

Headcount and Full Time Equivalent (FTE) comparison and Agency usage

Chart 1 shows that the headcount (based at the end of each quarter) at Cherwell District Council (CDC) has seen a reduction of 11 between quarter 3 and 4 of 2024/25. Within the headcount of 626, 14 employees have 2 roles, and have therefore been counted twice.

Quarter 4 of 2024/25 has seen adjustments of 22 leavers and 12 new starters across the organisation.

Chart 1  
Headcount by Quarter  
Quarter 1 2022-23 to Quarter 4 2024-25

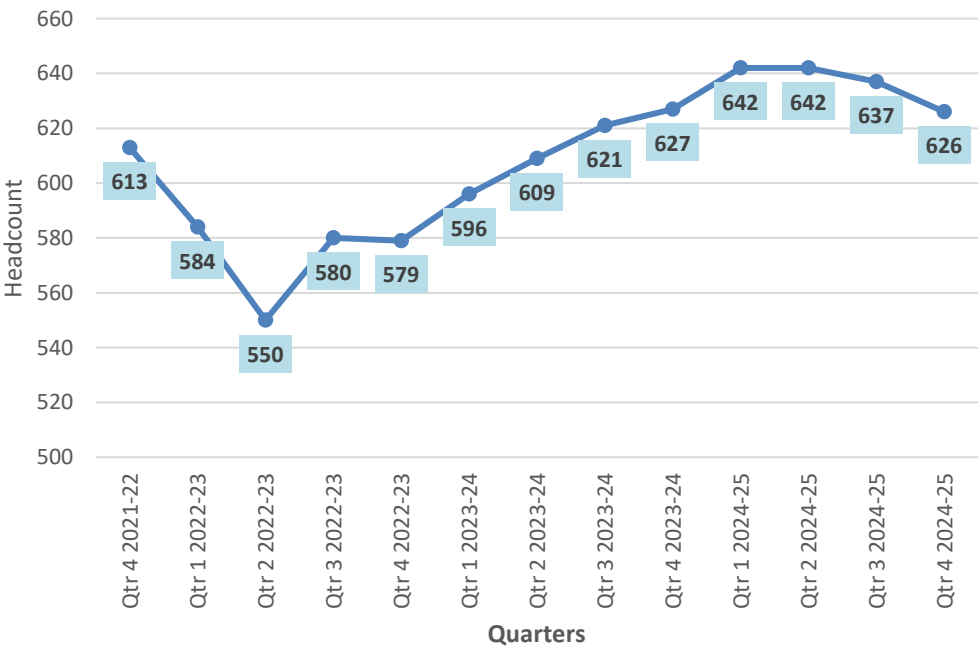


Chart 2 details the distribution of headcount across our departments and directorates as at the end of quarter 4 in 2024/25. Wellbeing and Environmental Services continue to show the highest headcount. The department of Chief Executive’s Office incorporates executive support and employees attributed to the Pan Regional Partnership, for which CDC is the accountable body. CDC are also host employer to the District Councils Network (DCN) and these employees are included in the HR, OD and Payroll directorate.

Property has had the biggest reduction in headcount with 4 since quarter 3. Customer Focus has reduced by 3 in the last quarter. Evironmental Services’ headcount has increased by 3 and Housing Services by 2 in the last quarter.

Chart 2  
Headcount by Department as at  
31 March 2025

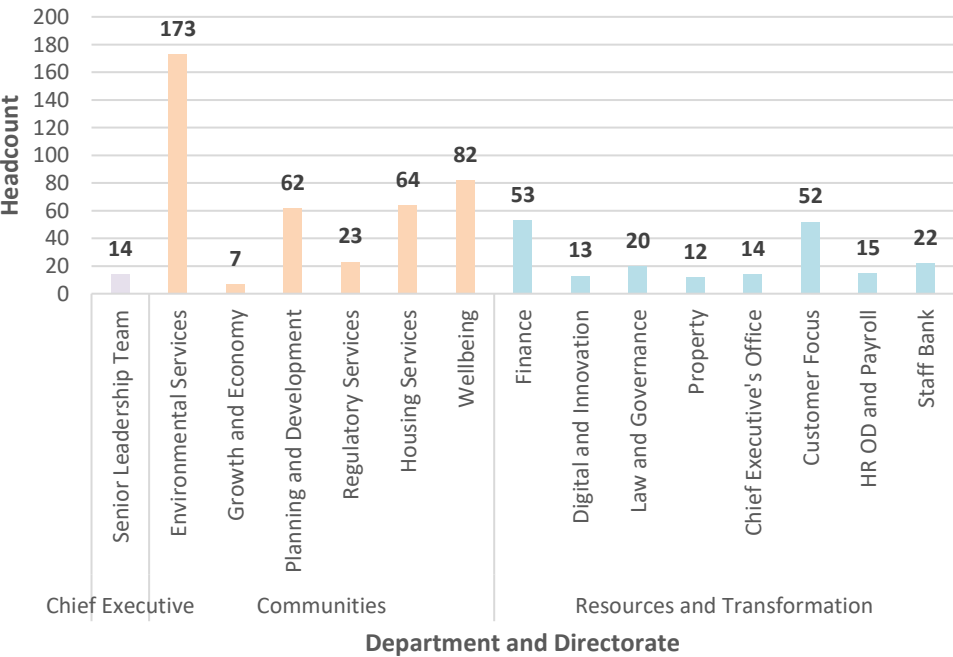


Chart 3 outlines the fluctuation of FTE which has reduced by 7.17 between quarter 3 and quarter 4 of 2024/25.

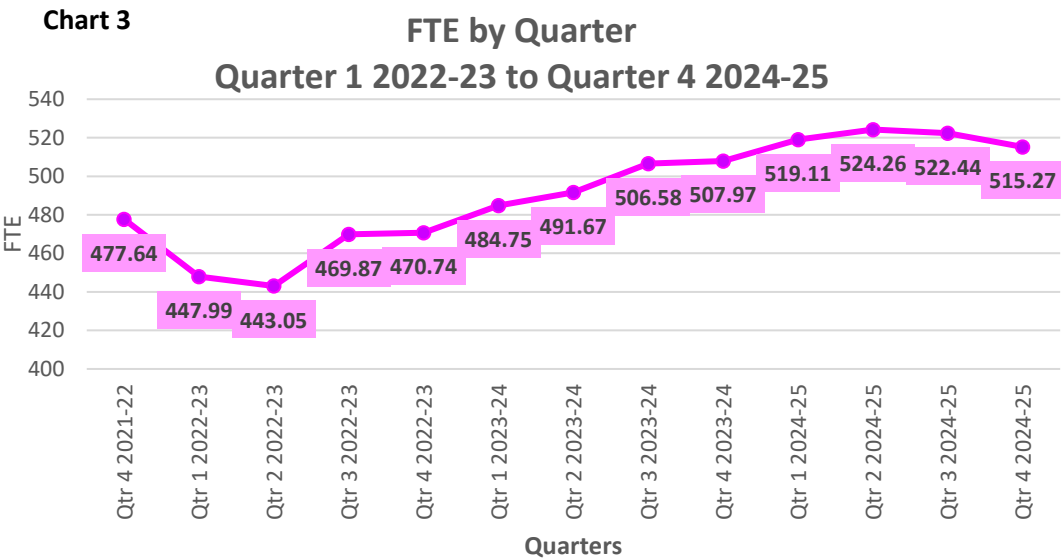


Chart 4 outlines the distribution of FTE across the departments and directorates as at the end of quarter 4 of 2024/25.

Since quarter 3 of 2024/25; Environmental Services has seen an increase of 2.5 FTE and Housing Services have increased by 1.95 FTE. Property's FTE has reduced by 2.66, Customer Focus' has reduced by 2.06 and Regulatory Services by 2 FTE.

Charts 5 shows the breakdown of basis of hours across our workforce as of 31 March 2025. Since quarter 3 of 2024/25 there has been minimal change to the make-up of role-basis with our full-time increasing by 0.4% and part-time reducing by 0.51% and our casual workforce increasing by 0.06%.

