

Report for: Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting:	17 February 2025
Subject:	Establishment Report
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Jane Lock, Cabinet Member for People, Development and Deputy Leader
Responsible Officer:	Matthew Page – Head of People, Performance & Waste James Hamblin – Operations Manager – People Services
Exempt:	N/A
Wards Affected:	All
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 – Structure Chart

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To provide Members an update on both the Establishment of the Council together with its performance. This report should be read in conjunction with the functions of individual officers highlighted in the Constitution.

This report sits within the current budget and policy framework. An updated set of structure charts are provided in Appendix 1.

Recommendation(s):

That the Scrutiny Committee note the report.

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the performance of our workforce.
- 1.2 These items include updates on the key establishment indicators of sickness absence, agency expenditure and turnover.
- 1.3 Focus on data and analysis continues to be a key consideration as we share and embed this across service areas through initiatives such as the quarterly

performance review report and subsequent operational meetings. Additional monthly updates are provided to the Corporate Management Team and Leadership Team on workforce data. Where possible the collection, reporting and sharing of data is being automated using our own systems.

- 1.4 The workforce data allows us to compare the performance and impact of vacancies, sickness, turnover, agency and overtime spend both corporately but also in particular departments. This helps us to regularly review our establishment and make sure it is fit for purpose.

2.0 Sickness Absence, Agency Expenditure and Establishment

- 2.1 For 2023/24 the Council had an average of 10.45 days sickness absence per full time equivalent (FTE). This compared to 10.09 days in 2022/23, 7.82 days in 2021/22 and 5.58 days in 2020/21. Figure 1 outlines sickness absence since 2020/21 and includes the first nine months of the financial year 2024/25.

- 2.2 Our policy expects employees to not exceed 6 days sickness absence in a rolling 12 month period. It should be noted that there will be a difference between FTE and per employee statistics. As noted on previous reports, lower sickness absence levels during the ‘pandemic years’ will reflect both the furlough scheme in place at the time and employees being able to work from home.

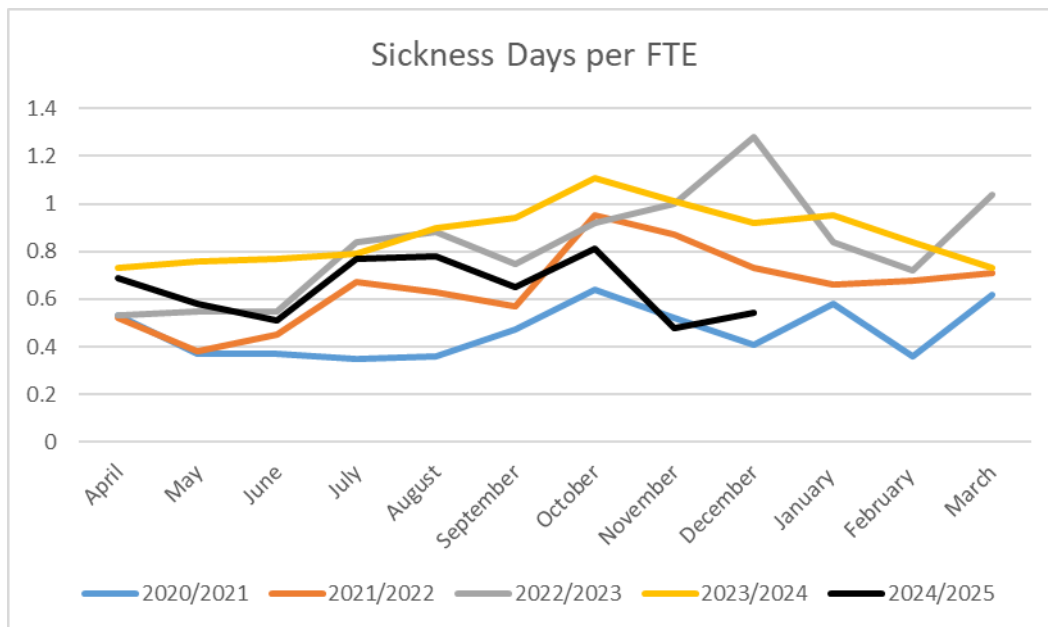


Figure 1. Sickness 2020/2021 – 2024/2025.

- 2.3 Sickness absence and the impacts this creates remain an ongoing challenge. The People Services department has rolled out in house training across the organisation following the updates made to the sickness absence policy. This training has been made available to employees through the

learning management system to ensure content created is readily available to existing and new line managers.

