

This Report will be made public on 8 June 2022



Report Number **P/22/03**

To: Personnel Committee
Date: 16 June 2022
Status: Non-executive Decision
Head of Service: Andrina Smith, Chief HR Officer

SUBJECT: HR ANNUAL REVIEW (2021/2022)

SUMMARY: This report presents a review of the HR function over the last financial year 2021-2022.

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/22/03.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The HR Service has now been back in-house at Folkestone & Hythe for 10 years 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 The HR team went live with its new structure based on the operating model set out under the transformation programme on 1st April 2021 following consultation with the affected staff. Whilst the Organisational Development (OD) team was largely unaffected by transformation as much of their work comes from external organisations, the 1FTE HR Assistant role was transferred to become a Case Officer within the Corporate Services Case Management Team due to the majority of their tasks being transactional and process driven. Job titles were updated across the whole team to mirror the move to levels of Specialist. The current HR Team structure can be seen in **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 The 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. Due to the original HR Assistant that transferred having a period of maternity leave, other case officers have been trained and we are now starting to see some resilience developing which supports the move to case for routine tasks such as recruitment, absence monitoring and some payroll tasks. This work is likely to continue over the next 12 months or more as further processes are reviewed and improved to identify more efficient ways to provide our service to the council.
- 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.
- 2.3 The HR Senior Specialist and Specialists continue to have monthly meetings with their Assistant Directors 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 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 2021/22 the HR team have supported the following cases:

- 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 was raised during the year.

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

3.2 As a comparison, during 2020/21 the following cases were dealt with:

- 5 disciplinary cases resulting in 1 verbal warning and 4 written warnings. Under section 4.4 of the disciplinary procedures a penalty can be agreed outside of a disciplinary hearing if the employee is in agreement. Four of the five case numbers mentioned above were issued in this way.
- 2 capability cases resulting in one member of staff leaving before the process concluded and one was dismissed with no appeal lodged.
- 1 grievance was raised during the year which was not upheld. There was no appeal to the outcome.

3.3 Whilst these figures do not show much of a change in terms of the number of cases dealt with, when considered against the increase in staff numbers over the last 18 months it is in effect a decrease in percentage.

For information, our average headcount over the last 3 years has increased from 363 (2019/20) to 415 (2020/21) and is now 460 (2021/22).

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.

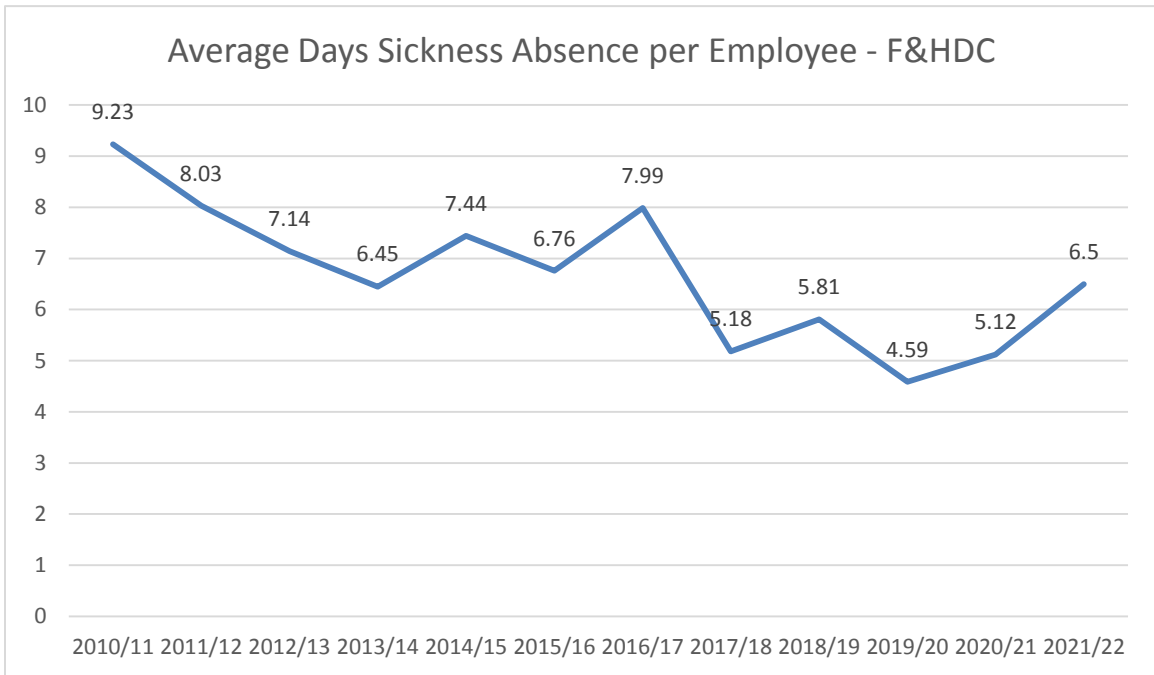
3.4 In addition, the HR team have supported the following restructures across the organisation:

- Grounds Maintenance
- Print & Post Room

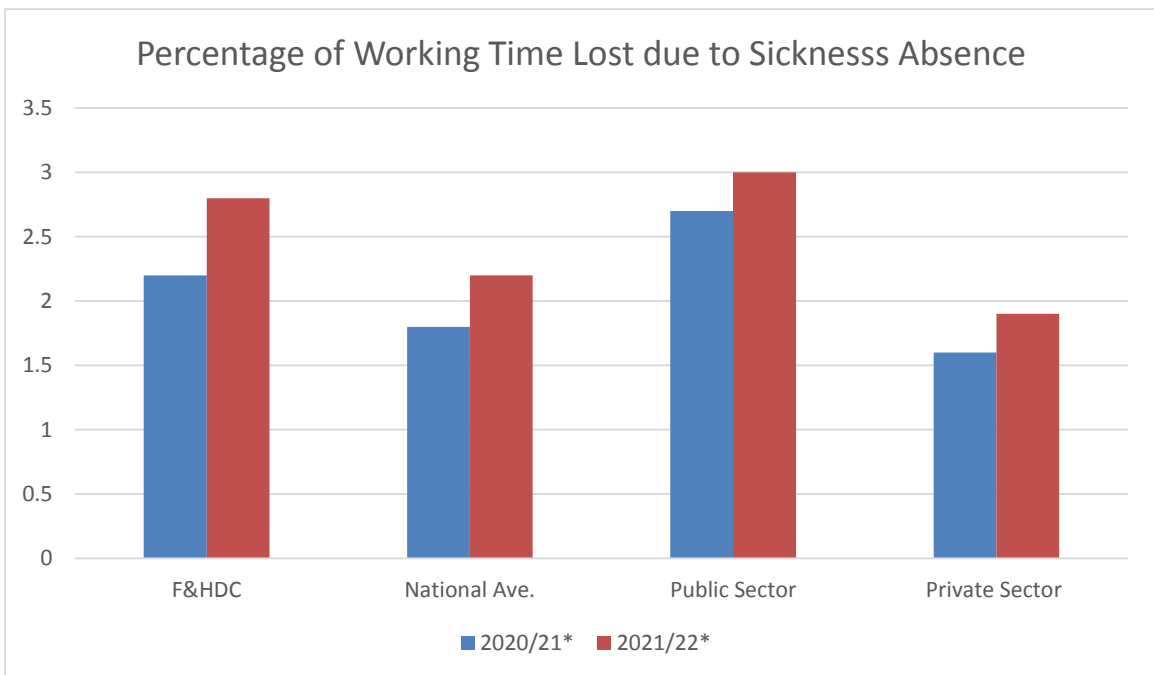
4. ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

4.1 In 2021/22 there was an average of 6.5 days sickness absence per employee (based on an average headcount of 460). During the year, 2.8% of all working time was lost due to sickness absence.

4.2 This represents an increase in sickness absence levels in comparison to last year. The pandemic has undoubtedly had an impact on sickness absence and, as presented in paragraph 4.3 below, absence rates have increased not only at F&HDC but across the UK. Sickness absences rates at F&HDC remain under the average for the public sector.