Chart 4

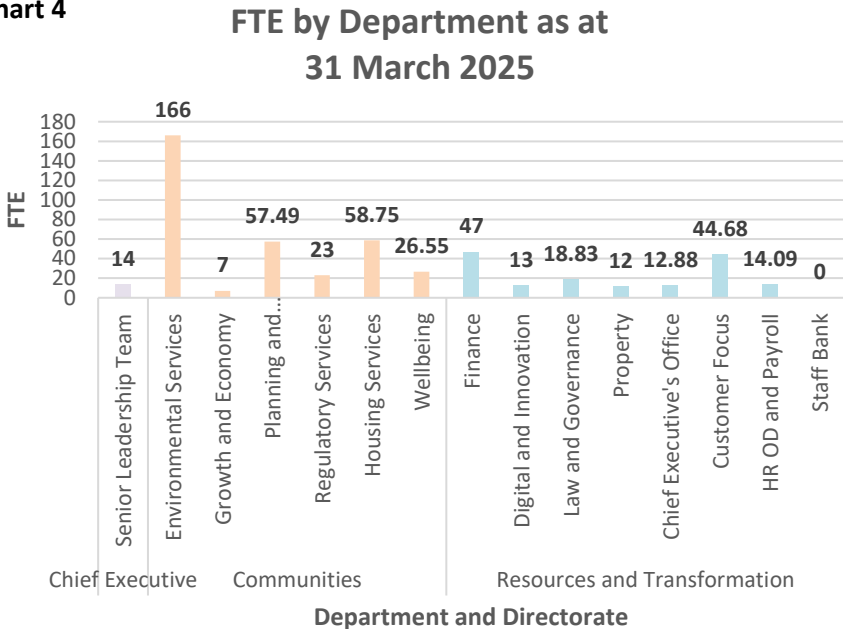


Chart 5

**% Breakdown of Role Basis as at 31 March 2025**

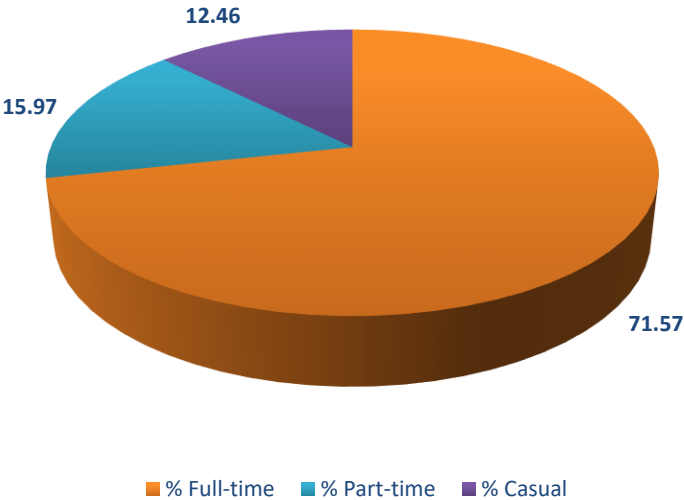
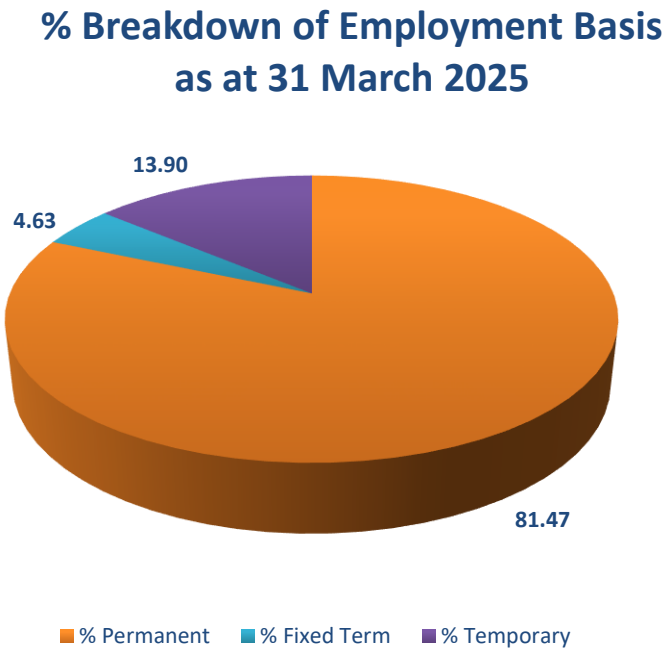


Chart 6 outlines the employment basis of those directly employed by CDC shows that 81.47% of our workforce are in permanent roles. This has slightly reduced, by 0.79% since Quarter 3 of 2024/25. There has been minimal fluctuation of employment basis since the last quarter.

Chart 6



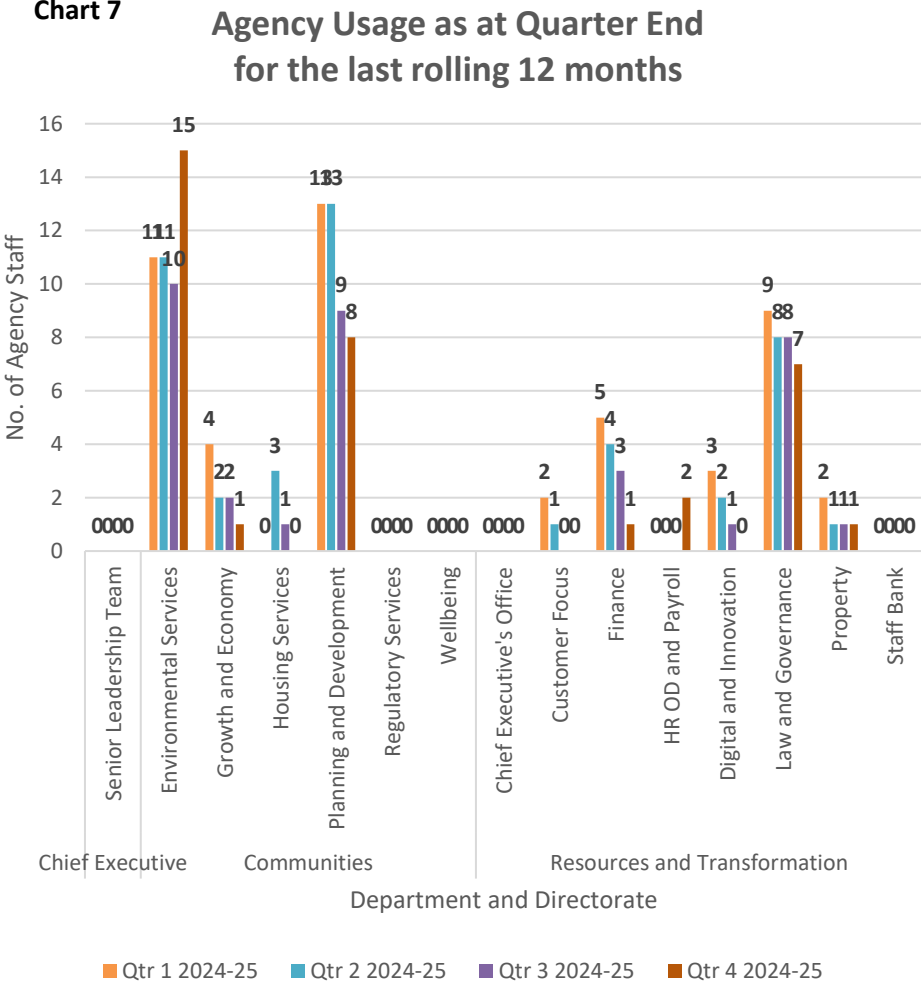
In addition to employing staff directly, CDC also utilise Agency Workers, either for interim or short-term usage for specific posts and projects.

Chart 7 outlines agency usage as at the end of each quarter for the last rolling year by department. A total of 35 Agency workers were engaged with CDC at the end of quarter 4 of 2024/25. This has remained the same since quarter 3 of 2024/25 but has reduced by 20 in the last 12 months.

The highest agency usage is usually Environmental Services, within refuse collection and this is due to having 3-person crews on refuse collection, often utilising agency staff to cover for employee sickness and holidays. Usage in this area has increased by 5 since the end of quarter 3.

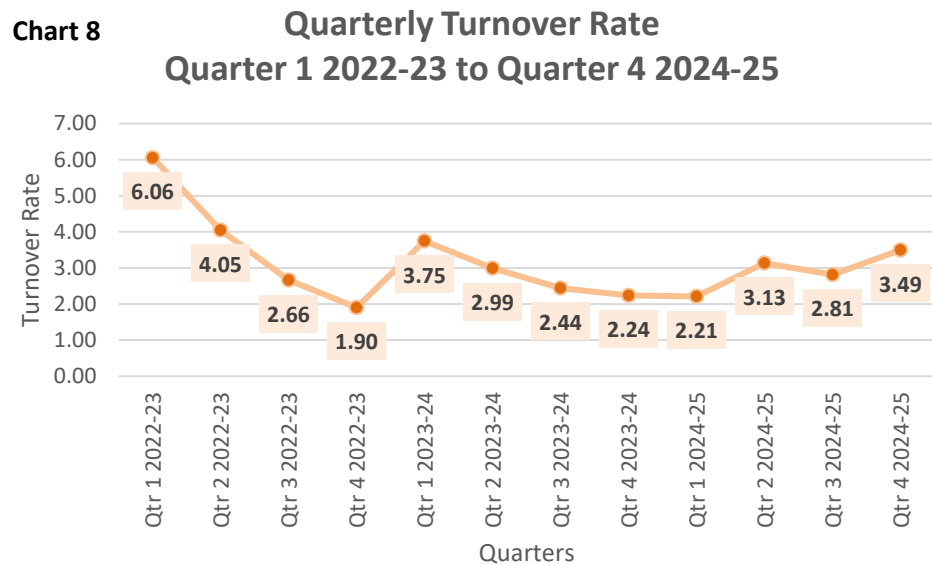
Growth and Economy, Housing Services, Planning and Development, Law and Governance and Digital and Innovation have each reduced agency usage by 1 in quarter 4.

Chart 7



Turnover rates and Leaver information

Chart 8 tracks the turnover rate per quarter over a 3-year period, from April 2022 to March 2025. The turnover rate is defined by firstly calculating the average number of employees for the quarter period and then dividing the number of leavers by the average number of employees.



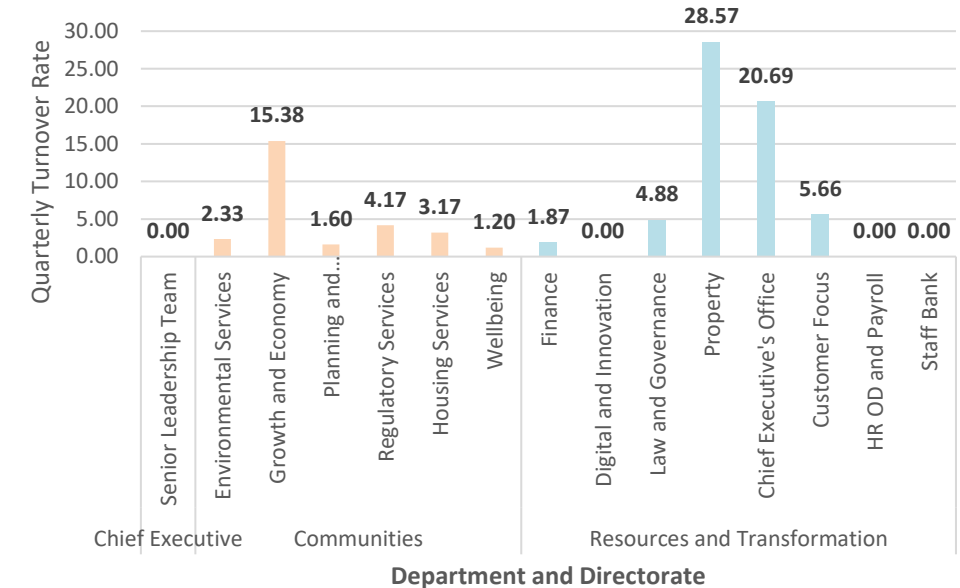
The turnover for quarter 4 shows an increase of 0.68% in the turnover rate since quarter 3 of 2024/25 and a 1.25% increase in the last financial year.

