employees considered themselves to have a disability.

These rates have increased due to an exercise undertaken in 2021 to encourage employees to record and report this data on their personal records within our HR/Payroll system. 31% of employees have decided not to report this data.

The ratio of employees either with a disability, or who have recorded themselves as being from an ethnic minority background within our workforce remains low despite the exercise undertaken in 2021 to encourage employees to report and record this data on their personal records. We will continue to work to encourage higher reporting of this data.

In addition, to improve consideration of equalities in service, project planning and for key decisions, HR have been working closely with the Equalities Focus Group and further staff training has been delivered to support Equalities Impact Assessments and to assist with championing equalities across the organisation.

The Council is committed to ensuring our recruitment and employment practices are fair and inclusive. Recruiting managers need to be aware of unconscious bias and there is training available on the Council's Learning Platform "EBC Learn" to support this.

In 2021, a new recruitment module was introduced within the Council's existing HR/Payroll system. This module brings together the approval of recruitment and all administration relating to job applications in one place and this should assist in the collection of ethnicity data from applicants and to help understanding the profile of the candidates being attracted. The rolling out of the module was supported by newly produced recruitment policy and guidance for Managers and guided training sessions from HR. Further training is planned for 2022 to support recruiting managers to understand their obligations during the recruitment process in terms of equality and diversity.

The Council has achieved 'Disability Confident' accreditation and continues to offer a guaranteed interview to candidates with a disability who meet the minimum essential criteria for any role that they apply for.

The Council also continues to support the publication "Living with Disability" through taking out an advert focusing on the Council as a disability confident employer. The magazine informs disabled people, their families and friends on how to access available products and opportunities and helps to raise our profile as a Disability Confident employer to its readership. As part of the Resourcing project, consideration will be given as to how we might attract more applications from disabled people for roles with the Council. Hybrid working practices make this more attractive and accessible than more traditional office-based working practices.

6 Sickness Absence Data

The following tables shows the percentage of available working days lost due to sickness for the past 7 years:

Year	% of days lost due to sickness EBC
2015	3.8%
2016	3.0%
2017	3.5%
2018	4.2%
2019	2.9%

2020	3.3%
2021	3.4%

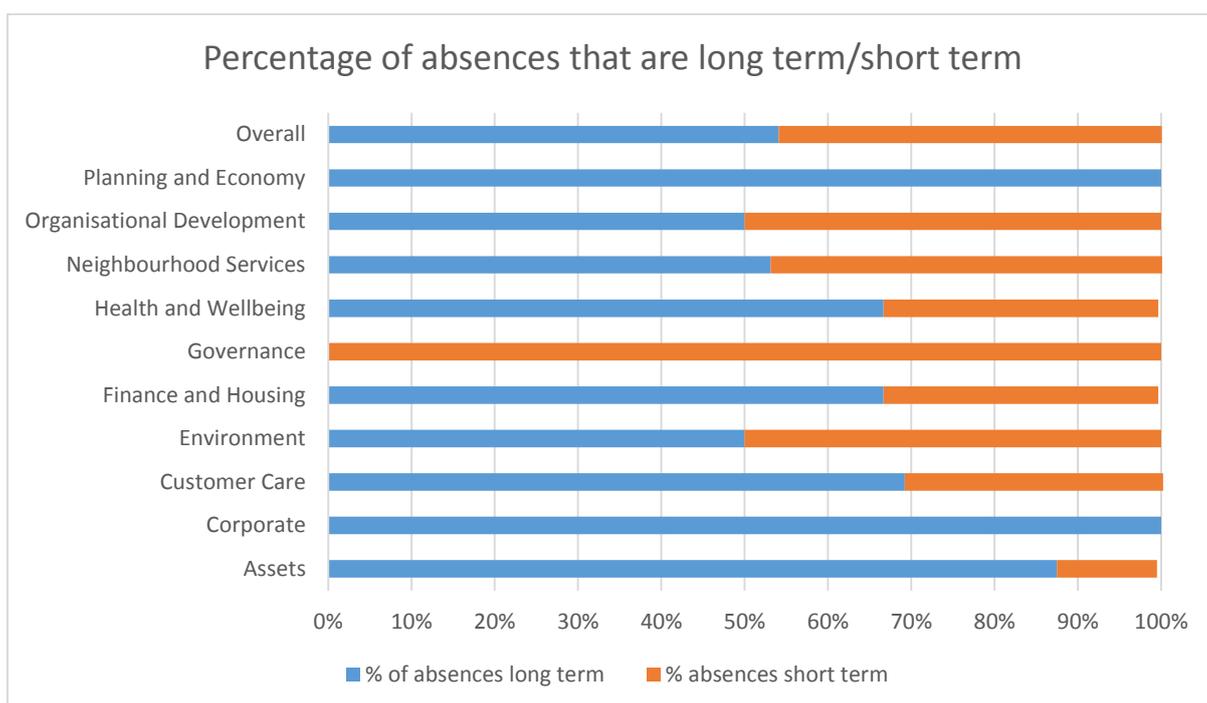
All sickness absences are managed through the Council's Absence and Wellbeing Policy and managers are supported by HR with individual cases. The Council takes a pro-active approach to managing absence through early engagement with employees who are absent for any reason and using occupational health where appropriate to seek medical advice on the capabilities of employees to return to work. Where there is a real possibility of an earlier return to work through the use of physiotherapy or other support, the Council will consider funding such treatment to support an earlier return. This often reduces the time that an employee is off work due to injury considerably when compared to waiting times for equivalent physiotherapy treatments available through the NHS.

