

This Report will be made public on 5 July 2023



Report Number **P/23/02**

To: Personnel Committee
Date: 20th July 2023
Status: Non-executive Decision
Head of Service: Andrina Smith, Chief HR Officer

SUBJECT: HR ANNUAL REVIEW (2022/2023)

SUMMARY: This report presents a review of the HR function over the last financial year 2022-2023.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report set out below.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report P/23/02.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The HR Service has been back in-house at Folkestone & Hythe since March 2012 following a period of out-sourcing to the East Kent HR shared service. This report is written to give Committee members an annual overview of the service and the HR developments that are in place to support managers in achieving their council objectives.
- 1.2 A report is presented to the Personnel Committee on an annual basis in order for members to be satisfied that the HR team is appropriately supporting the council.

2. HR STRUCTURE AND SERVICE

- 2.1 Following completion of the Transformation programme, the HR & OD team are still embedding the case management approach into our processes with the support of the ICT & Digital team to enable many routine queries to be dealt with via the Staff Hub directly by a Case Officer trained in HR tasks. The current HR & OD Team structure can be seen in **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 Overall, the service continues to maintain a Business Partner approach to supporting managers. This enables a greater understanding of the council's service areas particularly for the two HR Specialist roles as they continue to develop and widen their generalist knowledge, however the team do also provide generalist advice across the whole business and work in an agile way to ensure that adequate support is always provided.
- 2.3 The HR Senior Specialist and Specialists continue to have monthly meetings with the Assistant Director and Chief Officers along with some Lead Specialists to discuss a standing agenda of HR items, including recruitment, absence management, casework, restructuring and corporate developments. They will also attend the relevant managers meetings within the service areas when required.

The OD Lead Specialist, HR Senior Specialist and HR Specialists each have a monthly 1-2-1 with the Chief HR Officer.

The HR team also have a weekly team brief to share knowledge, discuss casework and receive corporate information.

- 2.4 The HR team have continued to work flexibly over the last year, attending the office when required for certain tasks or meetings and in addition coming in to the office on a Wednesday each week to enable further interaction and knowledge sharing.

3. CASEWORK

- 3.1 During 2022/23 the HR team have supported the following cases:
- 16 disciplinary cases resulting in 4 verbal warnings and 4 first written warnings. Under section 4.4 of the disciplinary procedures a penalty up to and including a final written warning can be agreed outside of a disciplinary hearing if the employee is in agreement. Seven of the eight case numbers mentioned above were issued in this way; the exception being one of the first written warnings which was the result of a formal disciplinary hearing.
 - 0 formal capability cases during the year.
 - 1 grievance was submitted which was partially upheld and the employee who raised the grievance requested to be redeployed which was accommodated.

While not formal cases, the team have continued to support a number of managers and staff with interventions including targeted actions and short-term performance improvement plans using our behavioural framework.

The continuation of the use of section 4.4 to enable warnings to be issued and recorded without the need for a formal hearing continues to reduce the amount of time being spent on formal hearings and the associated preparation time unless the case is particularly serious or complex in nature.

- 3.2 As a comparison, during 2021/22 the following cases were dealt with:
- 6 disciplinary cases resulting in 1 verbal warning, 1 first written warning, 3 final written warnings and 1 summary dismissal. Under section 4.4 of the disciplinary procedures a penalty up to and including a final written warning can be agreed outside of a disciplinary hearing if the employee is in agreement. Five of the six case numbers mentioned above were issued in this way; the exception being the summary dismissal which was the result of a formal disciplinary hearing.
 - 2 capability cases which resulted in one member of staff leaving before the process concluded and the other was dismissed on the grounds of ill health capability.
 - 0 grievances were raised during the year.
- 3.3 The last financial year saw a number extremely complex and high profile disciplinary investigations which saw HR and Internal Audit working closely to support managers appointed to investigate the various allegations. Some of these investigations were very time consuming, with two of the particularly complex cases taking in excess of 6 months to bring to a conclusion.
- 3.4 In 3.1 above it was stated that there were 16 disciplinary cases but only 8 outcomes are recorded. It is worth noting that 6 of the remaining 8 cases were linked to the complex investigations mentioned in 3.3 above and resulted in the employee resigning either before the investigation completed or before a formal hearing could be convened.
- 3.5 Members of the Personnel Committee will be aware that since the investigations in 2022 a governance action plan has been implemented by the Director of Corporate Services and Assistant Director for Governance & Law. As part of that action plan, during Q4 of 2022/23 the HR & OD team have been instrumental in designing a 'Getting it Right' session outlining the importance of declarations, contract management and compliance with the officer code of conduct and financial procedures. The intention is to have several 1 hour sessions which will be made mandatory and conducted face to face in the Council Chamber with a member of CLT present to introduce each session. A register of attendance will be kept and after each session every member of staff will receive a newly designed declaration form which they will need to complete and have authorised before it being saved on their personnel records.

Whilst this report is intended to be a review of the last financial year, given the high focus on ensuring staff receive appropriate training to understand the importance of getting these elements right, it is felt appropriate to update members of this committee on progress even though it would technically be part of the 2023/24 report.

Throughout May 2023, 7 face to face sessions were held with attendance made mandatory at the civic centre. One final session was then held remotely via Teams at the start of June

to enable the few staff who were unable to attend for various reasons (agreed with the Chief Executive and Chief HR Officer) to receive the training.

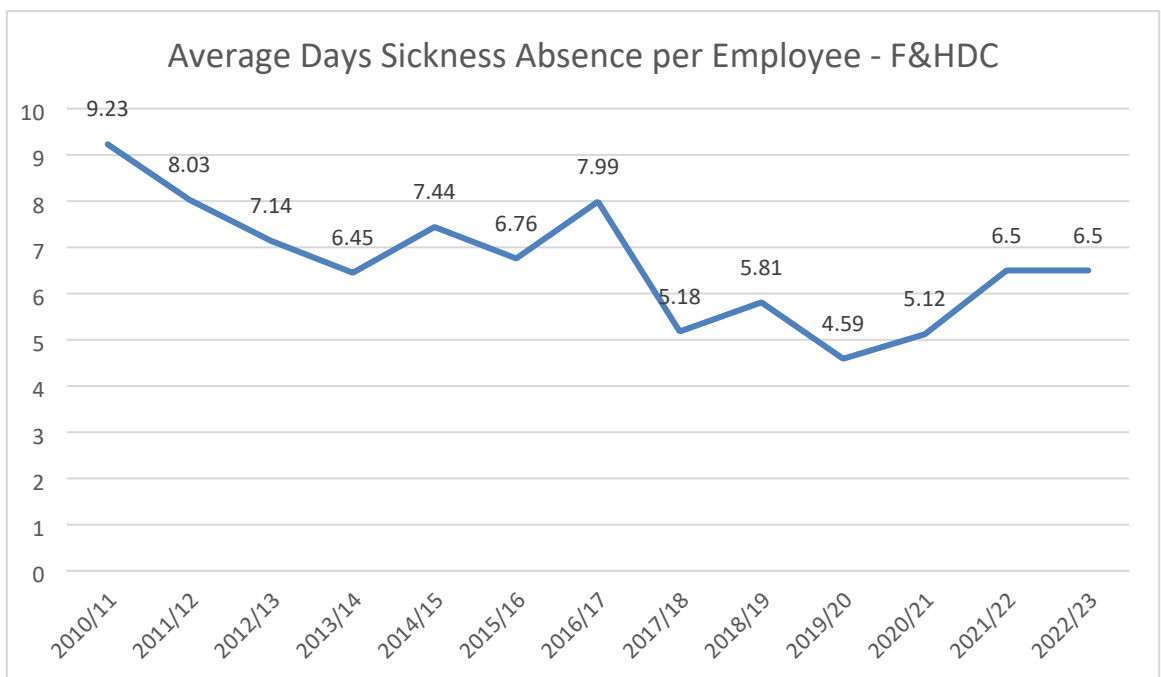
Including agency workers, 480 staff were invited to the Getting it Right Training sessions. At the time of writing this report, 437 staff have attended one of the sessions. Of the 43 that haven't attended: 8 are on maternity leave, 19 are on casual zero hour contracts, a further 8 were due to leave the council's employment before the end of June 2023, 2 are on long term sick leave, leaving only 6 staff who could not get to a session due to their shift pattern.

The remote session was recorded and will be made available for all new starters at the council as part of their initial induction period and will be sent to those who haven't yet attended a session to ensure that we reach all of the staff.

