



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Virtual Meeting - Teams Meeting on Tuesday, 8th September, 2020 at 5.00 pm.

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Burgess, Farrell, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland, Blanford, Campkin and Hayward

Agenda

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1. **Apologies/Substitutes**

To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (c)

2. **Declarations of Interest**

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To declare any interests, which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document:

- a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)
- b) Other Significant Interests (OSI)
- c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests

See Agenda Item 2 for further details

3. **Minutes of the last Meeting**

3 - 10

To approve the Minutes of the last Meeting

4. **Recovery Report - verbal update**

5. **Annual Sickness Report**

11 - 24

6. **Digital Transformation Task Group (verbal update)**

7. **Future Reviews Tracker**

25 - 26

RR
28 August 2020

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Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG's Guide for Councillors, at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council's Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf>
- (c) Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held as a virtual meeting on the **11th August 2020**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Blanford, Burgess, Chilton, Farrell, Harman, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Ledger.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Cllr. Harman attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Hayward.

Apologies:

Cllr. Hayward, Mulholland.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Feacey, Pickering

Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications, Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing, Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader, Strategy and Policy Development Manager, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer (KM), Member Services Officer (CR).

35 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 14th July 2020 be approved and confirmed as an accurate record.

36 Draft Recovery Plan 2020

The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications introduced the report, and explained that there were three aspects that would be covered in the Meeting. The first part would cover the report 'The Council's Emergency Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic' that went to Cabinet on 25th June. The second part would talk about lessons learnt from the Covid-19 Pandemic and the final part would be the actual Recovery Plan.

The Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing introduced the first Report 'The Council's Emergency Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic' which included details of the command and control arrangements, the establishment of the Ashford Response Depot, the Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal, the assistance provided to those

on NHS shield lists and other vulnerable people, and grant support arrangements for the voluntary sector. The report outlined the significant steps taken to keep essential services running as well as responding to immediate emergency needs. Since the report had been produced, Covid cases had reduced in the Borough, with six cases reported in the last week. The Kent Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group had now been stood down, however the Tactical Coordinating Group continued to meet weekly. An Ashford Local Outbreak Control Plan was currently being drawn up to support the county arrangements but would be focusing on the specific actions to be taken by the Borough Council in the event of a local outbreak, community spread or local lockdown. It would take the form of an action matrix.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A Member asked about the Ashford Local Outbreak Control Plan, specifically where it would be reported to and whether the O&S Committee would have the opportunity to scrutinise it. The Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing confirmed that the document was currently being prepared but that there would be no problem sharing it with the O&S Committee.
- In response to a question about Covid testing and symptomatic people, the Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing referred the Member to information regarding testing on the NHS website for full details but confirmed that those with symptoms could be tested as could someone they live with.
- Regarding case numbers, the Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing indicated that the latest Leaders briefing contained lots of information regarding Covid cases within the Borough, along with a document regarding national and regional comparative figures. It was stressed that while the number of cases had decreased, it was important to avoid becoming complacent, to prevent future outbreaks. Additionally, caution should be given to the cumulative case data since the reasons for the earlier higher numbers in Ashford related to the start of the outbreak rather than the current position.
- A Member enquired whether the Council were confident that they and KCC were receiving the correct data regarding making contact with those people that had tested positive in the Borough. The Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing indicated that data provided was that circulated with the Leader's Briefing and that the lead for individual cases was KCC on Public Health and Public Health England. It was stated that ABC had offered assistance with the track and trace system, should there be a resourcing issue.
- In respect of what steps were being taken to ensure public communications were accurately relayed, The Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing was pleased to note that some radio programmes were now accurately reporting that Ashford was now in a better position. ABC were working with KCC Communications Team as the lead Public Health Agency and its own internal Comms Team.

The Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader then introduced the second part of this item, which included a presentation on 'Covid-19 Lessons Learnt to date'. She explained that the Council were still in the response phase, and the lessons identified were still a work in progress. The Kent Resilience Team were also carrying out a similar exercise with regards to lessons learnt, and had been working closely with Leicester following their local lockdown, to explore how they implemented this and the key challenges they faced. The Presentation was split into three parts covering:

1. 'What went well' covering the areas of Community, Staff, Communications, IT and General.
2. 'Even better if' i.e. how the Council would change its response in future again within the areas of Community, IT, MHCLG and generally.
3. 'Recommendations' – within the Community Voluntary Sector, Digitalisation, IT Systems and Remote Working.

The presentation was praised by Members and thanks was given to the Officers involved for their committed hard work responding to Covid-19. It was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A Member commented that the good weather had been favourable throughout the lockdown period, and asked what contingency plans were in place for if lockdown occurred throughout the winter period, with regards to ensuring continuity of distribution of goods/services. In the context of a surge in Covid cases in the winter months, it was confirmed that Kent were aiming to have a Command and Control structure that ensured all three risks, i.e. Covid, Brexit and Severe Weather could be addressed together. There was specific work being carried out around this within Kent.
- A Member asked what support mechanisms may be needed for those Officers that would not normally choose to work from home. He added that the IT support given to Members from Ashford was commendable. It was confirmed that any staff with concerns had been advised to raise these issues with their line manager or HR. Additionally, Property Services were formulating plans for the return of some staff to the building.
- In relation to a query about financial contribution towards staff broadband costs, and provision of laptops, the Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader said that she was unaware of any financial support for staff towards costs, but she would look into this and reiterated that any staff concerns should be reported to HR. All staff were given a laptop prior to lockdown.
- The Council had built links with the voluntary sector during the course of the pandemic and a Member asked how those connections would be maintained, particularly in relation to digital links with the Parish Councils. ABC continued to work closely with the Volunteer Centre, and a database had been created containing details of all the voluntary agencies that had worked with ABC. Further to this, a Member asked were there any ideas in relation to lists of

vulnerable people within wards and community outreach in the future, and GDPR issues. It was confirmed that the Policy Team were currently reviewing the various data ABC had received, how it was stored and how it could be utilised again were a second wave to occur. The Head of Community, Safety and Wellbeing added that both the Health and Wellbeing Recovery Plan and Corporate Recovery Plan emphasised the community engagement linkages and drew on the positive relationship built during the pandemic.