Sickness absence data is a key indicator of organisational performance and needs to be well managed. It is reported on regularly to the Executive Team and senior service managers.

The top three reasons stated for absence during 2021 were stress, musculo skeletal and colds/flu. The higher incidence of colds/flu in 2021 can be explained in part due to symptoms being similar to COVID-19.

Long term absences accounted for 54% of absences in the Council.

Executive area	% of absences long term	% of absences short term
Assets	88%	12%
Corporate	100%	0%
Customer Care	69%	31%
Environment	50%	50%
Finance and Housing	67%	33%
Governance	0%	100%
Health and Wellbeing	67%	33%
Neighbourhood Services	53%	47%
Organisational Development	50%	50%
Planning and Economy	100%	0%



We continued to support employees through the pandemic in 2021 through the production of monthly health and wellbeing bulletins and raising the awareness of the employee assistance programme.

7 HR Casework

The following table shows the number of formal cases being managed with support from HR for the past 3 years:

	2019	2020	2021
Formal Absence Management Cases	31	19	27
Formal Disciplinary Hearings	7	3	3
Formal Grievance Hearings	4	1	0
Formal Performance Management Cases	3	3	2
Dismissals on probation	0	3	1

It is pleasing to note that there were no formal grievances during 2021 because the levels of grievances are often considered a barometer of employee satisfaction. HR polices are located on the Staff Hub so that staff and Managers have easy access. The HR team continues to provide support to Managers in handling any cases.

Issues have been resolved informally with close working between HR, Managers and the trade unions.

Whilst the pandemic has significantly affected the way we work across the Council, with significant numbers of employees working remotely from home, casework has still arisen and HR specialists have continued to support Managers to handle these. The majority of the formal meetings were of course held in a socially distanced manner or, more commonly, over Microsoft teams. Our approach continues to be in line with market best practice and guidance.

As a result of the pandemic, there were a number of revisions and additions to our suite of HR policies and procedures, to reflect both changes in legislation and amendments to working practices as a result of remote working and social distancing requirements.

8 Learning and Development

Our general corporate training offering was lower during 2021 compared with previous years due to the continuing impact of the covid-19 pandemic and the restructure of the Council. The corporate training requirements from each executive area for the financial year 2022/23 are currently being gathered and these will be formulated into the training plan. Initial indications are that learning and development requirements will be increased significantly in the next financial year, probably as a result of many planned learning and development plans being on hold during the past 18-20 months due to the pandemic but will still be managed within budget.

Throughout 2021, the EBCLearn platform that was launched in 2020 has enabled us to continue to provide access to training and development learning as well as supportive learning materials on health and wellbeing and other associated topics, for example time management, personal resilience, stress management. The system enables training records to be stored in one place and also provides significantly improved reporting tools in relation to learning and development. For example, the Council is able to identify the numbers of employees who have accessed a particular training module and Managers can access a “dashboard” relating to the training that their own team has completed/not completed. This enables the Council to identify and track employees’ completion of mandatory training.