Chart 9 details the quarterly turnover rate by department for quarter 4.

Whilst its useful to review labour turnover on a quarterly basis throughout the year; turnover can also be measured at an annual rate. Table 1 outlines the labour turnover rate at CDC an annual basis comparatively for the last 3 years. In 2024/25, CDC had 74 leavers in total, which is 8 more than the previous year. The annual turnover rate saw an increase of 0.52% in comparison to the previous year.

**Chart 9**

**Quarterly Turnover Rate by Department**  
**as at**  
**31 March 2025**



**Table 1**

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Headcount at 01/04	605	578	627
Headcount at 31/03	579	627	626
Average no. of employees	592	602.5	626.5
No. of leavers	85	68	74
Turnover rate (%)	14.36	11.29	11.81

Chart 10 outlines leavers by reason for quarter 4 of 2024/25. Of the 22 leavers recorded in quarter 4, resignation is the highest reason for leaving, accounting for 55.45%. 13.64% of leavers are due to end of fixed term contract, Retirement and Failure to pass probation each accounted for 9.09% and dismissal due to capability accounted for 4.55%.

Chart 11 outlines leavers by length of service across the last 12 quarters. In quarter 4 of 2024/25, 7 leavers had less than a year's service, 8 had under 5 years' service, 4 had less than 10 years' service and 3 had over 10 years.

Chart 10

% of Leavers by reason  
1 January to 31 March 2025

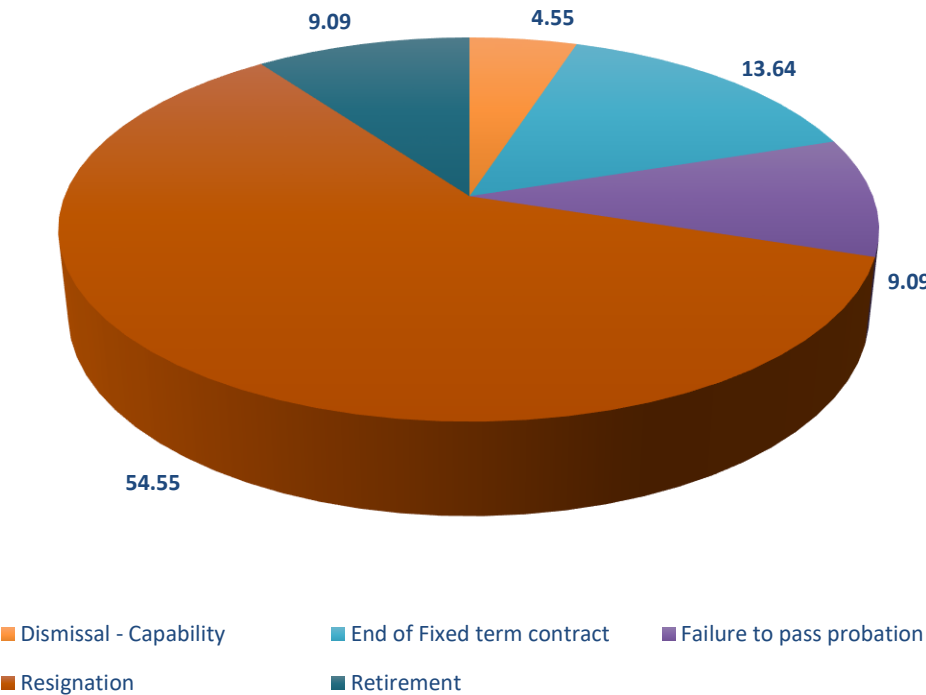
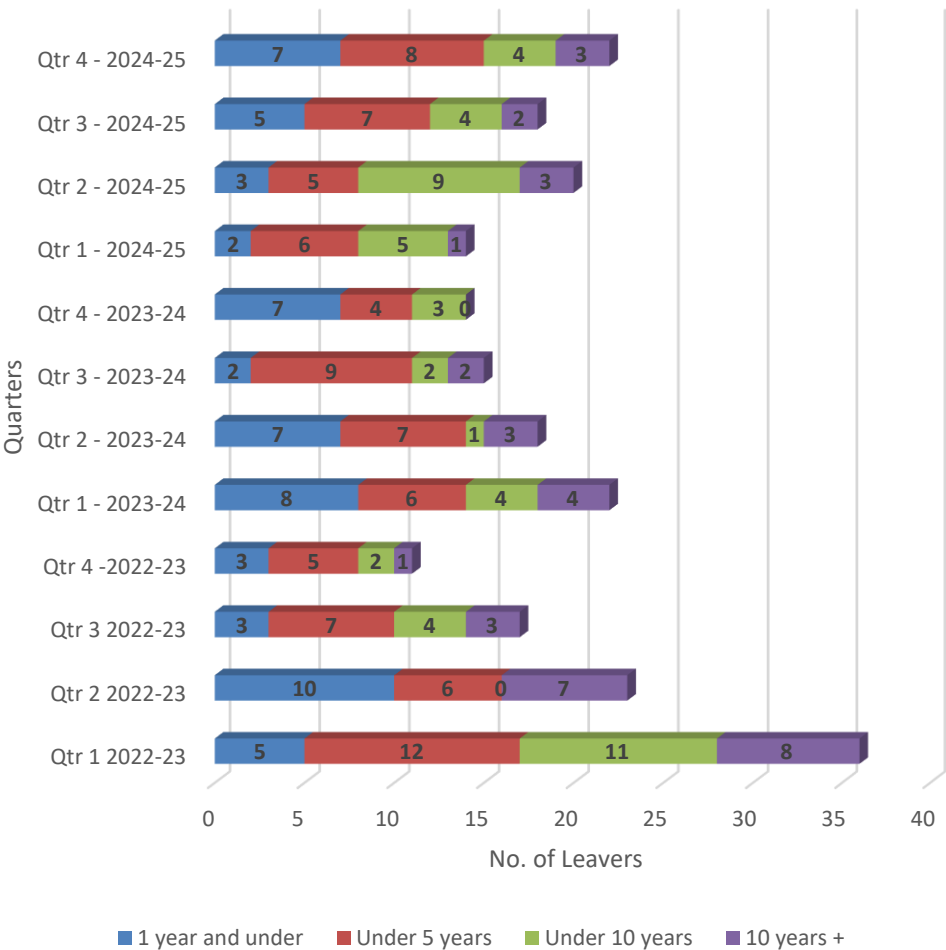


Chart 11

Leavers by Length of Service  
1 April 2022- 31 March 2025



When a resignation is received within HR, employees are provided with an electronic exit questionnaire to complete via our HR/Payroll system and invited to attend a meeting with a member of the HR team to ascertain why they are leaving and whether they have any advice or comments on lessons learned or improvements that could be made.

Of the 22 leavers in quarter 4, all were offered the opportunity to partake in an exit interview. 14 completed the exit interview questionnaire and attended meetings with a member of the HR Team. This is a 64% completion rate, which is an increase from the last quarter that recorded a 46% completion rate. We cannot force employees to provide this data to us or attend a meeting with HR but we will continue to encourage engagement in this process in order to embed this.

Comments received within the interviews that took place were generally very positive around the teams worked with, with mixed reviews around workloads, with some stating certain areas are busy, but also one comment about a lack of workload. Some left due to family matters and we had a number of fixed term contracts that came to an end.

HR business Partners review exit interview data in order to pick up any trends and discuss content with relevant managers. Data will continue to be gathered and shared with the relevant managers in a bid to act on any advice received in order to make improvements, where possible, for existing employees, thus aiding retention.

Sickness Absence reasons and rates

Chart 12 shows the number of sickness absence incidents by reason over the last 8 quarters, back to April 2022. stomach/liver/kidney and digestion has seen the most incidents across this period, with 210 across the period. This is closely followed by Musculo-skeletal which had 201 incidents.