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 2020/21 and 2021/22. 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 2022
 *Comparisons made with 2021 and 2020 data

Nationally, an increase in sickness absence rates has been reported across both private and public sectors over the past year. The effects of the pandemic have undoubtedly had an impact on this sickness absence data though. While Covid-19 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, have led to a rise in sickness absence across the country in 2021 to above pre-pandemic levels. Indeed, these national figures represent the highest sickness absence rates recorded in the UK in over 10 years.

While sickness absence rates in the private and public sectors both rose by 0.3 percentage points in 2021, sickness amongst public sector workers have consistently been higher than private sector workers. 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, particularly over the past two years as the council's headcount increased in line with the introduction of the new housing service. The average number of days per employee column therefore 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

4.5 Over the past year 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 since the HR team have reported data in this format in the Annual Report.

Absences relating to Covid-19 were the most predominant cause of short-term sickness absence at the council last year. It is clear that Covid-19 has significantly contributed to sickness absence levels at F&HDC and nationally. Covid-19 accounted for nearly one in

four of all occurrences of sickness absence in the UK in 2021¹ and the council has experienced a more significant increase in shorter-term sickness as a consequence. Minor illnesses (such as colds and flu, headaches, nausea, diarrhoea etc), traditionally the biggest reason for sickness absence, were the other principal causes of short-term sickness absence.

- 4.6 We have also continued to experience a rise in long-term sickness absence cases. An increased headcount (2021/22 was the first full financial year since the introduction of the Housing Service) would, however, be expected to have some impact on number of cases reported this year. Overall, 7% of absences were long-term and this equated to 54% of the total time lost due to sickness.

As with 2020/21, the biggest reason for long-term absence over the past year was mental ill health and stress, which accounted for 44% of our long-term sickness cases. Overall 34% of all time lost due to sickness absence has been classified as relating to “stress, depression, anxiety, mental health, fatigue”. 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 recognise the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of individuals and continue to report mental health and stress amongst the most predominant cause of long-term absence across the country, particularly in the public sector.²

- 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, and promoting well-being. This has included dedicated sessions on men’s mental health and the launch of the “menopause café”.
- Initiatives to reduce isolation and keep staff connected, including the virtual kitchen (“Chai There”), “Connect sessions” for those isolated at home, New Starters Forum, Armed Forces community staff group, weekly email and Teams communications, and bi-monthly podcasts.
- Developing a team of mental 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.

¹ Office for National Statistics: [Sickness Absence in the UK Labour Market 2021](#).

² Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development: Health and Wellbeing at Work 2022.

- Health and wellbeing activities including free 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 and take targeted actions to mitigate these effectively.
- Promoting flexible working options and other policies that may support work/life balance and those with caring responsibilities.
- Undertaking staff surveys, which can help us identify both team and organisation-wide issues and assess the positive steps taken to address these.

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:

- The council's agile working culture supported staff who were required to self-isolate to continue working if they were well enough to do so.
- A robust absence monitoring system is in place. The line manager immediately records the absence, cause, and expected duration on the Staff Hub, 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, it is made very clear to the employee that if their absence(s) continue then we may take the decision to withhold occupational sick pay and formal processes may also be instigated.
- 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 Management Development Programme session on effective absence management and supporting staff health & wellbeing in March 2021, with the next scheduled for November 2022.
- 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 are anticipated to continue 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 to improve health and wellbeing and support absence management. For example, Health and Safety have undertaken home workstation risk assessments remotely and specialist equipment has been redistributed or provided effectively and where necessary.

- The Council has historically offered staff free 'flu vaccinations at the Civic Centre. Due to pandemic restrictions and the way in which we are all working now, over the past two financial years staff have been reimbursed the cost of private 'flu vaccinations.

5. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 The focus of our small 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 area will be taken in turn.
- 5.2 The OD Team delivers work for other East Kent Councils, including apprenticeship delivery and running training and development courses and coaching. During 2021/22 this work brought £100,302 of income into 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.

6. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 6.1 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 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).
- 6.2 Our Management development programme has, as usual, been updated to reflect the development needs of people managers. It is now all delivered online. The majority of sessions are an hour long, with some longer, as needed. Topics covered have included:
- April 2021: Performance Management and the Council's Competency Framework
 - May 2021: Prioritising and Delegating
 - June 2021: Formal HR Processes
 - July 2021: Political Insight Q&A
 - September 2021: Recruitment and Selection
 - October 2021: Mental Health Awareness for Managers
 - November 2021: How to have effective 121s and delivering good feedback
 - November 2021: Report Writing (including Climate Impact statement)
 - December 2021: Helping your team members manage their workloads
 - January 2022: Power and Personal Presence
 - January 2022: Political Insight Q&A
 - February 2022: Unconscious Bias & Cultural Diversity Awareness
 - March 2022: Menopause Awareness for Managers

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

6.3 Over the course of the 2021/22 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 2021:	Managing Conflict
May 2021:	Personal Resilience; Time Management; Phone-based Customer Contact; Mental Health First Aid
June 2021:	Phone-based Customer Contact; Supporting Vulnerable Customers
September 2021:	Presentation Skills Practice
October 2021:	Personal Resilience; Train the Trainer
November 2021:	Mindfulness at Work; Men's Mental Wellbeing
December 2021:	Managing Stress in the Workplace
January 2022:	Measuring & Improving Wellbeing; Personal Resilience

6.4 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. In general, 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.

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

May 2021:	Designated Officers for Safeguarding training
June 2021:	Staff Hub training; Modern Day Slavery; Introduction to Tackling the Climate Emergency
July 2021:	Excel for Beginners
September 2021:	Advanced Excel; iTrent (payroll system) for non-managers
October 2021:	Whistle-blowing, Anti-Fraud and Corruption Training

6.6 Role-specific professional development enables us to deliver the Corporate Plan and this year have included:

- Finance – CIPFA courses
- Case (Corporate) – HRA; Business Rates; Recovery & Enforcement
- Democratic Services - ICO Certificate; Committee Services Administration, AEA Elections Foundation, Personal Admin Qualification; Monitoring Officer; Governance & Law; Constitution
- ICT – Advanced Business Objects, Salesforce Developer; Apex coding
- Strategy Policy and Performance - RTPi; Safeguarding; CIPS; Legislative Updates
- HR – L7 CIPD qualification; L3 L&D Practitioner
- Legal – apprenticeship training course for trainee
- Procurement – CIPS qualification
- Revenues and Benefits– Introduction to Welfare; Universal Credit; Debt Advice; Benefits & Mental Health; Shelter; IRRV Council Tax; Housing Benefits Info; GovPD; Money Advice Trust; Gendered Intelligence
- Grounds Maintenance – various equipment training courses: Confined spaces; Pumps crew; Cots cemeteries/Shoring; Mini digger; Dumper; Rotary ride on mower; Cylinder ride on mower; Strimmer; Hedge cutter; Pedestrian mower; All terrain vehicle

- Estates & Assets – RICS - Landlord and Tenant; Introduction to Freehold Covenants; Introduction to Valuation;
- Planning & Development: – Legal Updates; RTP1 CPD; Flooding ; Viability
- Economic Development - Professional certificate in Economic Development from International Centre for Parliamentary Studies
- Case (Place) - Parking & Licencing
- Hythe Pool - NPLQ
- Customer Services - Complaints Handling
- Private Sector Housing – Fire Safety; Electrical Safety; Hoarding Awareness; HMO Licensing/ Inspection
- Housing: Housing Options and Allocations Update; Managing Temporary Accommodation; Working with vulnerable homeless households; Working with Private Sector Housing; Affordable Housing delivery
- Environmental Health – ABC Food Law subs; Animal Welfare Qualification; CIEH Practitioner Programme
- Environmental Protection - RIPA, PAC, B-Tec Level 2