With the revised structure in early 2021, a comprehensive development programme has been rolled out to the 9 newly appointed Executive Heads which was almost complete at the end of 2021. This included training on such matters as managing time and focus, engaging and mobilising managers, applying resonant leadership and using connective intelligence to enhance decision-making. In addition, a comprehensive series of “Coaching in the Moment” modules was available for Managers to help to embed the culture of coaching as part of normal day to day management activities at Eastleigh. These modules were completed in January 2022. Work to ensure this training has been fully embedded will continue in 2022.

A new Professional Qualifications Policy will be launched in the new financial year (2022/23) in line with the revised learning and development budgets aligned to the new Executive areas. It is hoped that this will encourage employees to further consider their professional development using the apprentice levy fund wherever possible which frees up valuable learning and development funds for other training.

The Policy establishes a formal route for employees to request access to professional qualifications and to ensure best value is achieved from our apprentice levy fund. It is hoped that this will assist in our aim to retain our own in-house talent.

8.1 Apprenticeships

During 2021, 9 new apprenticeships began in the Council, as follows: -

- 1 Chartered Manager degree apprenticeship
- 1 Business Administrator
- 1 Heavy vehicle service and maintenance technician
- 2 team leader/supervisor apprenticeships
- 2 Chartered Town Planner degree apprenticeships
- 1 Internal Audit professional
- 1 Professional Accounting/taxation technician

Plans are already in place for two additional apprenticeships to commence in early 2022.

We continue to work with Managers to encourage them to consider recruiting an apprentice for lower salary banded roles and in entry-level technical roles. The week of 7 to 13 February 2022 was National Apprentice Week and information was circulated to Managers to raise awareness of the use of apprenticeships in the Council. If a qualification can be funded through the apprentice levy, we will not fund this through the training budget.

8.2 Work Experience, Careers Outreach

Work experience continues to be an important gateway for recruitment and the Council's Website now has a dedicated work experience page where interested applicants can follow a process to request to undertake work experience at the Council. We regularly take work experience placements across a number of service areas. Due to COVID-19 and social distancing measures, the guidance for Managers on the management of work experience placements has been updated to ensure that anyone undertaking a placement with Eastleigh has a meaningful experience and is adequately supported and managed when in a hybrid working environment.

Due to the pandemic, there were no face-to-face careers events possible in local schools and colleges in 2021 although we engaged with virtual events wherever possible and will continue to do so in 2022.

The One Horton Heath team has taken on a supported internship and two "T level" student placements and work experience placements have been offered across other areas of the Council.

9 People Strategy Update

The Council's current People Strategy is based on three key principles; Attract, Develop and Retain. The Strategy details the activities that aim to ensure the Council has the right people with the right skills, attitude, motivation and flexibility to deliver services and objectives; it focuses on five key areas:

- Pay and Reward;
- Recruitment and Retention;
- Performance Management;
- Skills Development;
- Leadership Development;

This strategy was reviewed during 2021 as a result of the continuing impact of the pandemic, the move to a hybrid way of working and the impact of the difficulties in the recruitment market which are currently being faced by most employers. The Council has launched a Resourcing project to consider the five strands of the People Strategy with a view to making Eastleigh Borough Council an employer of choice.

The Resourcing project will look at a significant number of key areas under the banner of Attract, Develop and Retain and we have recruited a temporary Recruitment and Retention Specialist on a 6-month contract to assist with the many branches of this far-reaching project, such as:

- The advertising and promotion of EBC vacancies
- Growing talent, succession planning, use of apprenticeships and learning and development
- Benchmarking salaries against competitors in the marketplace
- Extending our employee benefits offering
- Analysing recruitment processes to ensure we are giving a good candidate experience
- Upgrading job descriptions to ensure they are clear
- Measuring the success of the Council's induction processes
- Reviewing HR policies and procedures to ensure they remain fit for purpose
- Producing recommendations from the hybrid working trial in 2022
- Ensuring that the Council is attracting a more diverse workforce and considering ways to increase or visibility to the widest range of candidates.

9.1 Pay and reward

Each year, employees receive a nationally agreed “cost of living” increase that is set nationally and following that we agree our local pay award that is based on individual employee performance. At the time of writing, the “cost of living” increase for 2021 has yet to be settled at national level, with trade unions balloting members on industrial action in support of an improved pay award offer. This “cost of living” increase was due to be paid in April 2021.