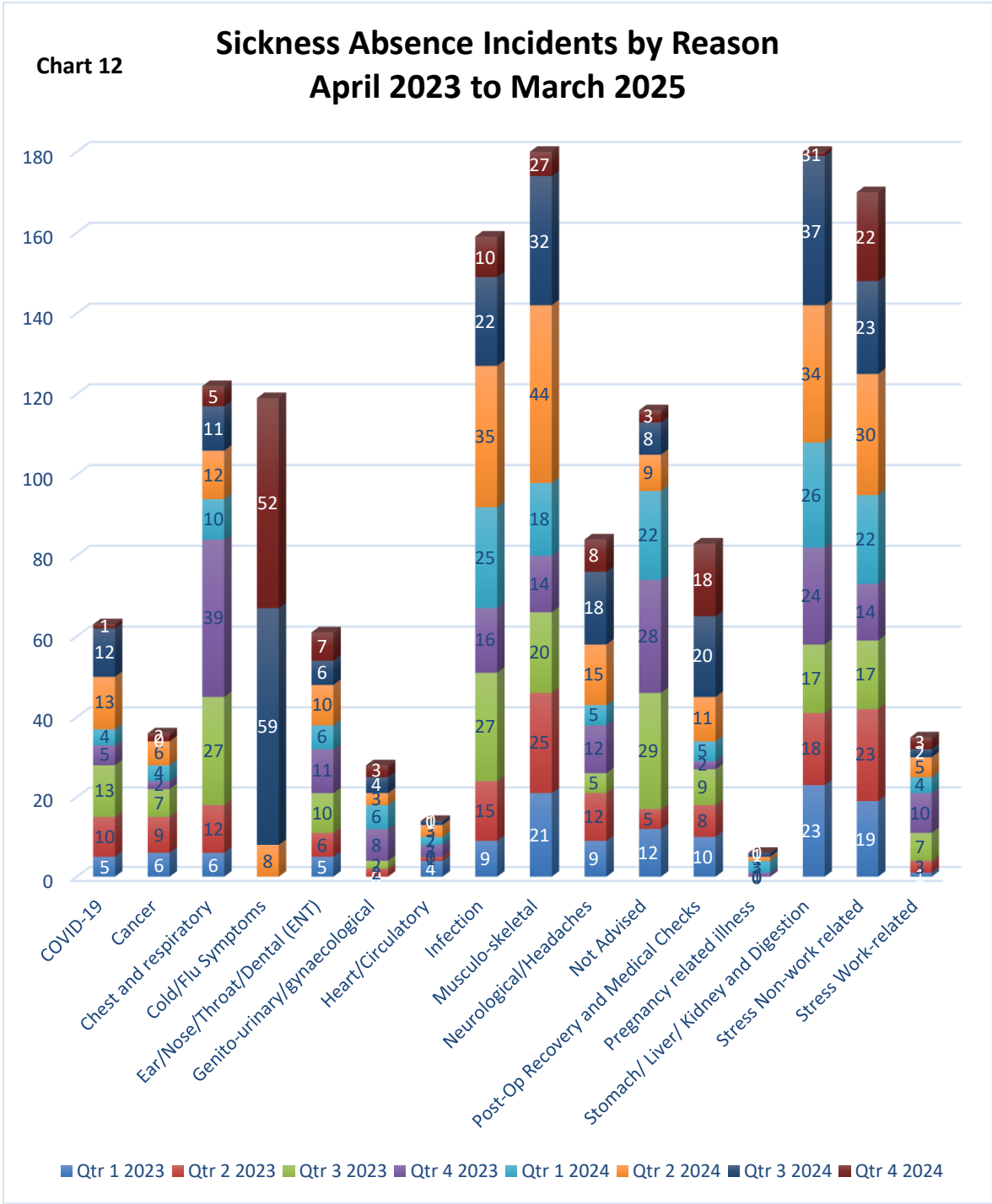
For Quarter 4, cold and flu was the highest recorded reason for sickness absence, accounting for 27% of all incidents in the last quarter. This is followed by stomach/liver/kidney and digestion, which accounts for 16% of all incidents in the last quarter. The third highest reason this quarter was Musculo-skeletal, accounting for 14% of all incidents.

There were 192 incidents of sickness absence recorded in Quarter 4 of 2024/25, this is 3 more incidents than the same quarter of 2023/24.

The highest reason for sickness absence across the last rolling 12 months was stomach/liver/kidney and digestion, with 128 incidents recorded and accounting for 15% of all incidents.

The second highest reason for sickness absence in the last 12 months is Musculo-skeletal, with 121 incidents reported which equates to 14.25% of all incidents.

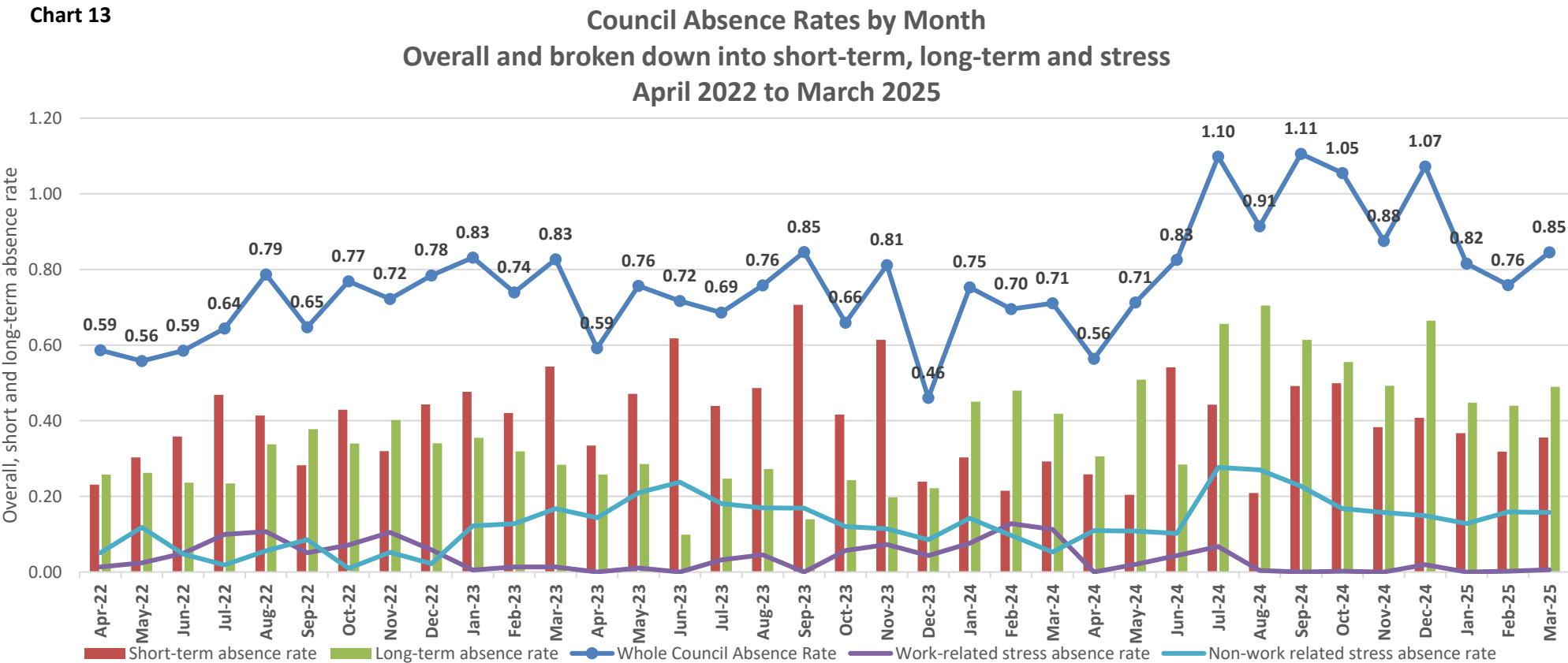
Cold and flu symptoms is the third highest reason in the last 12 months, recording 119 incidents and accounting for 14.02% of all incidents.



For the purposes of sickness absence reporting, short term absence is recorded as any incident that is less than 28 days, and a GP fit note is required after an employee has been absent for 7 calendar days. Long-term sickness is recorded as any absence spanning 28 days or more. HR work with managers and employees, where employees are off on long-term sick to engage with Cordell Health, CDC’s Occupational Health Provider and ensure effective absence management.

Chart 13 tracks the absence rate per month, which is effectively the percentage of working time lost, from April 2022 to March 2025 and shows a decrease in sickness absence rates since quarter 3. The absence rate is calculated by dividing the hours lost due to sickness absence by the available working hours for the period. September 2024 records the highest rate of absence at 1.11% of working time lost.

Chart 13 also captures the absence rate of short and long-term instances, In the last 12 months. September 2023 has the highest rate of short-term absence, recording a rate of 0.71 days lost. August 2024 had the highest rate of long-term absence in the last 12 months, with 0.70 days lost.





The absence rate attributed to stress is also displayed in Chart 13 and a slight increase in work-related stress was recorded in the last quarter, with a rate of 0.01 in March 2025. Work-related stress incidents accounted for 1.54% of incidents in quarter 4 of 2024/25 and 1.65% of incidents in the last rolling 12 months.

The non-work-related stress absence rate has increased slightly over the last quarter. It has increased from 0.15 at the end of quarter 3 to 0.16 at the start of quarter 4. Non-work-related stress accounted for 11.45% of incidents in quarter 4 of 2024/25 and 11.43% of incidents in the last rolling 12 months.

HR continue to ensure that Occupational Health support is accessed at the point that employee sickness is classified as long-term unless there are benefits to instigate this sooner. If an employee reports that they are absent due to stress, then an immediate referral to Occupational Health is made to ensure that support mechanisms can be put in place as soon as possible. Employees are also asked to complete a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Questionnaire as this provides information on the causes of stress which aids the organisation in supporting employees to deal with these issues where possible.

Employees also continue to have access to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which is provided by Health Assured and offers access to counselling, legal and financial advice, and wellbeing resources. The service is confidential and whilst statistics on usage are reported through to CDC; details of which employees have made contact is withheld.

Charts 14 and 15 provide a breakdown of the percentage of working time lost by department for both short term and long-term sickness absence.