- A Member commented that he felt it was important for staff to return to the Civic Centre, as well as the Town Centre. Staff productivity was more prominent within the workplace and there were limitations to working from home. The Chairman responded that this topic was far reaching and noted that many Council staff did not live in Ashford. He acknowledged that some Members may favour face-to-face meetings, but he felt that there was a place for remote working and virtual meetings, and looked forward to seeing how these new ways of working would develop in the future. The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications added that staff had been surveyed throughout lockdown and the results showed that many preferred working from home and felt that they could be more productive, and this had been shown to be true across the board. A balance would need to be struck between productivity and wellbeing, and this would be explored in more detail as part of the Recovery Plan going forward.

The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications then introduced the final part of this item, which was the draft Recovery Plan. She showed a presentation to the Committee which covered and included the following ideas and themes:

1. The Road to Recovery – focus on what can be achieved over next 18 months, some projects on hold, aligned to national and Kent wide plans.
2. The Ashford Ambition – new Five year Corporate Plan, Economic Development Strategy and Carbon Neutral Strategy to be adopted in Spring 2022.
3. Ambition supported by three themes – Green Pioneer, Caring Ashford and Targeted Growth.
4. Economic Recovery – balance resources to support existing business, safeguard jobs, stimulate economic growth to create employment and increase productivity.
5. Key actions – Advice and support, utilising government funding, working alongside Ashford College, supporting the tourism industry.
6. Community Recovery – work with statutory providers and assist the voluntary sector to support the most vulnerable, particularly those most affected by the pandemic.

7. Key actions – undertake a community engagement programme, delivery of community safety recovery actions, work closely with health colleagues.
8. Place Making, Regeneration and Infrastructure – the Council has a strong track record of delivering projects, bringing prosperity, events and heritage to the fore in the Borough. Adapt to the challenges post-coronavirus.
9. Key actions – housing delivery, leisure procurement, improve broadband.
10. Organisational Change and Workforce Development – seeking to improve customer's experience, participation in the democratic process, core values remain.
11. Green Principles – remain committed to being carbon neutral by 2030.
12. Key Actions – balance the MTFP, enable remote working and continue the digital transformation programme.
13. Delivery, Monitoring and Review – Quarterly progress and monitoring, Bi monthly Recovery Plan Monitoring Advisory Committee.
14. Next steps and recommendations.

The presentation was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A Member queried when the Council would be in a position to set targets in regards to affordable housing. The Compliance and Data Protection Manager explained that Key Performance Indicators were longstanding and work was currently being undertaken on Pentana in relation to targets.
- In response to comments stating that the Recovery Plan was very broad and querying whether all the actions were related to recovery, the Head of Corporate Policy, ED and Communications stated that priorities had been focussed on recovery, but the plan was in effect an interim Corporate Plan. Therefore, it was important to ensure that 'business as usual' services like planning and waste collection continued to perform at an acceptable level throughout the recovery period.
- A Member remarked that the Recovery Plan failed to ask bold questions about the future and what service activities the Council would wish to engage in. The changing demographics of the Borough would inevitably affect the housing market, and the Council needed to ask were residents adequately housed. He went onto speak about public engagement and the need to review how the Council responded to petitions. Planning procedures, town centre investment and strategic parks were also areas that needed examination. Finally he queried whether any funding had been received from the latest round of South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) funding. The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications responded that the Mid Term Financial Plan would encompass some of those issues and was critical

to shaping the future. Some of the strategic issues mentioned could be debated via the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Cllr. Bartlett confirmed that two projects in Kent had been approved for SELEP funding; Jasmine Vardimon and Thanet Parkway.

Resolved

That the report be received and noted.

37 Future Reviews Tracker

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced this item and confirmed that following the last Meeting she had run the topics suggested through the selection matrix and could give an update on what would be contained within the Work Programme going forward.

The Recovery Plan was a high priority and would continue to be discussed at the next O&S meeting, with recommendations being put forward to Full Council. The future Plans of Ashford College remained a high priority and it had been proposed that a briefing would be held in the Autumn that would be open to all Members. Lower scoring scrutiny topics included Decision Making over the new Lorry Site, S106 Decision Making Process and the Objectives of the Property Company. It was proposed to retain these items on the Tracker and review in early 2021.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- Cllr. Farrell expressed his concern that the Objectives of the Property Company was not being treated as a high priority, since there was growing public interest and concern over the direction of the Company and its financing, and he felt that the Committee should review this topic sooner than 2021.
- The Chairman reminded Members that they were invited to use the selection matrix themselves and bring their findings back to the Meeting, since each topic would have varying degrees of interest for each Member.
- Cllr. Chilton supported what Cllr. Farrell had said, and went onto say that the Lorry Park was a subject requiring serious review, as he understood that the government had unilaterally made the decision to purchase the land without consultation. The site was of huge public interest since 1000's of new homes were due for construction in close proximity to the site. The Compliance and Data Protection Manager explained that the actual process of how the site was purchased could be reviewed, with the Chairman adding that the issue of consultation and engagement could be examined and be the overarching theme. Cllr Chilton agreed with these comments.
- A Member stated that he felt there was still value in reviewing the Section 106 Decision Making Process and the Chairman encouraged Members to use the

Selection Matrix themselves with the topics they felt were a priority, and then forward their findings and comments to himself and the Policy & Scrutiny Officer.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

POST MEETING NOTE: Since the Meeting it has been clarified that S106 and the Lorry Site will stay on the Tracker. It has been agreed that the Property Company would be removed from the tracker as suggested in the report and by the matrix. However, there was the view that the Committee could revisit this at some point in the future.