- 6.7 Chief Officers, Assistant Directors and Corporate Directors are also offered coaching and bespoke training courses provided by respected organisations such as universities, Roffey Park Institute and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).
- 6.8 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 November 2022 are looking to introduce Manager Dashboard functionality to enable Managers to track the completion rates of those in their teams.
- 6.9 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. Apprentices are either trained by us in-house or access relevant courses with external training providers.
- 6.10 In terms of the specific apprenticeships we offer, we have 12 officers currently undertaking a Management Apprenticeship which also involves studying for an ILM Level 3 Diploma for Managers qualification (we are an ILM Centre so deliver this ourselves). Four of these learners started in January 2022, the others started a year before and are nearing completion of the course. This is a year-long programme and helps develop our talent pipeline in terms of developing 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.
- 6.11 We also have 4 officers undertaking our in-house Level 3 Apprenticeship in Business Administration, having one of whom started in January 2022, the others in September 2020.
- 6.12 Where appropriate we continue to use external training providers to support apprentices; we currently have officers undertaking a Solicitor Apprenticeship (with Associated degree); a Junior Content Producer (in Communications); a Planning Apprenticeship (with associated Masters); a Level 4 Project Management Apprenticeship; an IRRV

Apprenticeships (Revenues and Benefits) and Chartered Institute of Housing Apprenticeships. 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.

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

Our work with schools has included:

- Work experience placement - July 2021: Turner School Work experience & Kent University work experience
- Talks in schools - November 2021: Diversity & Inclusion Talk for Year 9 at the Turner School; March 2022: Officers and Councillors attended a number of "Talk Folkestone" events at a range of Turner Schools - primary and secondary.
- Careers events - November 2021: Panel discussion on careers in Local Government for Kent University; November 2021: Careers in Local Government talk for Year 8 at Folkestone Academy; February 2022: Talk with Business Studies students at Folkestone College

Our support for the Kickstart programme (see section 11 below for further information) has involved a comprehensive employability support package for the 5 F&HDC employees on the programme, including:

- Workshops in project management and time management
- Career and wellbeing coaching
- Employability workshops (career decisions, CV writing, interview skills, mock interviews).

- 6.14 In addition, we are currently exploring options to fund school leavers/ graduates to do degree or masters level apprenticeships in areas of the organisation that require additional succession planning. This would give local people the opportunity to do 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.

- 6.15 Councillors have points of contact within the HR team and Committee Services team in order for them to be able to request any individual training or conferences. Councillors also have a specific page on the Learning Zone of the staff intranet. All training presentations are uploaded after each session has taken place to enable those who could not attend to view the materials.

7. WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1 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 March 2021, we undertook the full, formal Best Companies engagement survey (used by hundreds of UK businesses and not for profit organisations) which saw us ranked as number 4 in their category for 'not for profit bodies' in the UK. The survey showed that we have attained a '2 star' or outstanding level of employee engagement (the maximum rating is '3 star' or world

class level of engagement). We held a Best Companies Celebration event in May to involve all staff in hearing the results announcement live.

After a strong focus on employee engagement, we have sought to maintain our strong position, as well as target areas of specific need, such as ensuring technology requirements are met (primarily due to homeworking) and Mental Wellbeing. Using an insight-led approach, we have targeted these areas to gain input and shape our approach. This year the following surveys have been carried out:

- April 2021: ICT Survey
- July 2021: Mental Wellbeing Survey
- Oct/Nov 2021: Staff Check in survey

7.2 Our Internal Communications and Engagement and Wellbeing strategies translate insights from our employees into a series of actions. Activity is delivered via various, online, 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 daily during December as we delivered the F&HDC advent count-down.
- Staff briefing (every 2 months)
- Connection events: Chai There (monthly), New Starters' Forum and New Managers' Forum (quarterly)
- Wellbeing events: Menopause café, wellbeing café and support for HR drop-in sessions
- Podcasts (ad hoc) focusing on officers from a variety of teams
- Other events (ad hoc) e.g. Bingo, Games, Quiz Time, Hum that Choon.

7.3 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.