Chart 14 % Working Time Lost due to Short Term Sickness Absence  
1 January to 31 March 2025

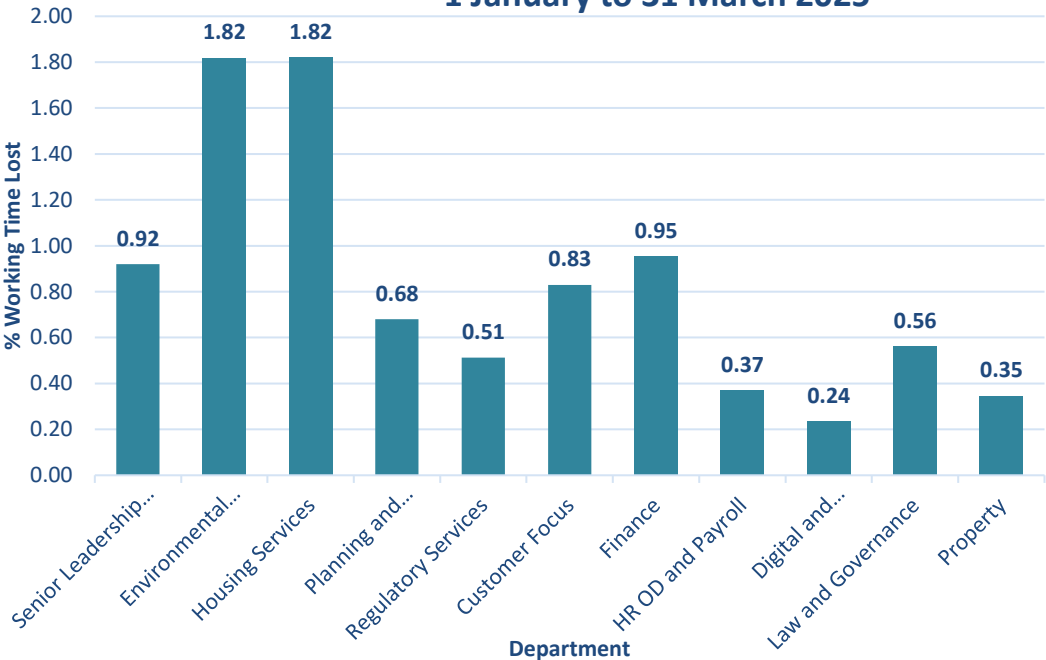
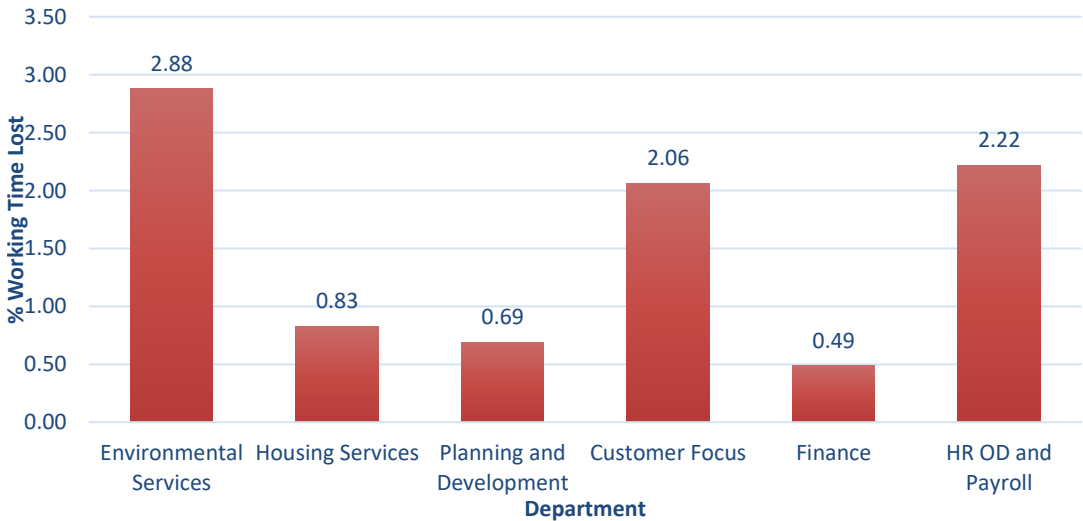


Chart 15 % Working Time Lost due to Long Term Absence  
1 January to 31 March 2025



Whilst data for sickness absence is analysed on a quarterly basis for the purpose of these statistics, it is helpful to reflect on this data on an annual basis and Table 2 provides details of CDC's annual absence rate, which is the percentage of working time lost due to sickness absence per year, for the past 3 years.

Table 2

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Average FTE</b>	460.72	484.94	510.24
<b>Available Working Hours</b>	888864.56	935583.95	984393.40
<b>Hours Lost</b>	28773.3	30260.23	40219.19
<b>Absence Rate (%)</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>3.23</b>	<b>4.09</b>
<b>Hours lost due to short term absence</b>	16007.05	18307.73	16958.94
<b>Short term absence rate (%)</b>	<b>1.80</b>	<b>1.96</b>	<b>1.72</b>
<b>Hours lost due to long term absence</b>	12766.25	11952.5	23260.25
<b>Long term absence rate (%)</b>	<b>1.44</b>	<b>1.28</b>	<b>2.36</b>
<b>Hours lost due to work-related stress</b>	2064.6	2111.9	609.53
<b>Work-related stress absence rate (%)</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>0.06</b>
<b>Hours lost due to non-work related stress</b>	3005.95	6117.25	7572.2
<b>Non-work related stress absence rate (%)</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>0.77</b>

In 2024-25, 4.09% of working time was lost due to sickness, this is 0.86% more than the previous year.

The short-term absence rate reduced by 0.24% but the long-term absence rate increased by 1.08% compared to 2023/24.

The absence rate for work related stress has reduced by 0.17 but the absence rate for non-work-related stress has increased by 0.12. As previously stated, occupational health support is provided at the earliest opportunity for all employees who report they are suffering with stress.

### Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Disability and LGBTQ+ Workforce Profile as at 31 March 2024

Chart 16 shows a breakdown by age of the CDC workforce, expressed in percentage. 13% of CDC employees are over 60. 28% are aged between 51 and 60. 20% of CDC employees are aged between 41 and 50. 21% of the workforce are aged between 31 and 40 and 18% aged 30 and under. There has been minimal change to the age profile within the last quarter.

Chart 16

#### Age Profile Percentage as at 31 March 2025

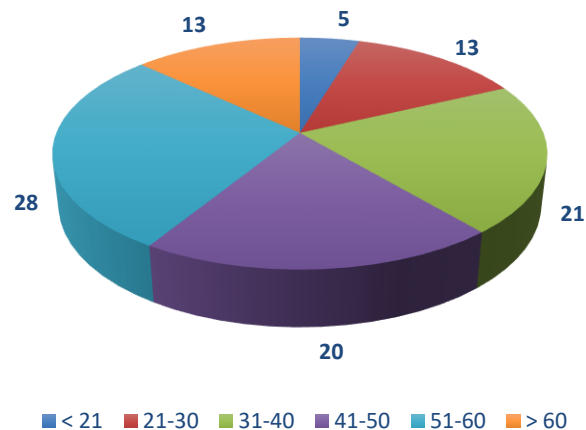
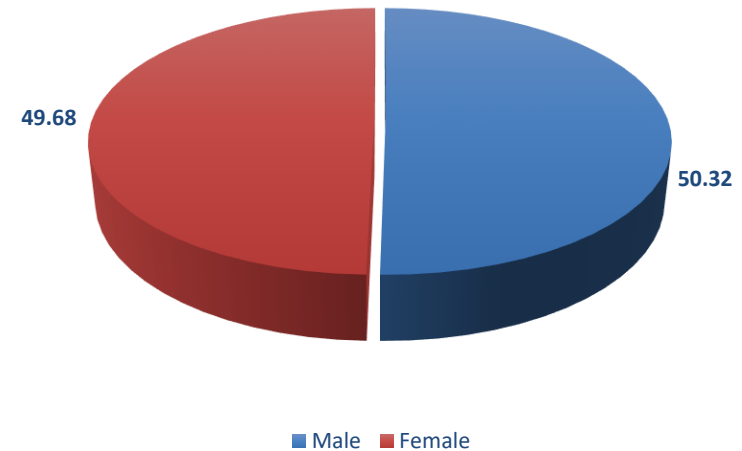


Chart 17 breaks down the gender of the CDC workforce and shows that CDC is almost a 50% split.

CDC record statistics on employee equalities data in order to ensure that our workforce is representative of the district we support and serve. Where we are under-represented, we need to review what we can do to ensure these groups are aware of the employment opportunities we have available. Local Insight data in relation to gender and ethnicity within the Cherwell District has been used to compare against the make-up of our workforce.

Chart 17

#### Gender Profile Percentage as at 31 March 2025



Out of a population of 161,837 within the Cherwell District, the latest census data records that 49.6% are male and 50.4% are female. At CDC, 50.32% of our workforce are male and 49.68% are female meaning it is representative of the district.

CDC employees continue to be encouraged to share their equalities data. In relation to employee ethnicity data, in quarter 1 of 2022/23 51% of employees had not provided this. At the end of quarter 4 of 2024/25, 88.22% of employees have recorded this information, with 5.10% preferring not to specify.

Chart 18 shows a breakdown of ethnicity within CDC. Comparative data has been sought both nationally and from the district and is presented in Table 5.

Chart 18

Ethnicity Profile Percentage as at 31 March 2025

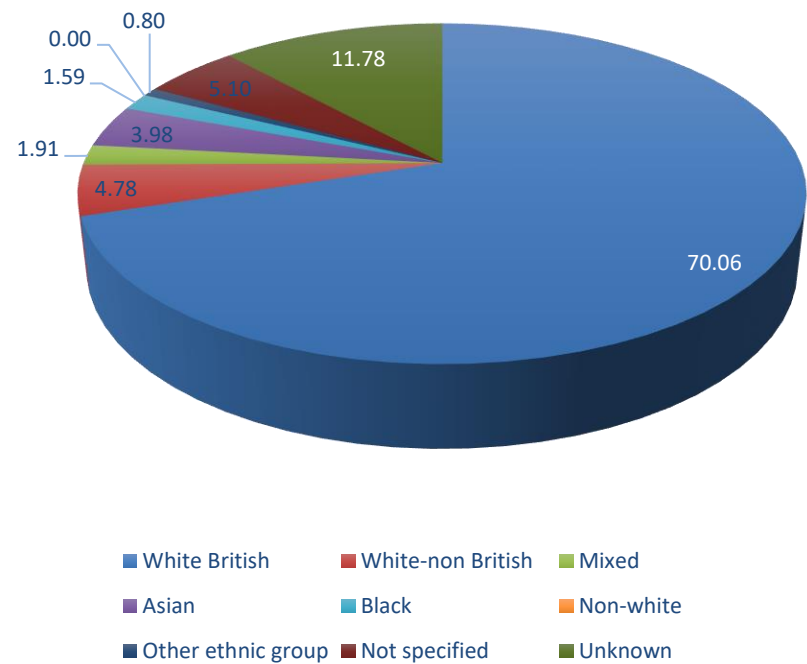


Table 3

Ethnic Group	England average (%)	Cherwell District (%)	CDC (%) Qtr 1 24/25	CDC (%) Qtr 2 24/25	CDC (%) Qtr 3 24/25	CDC (%) Qtr 4 24/25
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	9.3	6.0	3.89	4.21	4.08	3.98
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	4.0	1.8	1.71	1.87	1.88	1.59
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	2.9	2.9	1.56	1.72	1.88	1.91
White	81.7	88.1	71.96	74.26	70.02	74.84
Other ethnic group	2.1	1.3	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.80
Not specified	N/A	N/A	5.45	5.30	5.18	5.10
Unknown	N/A	N/A	14.64	11.86	11.62	11.78

CDC’s workforce is predominantly white British with 70.06% of the workforce recording their ethnicity in this category.