- 2.4 In the first nine months of this financial year, 5.81 days sickness absence per FTE were recorded. Acknowledging this, current projections would suggest approximately 7.75 days lost per FTE in 2024/2025. This year has seen a significant reduction in Autumn and Winter absences as shown in Figure 1, returning to levels last seen in the financial year 2020/2021. It should be noted that sickness absence meetings are the majority of our employee relations cases and has been for the last 12 months.
- 2.5 Expectations regarding sickness absence continue to be communicated through line managers, with particular acknowledgement given to the challenges brought by presentism which has nationally gained attention as the country has transitioned into longer term hybrid working practices following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.6 Dedicated flu vaccination appointments for our staff had been secured with a local provider. Whilst uptake on the offer this year was reduced compared to last year, we are minded that some staff already have free access to the jab via the NHS should they meet the criteria set.
- 2.7 January 2025 will see the return of free health checks for staff. Dates and times have been communicated to our workforce. This follows the positive feedback from the trial in 2024 and is aligned to efforts being made to prioritise the health and wellbeing of our workforce.
- 2.8 Following conclusion of the All Staff Survey in 2023, an action plan has been created focused on themes of Communication, Engagement as well as Pride and Wellbeing. This followed further feedback provided by the Impact Consultative Group and our recognised Union. Steps taken so far include; the introduction of regular all staff briefings, social events for all staff and the regular sharing of good news stories. The recent social event prior to the Christmas break generated £480 in donations for a local charity. Autumn 2025 will see the launch of the next All Staff Survey.
- 2.9 During 2023/24 the Council spent £682,789.04 on agency workers. Table 1 outlines agency spend since 2020/21. For the current financial year, we are currently tracking below spend incurred last year and final spend for this year will be confirmed in future reporting.
- 2.10 The labour market continues to fluctuate between the broader benefits and security of permanent employment and the typically higher salary and greater flexibility offered by agency work. This is particularly challenging in specialist roles. The Council continues to review benefits available to our workforce to ensure we maintain an attractive employment offer. It should be noted that figures outlined in Table 1 may vary from previous reporting due to payment terms with the providers.

Year	Agency Spend	Year On Year Change (+/-)
2020/21	£576,368.28	
2021/22	£812,248.34	+33.97%
2022/23	£1,102,933.68	+30.36%
2023/24	£682,789.04	- 47.06%

Table 1. Agency Spend 2020/21 – 2023/24

2.11 Table 2 compares the Establishment for the Council and associated costs from 2020/21 to 2023/24. The 2024/25 pay award of £1290 (or 2.5%) was finalised in October 2024, with staff having pay backdated 7 months to 1 April 2024. Strike action was not supported by union members. Feedback has been provided already to employer representatives within the pay negotiation for consideration in future settlements.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total number of employees /workers paid	697	728	765	798
Establishment FTE (Average)	422.79	426.43	430.44	443.69
Total Taxable Gross Pay	£11,515,324.63	£12,197,334.88	£13,168,855.70	£14,343,265.15
Employers NI	£1,038,135.28	£1,126,244.53	£1,277,182.95	£1,365,846.63
Employers Pension	£1,832,713.73	£1,938,973.16	£2,093,547.57	£2,585,379.63

Table 2. Establishment 2020/21 – 2023/24

2.12 The year on year increase in ‘Total Taxable Gross Pay’ outlined in Table 2 reflects the increased FTE, each year’s pay award made as well as the yearly incremental increase. It should be noted that the overall yearly payroll budget includes an aspect of agency staffing costs which can be used to cover hard to recruit areas e.g. Solicitors in Legal, Planning Enforcement Officers.

2.13 In October and November 2024, training focused on Recruitment, Interviewing and Selection was rolled out in response to employees specifically requesting this. Attendee feedback has been positive and new tools to assist with tasks such as candidate shortlisting have been shared.

2.14 Learning Partnerships, a collaborative group of staff from different services to review learning and workforce planning across the Council, has been created. Regular meetings are underway and feedback is being shared with management teams on insight and action being proposed.

2.15 The Council and staff received recognition in October 2024 at the annual South West Challenge. Three teams made up of staff from across our service areas represented Mid Devon District Council and competed against other South West local authorities. The teams performed exceptionally well, being shortlisted for all award categories and finishing as the best placed authority in one category.

3.0 Turnover

3.1 Turnover for 2023/24 was 17%. This compares to a turnover of 19.49% in 2022/23, 21.25% in 2021/22 and 14.23% in 2020/21. Figure 2 shows turnover at the Council since 2020/21 and includes the first nine months in the financial year 2024/25.