7.4 The OD & Engagement team have also run online meetings and Away Days for teams to help them review progress and plan for the future. These have included sessions for:

- Independent Living Managers Team Building
- Housing Team integration sessions (to build relationships within Housing & wider organisation)
- Case Corporate Team Leader Team Building
- Housing United Team Building

7.5 We also help managers by facilitating meetings, both with the wider staff group, and with our residents, including:

- Waste meetings with staff (to navigate the challenges with collections)
- Waste & Recycling residents' panel facilitation (for staff)
- Climate Champions Staff forum
- East Cliff residents association engagement
- Landlord event webinar

7.6 We have also supported meetings of the wider management team (every 2 months), engaging Middle Managers in the organisation's strategic thinking and planning.

8. RECOGNITION

- 8.1 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 online 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.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 In January 2022 we handed out the second ever Employee of the Year award that we introduced to recognise a single individual who has relentlessly demonstrated our core values. The winner was Jana Getliffe, Horticulture Lead Specialist, who had shown herself to display our values consistently and continually go above and beyond to make our district environmentally sustainable and look beautiful.

9. F&H REWARDS

- 9.1 At the last meeting of the Personnel Committee (14th April 2022), members were presented with a comprehensive report 'Update on F&H Rewards' – P/21/08 which can be accessed by clicking [here](#).
In future years, rather than presenting a separate report, an annual update on the scheme will be included in this report.
- 9.2 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 in the first 3 weeks of running the scheme we have already had 2 members of staff order an electric car with several other members of staff also expressing a strong interest in the scheme over coming months. Tusker have confirmed that they will be attending the summer social planned for 1st July 2022 in order to further promote the scheme to staff.

10. PEOPLE STRATEGY

- 10.1 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**.

- 10.2 The 6 main themes of the people strategy are:



10.3 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.

10.4 Agile Working

As an employer, we continue 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.

During the pandemic whilst the civic offices were closed we continued to listen and engage with staff and based on a significant volume of feedback there was a considerable evidence base to further support the advantages that come from agile working. As a result, in line with the People Strategy, a new Agile Working Framework was developed which took steps towards making this a permanent feature in the way in which we operate. The Agile Working Framework can be seen at **Appendix C**.

We re-opened the civic offices at the end of August enabling managers 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 (November 2021) which led to some changes being implemented in early 2022 and we have also asked for further feedback as part of the current staff survey.

Once the feedback from the staff survey has been considered and discussed at CLT we will update the Agile Working Framework if appropriate to ensure that it still accurately reflects our approach towards flexibility whilst maintaining performance.

10.5 People Strategy – progress against objectives

In addition to many of the activities already highlighted throughout this report, key activities are already underway to progress actions within the People Strategy including:

- The Agile Working Framework (see 10.4 above) remains a key focus to ensure that we are operating in the best way possible to maximise our performance as a council.
- Short term (6-12 months) secondments have actively been promoted across the council, for example the Refugee Resettlement Co-ordinator and Elections Officer posts, and an external secondment for 12 months has also been approved.
- The OD team continue to ensure mental health and wellbeing is promoted to staff and sessions are arranged covering relevant topics (eg men's mental health, menopause) and a team of mental health first aiders are in place following training with Mind.
- F&H Rewards continues to develop with the newest addition being the Tusker car lease salary sacrifice scheme which also supports the green agenda and the council's carbon action plan.
- The HR team have seen demonstrations of HR software that could enhance our ways of working in order to provide a more efficient service to the council, including

recruitment software, with the next step being consideration of how this can be taken forward more formally.

- Early discussions have taken place to shape a potential apprenticeship programme in identified areas to support succession planning due to an ageing workforce.

11. KICKSTART PROGRAMME

- 11.1 The Kickstart Scheme provides funding to create new short term jobs for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long term unemployment. There will also be 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 covers 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 receives £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.

- 11.2 As part of the scheme, Kickstart participants must be provided with support to improve their employment prospects to help them move into long-term sustained employment. This should include support with writing CV's/applications, interview preparation, careers advice and guidance.