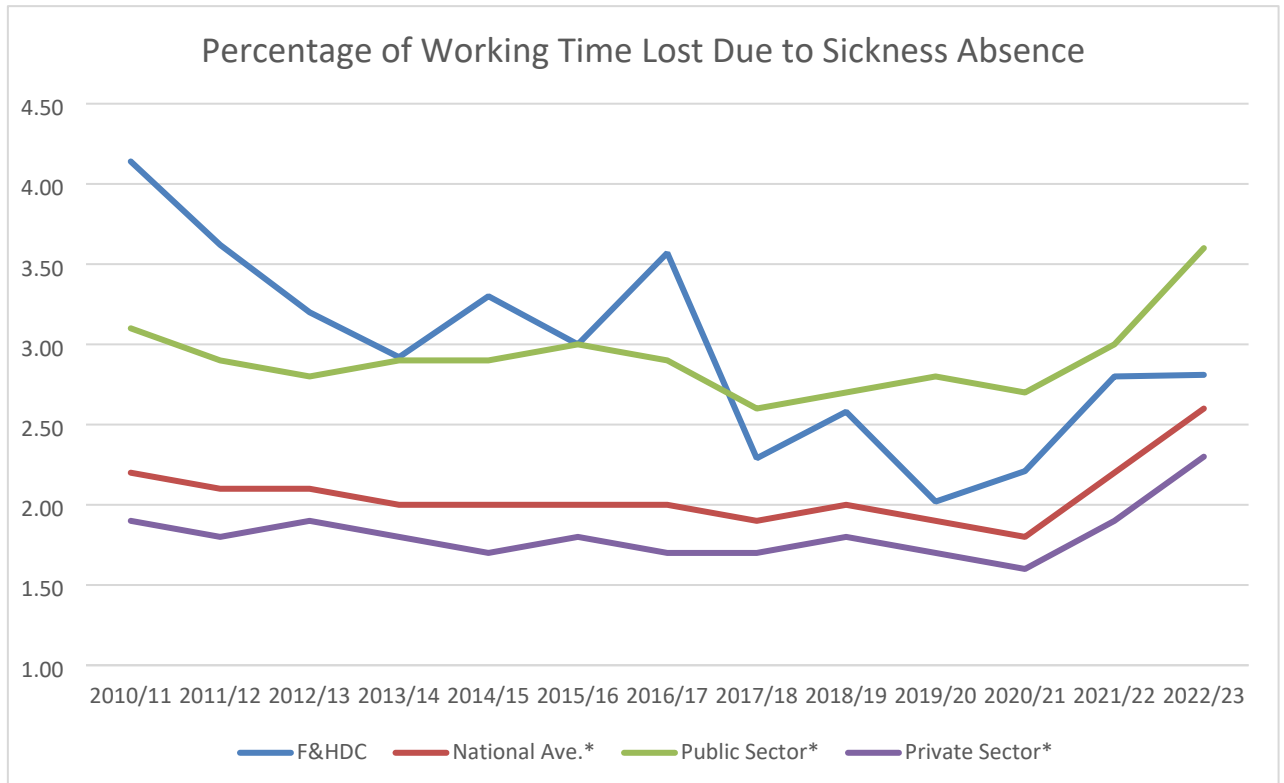
4. ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

4.1 In 2022/23 there was an average of 6.5 days sickness absence per employee. This is based on an average headcount of 468.5. During the year, 2.8% of all working time was lost due to sickness absence.

4.2 This represents the same level of sickness absence across the authority as reported last year:



4.3 Measuring absence rates in terms of the “average number of days per employee” is a widely used formula across different sectors and has previously enabled comparisons to be made using data collected by professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). However, the pandemic and associated measures have had a deep impact on businesses, the UK labour market and the validity of this as a comparative measure of data in both the 2020/21 and 2021/22 reporting years. While we therefore need to be cautious with data comparisons, using the percentage of working time lost due to sickness absence is the measure least impacted by the pandemic measures, is utilised by the Office of National Statistics, and is therefore used for comparative purposes here:



Source: [Office of National Statistics](#), April 2023
 *Comparisons made with calendar year data

The pandemic had a significant effect on sickness absence data in recent years. While Covid-19 infections may have led to increased absences, measures such as furloughing, social distancing, shielding and increased homeworking helped to reduce other causes of sickness and, nationally, absence rates actually fell to a record low in 2020. However, the reduction in these measures, coupled with new Covid-19 variants, led to a rise in sickness absence across the country in 2021 to above pre-pandemic levels. Sickness absence rates in the UK continued to rise again in 2022 and is now at their highest level since 2004.

The national picture is reflected in both the public and private sectors, which experienced increases of 0.6 and 0.4 percentage points respectively in comparison to the previous year. Sickness amongst public sector workers have consistently been higher than private sector workers and there are several factors that may cause this, including the types of work undertaken in the public sector.

4.4 Since the 2014/15 annual report the HR team have provided a breakdown of sickness absence figures in terms of long-term and short-term cases.

Long-term absence is classed as four weeks or more.

The instances of absence and amount of days lost to sickness will be influenced by fluctuations in staffing levels. The introduction of the new housing service in October 2020 increased the council's headcount and therefore an influence on the instances of sickness absence for example. The average number of days per employee column gives the most accurate indication of the relative impact that short or long-term absences have had on the organisation.

“Days lost” refers to the amount of working days lost to sickness absence.

“Ave. days” refers to the average amount of days sickness absence per employee.

Year	Short-Term Absences			Long-Term Absences		
	Instances	Days Lost	Ave. Days	Instances	Days Lost	Ave. Days
2014/15	425	1031.5	2.72	36	1788	4.72
2015/16	349	1016.89	2.65	33	1562	4.06
2016/17	375	985	2.62	29	2021.5	5.37
2017/18	345	951.5	2.58	18	957	2.60
2018/19	258	675	1.87	30	1424	3.94
2019/20	294	879.5	2.42	16	787.5	2.17
2020/21	250	768.5	1.85	27	1355	3.27
2021/22	454	1372.5	2.98	34	1630.5	3.54
2022/23	547	1717	3.66	32	1317	2.81

4.5 Over the past two years we have experienced an increase in short-term absenteeism (absences of less than 4 weeks). The average number of days lost to short-term sickness cases is at the highest level since the HR team have reported data in this format in the Annual Report.

Nationally, sickness absence rates are at their highest since 2004, with minor illnesses (such as coughs, colds, flu, sickness, nausea and diarrhoea etc) increasing sharply over the past year and the most common reason for absence in the country. Mirroring this national trend, such illnesses are recorded as the most prominent reason for sickness absence at F&HDC.

Paragraphs 4.7 and 4.8 outline the measures the council is taking to reduce sickness absence rates.

4.6 Long-term sickness absence (absences of more than 4 weeks) have reduced in comparison to last year. Overall, 5.5% of absences were classified as long-term and this equated to 43% of the total time lost due to sickness.

The most prominent reason for long-term absence over the past year remains mental ill health and stress, which accounted for 50% of our long-term sickness cases. Overall, 27% of working time lost to sickness absence has been classified as relating to “stress, depression, anxiety, mental health, fatigue”. While this represents a reduction on the previous year, where we reported a figure of 34%, this remains our most predominant reason for working time lost.

There is a mixture of work and personal related cases and while the team work to get people back into work as quickly as possible such cases have to be handled appropriately, including ensuring sufficient recovery time, in order to enable an effective return to work. The prominence of this type of absence is not unique to Folkestone & Hythe; the CIPD continue to report mental health and stress amongst the most predominant cause of long-term absence across the country, particularly in the public sector.¹

¹ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development: Health and Wellbeing at Work 2022.

4.7 With this in mind, the council has implemented a number of measures to support employees in the workplace, proactively manage mental health and prevent stress related issues:

- Specific Learning & Development sessions focused on personal resilience, managing and reducing the causes of stress, promoting well-being, and positive management actions that can be taken. This has included dedicated sessions on financial wellbeing, men's mental health, and menopause awareness for example, as well as the facilitation of health & wellbeing groups such as the wellbeing café.
- Initiatives to keep staff connected while working in an agile manner, including the virtual kitchen ("Chai There"), New Starters and Manager Forums, Armed Forces community staff group, connection days and weekly email communications.
- Developing a team of mental health first aiders and promoting their role throughout the council.
- Virtual "drop in" support and wellbeing sessions, where an HR representative and mental health first aider are always available.
- Access to an online wellbeing centre, which includes a range of health and wellbeing advice and resources, and an Employee Assistance Programme available through F&H Rewards. Staff can access counselling services and specialist information and support on a range of personal and professional issues that could be affecting them in their work or their health and wellbeing generally, including financial, debt and legal advice.
- A range of resources and support on a dedicated health and wellbeing intranet page, including access to 'My Wellbeing' which provides staff with a weekly programme of information aimed at improving overall well-being.
- Health and wellbeing activities including swimming at Hythe Pool, discounted gym memberships available through the council's reward platform 'F&H Rewards', and initiatives organised and supported by the Civil Service Sports Club.
- Utilising our occupational health providers and resources such as HSE risk assessment questionnaires to understand the causes of stress for individuals and teams, and taking targeted actions to mitigate these effectively.
- Promoting flexible working options and other policies or initiatives that may support work/life balance and those with caring responsibilities.
- Undertaking staff surveys, which help us identify both team and organisation-wide issues and assess the positive steps taken to address these.

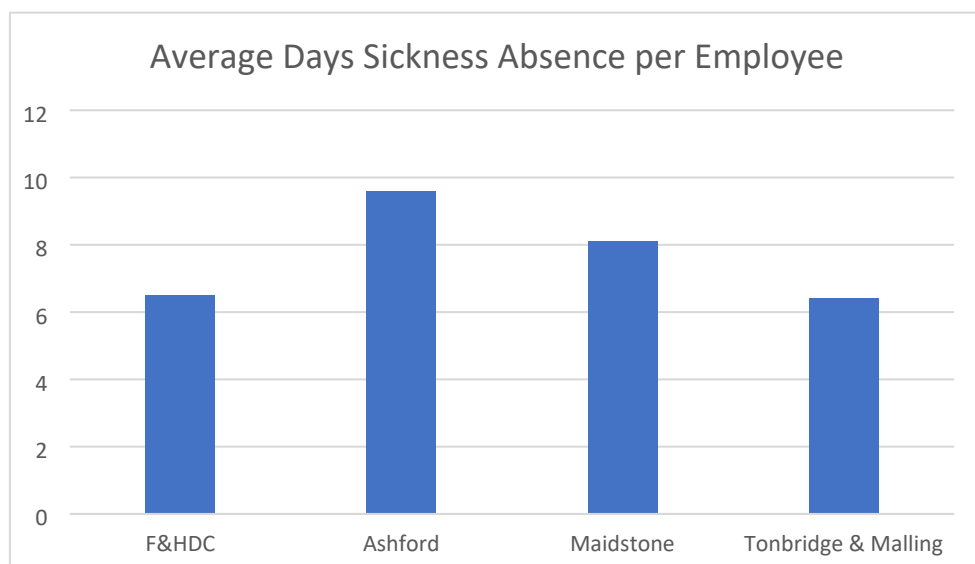
Further detail and specific initiatives to support health and wellbeing are outlined in section 7 of this report.

