



# Report to Finance and Resources Select Committee

- **Date:** Finance and Resource Select Committee 28 January 2021
- **Title:** Staffing and Engagement Update April – December 2020
- **Relevant councillor(s):** Ralph Bagge/Katrina Wood
- **Author and/or contact officer:** John McMillan
- **Ward(s) affected:** none specific
- **Recommendations:** That the Finance and Resources Select Committee note the contents of the report.

## 1. Executive summary

This report brings an update on Staffing and Engagement, 9 months into our unitary journey. It refers to our workforce profile; our Together Survey findings and employee communication, and health and wellbeing interventions that have been implemented to support our staff through vesting day and the unique set of circumstances in 2020.

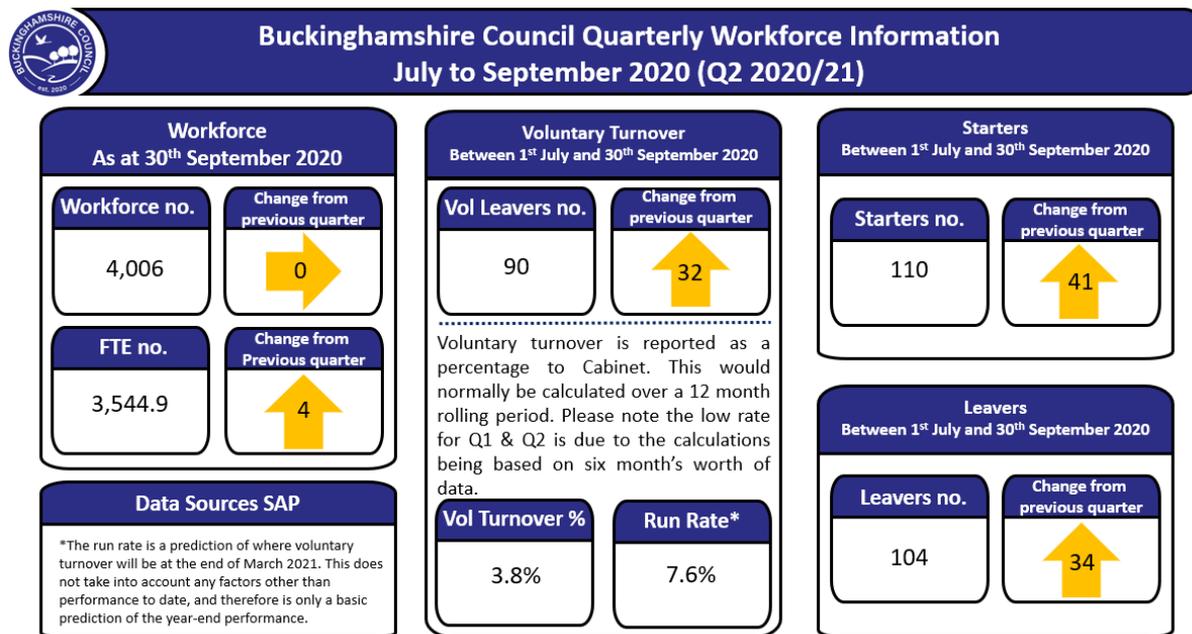
## 2. Introduction - People policies and processes

In preparation for Vesting Day people policies and processes were put into place to support the culture, values and behaviours for the new Council including

- Buckinghamshire Council Values and Behaviours – PACT
- Our LEADER behaviours and a framework for expectations of Buckinghamshire Managers
- A new and consistent performance appraisal process – Coaching for Performance
- Buckinghamshire Council's own Pay, and Terms and Conditions which apply to new starters and to those staff who move to a substantially changed role
- Consistent core HR policies – conduct, grievance and disciplinary processes

This framework has provided a firm foundation for our people plan and ensured a consistent understanding of our shared values and expected behaviours from the start of vesting day – allowing the Council to develop its own identity and a positive workplace Culture which has been reflected in the September staff survey where 80% of staff responded positively to the statement ‘Overall I am happy to be working for Buckinghamshire Council’

### 3. Workforce profile



#### 3.1 Turnover

At the end of September, Buckinghamshire Council employed 4,006 people, a full-time equivalent of 3,544.9.