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Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Sickness 2019/20 and other indicators of corporate health

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

Consider the information provided in this report and advise officers:

1. If the committee would wish to receive a further update in a year's time
 2. If any further information is required
-

Date of O&S meeting: 8 September 2020

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Noel Ovenden

Relevant Portfolio(s): Cllr Alan Pickering – Portfolio Holder Human Resources and Customer Services

Summary: This report provides annual information on sickness absenteeism for 2019/20 and wider data to provide a picture of general corporate health.

Exempt from Publication: NO

Background Papers: none

Contact: Michelle Pecci
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Sickness 2019/20 and other indicators of corporate health

Introduction

1. This report provides members with sickness absence figures for the financial year 2019/20 together with data reflecting wider corporate health including turnover, disciplinary and grievance data.
2. Data is presented in the following sections in order to provide more in-depth information to Members for their review:
 - Sickness
 - Turnover
 - Employment relations
3. Similar data is provided to Directors and Heads of Service on a six-monthly basis in order that the Council's senior management team have an up-to-date overview of key HR Metrics.

Sickness:

4. The reported figures for Ashford Borough Council employees are from sickness absences recorded on the iTrent Payroll and HR system. The figures are presented as the average number of working days lost to sickness per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employee during the year, starting 1 April.
5. The council's level of annual sickness absence is compared with previously reported figures, nationally reported figures and some neighbouring authorities.

Sickness absence per employee 2019/20

6. A total of 3,950 days were lost to sickness absence across the 12-month period from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020. Based on the average number of 433 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees across the 12-month period, the total amount of working days lost due to sickness equals 9.1 days per FTE. This is an improvement on the previous year, which was 10.8 days per FTE.
7. 340 employees incurred sickness absence periods during the period 2019/20. 30% of employees did not incur any periods of sickness absence during the 12-month period. This figure remains broadly constant when compared to last year's figure of 31%.
8. Of the 3,950 days lost due to sickness absence within the period, 57% of this absence is categorised as short-term absence lasting up to and including 19 days. Therefore 43% of absenteeism is categorised as long-term. The longest period of absence was 154 days.
9. The report deals with issues relating to long term sickness absence and short term sickness absences separately as the nature of these two types of sickness

absence, and the way in which they are supported, differs significantly. It is therefore useful to consider the average days lost in each category.

- Average days lost due to short-term sickness absence equals 5.2 days per FTE.
- Average days lost due to long-term sickness absence equals 3.9 days per FTE.

Comparison with previous years

Description	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Number of days lost due to sickness absence across the 12 month period from 1 st April to 31 st March	3,495	4,558	3,950
Total amount of working days lost due to sickness within the year per FTE	8.56	10.8	9.1
% of employees taking no time off work due to sickness absence	29%	31%	30%
% of short term absence (under 20 days)	55%	44%	57%
% of long term absence (20 days or more)	45%	56%	43%
Number of cases of long term sickness absence	27	39	34

10. The percentage of employees incurring sickness absence has broadly stayed the same however we have reduced the level of long term sickness in the year to 43% (down from 56%) as a percentage of overall sickness levels in the council.