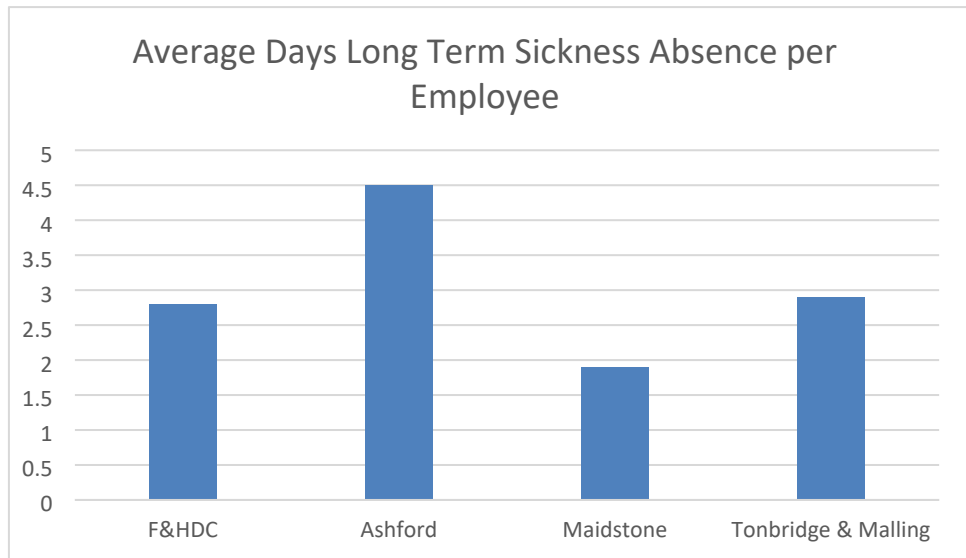
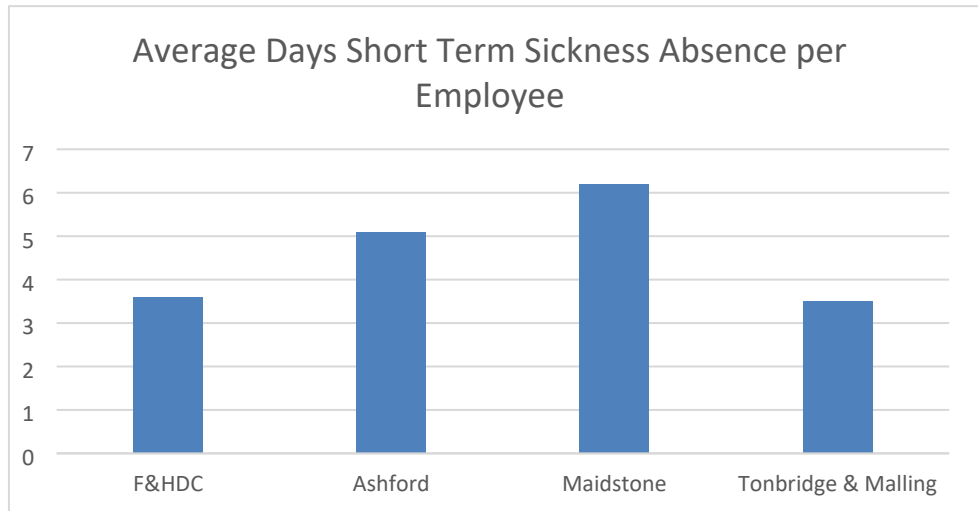
4.8 In addition to the initiatives outlined in paragraph 4.7, a number of other measures are in place to ensure that we continue to support health and wellbeing and reduce absenteeism:

- A robust absence monitoring system is in place. The line manager immediately records the absence, cause, and expected duration on the Staff Area, ensuring swift interventions from the team.
- As the expected duration of absence is included in the notification HR can monitor the undertaking of return to work interviews, which form an integral part of effective absence management. If HR have not received a copy of the return to work interview as expected reminders are sent to the line manager to ensure they are completed.

- There are clear absence triggers in place and the HR team provide dedicated and focused support to managers, including attending return to work interviews if there is a cause for concern. At these meetings supportive measures may be discussed that enable the employee to return to work earlier than otherwise anticipated or, in the case of frequent absenteeism, attend work on a more regular basis. If appropriate, formal processes may be instigated and/or the continuation of occupational sick pay considered.
- Absence data and cases are reviewed with relevant Directors, Assistant Directors, or Chief Officers as appropriate on a regular basis.
- Alongside a case management approach and providing focused support to line managers, HR also provide general training on absence management as part of the manager induction process. There was a specific training session delivered to managers and team leaders on effective absence management and supporting staff health & wellbeing in November 2022, with the next session scheduled for March 2024.
- Occupational Health services continue to be utilised and through increased contract monitoring, focused KPIs and closer working relationships, we believe we have overseen an increase in quality of medical advice and effective support received in recent years as a consequence. The contract provider changed in January 2022 and these increases in quality and effectiveness have continued as a result.
- The HR team continue to promote the council's Employee Assistance Programme available through F&H Rewards.
- The HR team have continued to work with other external organisations and sources of support, such as Access to Work, and relevant internal departments (such as Health & Safety) to improve health and wellbeing and support absence management.
- The council's agile working culture enables staff who are self-isolating to continue working if they were well enough to do so.
- The council historically offered staff free 'flu vaccinations at the Civic Centre and post-Covid this practice has continued with staff being able to reclaim the cost of obtaining a vaccination privately.

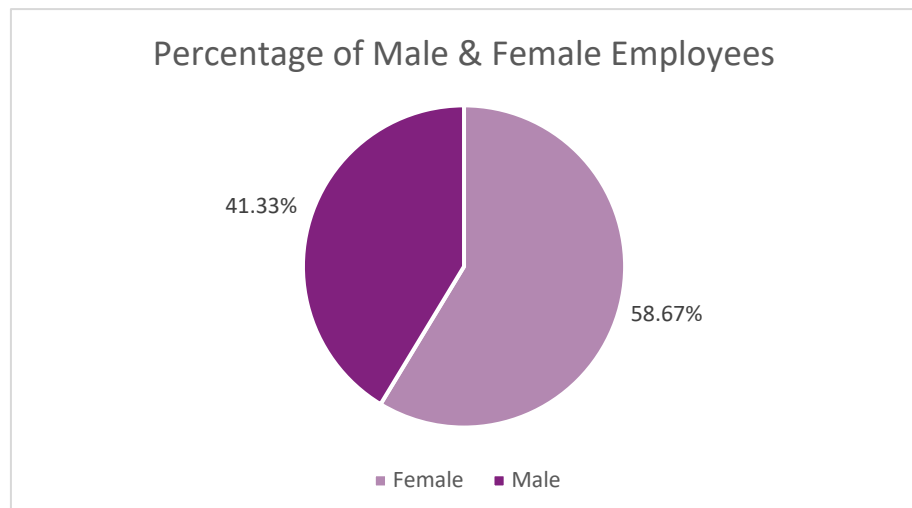
4.9 By way of a small local comparison, we have been able to obtain some benchmarked data from 3 other local authorities in Kent. At the time of writing this report, not all of the local authorities had responded to the request originally made by Ashford Borough Council.



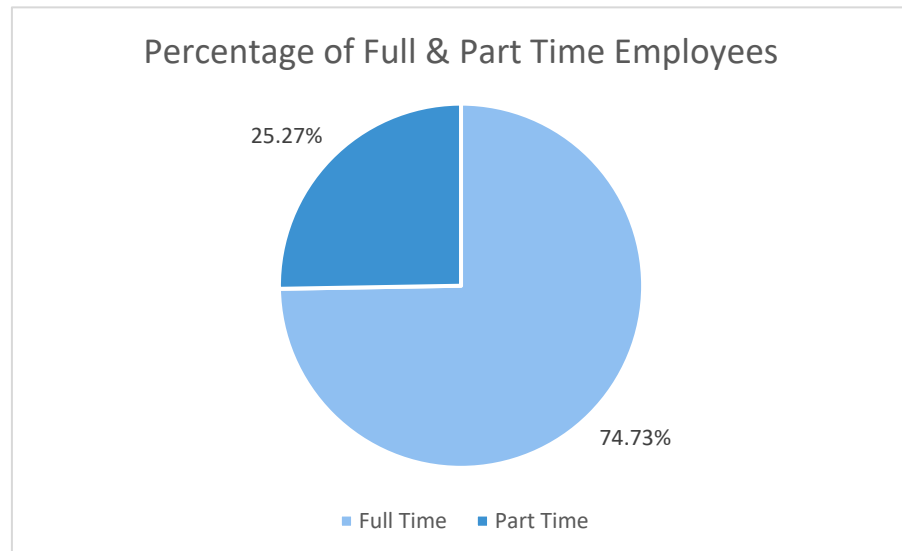


5. WORKFORCE INFORMATION (31st March 2023)

5.1 As a snapshot on 31st March 2023, the Council employed a headcount of 467 staff which is reflected as 411.6FTE (Full Time Equivalent).