Table 3 compares the make-up of ethnic groups across the UK and the Cherwell District and then compares this with the make-up of our workforce. The Cherwell District has a higher percentage of residents in the *White* ethnic group than the average across the UK. Of the workforce data recorded, the *White* category increased in the last quarter by 4.82% but at the end of quarter 4 was 13.26% less than the Cherwell District.

The CDC workforce is slightly under-represented in all the ethnic groups in comparison to the district, and there has been no significant change in any ethnic group between quarters 3 and 4 of 2024/25.

The Personnel Committee requested further information on ethnicity by grade across the organisation. The grade bands have been split into 3 categories; A to E who generally have no supervisory or line management responsibilities, F to I; who are typically team leader and supervisory level roles and then J and above which are management grades.

Chart 19 outlines the percentage of employees by ethnic group and grade band.

We have requested disability information be provided by employees. At the end of quarter 1 of 2024/25, 43% of the workforce had not provided this data, however this has reduced to 19% at the end of quarter 2, and 14% at the end of quarter 3, and this remains at 14% at the end of quarter 4, as illustrated in Chart 20. The HR Team are committed to completing further follow-up to improve the data collection within this area. Chart 21 shows a breakdown of data relating to disability by grade

Chart 20    Disability Percentage Profile  
as at  
31 March 2025

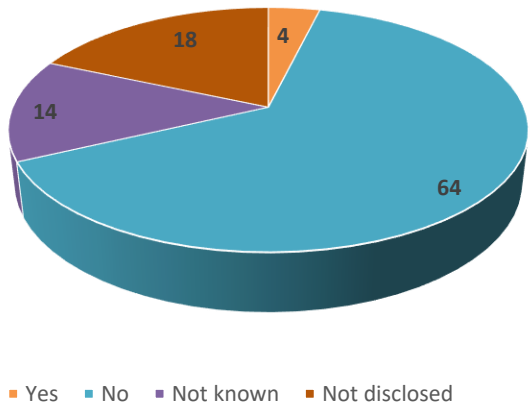


Chart 19    Ethnic Group Percentage by Grade Band  
as at 31 March 2025

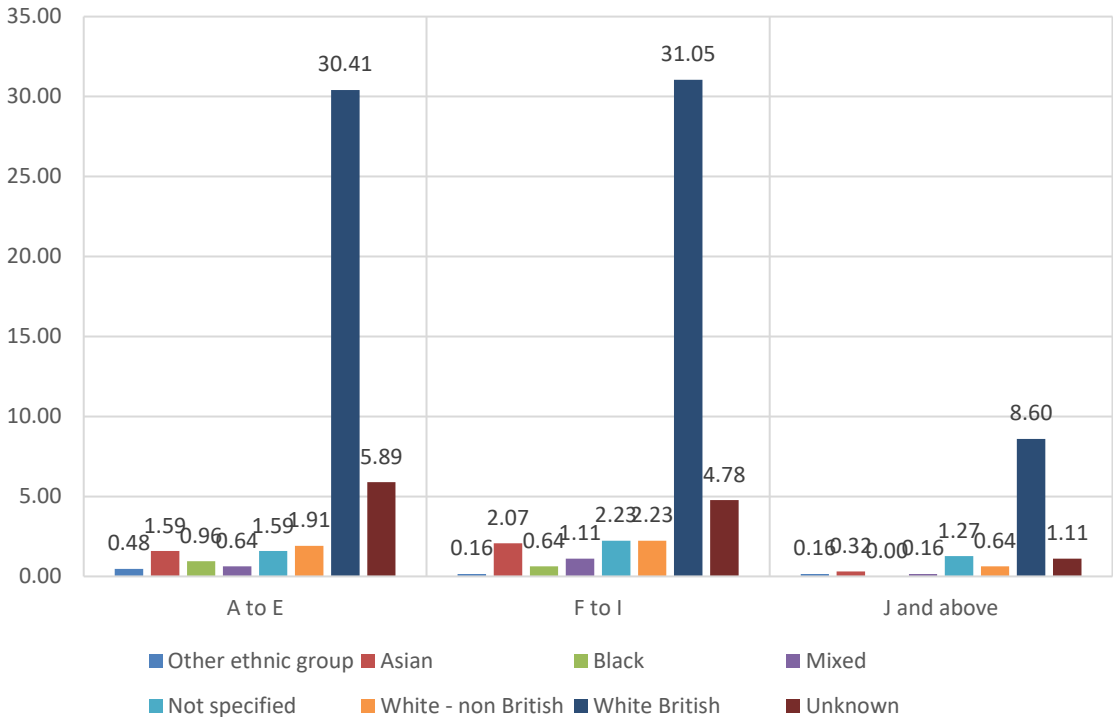
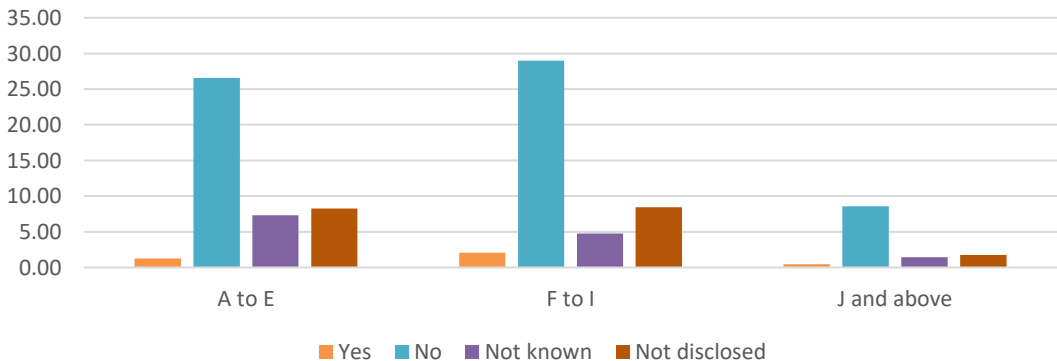


Chart 21    Disability Percentage by Grade Band  
as at 31 March 2025



CDC is a disability confident employer which means we participate in the Department of Work and Pensions Scheme to guarantee interviews to any disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria for our roles. Where disabilities are identified, management and HR work closely with employees and the council’s occupational health provider to review any reasonable adjustments that could be put in place to assist the employee in their role.

The Personnel Committee also requested data on sexual orientation for our workforce which is provided at Chart 22.

Within this category, 12.42% of the workforce have declined to specify and 13.22% have not completed this data.

As with ethnicity information, sexual orientation data has also been broken down into grade bands and this is shown at chart 23.

As part of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity strategy that was published this year, we have a workforce plan with actions to work through. Data around protected characteristics will continue to be tracked whilst the actions are undertaken, and variations will be provided in future iterations of these statistics.

The HR Team will continue to work with the organisation to gather outstanding data and will continue to update on a quarterly basis.

Chart 22

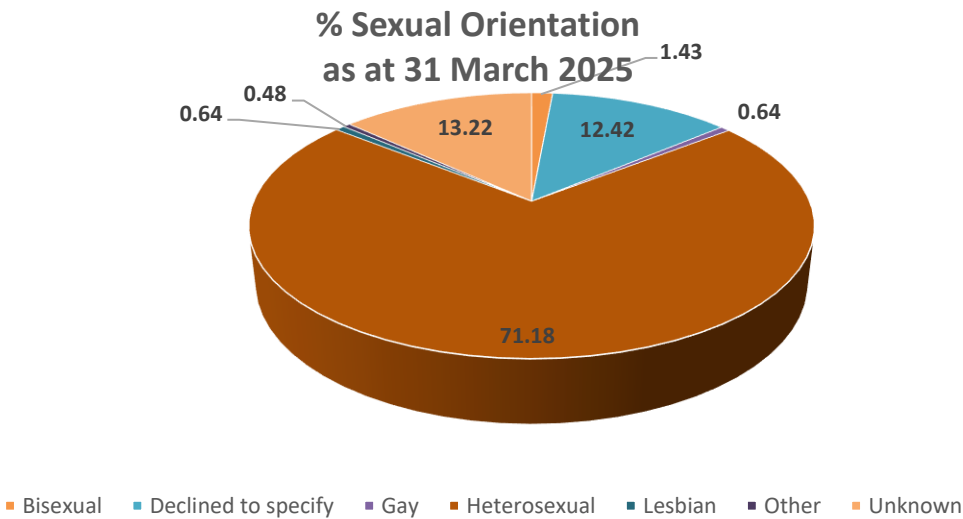
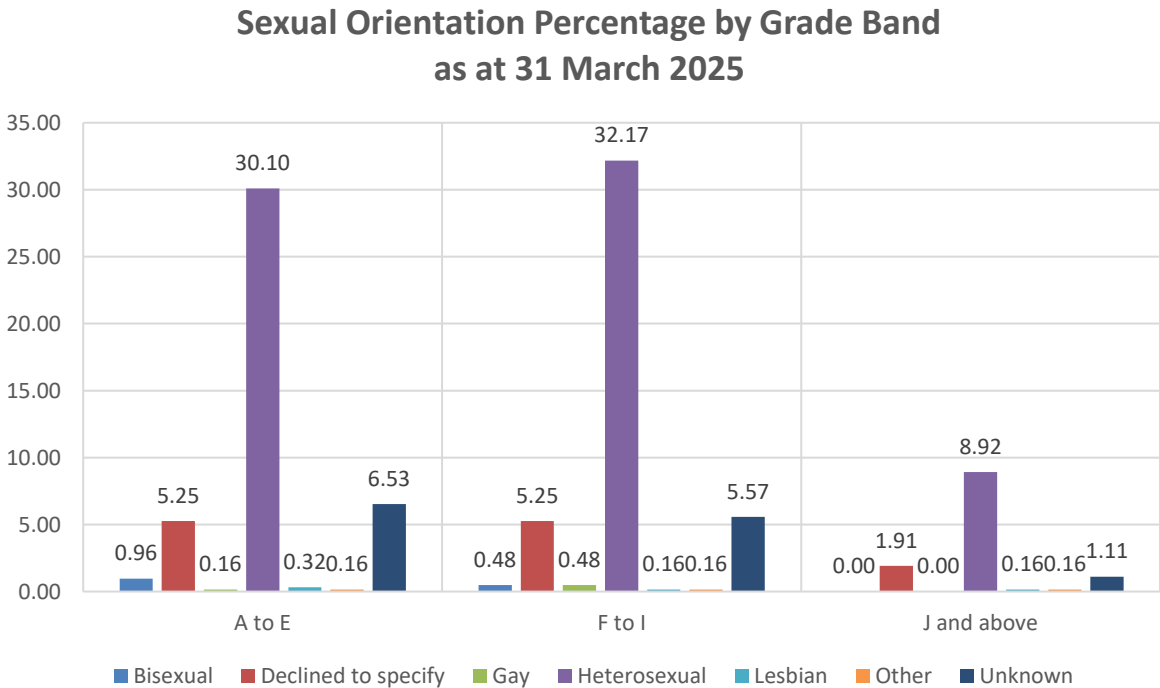