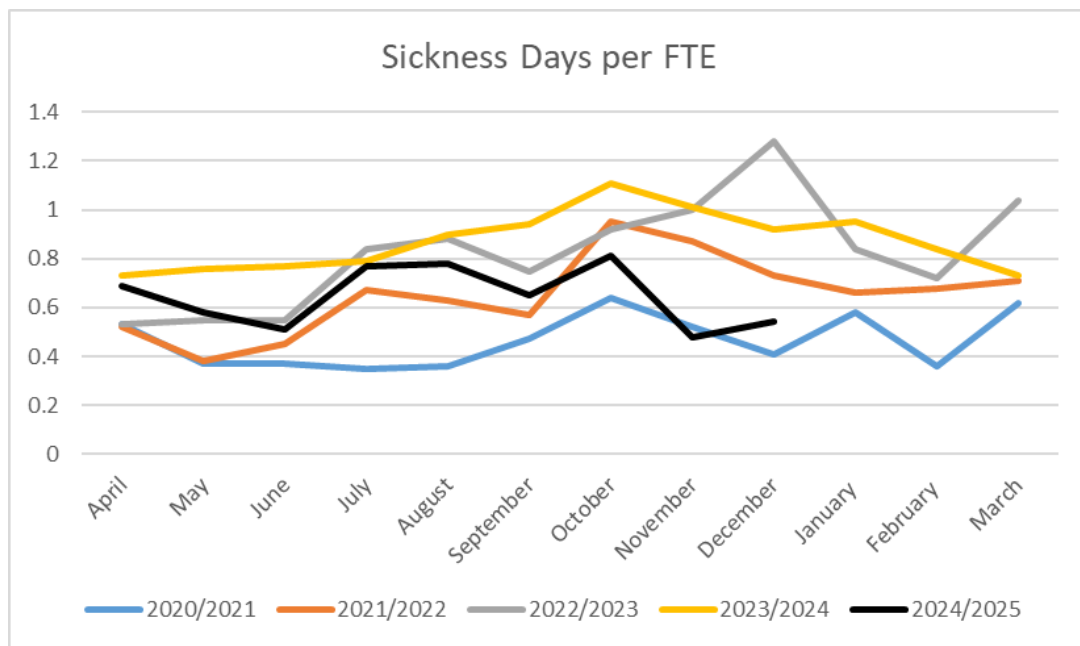


Figure 2. Turnover 2020/21 – 2024/25.

3.2 In the first nine months of 2024/25, turnover totalled 13.55%. Acknowledging this, current projections would suggest we end 2024/25 with a turnover rate of approximately 18.07%.

3.3 Feedback from exit interviews is being shared with services to reflect on what we, both at a service and whole Council level, could consider to retain employees. Reasons cited by employees leaving the Council vary but regularly referenced includes; Career Progression, Better Salary and Benefits and Retirement.

- 3.4 Alongside fourteen apprenticeships across the Council, we continue to support Mid Devon residents with work experience. We have already been contacted by students from different educational providers for work experience in 2025, with 15 due to join our services to gain insight into working life at the Council. We continue to use our apprenticeship levy funds to support the development of our employees whether this is in the form of those joining us as an Apprentice or upskilling existing employees.
- 3.5 The latest round of appraisals at the Council concluded in December. A core theme of the process for this year will be to ensure we embed the new Corporate Plan within the objective setting process so that all employees can understand how they contribute to the strategic direction of the Council.
- 3.6 We continue to work with other authorities to understand how our performance compares. A new online subscription will provide data to us on key workforce metrics of other authorities. Insight from this is expected from April 2025 onwards.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 4.1 Work will continue to review our establishment and staffing budget. Greater insight from data and analysis will support services to analyse their service needs. Although we have strengthened our understanding and analysis of how our projected establishment and actual workforce compare, there is further work to do to ensure we are effectively resourced right across the Council.
- 4.2 Whilst sickness absence and therefore the impact from sickness absence appears to be reducing, it is important that we do not lose sight of the need to address absence with timely management interventions. Similarly, the reduction in agency spend should not be taken lightly and efforts, such as the regular review of vacancy need within the Council, is required to ensure we manage what is within our gift.
- 4.3 Acknowledging the next All Staff Survey will be rolled out later this year, it is important that the associated action plan remains in place and monitored.
- 4.4 Following experiences in recent years, it is important that feedback from staff impacted by the delayed pay award is provided back to those involved in the negotiations. This can both support staff with the immediate impact from the cost of living rises seen in recent years, as well as, reduce the potential impact of industrial action.

Financial Implications

Financial risk will only occur where the structure of a service changes without adherence to allocated budgets.

Legal Implications

In accordance with Article 14 of the Constitution.

Risk Assessment

If the Establishment of the Council is not appropriately managed and reviewed service delivery may be put at risk.

Impact on Climate Change

No climate change issues are highlighted in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

Considerations are given to specific policy and decisions with regards to equality impact assessments.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

This report highlights the Establishment figures and supports our aim to reduce costs without affecting service quality and continuity, as well as, being an employer of choice in the Mid Devon area.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 Officer
Date: 05/02/25

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 04/02/25

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh
Agreed by or on behalf of the Corporate Director
Date: 04/02/25

Performance and risk: Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 31 Jan 2025

Cabinet member notified: yes

Report: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. (No)

Appendix: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. (No)

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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Background papers: Previous Establishment Reports taken to Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and PDG's