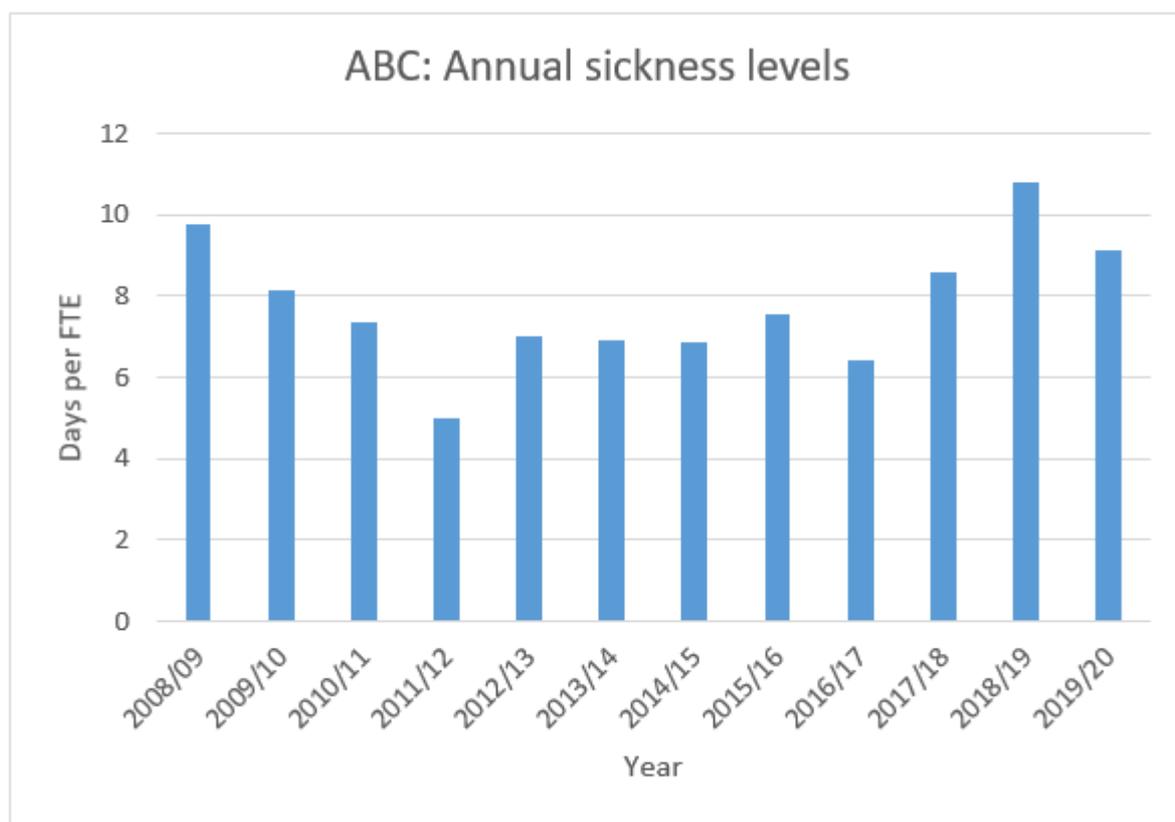
Reasons for all sickness

All Absence Reasons	% of Total Absence
Stress, depression, anxiety, mental health, fatigue	27.04
Other	11.62
Cold, Influenza, Fever, Pneumonia	9.41
Back and neck problems (inc. Sciatica)	7.70
Other musculo-skeletal problems (inc. arthritis)	6.99
Virus (inc. e.g. vomiting, diarrhoea, food poisoning)	5.94
Chest, respiratory	5.31
Stomach, liver, kidney, digestion	5.02
Phased return	4.46
Eye, ear, nose, throat, tonsillitis, glandular, mouth/dental problems, sinusitis	4.38
Surgery, surgery recovery, hospital appointment/procedure	3.19
Headache, Migraine, Vertigo	2.28
Heart, blood pressure conditions, circulation	2.04
See Doctors Certificate	1.30
Infections	1.23
Pregnancy related	0.99
See Self Certificate	0.47

Genito-urinary; menstrual problems	0.34
Fracture, injury, accident outside of work	0.20
Sickness	0.10

11. Mental ill health (including stress) accounts for 27% of the council's total absence with 21% being long-term sickness (lasting more than 20 days). This is an improvement on last year where long-term rates for poor mental health were 27%.
12. The national average for mental ill health this year is 59%. (43% last year). We have a comprehensive wellbeing programme to support mental wellbeing, which will have helped to improve our figures this year.
13. The current position in relation to the 34 employees who were absent long term is as follows:-
 - 33 employees have either returned to work or left the employment of the council
 - 1 is currently off with a new, unrelated, long term condition
14. The following chart shows the number of days' sickness absence per employee (FTE) for each financial year since 2008/2009.