Chart 23



Diversity in Recruitment

In October 2023, CDC launched a new recruitment module as part of its HR and Payroll system. This has meant that analysis of recruitment data can now be completed. In line with CDC’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity agenda, this data allows insight into whether or not CDC is reaching and is representative of all communities within the district. The data presented in this report is representative of the last 12 months from April 2024 to March 2025. There have been 69 recruitment campaigns during this period to which 939 applications were received and 61 offers of employment made.

The following data provides insight into the application data, and where possible provides comparison to the make-up of the district to aid analysis into representation.

Chart 24 shows a breakdown of applicants by age category. At the request of Personnel Committee, the age ranges of applicants have been updated to match the district census data. The highest number of applicants were between ages 35 and 49, followed by 50 to 64, these 2 groups account for 55.48% of all applications. Table 4 provides district data on age bands. When comparing the data of applicants by age to district census data, it shows that applicants in the 25-34 age range are significantly higher than the district percentage and other categories broadly align.

Chart 24

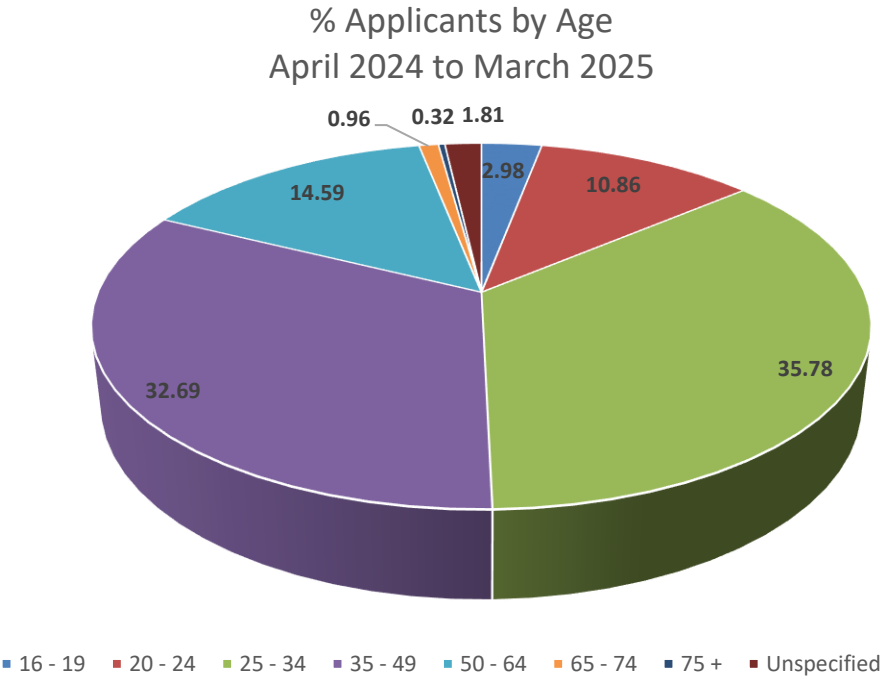


Table 4

Age	% Residents
16 - 19	5.48
20 - 24	6.71
25 - 34	19.45
35 - 49	28.49
50 - 64	26.99
65 - 74	12.88
	100.00

Chart 25 outlines the percentage of applicants per ethnic group and Table 5 shows the make-up of the District.

Chart 25

% Applicants by Ethnicity  
April 2024 to March 2024

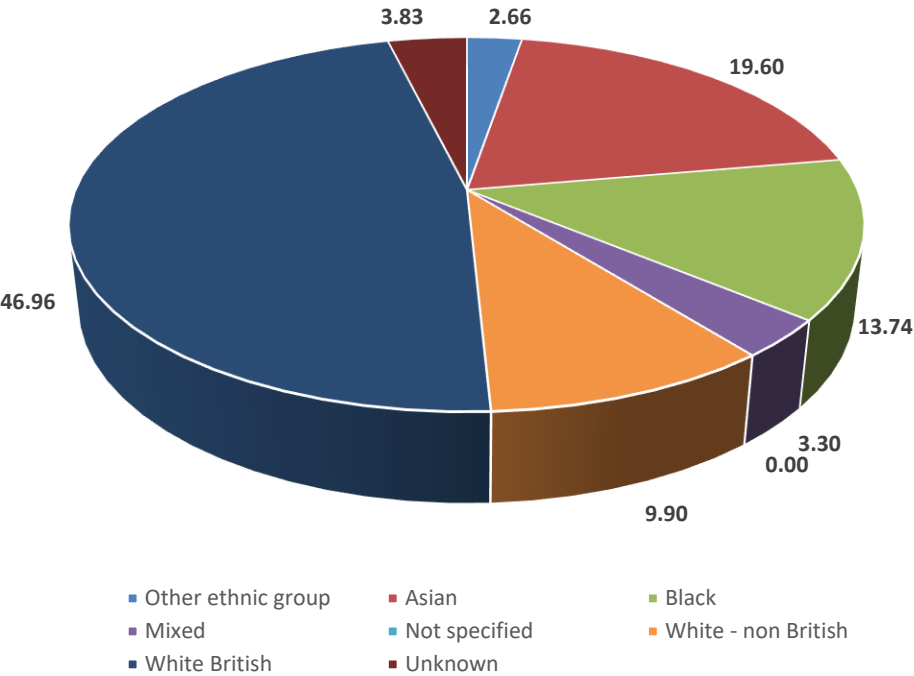


Table 5

Ethnic Group	Cherwell District (%)
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	6.0
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	1.8
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	2.9
White	88.1
Other ethnic group	1.3
Not specified	N/A
Unknown	N/A

This data shows that applicants for CDC jobs are ethnically diverse, with applicant numbers within Asian and Black ethnic groups significantly higher than the district percentages.

Chart 26

% Applicants by Gender  
April 2024 to March 2025

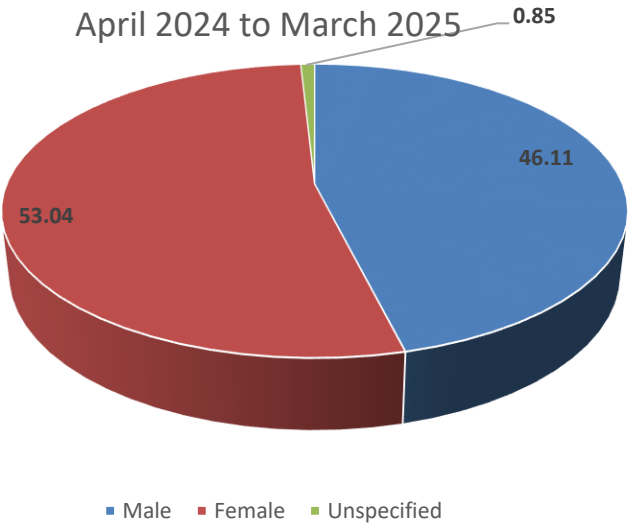


Chart 26 shows the percentage of applicants by gender, which is an almost 50/50 split across male and female, which is both reflective of our current workforce and district data covered earlier in this report.