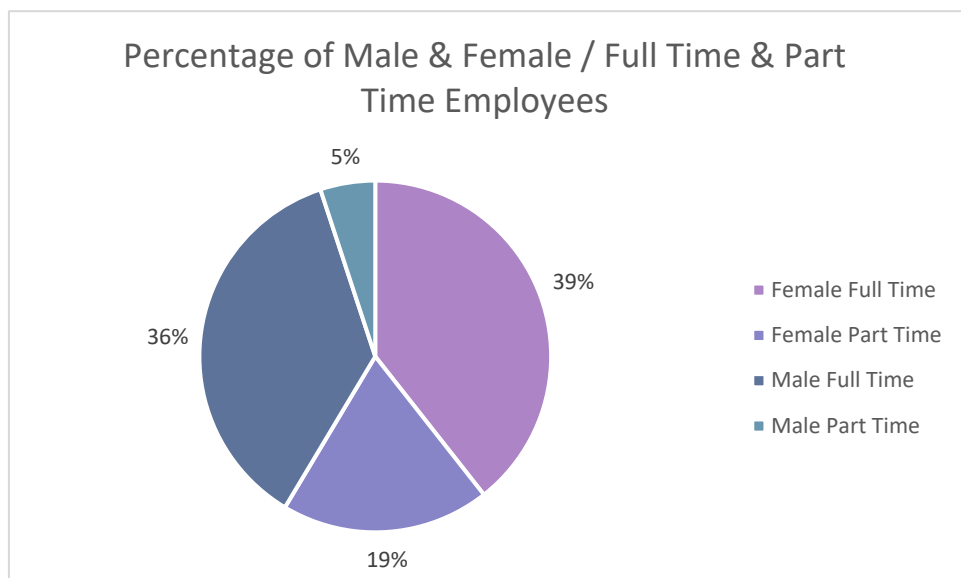


5.2 Staff are employed on a contract which specifies the number of hours to be worked each week. Full time is considered to be 37 hours per week and part time contracts could be anything up to 36 hours per week.

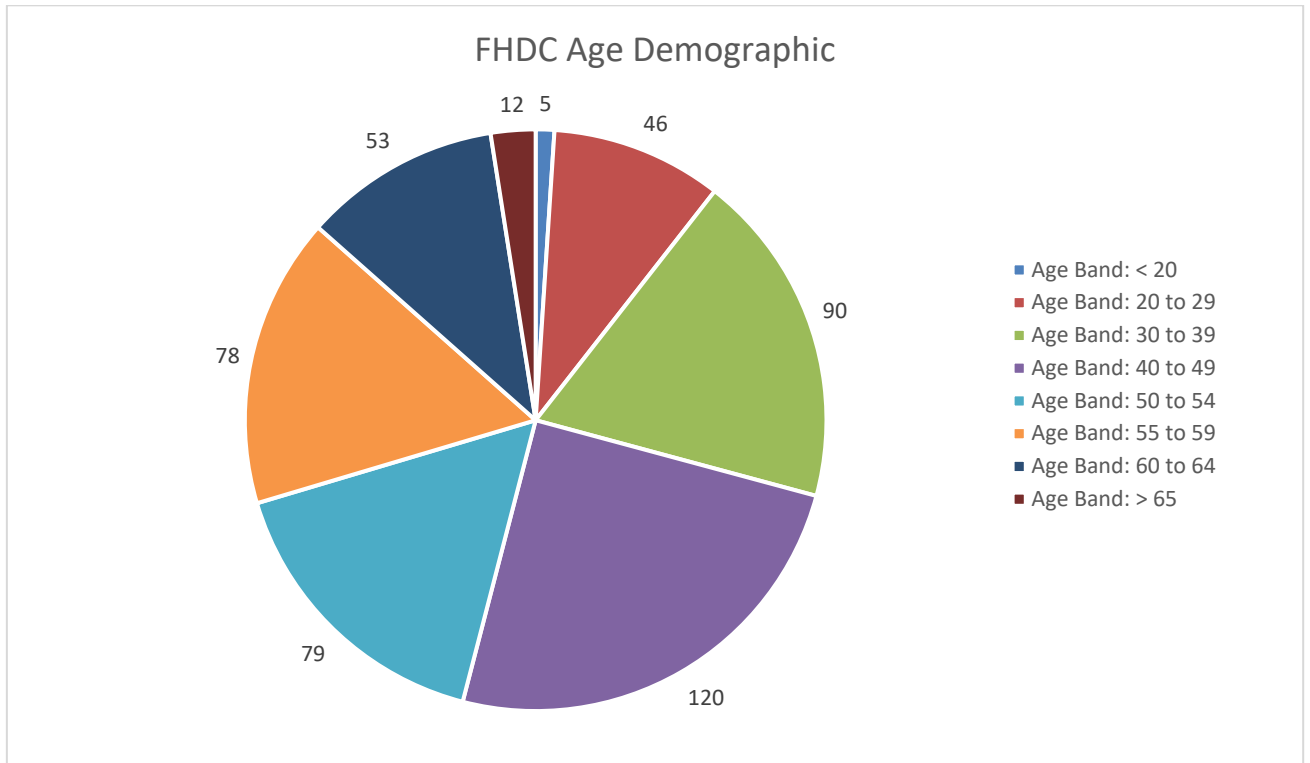


Of the 118 staff (25.27%) who work part time, 92 are female whereas we only have 26 males who work part time.

5.3 When looking at the breakdown of male & female employee in terms of whether they work full time or part time:

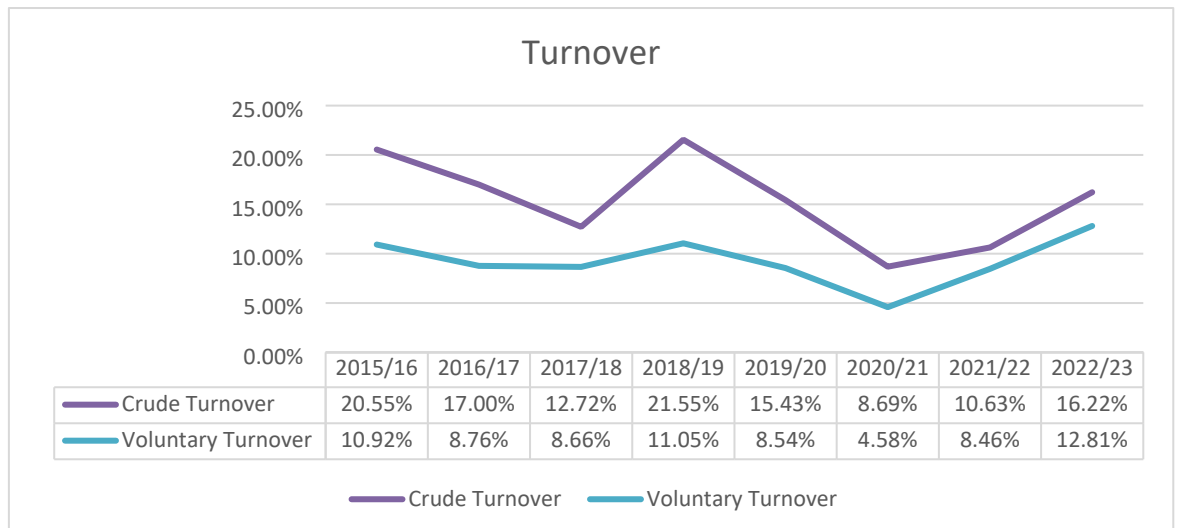


5.4 The age profile of the Council does clearly show that we have an ageing workforce with nearly 50% aged 50 or over:



The age profile of every team has been created as part of the Taking Stock project which has provided a clear indication of where we need to focus efforts on clear succession planning for the future.

5.5 Employee turnover is monitored annually and the chart below tracks the turnover over the last 8 years:



Employee turnover reflects the percentage of staff that have left the council each year. People may leave employment for a number of reasons; staff may resign, retire, their casual or fixed-term contract to cover for example maternity leave or work on a short-term piece of work such as the annual canvass may end, there may be redundancies, ill health, or staff may be dismissed because of their conduct, capability or failed probation.

Crude turnover figures include all those that have left the council, whatever the reason. Voluntary turnover figures include those that have left because they have decided to resign or retire.

Following the national trend, we have seen an increase in turnover in 2022/23. While people may have refrained from changing employers at the outset of the pandemic, the opening up of the economy along with factors such as labour shortages and a reduction in geographical barriers due to hybrid working approaches have created greater opportunities in the job market.

Whilst the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development and Office of National Statistics don't produce annual information on turnover trends, Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) provided some research in a recent article which included some benchmarking across the UK clearly outlining the increase in voluntary turnover².

6. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 6.1 The focus of our OD and Engagement Team is to enhance organisational effectiveness. This is achieved through several areas of our People Strategy, with the primary focus being: Learning and Development, Workforce Engagement and the recognition element of Reward and Recognition. Each of these areas will be taken in turn.
- 6.2 The OD & Engagement Team delivers work for other East Kent Councils, including apprenticeship delivery and running training and development courses and coaching. During 2022/23 this work generated £118,900 of income for the council. The cost of additional staff brought in to support with the delivery of this work has been covered with this income and our approach has given the OD Team greater resilience, economies of scale, and a wider range of facilitators to appeal to different personalities. Working with other councils has meant that our staff have benefited from a more diverse learning environment, sharing best practice in management with participants from other local authorities. Feedback from the councils we are working with has been resoundingly positive and we have been fostering a deeper sense of community between F&HDC and our neighbouring authorities.

7. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 7.1 Our Learning and Development offer is comprised of general skills development (we develop managers, deliver training, and run apprenticeships to help ensure staff perform well and reach their potential) and technical skills development (we make sure the Council is compliant, appropriately skilled and that the professional skills training budget for the whole organisation is well-managed).
- 7.2 Our Management Development Programme has, as usual, been updated to reflect the development needs of people managers. The majority of sessions are an hour long, with some longer, as needed. Topics covered have included:
- May 2022: Creative recruitment and selection
 - May 2022: FOI requests
 - June 2022: Data protection

² [Employee turnover trends revealed: How economic uncertainty is influencing churn, and what employers can do about it - PwC UK](#)

- June 2022: Better business cases
- June 2022: Political insight Q&A
- July 2022: Our approach to project management
- September 2022: Managing performance forum
- November 2022: Absence management and supporting wellbeing
- December 2022: High performing teams – what drives team performance?
- January 2023: Personal Development Plans – simple but effective!
- February 2023: Political insight Q&A
- March 2023: Contract Management Standards

OD & Engagement also offer managers ad hoc support and coaching with specific people management-related issues.

7.3 Over the course of the 2022/23 year we have offered a variety of online development opportunities for staff at all levels. The OD & Engagement team have run 60-minute to half-day sessions on:

- April 2022: Six-week resilience through mindfulness course
- June 2022: Assertive communication and building relationships
- September 2022: Presenting online with confidence
- September 2022: Beginners' Excel
- September 2022: Six-week resilience through mindfulness course
- October 2022: Managing conflict and challenging conversations
- January 2023: Contract Standing Orders
- January 2023: Building resilience at work
- January 2023: Fraud Awareness
- March 2023: Fraud Awareness for Grounds Maintenance

Following each development session, a review is undertaken to evaluate the success of the topic. Workshops are evaluated based on the extent to which participants felt that they have increased their competence and confidence in the topic area of the workshop. The majority of participants reported that the workshops have increased their competence and, to a lesser extent, their confidence which develops as they begin to put into practice what has been learnt during the sessions.

7.4 In addition, we have commissioned training on other areas of cross-organisational interest, as follows:

- April 2022: Effective Complaint Handling
- May 2022: Asbestos Awareness Training
- June 2022: First Aid at Work
- October 2022: Intermediate and advanced Excel
- January 2023: Fraud Awareness (East Kent Audit Partnership)
- January 2023: Prevent (KCC)

7.5 Role-specific professional development enables us to deliver the Corporate Plan and this year we have invested in the following courses for staff:

Name of Team	Course
Democratic Services	AEA Foundation Course Local Government Governance Training Governance & MO Training
Transportation	Civil Enforcement Regulations 2022 ParkMap Training
Procurement	CIPD L6 Professional Diploma in Procurement & Supply Carbon Action Requirements within Procurement Forthcoming new legislation within Procurement
ICT Support	Business Objects Reporting Administering Microsoft Endpoint Manager Administering Microsoft Office 365 and Teams
Housing Options	Decision Letter Writing
Revenues & Benefits	Vulnerability Academy (UK Finance) Data, GDPR & Vulnerability (Money Advice Trust) Supporting Customers with Addition (Money Advice Trust) Understanding & Supporting Customers with Serious Illnesses Self-Harm Awareness Post-Natal Depression Awareness Schizophrenia Awareness Understanding Phobias Housing Benefit Subsidy Workshops Appeals Training
Communications & Engagement	Essential Video Skills CIPR Stakeholder Engagement
Food Safety & Health & Safety	ABC Food Law online training Competency Development Portfolio – CIEH PACE Interview Skills Acupuncture, Tattoo & Cosmetic Skin Piercing
Licensing	Professional Licensing Practitioner Qualification Responsible Authority Licensing Training Canine & Animal First Aid Course L3 Certificate for Animal Inspectors with C&G conversion Scrap Metal Course – Institute of Learning Taxi Licensing
Private Sector Housing	DFG Procurement Course

	<p>BRE Fire Door Inspection HHSRS Enforcement HMO Practical Inspection HHSRS Damp, Mould and Excess Cold Basic Electrical Awareness</p>
<p>Grounds Maintenance & Property</p>	<p>Chainsaws Chainsaws in Trees Tree Climbing ICCM Diploma Manual Handling Use of Trailers for Beginners C&G NPTC L2 Award in Safe Use of a Powered Pole Pruner CDM Principal Designer ROSPA Weekly Inspection RICS Dilapidations Annual Conference 2022 JCT Minor Works Building Contract 2016 CIOB Chartered Membership PASMA Mobile Access Towers for Users</p>
<p>Case Management (Corporate)</p>	<p>Governance FOI Refresher Training – Leadership through Data NNDR Masterclass Course & One Day Overview – DM Training Services</p>
<p>Economic Development</p>	<p>APM Exam & Refresher Course</p>
<p>Strategy, Policy & Performance</p>	<p>Train the Trainer – Safeguarding Training Effective Performance Management and Analysis Implementing Carbon Net Zero Locally – RTPi Heritage & Conservation – RTPi Planning & Good Design – RTPi Planning & Community Engagement – RTPi Impactful Planning Communication – RTPi</p>
<p>Hythe Pool</p>	<p>NPLQ Training</p>
<p>Environmental Protection</p>	<p>Mallard Consultancy Subscription Court Case Review & Preparation National Enforcement Academy Training – Keep Britain Tidy Building Community Engagement – Keep Britain Tidy Dogs in Public Spaces</p>
<p>Customer Services</p>	<p>Security Industry Assessment licence renewals</p>
<p>Estates & Assets</p>	<p>RICS – Landlord & Tenant</p>
<p>Finance</p>	<p>CIPFA Courses Business Rates CIPFA / IRRV</p>

7.6 Chief Officers, Assistant Directors and Corporate Directors are also offered coaching and bespoke training courses provided by respected organisations, for example, one Chief Officer is attending the Springboard programme for highflyers run by the Local Authority training provider SOLACE.

7.7 E-Learning modules have been promoted to all staff in order to comply with our duties for providing relevant Health & Safety and statutory training. We are continually improving our system and in January 2023 introduced Manager Dashboard functionality to enable Managers to track the completion rates of those in their teams.

7.8 With the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2016/17 Personnel Committee agreed to focus on apprenticeships.
As a council, we decided to become an accredited Apprenticeship Training Provider, so that we can deliver our own apprenticeships and draw down on Apprenticeship Levy funds to pay ourselves to do so. This has the dual benefit of bringing in an income to the council and allowing us to carefully tailor our courses to meet the specific needs of local government.

This means that we are subject to inspection by Ofsted and in August 2022 we received our first full inspection.

We were delighted to be graded as a 'Good' provider; here are two comments from their report:

- "Apprentices benefit from a welcoming and positive environment that is highly conducive to their learning. They value the high-quality online learning sessions that they participate in."
- "Apprentices enjoy their apprenticeship and value the new skills, knowledge and behaviours that they acquire. They are motivated, conscientious and keen to produce work to a high standard. Their confidence grows over time and they take on additional responsibilities at work".

7.9 In terms of the specific apprenticeships we offer, we have 10 officers currently undertaking a Level 3 Team Leader Apprenticeship which also involves studying for an ILM Level 3 Diploma for Managers/ Team Leaders qualification (we are an ILM Centre so deliver this ourselves).

Five of these learners started in March 2023 so are just beginning.

This is a 13-15 month long programme and helps develop our talent pipeline of aspiring managers. To enhance their development, our management apprentices have taken on additional management and cross-training responsibilities as well as shadowing budget managers (where they don't manage a budget themselves) to learn the basics of budget management.

7.10 We also have 3 officers undertaking our in-house Level 3 Apprenticeship in Business Administration, which also involves studying for a City & Guilds L3 Diploma for the Business Administrator, and 3 officers undertaking our in-house Level 5 Professional Coach apprenticeship, which involves achieving an ILM L5 Certificate in Effective Coaching and Mentoring (as an accredited City & Guilds/ILM training provider, we deliver these ourselves).

Where appropriate we continue to use external training providers to support apprentices. We currently have officers undertaking the following:

- a Solicitor Apprenticeship (with associated degree);
- an Accountancy apprenticeship (with professional accountancy qualifications);
- a Digital and Technology Solutions Apprenticeship (with associated degree);
- a Level 4 Project Management Apprenticeship;
- an IRRV Apprenticeship (Revenues and Benefits) and
- Senior Housing and Property Management Apprenticeships (with professional CIH qualification).

This is an economical way of funding training as it is funded from our apprenticeship levy account and when this is used up, 95% of the course fees are funded by Central Government.

7.11 We are also engaged in developing future local talent. This is done through engagement with schools/education facilities and through initiatives such as the Central Government's Kickstart programme (supporting young people who are unemployed).

Our work with schools/ education establishments has included:

- June 2022: F&HDC Presents: A Career in Local Government Webinar: <https://youtu.be/BNdq93GFFdQ>
- July 2022: Work experience placements with students from: Harvey Grammar; Folkestone School for Girls; Folkestone College; Brockhill Park and University.
- October 2022: Talk at Folkestone College about careers in Case Management.
- January 2023: Discussion about work expectations and competencies at Folkestone College
- January 2023: Careers talk at Turner Free School.
- January 2023: Careers talk at Folkestone Academy.
- January 2023: Jobs Fair at Leas Cliff Hall, Folkestone.
- February 2023: T-level placements (45 days) for three East Kent College Group students.
- February 2023: Two work experience placements for students from Folkestone College.
- March 2023: Interview/ employability skills support at Folkestone College.

7.12 The Kickstart Scheme provided funding to create new short term jobs for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit who were at risk of long term unemployment. There was also funding available to support young people to develop new skills and to help them move into sustained employment after they have completed their Kickstart funded job.