Chronological Comparison

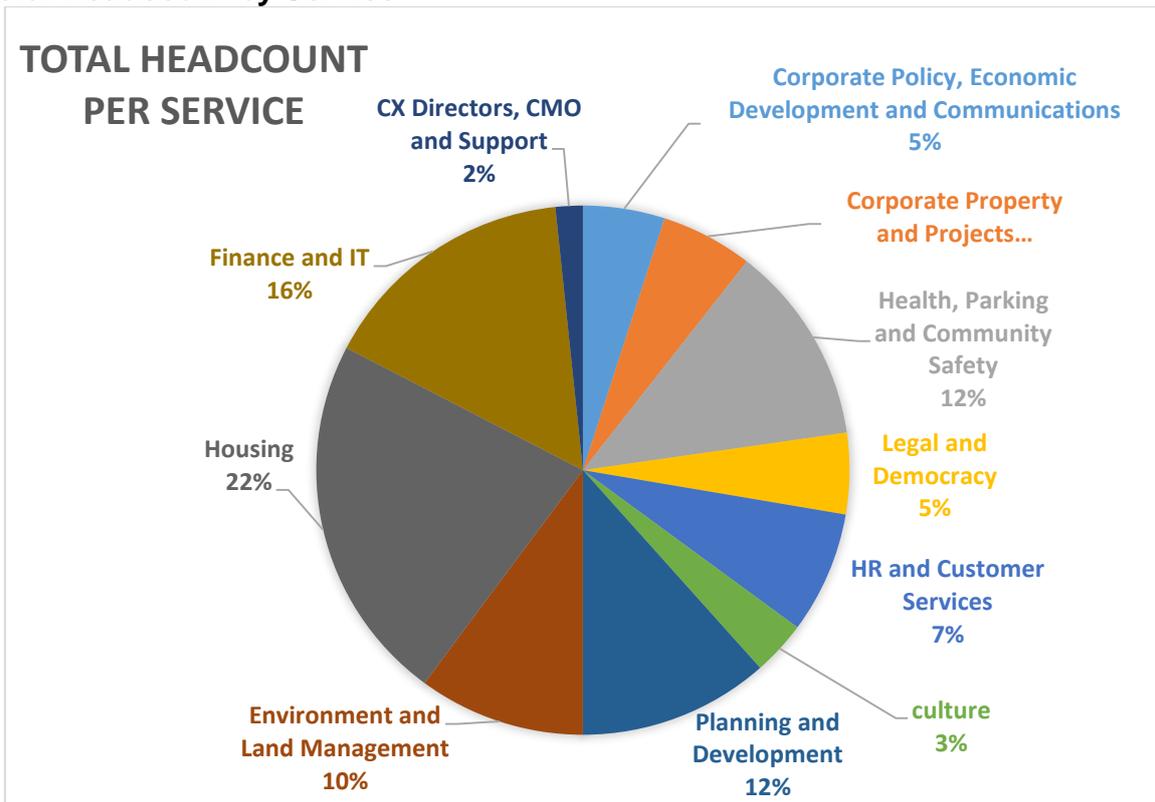


Service Comparison

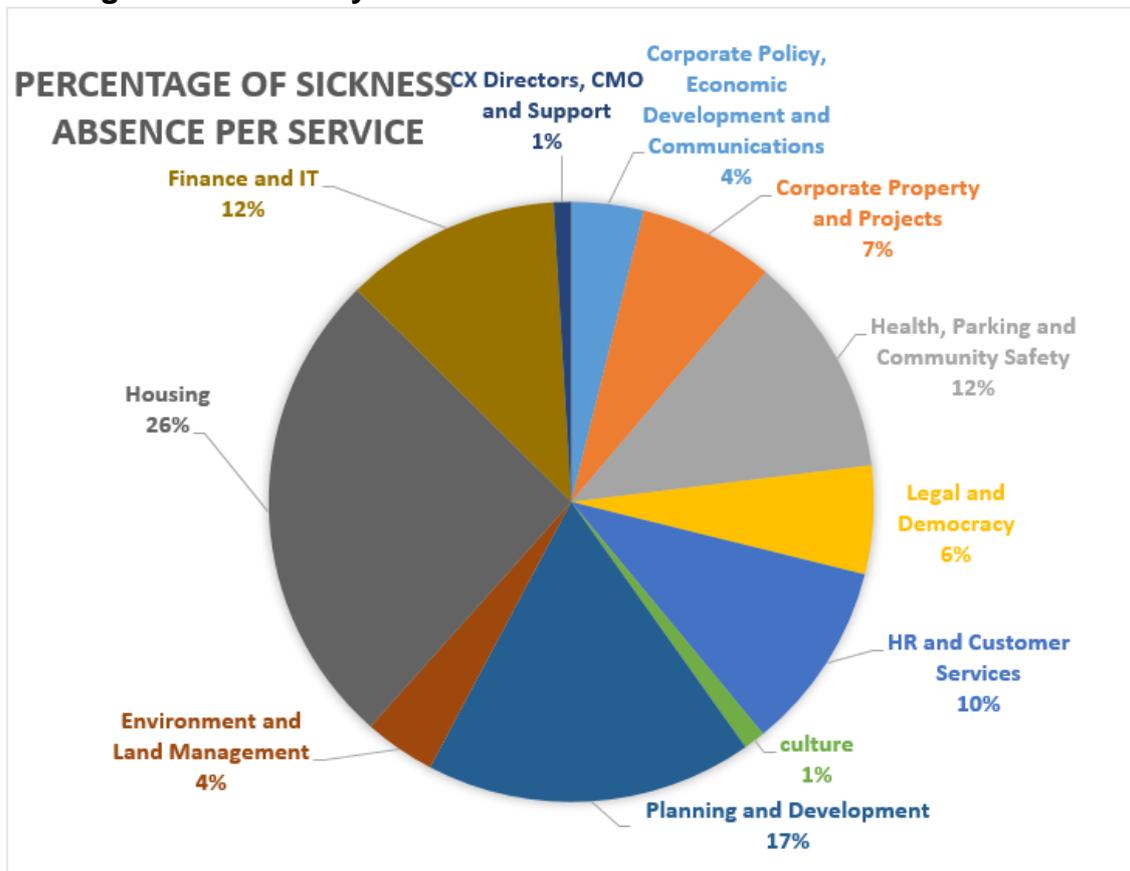
15. The following charts show how headcount is distributed across the services, and how sickness is distributed by service. The charts should broadly show similar percentages. The largest variances are Environment and Land Management

who, despite having 10% of staff, account for just 4% of the sickness. Planning & Development have 12% of staff but have 17% of the sickness.

Total Headcount by Service



Percentage of sickness by Service

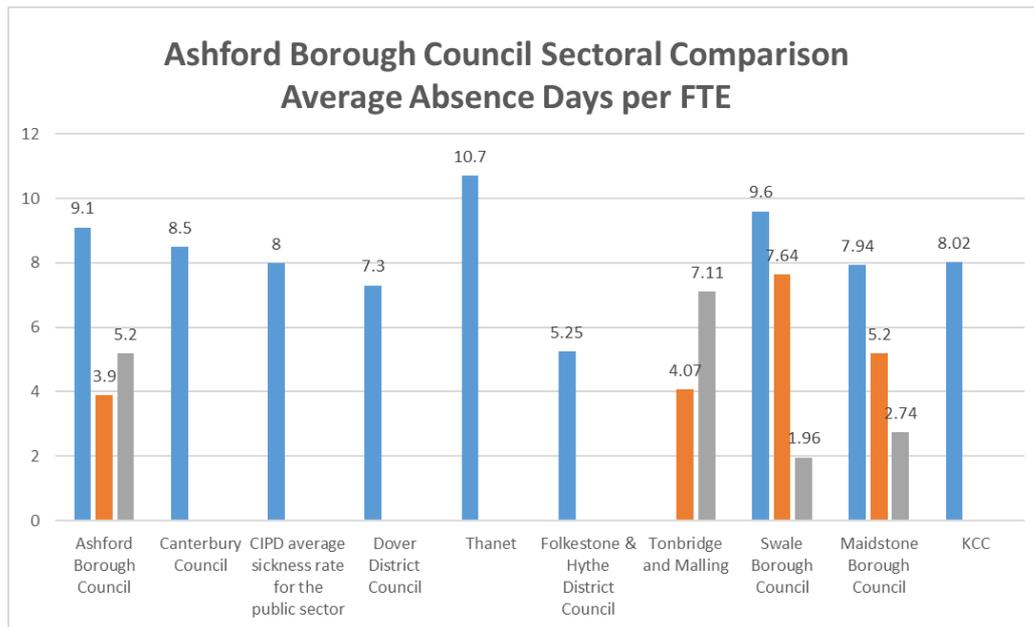


16. The service areas that have a higher proportion of sickness compared to their head count are:
- Planning and Development contribute 17% sickness for 12% staff
 - Housing contribute 26% of sickness for 22% of staff
 - HR & Customer Service contribute 10% of sickness for 7% of staff
 - Legal contribute 6% sickness for 5% staff
17. In **Planning & Development** the main cause of absence was Stress, depression etc., which accounted for 45% of absence in the Service. This is attributed to five individuals having long-term absence due to stress, depression etc. This may be reflective of a year whereby there were significant workload pressures and backlogs in the service as well as organisational change due to a restructure. Personal circumstances have been attributed to the majority of the employees in this category. Four are now back at work, a fifth is currently absent with an unrelated condition but had previously made a successful return to work too. A further 18% absence in the service was due to other chronic conditions.
18. In **Housing** 46% of the absence was long-term sickness caused by chronic musculo-skeletal conditions, surgery issues and poor mental health across eight members of staff. All of these staff have either left the council's employment or are back at work.
19. **HR & Customer Services** 43% of absence was due to long-term absence caused by stress, depression etc., heart related conditions (requiring hospitalisation) and sickness due to surgery and complications related to the surgery. Of the six people who had long-term absence all are back at work, or have left the council. Call Centre staff do tend to have higher absence levels in the wider industry, and at the council this will be exacerbated by this team not having access to flexi- time in the way other teams do. For example, they are more likely to call in sick before their rota'd shift rather than start work a bit later as other staff can do.
20. In **Legal & Democratic** 67% of the absence in this service was due to one member of staff with a chronic condition. This staff member has left the council.