Chart 27

% Applicants with Disabilities  
April 2024 to March 2025

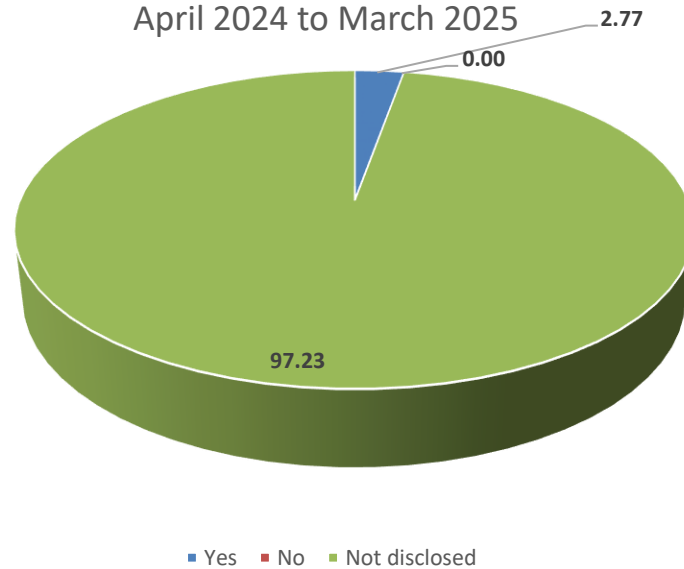
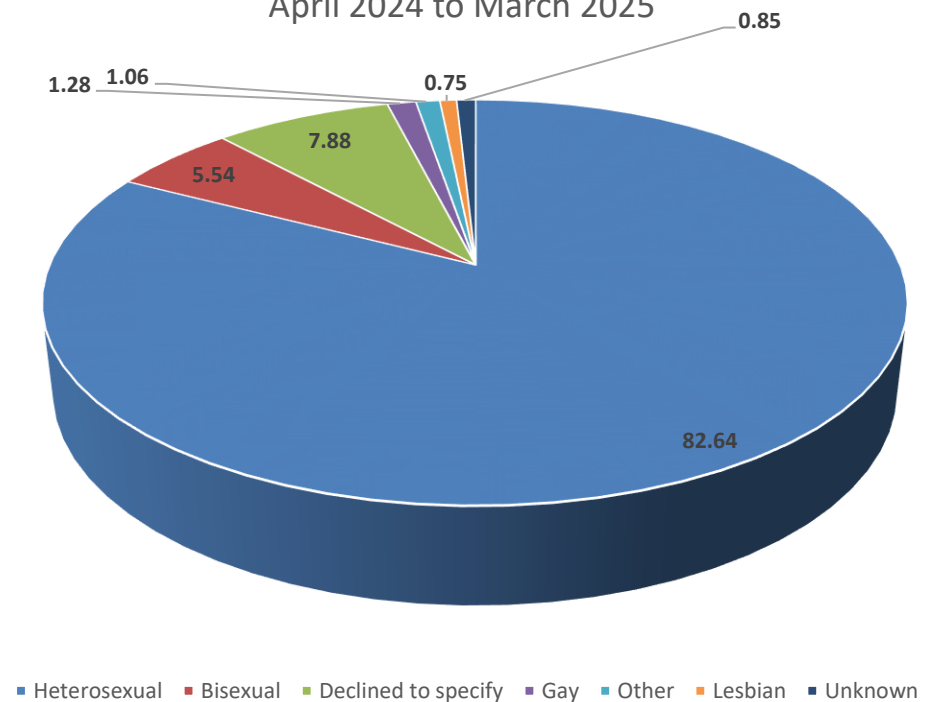


Chart 27 shows the percentage of applicants by disability. 97.23% of applicants have not disclosed this at applicant stage. It is hoped that applicants would provide this information should they have disabilities as we have a guaranteed interview scheme if they meet the essential criteria for a role, as part of being a disability confident employer.

Chart 28 shows the percentage of applicants by sexual orientation. Oxfordshire County Council confirms from census 2021 information that 89.4% of the county identify as straight or heterosexual, with 3.4% not identifying as straight or heterosexual and 7.9% preferring not to say. CDC's applicant data is reflective of these county statistics.

Chart 28

% Applicants by Sexual Orientation  
April 2024 to March 2025



Apprenticeships within Cherwell District Council as at Quarter 4 – 024/25

Background

As an organisation with an annual pay bill of more than £3 million, we pay 0.5% of our pay bill towards the apprenticeship levy. This levy is then used to support apprentices to study for qualifications from Level 2 – Level 7.

Apprentices are new employees into the organisation, who are employed specifically into an apprenticeship role or it is also existing staff who are upskilling using the levy.

The organisation has an apprenticeship levy dashboard (DAS) which is supervised by the HR Department.

Information on apprentices in the organisation

There are 26 apprenticeships currently running within the Council for this quarter, of which 5 is an apprentice on programme, employed specifically as an apprentice; and the remaining 21 are employees undertaking an apprenticeship as CPD or career progression.

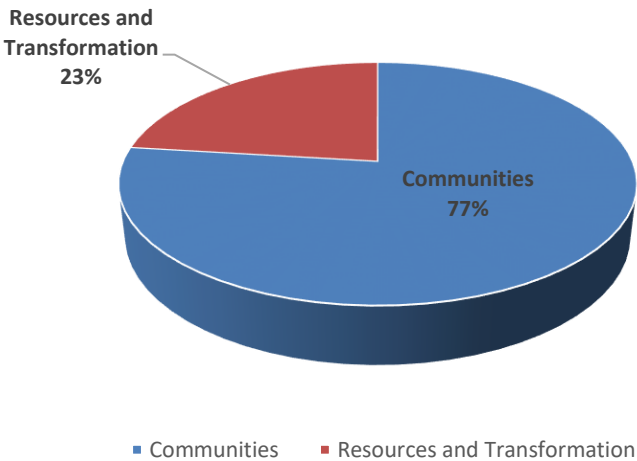
There are currently 20 apprenticeships within the Communities Directorate and 6 within the Resources and Transformation Directorate – please see chart 26.

Details of the apprenticeships at the organisation are detailed in the table below. The organisation is using its apprenticeship levy predominantly for upskilling existing staff.

Apprenticeships details below:

Apprenticeship Standard	Level of Apprenticeship	Duration of Apprenticeship	Number of employees on apprenticeship	Apprentice or Employee CPD	Team	Directorate	Cost of Apprenticeships (£)
Business Administrator	Level 3	18 months	1	Apprentice	Depot – Thorpe Lane	Communities (1)	5,000

Chart 29 Percentage of Apprenticeships within Directorates



Apprenticeship Standard	Level of Apprenticeship	Duration of Apprenticeship	Number of employees on apprenticeship	Apprentice or Employee CPD	Team	Directorate	Cost of Apprenticeships (£)
HR Support	Level 3	18 months	1	Apprentice	Human Resources	Resources and Transformation (1)	4,500
Team Leader/Supervisor	Level 3	18 months	5	CPD	Sport and Physical Activities (2) Housing Options and Homelessness (1) ICT (1) Environmental Protection & Enforcement (1)	Resources and Transformation (1) Communities (4)	22,500
Transport and warehouse operations supervisor	Level 3	14 months	1	CPD	Business Support - Depot	Communities (1)	4,700
Motor vehicle service and maintenance technician - light vehicle	Level 3	22 months	1	Apprentice	Fleet Management	Communities (1)	10,669
Sports Coach	Level 4	14 months	1	Apprentice	Wellbeing	Communities (1)	9,000
Data Analyst	Level 4	14 months	1	CPD	Digital Innovation and	Resources and Transformation (1)	14,250
Data Protection and Information	Level 4	18 months	1	CPD	Legal Services	Resources and Transformation (1)	10,000

Apprenticeship Standard	Level of Apprenticeship	Duration of Apprenticeship	Number of employees on apprenticeship	Apprentice or Employee CPD	Team	Directorate	Cost of Apprenticeships (£)
Governance Practitioner							
Senior housing and property management	Level 4	22 months	1	CPD	Housing Grants and Standards	Communities (1)	8,933
People Professional	Level 5	18 months	1	CPD	Human Resources	Resources and Transformation (1)	11,000
Chartered Surveyor	Level 6	66 months	1	Apprentice	Access and Grants	Communities (1)	27,000
Environmental Health Practitioner	Level 6	48 months	1	CPD	Health Protection and Compliance	Communities (1)	22,000
Public Health Practitioner	Level 6	36 months	1	CPD	Health Place Shaping	Communities (1)	22,000
Chartered Town Planner	Level 7	30 months	7	CPD	Planning	Communities (7)	92450
Accountancy Professional (CIPFA)	Level 7	36 months	1	CPD	Finance	Resources and Transformation (1)	20,433
Sustainability business specialist	Level 7	24 months	1	CPD	Environment Services	Communities (1)	10,755
			<b>26</b>		<b>Total apprenticeship levy committed</b>		<b>295,190</b>

**Current amount in the Levy Account**

The Council currently has £175,108 in their levy account. It is estimated that a further £101,935 will be received over the next 12 months, based on funds entering the Council's Apprenticeship service account, including the 10% top up from the government. It is estimated that the Council will spend £78,124 in the next 12 months based on the current apprenticeships within the table above.

**Expired Funds**

No funds expired in Quarter 3 of 2024/25 but the levy account is indicating that the Council will not have any funds expiring until May 2027. These indications are estimates made by the apprenticeship dashboard and are based on details available from our last levy payment and apprenticeship arrangements, which may not be up to date. Providers are not always timely in providing the details to add new apprenticeships onto the dashboard and so these estimates may change once a new course is added and payments are starting to be taken from the levy pot.

We may have indicated in a previous quarter's stats that funds were due to expire but if apprenticeship details are updated after creating the report this could then mean no funds expired.

Due to the Council actively putting staff onto apprenticeships, expiring funds are now not anticipated until May 2027 and as the Learning and Development Team are currently engaging further employees on to apprenticeships, this expiry date will be pushed further away.

**Apprenticeship Reforms under the new Government**

The Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson announced a new growth and skills levy which will replace the existing apprenticeship levy and is to include new foundation apprenticeships.

These new apprenticeships will give young people a route in to careers in critical sectors, enabling them to earn a wage whilst developing vital skills.

In February the government highlighted several changes to how apprenticeships will operate in the future, in response to employers' calls for more flexibility. This will include introduction of shorter apprenticeships from August 2025 (subject to the parliamentary timetable), with the minimum length reduced from 12 to 8 months. The new development will allow training to be delivered and completed faster where that makes sense for a given industry, or an individual has significant prior learning.

Added to this, employers were given more flexibility over maths and English requirements for apprentices. Businesses will now be able to decide whether adult learners, over the age of 19 when they start their apprenticeship course, will need to complete a level 2 English and maths qualification (equivalent to GCSE) to pass it. This does not mean that apprentices won't be assessed on core English and maths skills needed to demonstrate competency relevant to their occupation, these requirements will remain a fundamental part of the apprenticeship.

Learners aged 16-18 will still be required to achieve English and maths qualifications.