Due to the delay, for 2021, the Corporate Leadership Board made the decision to pay the local pay award in advance of the national settlement and this was paid into employees' salaries in December 2021. For both 2020 and 2021, due to the pandemic, a decision was taken to award all employees a standardised local pay award due to the on-going efforts that staff had made as a result of the pandemic.

The Council continues to demonstrate its commitment to the Living Wage by increasing payments to £9.90 per hour from April 2022. The Council was also successful in achieving accreditation as a Living Wage Employer during 2021.

9.2 Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment has continued in a remote way during 2021 although there have been increasing issues in attracting quality candidates for some roles as a result of the issues already outlined earlier in this report.

One particular issue the Council faced in 2021 was in the recruitment and retention of qualified LGV drivers in Waste Services. The shortage of LGV drivers in the market was the subject of significant media attention when all employers reported issues with recruiting LGV drivers. The shortage was exacerbated by a number of drivers from Europe leaving the UK as a result of Brexit and with COVID-19 restricting the number of driving tests available for new LGV drivers to qualify. As a result of a benchmarking exercise to compare the Council's LGV drivers' salaries with the local market, a temporary market supplement was put in place in 2021. A longer-term resolution will be considered as part of the Resourcing project already mentioned in this report.

During 2021, all of the newly created Executive Head roles had been filled and were in post, with 8 posts having been filled by internal promotion of existing staff and one external recruit.

In late 2021, a new recruitment module, within our existing HR/Payroll system, was introduced across the Council. This enables the recruitment processes to be automated and introduces a platform for external candidates to manage their applications to the Council. The rollout was supported by training and briefing sessions for users as well as a revised Recruitment Policy and associated guidance.

In late 2021, a "buddy scheme" was introduced to support new starters, particular in light of the fact that the majority of employees continue to work from home/in a hybrid way. A "buddy" is someone who partners with a new employee during their first few weeks of employment, which is a crucial time for the new employee. Their primary role is to offer advice and guidance regarding the day-to-day aspects of working for the Council and may also offer encouragement and knowledge. Line Managers are responsible for identifying a suitable buddy for any new starter in their teams.

9.3 Performance Management

The Council introduced a revised People Performance framework in November 2018 based on the principles that all staff should have regular performance, wellbeing and development discussions. Within this, employees should have a clear work programme and SMART objectives in place so that discussions on priorities, issues and problems can also take place on a structured basis. The framework also ensures that every employee plays an active part in their own performance management. Fundamental to the performance process are regular 1:1 meetings between Managers and employees and, due to the pandemic, these have become a key cornerstone of regular communication between Managers and staff. The results of the staff pulse surveys undertaken during 2020 have shown that on the whole

Managers were doing an excellent job of keeping employees informed and in regular contact. Further consideration will be given to the current performance management process during 2022 to ensure that it remains relevant in the climate in which we are now operating and against the background of the market challenges we are facing. Part of this review will include the consideration of a technological solution to performance management as our current process is very paper based. Early research has already begun in this respect.

10 Other updates

10.1 Thank You Cards

These cards were introduced in 2019 and continued to be used across the Executive Areas. They continue to receive positive feedback and have been a more tangible way of saying “thank you” to employees as the majority are working remotely from colleagues and customers.

10.2 Shopping Vouchers

Managers can award £20 shopping vouchers to distribute to their staff as they deem appropriate to recognise individual staff contributions. The vouchers are a way to give a small but tangible token of recognition which supports the Council’s commitments to individual contributions. Feedback to date is very positive and staff have stated that they really appreciate the quick and simple recognition from their manager.

10.3 Staff Awards

The new Staff Awards process was launched in September 2019 based on the four key themes within our new Way We Work framework and a #TeamEBC award for the teams. In 2020, there was an increase in the number of individuals and teams nominated for awards than in 2019 and the event itself was held virtually over Teams in January 2021. As an addition for 2020, each employee who was nominated for an award received a personalised message to inform them of the content of their nomination(s) and this was well received. Although an in-person event was initially planned for early 2022, due to the impact of the Omicron variant, it was decided that the staff awards celebration would again be a virtual event. It was pleasing to see that over 150 nominations were put forward, covering 100 employees, in the 2021 Staff Awards.