National and sectoral comparison

21. The April 2020 Health and Well-being at Work Survey produced by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported on national absence trends across sectors. The Survey reported an average sickness rate for the public sector of 8 days per employee (FTE) which is a decrease from the figure of 8.4 days per FTE in 2018/19.
22. The chart below shows how the council compares with national public sector absence and some of our neighbouring authorities. All authorities collect and report on this data in different ways therefore to ensure comparison average absence days per FTE is shown in blue, Average short term absence per FTE is shown in grey and average long term absence is shown in orange.

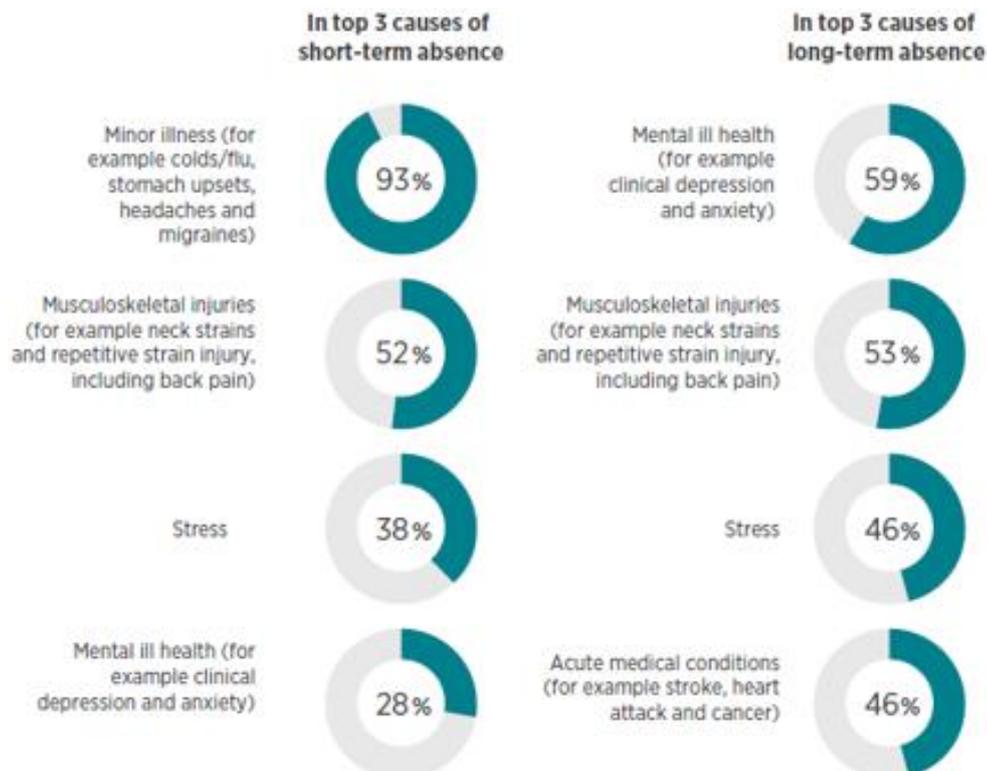
23. Lowest overall absence levels are in Folkestone and Hythe and highest levels are in Thanet and Swale. It should be noted that Thanet report high numbers of manual workers in their workforce.



Reasons for Sickness Absence

24. The CIPD Health and Well-being At Work Survey reported on the most prevalent reasons for both long term sickness absence and short term sickness absence.

CIPD survey: The most common causes of absence (% of respondents who include their top 3 causes)



25. The following two tables detail the reasons for our long-term and short-term sickness absence.

Absence Reason 20 days or more (long-term absence)	% of all sickness
Stress, depression, anxiety, mental health, fatigue	19.00
Other	6.20
Back and neck problems (inc. Sciatica)	5.42
Other musculo-skeletal problems (inc. arthritis)	4.39
Chest, respiratory	2.73
Heart, blood pressure conditions, circulation	1.39
Surgery, surgery recovery, hospital appointment/procedure	1.37
Stomach, liver, kidney, digestion	1.24
See Doctors Certificate	0.73
Pregnancy related	0.61
TOTAL	43%

Absence Reason less than 20 days (short-term absence)	% of all sickness
Cold, Influenza, Fever, Pneumonia*	9.41
Stress, depression, anxiety, mental health, fatigue	8.04
Virus (inc. e.g. vomiting, diarrhoea, food poisoning)*	5.94
Other	5.42
Phased return	4.46
Eye, ear, nose, throat, tonsillitis, glandular, mouth/dental problems, sinusitis*	4.38
Stomach, liver, kidney, digestion	3.78
Other musculo-skeletal problems (inc. arthritis)	2.59
Chest, respiratory	2.57
Back and neck problems (inc. Sciatica)	2.28
Headache, Migraine, Vertigo*	2.28
Surgery, surgery recovery, hospital appointment/procedure	1.82
Infections	1.23
Heart, blood pressure conditions, circulation	0.65
See Doctors Certificate	0.57
See Self Certificate	0.47
Pregnancy related	0.38
Genito-urinary; menstrual problems	0.34
Fracture, injury, accident outside of work	0.20
Sickness	0.10
TOTAL	57%

*minor illnesses – colds, stomach upsets and headaches

26. Comparison with national trends – long-term absence

- CIPD trends indicate that mental ill health continues to be the major cause of long-term sickness. In Ashford Borough Council, this 19% of long-term absence is attributable to stress, depression, anxiety, mental health and fatigue. This is a reduction from 2018/19 when it was 27%.