The funding covered the following:

- 100% of the [National Minimum Wage](#) (or the [National Living Wage](#) depending on the age of the participant) for 25 hours per week for a total of 6 months
- associated [employer National Insurance contributions](#)
- [minimum automatic enrolment pension contributions](#) (up to 3%)

Each placement also received £1,500 funding towards PPE, uniform, equipment and training.

Participants had to be placed in employment by 31st March 2022 as the funding was only agreed until 30th September 2022.

We hosted and developed five Kickstart placements covering a range of roles. Three of the placements were within our Case Management teams learning office based skills, one is working within Grounds Maintenance as a Gardener and the final placement is learning skills as an Assistant Caretaker within our Housing Management service.

The employability support they received from the HR & OD Team included: Careers Workshop; CV Writing training; Preparing for an Interview; Mock job interviews.

One of the Kickstarter placements subsequently secured a permanent role with us and we are supporting him to complete a law degree (via the apprenticeships scheme) and qualify as a solicitor.

- 7.13 We are also supporting government-backed T-Levels (vocational courses with an in-built 45 days of industry placement) and are working with EKC Group to organise placements for students, the first three of which started in February '23.

In addition, we are currently funding two school leavers/ graduates to do degree or masters level apprenticeships in areas of the organisation that require additional succession planning (Finance and ICT). This gives local people the opportunity to obtain a degree or masters that is funded by our apprenticeship levy whilst learning on the job. This represents an evolution of the Grow Our Own scheme that we ran from 2015 to 2019 and enables us to reduce costs by using government funded apprenticeships that have now been made available at university level.

8. WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

- 8.1 A key part of our role in OD & Engagement is to drive employee engagement, which has been proven by numerous studies to drive organisational performance.

In 2021, we were ranked as number 4 in the Best Companies category for 'not for profit bodies' in the UK, with outstanding levels of employee engagement.

We have sought to maintain our strong position and in June 2022 we carried out our own, in-house, survey using similar questions to the Best Companies questions, plus the well-established Employee Net Promoter metric, in which we scored +45 (higher than Google, Netflix and Microsoft in their latest published results).

- 8.2 Our Internal Communications and Engagement and Wellbeing strategies translate insights from our employees into a series of actions. Activity is delivered via various online and in-person channels:
- Weekly emails with links to videos and intranet articles (this will transition to Teams channels as we embed this new communications platform). Emails were more frequent during December as we delivered the F&HDC 12 days of Christmas.
 - Staff briefing (every 2 months).
 - Connection events: Chai There (monthly), New Starters' Forum and New Managers' Forum (quarterly); Connection Days in the office (every 2 months)
 - Wellbeing events: Menopause café, Craft Club, Wellbeing café and support for HR drop-in sessions, lunchtime meditation.
 - Other events (ad hoc) e.g. Bingo, Games, Quiz Time.

- 8.3 This year, with the continued implementation of our Wellbeing Strategy, we have delivered a range of internally and externally run sessions focused on employee wellbeing:
- May 2022: Let's talk Wellbeing
 - June 2022: Managing stress and improving team wellbeing with Dr Anthony Parker
 - July 2022: Financial Wellbeing – getting the most out of your pension
 - July 2022: Yoga for All (6 week course)
 - October 2022: Menopause Awareness (Best me in 45)
 - November 2022: Men's Mental Health (Best me in 45)
 - November 2022: Intro to Financial Wellbeing (Best me in 45)
 - Dec 2022: Measuring & improving wellbeing with Tom Jeffs from Changing Minds Kent
 - Feb 2023: Let's Talk Wellbeing
- 8.4 In July 2022, our in-house Mental Health First Aiders went on tour (virtually), running 15-minute wellbeing sessions at team meetings for teams across the Council. We have also undertaken some targeted wellbeing interventions for specific teams, for example, in October 2022, a bespoke 'Managing stress and improving wellbeing' session with Dr Anthony Parker was delivered specifically for Customer Services, given the challenging calls they sometimes deal with.
- 8.5 In November 2022, we ran 'Let's talk wellbeing' sessions for all Grounds Maintenance staff alongside on-site health checks to support with their wellbeing. This work has been in tandem with improving welfare facilities for Grounds Maintenance staff at their depots (water coolers, drying facilities etc).
- 8.6 In October 2022, we received the Bronze Award from Kent and Medway's Healthy Workplaces programme, acknowledging our commitment to employee wellbeing. In March 2023, we achieved Kent and Medway's Healthy Workplaces Gold Award. We submitted evidence for 30 wellbeing activities that we undertake, in line with healthy workplace initiatives that are considered best practice by Public Health England, Health and Safety Executive, Business in the Community and NICE.
- 8.7 In February 2023, following on from a recommendation from our Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Assessor we ran focus groups with staff affected by vicarious trauma to understand their wellbeing needs. As a result of these sessions, we will implement an action plan to better support staff affected by vicarious trauma.
- 8.8 We ensure strong two-way communication with our people through a variety of interactive workshops and focus groups, e.g. the Civic Centre relocation working group.
- 8.9 The OD & Engagement team have also run meetings and Away Days for teams to help them review progress and plan for the future. These have included sessions for:
- Grounds Maintenance: Wellbeing and Engagement for GM; Hot Weather working protocol; and Head Gardeners management training (x2).
 - Environmental Enforcement: Team building.
 - Case Corporate: Team Building and Planning event for Team Leaders.
 - Case Management (Corporate and Place): Accountability for Case and Specialists (3 sessions).
- 8.10 We have also facilitated meetings of the wider management team (every 2 months), engaging Middle Managers in the organisation's strategic thinking and planning.

9. RECOGNITION

- 9.1 We have continued with the delivery of our recognition scheme. The peer-nominated scheme recognises those who have noticeably displayed behaviours aligned to our core values. The panel meets three times a year and small prizes are issued shortly afterwards. We also focus on embedding our core values through the corporate induction and our behaviour framework. We continue to promote our E-cards service, making it easier for staff to recognise one another for displaying our values at any time of year. In addition to this, we recognise those officers who have dedicated significant years of service to the organisation with small tokens of appreciation.
- 9.2 In October 2021 we ran a special recognition for our Housing Service, to celebrate a year since they had come in-house. This was an opportunity to thank and motivate this new team who have worked so hard to deliver a brand new service.
- 9.3 In January 2023, we awarded our Employee of the Year for the third year. This was introduced to recognise a single individual who has relentlessly demonstrated our core values. The winner was Mark Mullender for his tireless support managing migrations and upgrades for the council's major ICT systems, including Revenues and Benefits, Housing, Finance and Cash and payments and document management.