Participants should also receive support to develop skills such as team work, organisation, communication, time management and training to develop skills to independently lead projects or as a team.

Grant funding may be used for these purposes or training and support can be delivered internally. Following discussions with the OD & Engagement Lead Specialist, the OD team designed a programme that matches the external provision that we have been supplied with plus we can currently offer a variety of e-learning on Learning Pool alongside the training sessions provided by OD.

- 11.3 Following a successful recruitment event hosted by the local Job Centre Plus in January 2022, 5 placements were offered to local unemployed people covering a range of roles. Three of the placements are 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.

12. EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

- 12.1 In February 2021, Personnel Committee approved the introduction of the Employer Supported Volunteering Policy (see Report P/20/07 – click [here](#)) which allows staff up to 2 days paid leave per year to undertake individual (or potentially team based) volunteering activities which ideally should take place within our district.

12.2 Since introducing this policy, HR have processed 12 individual staff member requests and a team request. Several of the individuals have also submitted requests in both the 2021/22 year and already for 2022/23.

12.3 The volunteering activities have covered a number of initiatives including:

Wish Upon a Star

Conservation Day at the Romney Marsh Partnership (Romney Warren) x3

Conservation Day at Folkestone Warren (White Cliffs Countryside Partnership) x2

Conservation Day at Fort Burgoyne (White Cliffs Countryside Partnership)

Sandgate Primary School – using computers in the workplace

Sheltered Housing Scheme

Tree planting in Newchurch

Retained firefighter breathing apparatus training x2

Primary School Governor

Air Force Cadets – activity first aid qualification

We continue to publicise events such as Conservation Days through our regular engagement updates to staff and a further update will be provided to members at the next annual review.

13. PAYROLL

13.1 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.

13.2 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.

East Kent Audit have carried out annual audit reviews of the payroll service and placed substantial assurance on the systems of internal controls in operation with no recommendations or actions, with one report stating that ‘the success...is reflected by there not being any payroll errors since the payroll went live in November 2014’. The most recent audit report from March 2021 confirms again that there was ‘no scope for improvement identified’.

14. PAY UPDATE

14.1 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.

No pay award has been negotiated for Directors or the Chief Executive since June 2019.

- 14.2 As it currently stands, we would expect Unison to request to open pay negotiations for 2024/25 towards the end of 2023 or early in 2024.

Work is expected to commence within the HR team in early 2023 to start modelling any National Living Wage forecasts from the Office of Budget Responsibility. With the National Living Wage rising to £9.50 per hour in April 2022 and forecast to reach £9.97 in April 2023 and £10.33 in April 2024³ it is clear that we may need to review our current grading structure or identify ways to enable the National Living Wage to be complied with at the lower end of the pay scales in future years.

- 14.3 Whilst we are on local terms and conditions, we do still pay close attention to the national picture for local government and as such we are attending the South East Employers regional pay briefings (with the next scheduled for 21st June 2022) where the Local Government Association provide updates on the national negotiations. Nationally, authorities on national terms and conditions are facing issues more rapidly than F&HDC in relation to the National Living Wage and its impact on the lower points of the pay scales and therefore we are gaining early insight into ways in which we could approach 2024 and beyond.

15. HR SERVICES IN 2022/23

- 15.1 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 2022/23 year includes:

- Further development of the behavioural framework, particularly in relation to recruitment activities;
- Continued support to the project covering the future relocation of the Civic Centre leading on the changes that will directly affect our people;
- Reviewing and maximising the use of the technology that exists to further enhance the ways in which we can best continue supporting the council's objectives;

³ <https://obr.uk/faq/where-can-i-find-your-latest-forecasts/>

- Supporting the continued development of the case management approach, not only in terms of HR resilience and efficient but also to ensure there is greater resilience and flexibility in how we deploy our people; and
- Preparation towards the induction and training programme for members elected in May 2023.

16. LEGAL / FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS / POLICY MATTERS

16.1 Legal Officers Comments (AK)

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

16.2 Finance Officers Comments (CS)

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

16.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (ASm)

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

17. 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 – Agile Working Framework