- Musculoskeletal conditions are cited as the second largest reason for long-term absence. Ashford's trends are aligned with this too.
27. Comparison with national trends – short-term absence
- We also match national trends with our short-term absence causes, the CIPD report that a wide range of minor illnesses (highlighted with an asterix on the table) such as cold, flu, stomach upsets, headaches and migraines are the leading cause of short term absence. This trend is reflected on the council's data with colds, stomach upsets making up 22% of short-term absence, followed by stress at 8%.
 - Mental ill health makes up 8% of short-term absence within the council, which is a 1% increase on 2018/19.
 - Phased returns to work made up 4% of short-term absence within the council, demonstrating the important part that recuperative return to work plans play in facilitating an early return to work following sickness absence, helping to reduce the overall long-term absence rate.

Sickness conclusions

28. Overall it is positive that sickness absence is reducing, our reasons for absence are consistent with national trends. Comparison with neighbouring councils
29. Whilst in some service areas sickness levels are higher than the average in the council we can understand why this might be the case and where necessary work is ongoing to address the causal factors.
30. We have worked well to reduce the long term sickness, and this will continue. A revised sickness policy and new attendance management policy will support ongoing reduction in both long-term and short-term sickness. It is intended that these policies will be considered by the JCC in October.

Staff turnover

31. Turnover is a good indicator of corporate health. The calculation typically includes all leavers, including those who retire, or leave involuntarily due to dismissal or redundancy. It also makes no distinction between beneficial turnover and that which is dysfunctional.

The standard calculation for turnover is:

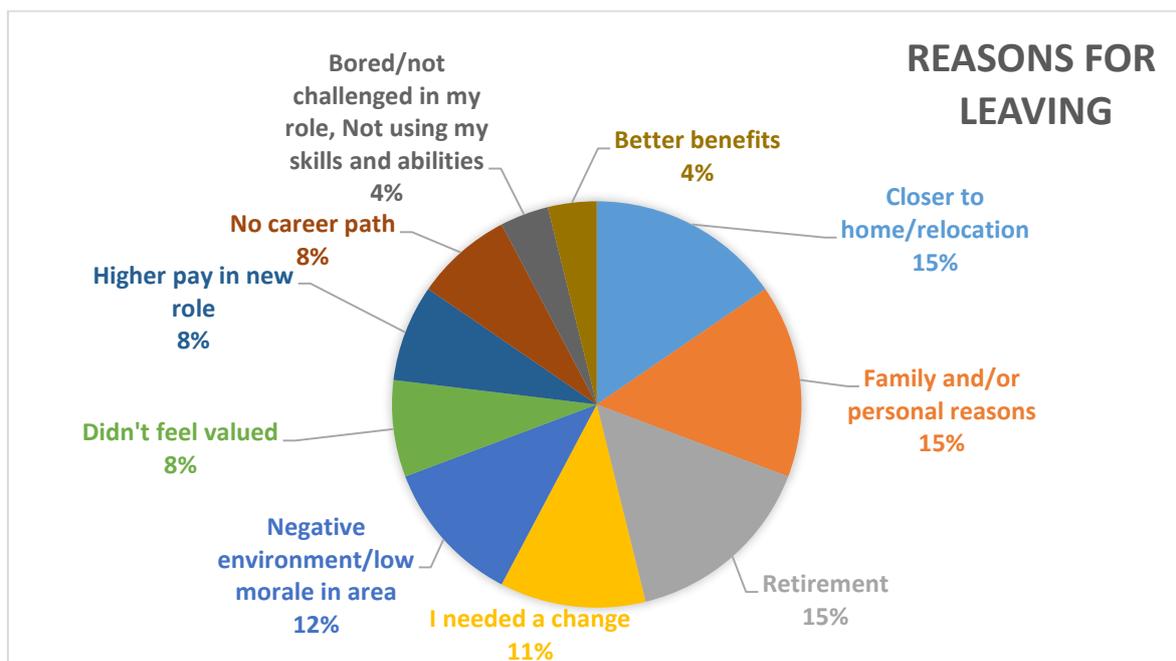
$$\frac{\text{Total number of leavers over period}}{\text{Average total number employed over period}} \times 100$$

32. However, it is also useful to calculate a separate figure for voluntary turnover (resignations), as such departures are unplanned and often unpredictable (unlike planned retirements or redundancies for instance) and can have a particularly adverse impact on the business.

33. Our turnover due to all reasons in 2019/20 was 11%, and 9% due to resignations. These figures tend to be lower than the national figure where 15% is the typical level.
34. The table below shows a per service breakdown of the turnover

Service	Service turnover due to 'All Reasons' (excl end of Fixed Term Contracts)	Service Turnover due to resignation	Percentage of corporate turnover due to resignation
Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	16.7%	16.7%	0.8%
Corporate Property and Projects	14.8%	11.1%	0.6%
Health, Parking and Community Safety	13.6%	5.1%	0.6%
Legal and Democracy	16.7%	8.3%	0.4%
HR and Customer Services	11.1%	11.1%	0.8%
Culture	12.5%	12.5%	0.4%
Planning and Development	14.3%	12.5%	1.7%
Environment and Land Management	12.2%	8.2%	0.8%
Housing	6.4%	5.5%	1.2%
Finance and IT	7.9%	3.9%	0.6%
CX Directors, CMO and Support	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%

35. We also collect data about why people are leaving, it is not obligatory for staff to provide us with this feedback. Just under half the leavers responded to the request for feedback during 2019/20 and the reasons for leaving were given below:



36. **Planning & Development** have a higher resignation rate than the corporate rate (12.5% v 9%). This equates to seven people. The reasons given for leaving in this area are: didn't feel valued, family reasons, no career path, better benefits and retirement. These are not unusual reasons when there has been significant internal changes, especially where internal promotion opportunities have not been realised and can lead to turnover and/or poor morale. The Planning Advisory Service review identified some of these issues and the new interim Head of Service is working on a plan to improve morale, embed the structure and improve performance.
37. Members have previously expressed concerns about turnover in the Planning and Development unit so it is worth expanding on this element. Historically we have had a stable service with low turnover. The market for Planning staff has always been a small, and 'Kent focused' with many staff 'doing the rounds' amongst local authorities. Overall Ashford has historically retained its staff because of the exciting prospects for development in Ashford and the high performing culture of the service, its reputation was enviable. A vicious circle of demotivated leavers and a reduction in performance levels has impacted our ability to attract new talent. i.e. our reputation across this close-knit sector (other planning authorities, developers, local agents, temporary staffing agencies supplying consultants etc.) was not of a workplace people wanted to come. The plan of action being implemented by the new interim Head of Service will help to address this, but it might take some time.
38. The recruitment is being taken forward currently now that lockdown is easing. The employment market has changed significantly since the country went into lockdown and it will be important to properly test the market to determine the impact of the pandemic on our ability to attract and retain talent. The Council has a number of tools it uses to make roles attractive, support for learning and development, relocation packages, flexible working, In the event that we are unable to attract talent we also have a Market Supplement Scheme that can be applied to enhance salary levels.
39. During lockdown when we initially paused all of our recruitment activity we placed a 'generic' advert on our website for Planners. This was to keep the door open for any speculative applicants. The campaign has yielded a greater number of speculative applicants than we would normally get and where we believe the skills match potential roles these are with the service for review, so the indications are positive to be able to successfully recruit to vacancies.
40. **Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications** have a resignation rate higher than the corporate resignation rate (16.7% v 9%). This equated to four people. Reasons given for leaving in this service were relocating closer to home, needing a change or because they were bored in their role.
41. **Culture** also has a higher resignation rate higher than the corporate resignation rate (12.5% v 9%). This equated to two members of staff, both of the staff members relocated for different job opportunities
42. **HR & Customer Services** has a higher resignation rate than the corporate resignation rate (11.1% v 9%). This relates to four members of staff, their reasons for leaving included better paid job elsewhere in the council, low morale and I

needed a change. The customer service part of the unit has had higher churn in the past similar to the wider call centre industry; the positive to this at Ashford BC is that customer service staff tend to move internally to other jobs so we retain their talent and knowledge corporately.

43. Finally, **Corporate Property & Projects** has a higher resignation rate than the corporate resignation rate (11.1% v 9%). This equated to two resignations. Neither completed the exit interview but from informal conversations before leaving at least one related to promotion opportunity elsewhere.

Turnover conclusions

44. Our turnover rate of 11% is considered to be good compared to the typical national levels (15%). A high number of the reasons stated for leaving are neutral reasons that the council had no control over (e.g. family reasons, relocation). However changes to working practices and the ability to work remotely may positively impact these in the future.
45. It should also be noted that some turnover is healthy, an organisation needs different experiences, new perspectives in order for it to evolve. It also needs to lose staff that are not productive or who are disruptive, so some turnover should be welcomed.
46. In the services where there appears to be comparatively high turnover, sometimes this is partly because of the small size of the service. However where this is not the case (Planning and Development) we understand the reasons why. We need to ensure that we learn the lessons related to change management that have lead to the turnover.

Employment relations

47. Poor employment relations is also an indicator of poor corporate health. Formal disciplinary and grievances result when informal interventions, designed to support and encourage improvements have failed, or where the conduct is so unacceptable it cannot be resolved informally.
48. The table below summarises the number of cases where HR advice has been sought in the previous year, and either resolved through informal stages of the procedure or progressed to a formal hearing. There are of course many informal cases that HR have not been required to support as they have been handled within the services.

	Total cases	Resolved through formal process	Issue dealt with in formal procedures
Grievance	10	2	2 x Management standards
Bullying & harassment	5	2	1 x peer to peer, 1 manager to subordinate
Disciplinary	8	4	3 x Conduct, 1 x failure to follow procedures

Service area	Total cases supported by HR
Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	1
Corporate Property and Projects	3
Health, Parking and Community Safety	4
Legal and Democracy	1
HR and Customer Services	0
Culture	0
Planning and Development	2
Environment and Land Management	1
Housing	8
Finance and IT	3
CX Directors, CMO and Support	0

49. It is difficult to benchmark casework with others as it is not only reflective of the culture and health of the organisation in a negative way it is also reflective of the context in which the organisation is operating. For example, awareness raising or training in a new policy may increase the number of people accessing that policy.
50. Both Planning & Development and HR & Customer Services have both been highlighted as having proportionately higher sickness and turnover. Only one of the cases that went through the formal process was in the Planning service and none in HR & Customer Services. Where HR have been asked to support with informal cases these have tended to be in services with inexperienced managers and they have done exactly the right thing by asking for help. The corporate training plan will be delivering management training this year aimed at developing these basic skills and we will use this data to allocate places.

Employment relations conclusions

51. There is not a concentration of formal cases in any one-service area. If this were the case, it could indicate poor health in that service area. There is a higher concentration of cases informally resolved linked to a Housing but this has been where the manager has needed support due to inexperience and does not indicate poor health in this area.

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Tracker – 08 September 2020

Current Work Programme			
Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
Digital Transformation	Ongoing (Final Report due October 2020)	HR and Customer Services Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications.	Recommended for the work programme by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to examine how far digital transformation has progressed in all services.
Homelessness	October 2020	Housing	Briefing on the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) and how the council has responded.
External Contract Procurement	November 2020	Corporate Property and Projects	A presentation on the procurement process for external contracts and determine where scrutiny could be beneficial.
Corporate Performance Report	November 2020	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 1
Consultation and Engagement	Later 2020	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Involvement and engagement of the public with the consultation process for corporate issues.
Update on Vicarage Lane Project	TBC	Corporate Property and Projects	A summary of the council's current position regarding the appointment of a Project Manager for the Vicarage Lane Project.
Budget Scrutiny	December 2020	Finance and IT	The Budget Scrutiny Task Group will meet to review the draft budget for the 2021/22 municipal year.
	January 2020		
S106 Decision Making Process	Early 2021	Planning and Development	A report regarding the S106 negotiations process and how the spending of contributions is decided.

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