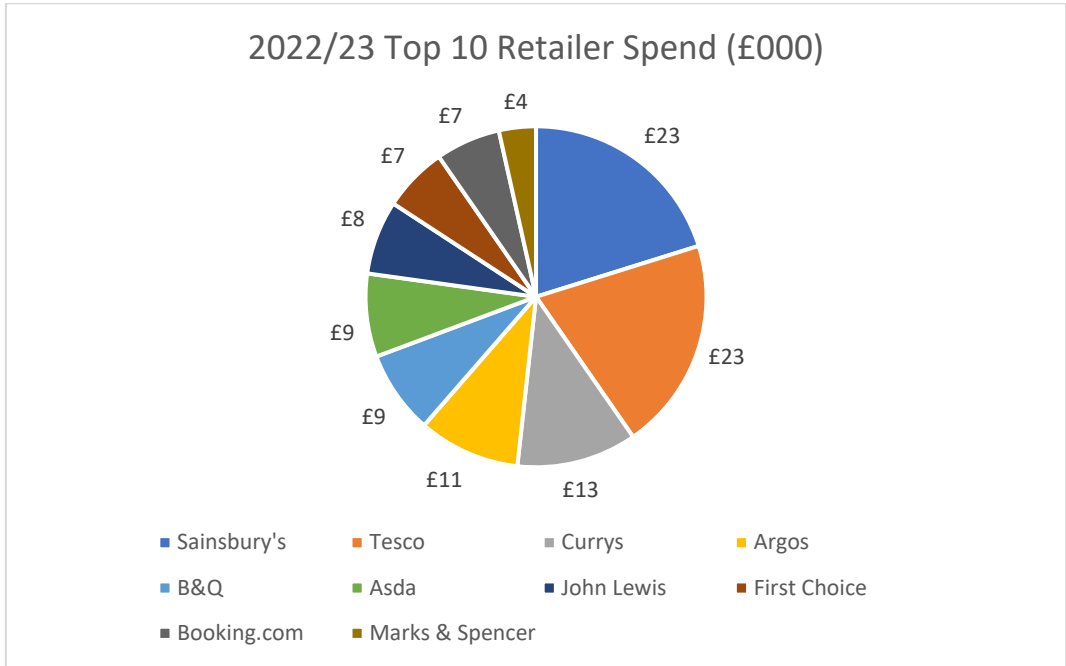
10. F&H REWARDS

10.1

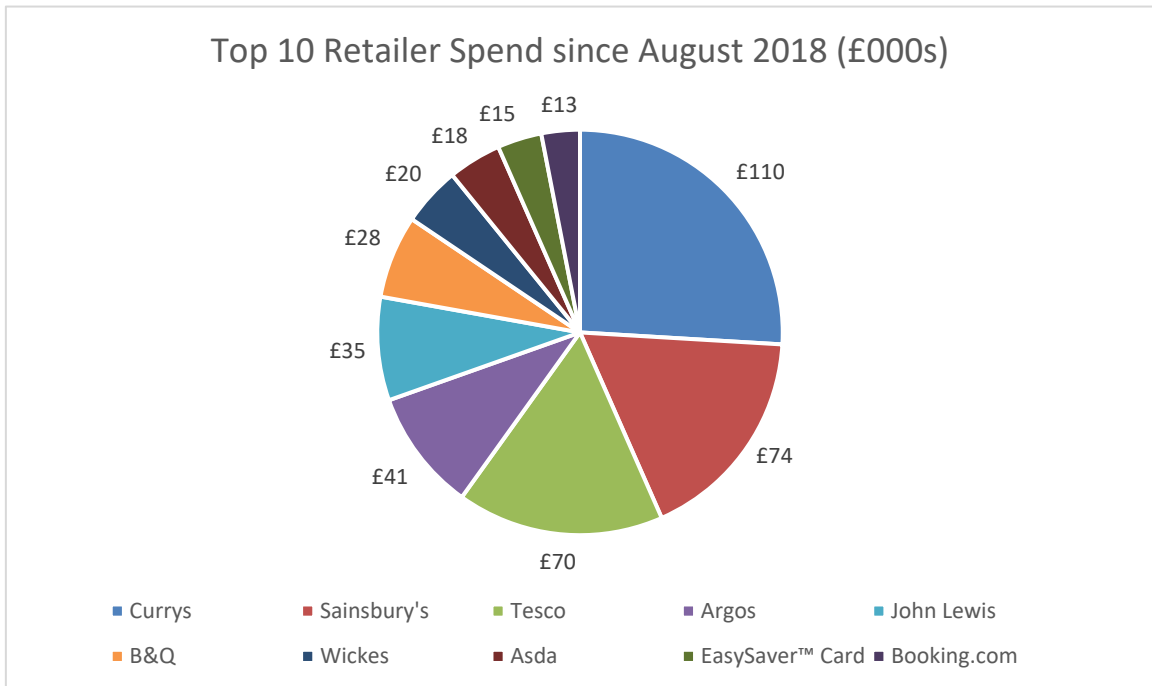


F&H Rewards via Reward Gateway was launched to staff in 2018 and has been extremely successful and popular with staff. Previous members of the Personnel Committee received a report at the meeting dated 14th April 2022 which provides a comprehensive overview of the platform and the different elements available to staff. That report 'Update on F&H Rewards' – P/21/08 can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

- 10.2 By way of an update since the report mentioned in 9.1 above, the Tusker car lease scheme was launched to staff on 25th April 2022 and we now have 5 employees who have ordered a car through this scheme with several other members of staff also expressing a strong interest in the scheme over coming months. Whilst this take up may sound on the low side, other councils who have introduced the scheme have reported a 1% average take up of the scheme. In addition, the current new car market for many manufacturers (regardless of whether it is via salary sacrifice or direct interaction) has a notoriously long lead in time from the point of ordering to building the car and the actual delivery – to the extent that a 12 month wait is not unusual. The impact of this is that many people do not want to wait (or cannot wait) that long for a car and therefore the second-hand market is more attractive to source nearly new vehicles that can be ready almost immediately.
- 10.3 The top 10 retailers are shown below in terms of the amount of spend over the 22/23 financial year, and it can clearly be seen that the big supermarkets are where staff are really taking advantage of this scheme.

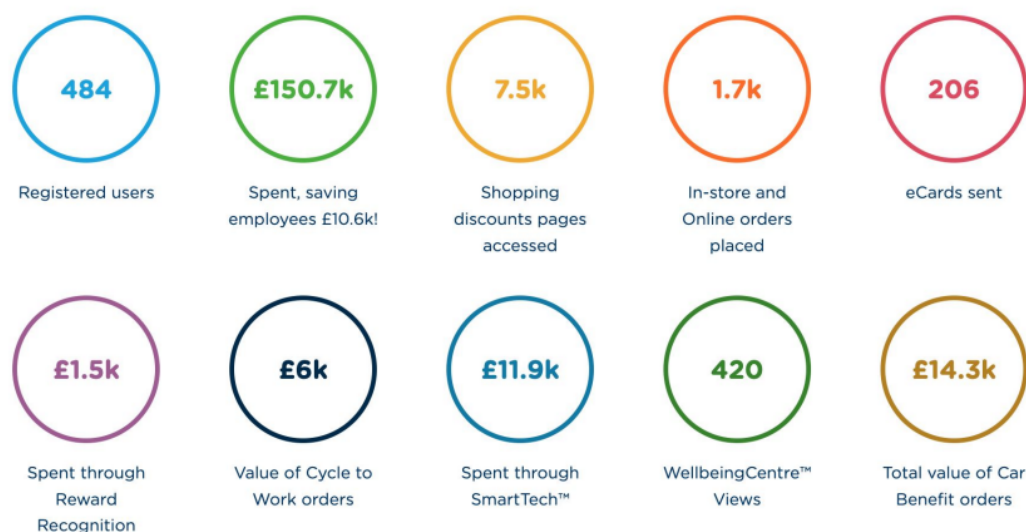


Looking back at this element of the F&H Rewards platform to when it was first launched in August 2018, the top 10 retailers are very similar:



10.4

How is F&H Rewards doing?



This is a general overview of the scheme over the last 12 months and the intention is to bring a detailed update to members at the January 2024 committee meeting.

11. PEOPLE STRATEGY

11.1 Since 2019, the People Strategy has become embedded within the council framework and underpinned not just the transformation programme but all of our people related activities. Following a review with the Continuous Improvement Board, a new strategy was devised and launched in 2021 aimed at supporting the council's objectives as we move forward with new ways of working following the pandemic.

The People Strategy 2021 can be found at **Appendix B**.

11.2 The 6 main themes of the people strategy are:



11.3 Behavioural Competency Framework

The framework continues to support our recruitment and selection process and has become embedded within performance management enabling managers to feel more confident in approaching behaviours as part of their 1-2-1s with team members.



Looking forward work is now underway to understand what additional selection exercises managers feel would enhance the selection process so that we can design, write and implement different selection exercises in order to provide more opportunity outside of a traditional interview for candidates to demonstrate their abilities and attitudes. Of course this will also naturally mean training managers in how to appropriately assess these types of exercises with the added consideration of whether some are face to face in the future or whether using media such as Microsoft Teams will remain an option.

In addition, the forms associated with annual performance reviews have been redesigned to bring a focus towards self and manager assessment of performance against the behavioural framework in order for development plans to not only focus on 'hard' targets but also on the behaviours we expect as an employer. This new format is likely to be rolled out during Q2 of the 2023/24 year following a 'test and learn' pilot with a limited number of staff in Q1 followed by a review at CLT.

Our behavioural framework can be found in **Appendix C**.

11.4 Agile Working

As an employer, we have continued to recognise the need to develop and encourage modern working practices to enable employees to maximise their performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the business, whilst maintaining high levels of customer service and a good work life balance.

An Agile Working Framework was developed to support this approach. The Agile Working Framework can be seen at **Appendix D**.

When the civic centre first re-opened managers were able to book specified zones on the 1st and 2nd floor hot-desking space for their team to work together as well as individual desks for those that needed to access to the office for various reasons. Since that time we have sought feedback from staff and the booking system has now been removed with all staff working on the 2nd floor hot desks rather than spread across the 1st and 2nd floors. Meeting rooms are still bookable to enable team meetings or hybrid meetings to take place.

- 11.4.1 We have surveyed staff regularly since March 2020 on how they have been feeling about working from home, the regularity with which they feel there is a need to be in the office (taken from both an employee view and a managers view for their team). The consensus of opinion has consistently been that agile working works well for individual performance, for teams, for customers and for managing teams.

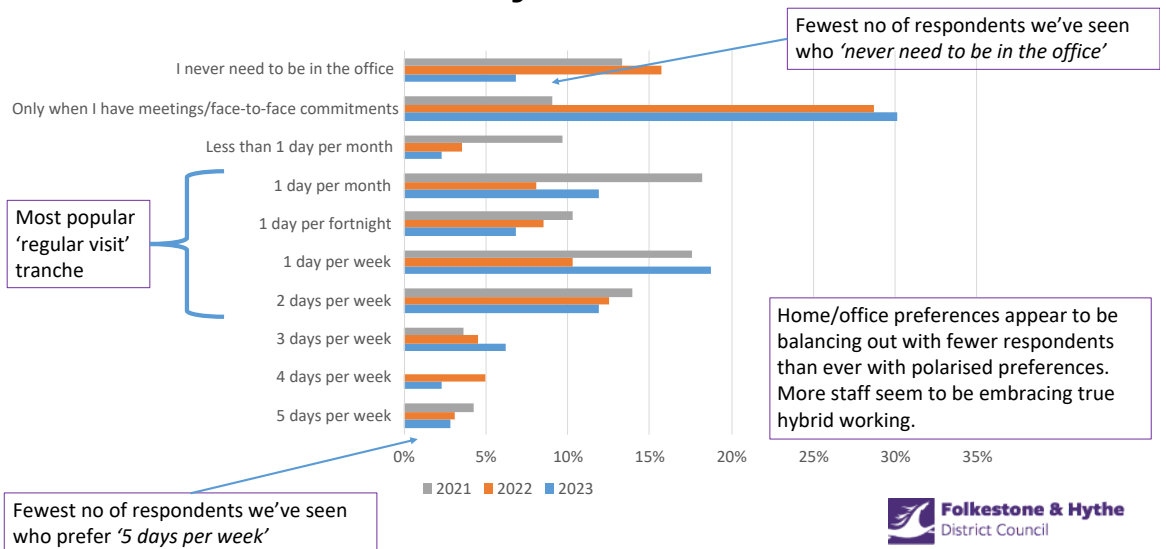
In addition, feedback is often received commenting on how agile working has improved the work/life balance, health & wellbeing and also reduced environmental impacts, reducing travel time and savings on fuel costs to travel to the office. Some staff have even commented that they would no longer work here if they were unable to work in an agile manner.