Employee Wellbeing –Monthly “Our Wellbeing” bulletins (bringing together all wellbeing news and information into one place for easy access) are now an established regular monthly communication to all staff. The Council’s network of internal mental health champions continues to meet on a 6-weekly basis to share news and information on wellbeing topics and the champions are available for confidential conversations with employees about their mental health. In early 2021, we engaged with an additional temporary service to enable staff to access regular workshops on a weekly basis on various health and wellbeing topics provided through our Employee Assistance Programme. In early 2022, our internal Mental Health Champions received a presentation from Vita, the company running our Employee Assistance Programme, so that they could signpost employees to the programme with full knowledge of the wide variety of assistance that it can provide. The Programme can offer advice, support, guidance and information from topics as

diverse as mental health, financial planning, legal advice, career planning and relationship advice.

Vita will also release some communications regarding the roll-out of the support website/contact feature in a mobile app. This will mean that employees have greater access to the Programme which is free to access and confidential.

In early 2021 we rolled out a programme of “Care” (Connect, Adapt, Resources and Evaluate) training modules which were aimed at giving employees tools to support themselves and others in the following months whilst working in a social-distanced manner from colleagues. This covered topics such as connecting with colleagues whilst working remotely, managing personal resilience, formulating team charters and managing resources. Feedback showed that these were well-received and were delivered at just the right time.

During Mental Health Week in May 2021, we issued daily mental health bulletins to staff on the subject of Nature with tips, hints and guidance on mental health. Plans are already underway to mark Mental Health Awareness week in May 2022 in a similar way.

During 2021 we formulated a new COVID-19 testing policy for employees, in line with the establishment of a temporary testing facility in The Point. We continued to encourage employees to take up the offer of a vaccination and to allow time during working hours where this was necessary.

10.4 Payroll

In 2022, we rolled out an automated process within the existing HR/Payroll system (XCD) for the claiming of overtime by employees which decreases the amount of manual paper claims across the Council and brings it into line with the method for claiming expenses.

At the time of writing this report, a major upgrade is being installed to the HR/Payroll system which has required significant user acceptance testing and support for its implementation. This has all been achieved in addition to the normal monthly payroll processes.

In early 2021 we introduced a new “Give As You Earn” scheme which allows employees to give regularly to any UK charity straight from their salary. Donations made in this way are tax efficient because they are taken before tax is applied, which means that the charity benefits more from each donation and it costs the donor less. Payroll giving is seen as a positive employee benefit and is in accord with our “social conscience”. With the devastating financial impact of the pandemic on charities, we hope that such schemes can help to bridge some of the gaps in charities’ income.

10.5 Union collaboration

The Council is keen to support union membership and there is recognised facility time for union representatives. It is very pleasing to report that Unison has a local branch secretary and there continues to be a growing number of additional official trade union representatives amongst Council staff. The Council has supported the branch secretary with an additional day per week purely dedicated to union duties/facility time. Throughout 2021, HR worked closely and collaboratively with the

unions to deal with any urgent matters raised by staff. This enabled issues to be resolved quickly and efficiently without the need to recourse to more formal methods of resolution. More formal matters continue to be raised through the Council's Joint Consultative Committee which includes members of Management, HR and the various trade unions.

11 Financial Implications

Staff costs represent our largest revenue expense, so it is essential our People and Reward strategies support the delivery our corporate objectives in the most efficient way. However, there are no specific costs associated with this report's recommendations.

12 Risk Assessment

There are no specific risks associated with this report. However, it should be noted that the Council has staff recruitment and retention and wellbeing included on the Corporate Risk Register and is continuing to monitor mitigation as part of the Corporate Risk Management Framework. Having sufficient resource is fundamental to ensuring the Council can continue to deliver its services.

13 Equality and Diversity Implications

The Equality Act is relevant to the decision in this report as the Council need to ensure that all its people management practices adhere to the Equality Act and actively support a tolerant and inclusive working environment. It needs to ensure it has robust policies and practices in place to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people. A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out for the purposes of this report because while there are some equalities impacts, it is not proportionate to carry out a full EIA.

14 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

There are no specific climate change or environmental implications from this report.

15 Conclusion

With the establishment of the Executive Team in 2021, there is increased collaboration and ownership across the whole of the Council on staffing matters.

In common with most organisations there are challenges in recruitment and retention across the Council. The Resourcing project has been referenced in this report repeatedly and that highlights its importance to the Council especially in the forthcoming year.

The development of our future ways of working is also a key issue and this will influence the delivery of the Council's priorities. It is important the Council continues to build on this progress and continues to support and promote a productive, inclusive, supportive and enjoyable work environment.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

None.