- 11.4.2 We have seen a real benefit from agile working when it comes to communication with staff. Prior to lockdown driving the move to an increase agile way of working, our staff briefing was always held in the council chamber and would only reach a small number of staff who could fit into the council chamber. Now that we have developed the agile way of working with hybrid meetings, on average over 200 staff attending in person or viewing via Teams

each briefing enabling important corporate messages to reach a much wider audience at one time.

- 11.4.3 The snapshot below taken from the most recent agile working survey in 2023 clearly illustrates how views have developed over the last 3 years with fewer staff having the extreme views of never needing to be in the office or wanting to be in the office 5 days per week. Most staff members are settling on preferences including 1 or 2 days per week or fortnight in the office.

Preferred number of days in the office



- 11.5 The People Strategy is due to be refreshed during Q2-Q3 of the 2023/24 financial year and a full review of progress against the existing People Strategy as well as the updated People Strategy will be presented to Personnel Committee in due course.

12. TRANSFORMATION – TAKING STOCK

- 12.1 Since January 2023, a small team drawn from HR, OD and also a manager from the Systems Development team have been working with the Chief Executive to review the Transformation Programme that took place primarily from 2018 through to 2021. The project has been referred to as ‘Taking Stock’ as it has been an opportunity to pause, reflect and review how the council has developed and changed over a number of years in order to inform decisions on any future changes that may be appropriate.
- 12.2 Taking Stock was split into 3 main workstreams – System & Customer Insight (led by the Systems Development Senior Specialist), Team & Staff Insight (led by the Chief HR Officer) and Communications & Engagement (led by the OD & Engagement Lead Specialist and Senior Specialist).

A wealth of data has been gathered on workload metrics, performance metrics, staffing data and information plus survey information and targeted focus groups to gain views from as many staff as possible on our current operating model with Specialists and Case Management.

The aim for the team is to complete the majority of the Taking Stock work by May 2023 to then able a period of time with CLT where various options can be considered and modelled

to ensure we move forward as a council with a structure that is not only fit for current purpose but fit for the future to deliver on our ambitions and also affordable in light of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy.

13. NEW COUNCILLOR INDUCTION & TRAINING FOR MAY 2023

- 13.1 During Q3 and Q4 of 2022/23 attention was placed on considering the May 2023 elections and subsequent requirements for an induction and training plan that would meet the needs of newly elected councillors and also those re-elected for a further term of office.
- 13.2 The Chief HR Officer sought feedback from all of the group leaders on the previous programme delivered in 2019 and also reviewed programmes from other local authorities in order to create the new programme for 2023.

The feedback gathered was extremely useful and changes for the 2023 programme have included shorter sessions wherever possible (compared to some that were 3 hours in 2019) and splitting briefings on each committee away from the first actual meeting of that committee in order to provide some breathing space to digest the information being conveyed to members plus having training over a concentrated couple of months rather than drawing it out for a longer time.

In addition, a massive development that came about during lockdown for the Covid-19 pandemic was that the majority of people have become accustomed to using apps such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Google Meet for meetings meaning that we could consider remote sessions as part of the programme rather than it all having to be face to face at the council as it had been in previous years.

- 13.3 The programme for May 2023 onwards focusses on delivery in-person initially, moving to a mix of face to face and remote sessions, and will include the following:
- Elected Councillor Information & Welcome Session
 - Introduction to Otterpool Park
 - Governance, The Constitution & How Council Works
 - Introduction to Local Government Finance
 - Introduction to Planning & Defensible Decision Making
 - Safeguarding
 - Scrutiny Essentials
 - Communications & Social Media
 - Licensing Act 2003 and Taxi Licensing
 - Housing & Homelessness
 - Introduction to the Personnel Committee
 - Chairing Skills
 - Introduction to the Joint Transportation Board
 - Outside Bodies – Roles & Responsibilities
 - Audit & Governance Introduction

- Introduction to our Partnerships & Supporting our Communities
- Personal Safety for Councillors
- An A to Z of Licensing
- Working with Central Government
- Prevent Awareness and Radicalisation
- FHDC Climate Commitments
- Questioning Skills for Overview & Scrutiny

A new addition for May 2023 will be the availability of FHDC's e-learning modules via the Workrite platform for councillors which will be optional but will cover topics such as anti-bribery & corruption, environmental awareness, equality & diversity and GDPR.

14. PAYROLL

- 14.1 Following Cabinet approval in February 2014, Ashford Borough Council have provided our council payroll service and our election payroll. The delegation arrangement and service level agreement are reviewed annually by the Chief HR Officer and the Head of Personnel at Ashford.
- 14.2 The payroll service continues to run in a very efficient manner between the two councils. Performance is monitored on a monthly basis with any fall below 100% accuracy reported being investigated and appropriate actions taken.
- 14.3 During 2022/23 a planned migration of the iTrent payroll service took place to enable Ashford Borough Council to move from a server based provision to a cloud based service. The project was led by a consultant from MidlandHR who run the iTrent system and FHDC had representation from the HR Senior Specialist and also members of the ICT team as the move meant ensuring elements such as two factor authentication and single sign on were effectively implemented.

The system went live for the February 2023 payroll and ran extremely smoothly. Staff were kept informed as the changes took place to ensure there was clear communication around the single sign on and how to access the system for self service and manager authorisation.

A new development was the introduction of being able to access iTrent via a weblink on a mobile device which now means receipts for expenses can be uploaded from a picture on the mobile device and employees can access their annual leave balances etc without having to log on to their work laptop.

15. PAY UPDATE

- 15.1 In December 2021 the pay negotiations were successfully concluded following meetings of the Joint Staff Consultative Panel and the subsequent staff ballot.

The pay award agreed was as follows:

2022/23

- Removal of Grade B Point 7 from the council pay scales. (Those staff who were held at Point 7 following the removal of Grade A in April 2020 will be held on Point 8 in future as a spot salary subject only to pay awards but not increments). This is to ensure compliance with the National Living Wage in the forthcoming years.
- £500 to be added to the salary points 8 - 10 within Grade B (which is equivalent to 2.6%).
- 2.0% pay award to all salary points within FHDC's Grades C to L and the old EKH Grades D to N.
- Increase in annual leave for those staff in Grades A to J who are currently on 24 days per year, to 25 days per year

2023/24

- £500 added to the salary points within Grade B (which is equivalent to 2.5%).
- 2.0% pay award to all salary points within FHDC's Grades C to L and the old EKH Grades D to N.

- 15.2 Towards the latter end of 2022, Unison requested that the pay award for 2023 be re-negotiated given the impact of the cost of living increases on staff. The Personnel Committee agreed to this request and negotiations took place resulting in a revised offer being tabled by members at a meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Panel to the staff side representatives.

Following agreement to ballot staff on the revised offer, it was confirmed in February 2023 that the vast majority of staff were in favour of accepting a revised offer comprising:

- £1,500 added to every salary point on the main FHDC pay scale and the old EKH pay scale or 3%, whichever is the greater; and
- Closure of the civic centre between Christmas and New Year each year.

This agreement was implemented for the 2023/24 financial year in the April 2023 payroll.

- 15.3 It should be noted that whilst staff have received pay awards of 3%, 3%, 2% and 3% for the financial years 2020/21 through to 2023/24 respectively, these awards do not apply to either the Chief Executive or Directors.

The senior management pay scales were last reviewed (following benchmarking by South East Employers) in early 2019 and revised pay scales (one for the Chief Executive and one for Directors) was implemented following discussion at Personnel Committee in June 2019, therefore whilst progression has taken place through the salary grade points on each scale, there has not been any percentage increase since 2019.

Before the end of the previous administration, work was commissioned with South East Employers to undertake a new benchmarking review of senior salaries across the region. That work has now been handed over to the Chief HR Officer and a report will be presented to Personnel Committee in due course.

16. HR SERVICES IN 2023/24

16.1 In line with the People Strategy, as well as continuing much of the work already highlighted throughout this report, some of the work already identified for the team during the 2023/24 year includes:

- Further development of the behavioural framework, particularly in relation to recruitment activities
- Review of the behavioural framework to ensure it still adequately meets the values of the Council
- Focus on support required to ensure identified training and development is rolled out to staff as a result of the governance action plan
- Continued support to the project covering the future relocation of the Civic Centre leading on the changes that will directly affect our people
- Continued support to the Taking Stock project and any subsequent organisational changes that may result from decisions
- Development of guidance and system developments that will enable managers to be more self sufficient and work monitored via the Salesforce system
- Training for managers on the Job Evaluation process to enable them to sit on evaluation panels
- Training for managers on the skills required to lead disciplinary investigations
- Delivery of the induction and training programme for members elected in May 2023
- Comprehensive refresh of the People Strategy

17. LEGAL / FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS / POLICY MATTERS

17.1 Legal Officers Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

17.2 Finance Officers Comments (TM)

There are no financial implications arising as a direct result of this report.

17.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (ASm)

There are no specific Diversities and Equalities Implications arising from this report.

18. CONTACT OFFICER AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

Andrina Smith – Chief HR Officer
Tel: 01303 853405
Email: andrina.smith@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – HR & OD Team Structure Chart

Appendix B – People Strategy 2021

Appendix C – Behavioural Framework

Appendix D – Agile Working Framework