The voluntary turnover rate for July – September was 3.8% which is an increase of 2.3 percentage points since Q1 when the quarterly turnover rate was just 1.5%. The new Council does not have 12 month rolling average figures however the run rate provides an estimation of the likely outturn position once we have a full twelve months of data. Assuming the workforce number remains stable and leavers continue at the same rate, this would equate to a voluntary turnover run rate of 7.6% significantly down on the combined figures for the Unitary Council pre vesting day, when the figure was 13.25% at the same point last year.

For benchmarking purposes, the table on the next page shows annual turnover figures compared to other authorities in the South of England. The shift in Q1 2020/21 is most dramatic for Buckinghamshire Council because as a new council we are not reporting a

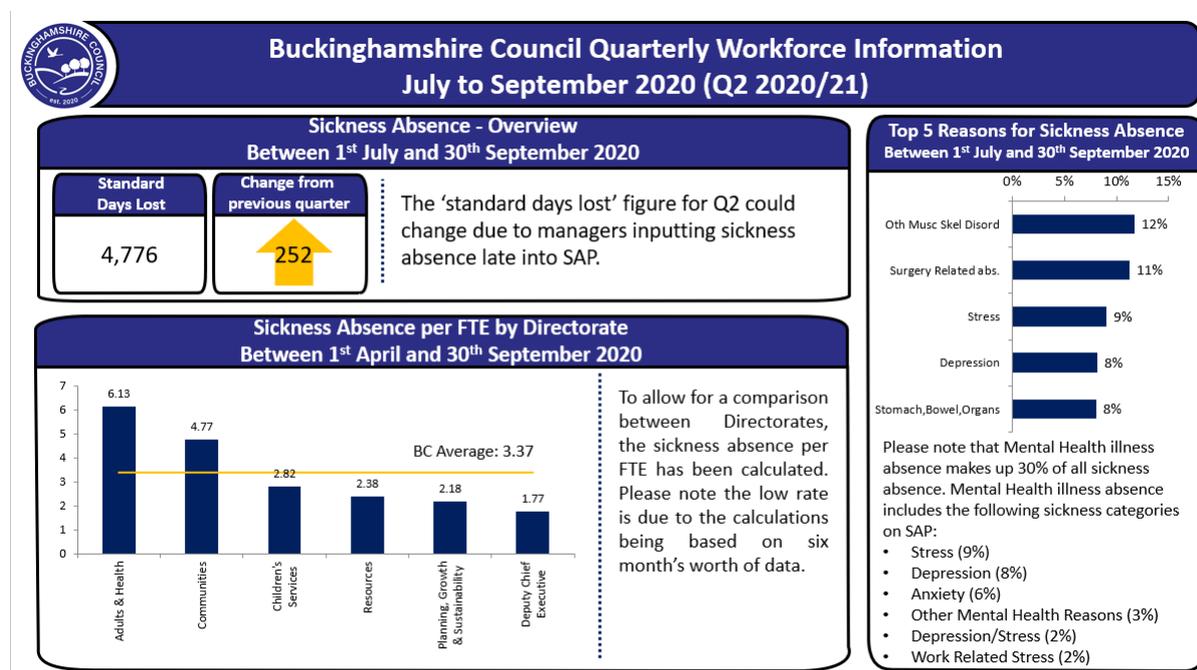
rolling figure for the last 12 months like the others. Our voluntary turnover run rate (referred to in paragraph above) is currently estimated to be 7.6% which compares well to the benchmark group.

### Turnover data from Local Authority benchmarking group 2019-2020 and 2020-2021

Date Period	Turnover Type	Local Authority Name					
		Buckinghamshire CC	Buckinghamshire Council*	East Sussex CC	Essex CC	Hertfordshire CC	Kent CC
Q4 19/20 (01.04.2019 - 31.03.2020)	All Turnover %	17.9%	15.9%	14.1%	19.7%	13.9%	12.6%
	Voluntary Turnover %	15.5%	13.8%	9.6%	8.7%	8.7%	9.0%
	Less than 1 yr service Turnover %	2.6%	-	2.9%	5.0%	3.5%	3.0%
Q1 20/21 (01.07.2019 - 30.06.2020)		Buckinghamshire Council*		East Sussex CC	Essex CC	Hertfordshire CC	Kent CC
		Q1 Result	Run Rate				
	All Turnover %	1.8%	7.2%	13.1%	10.7%	13.2%	9.3%
	Voluntary Turnover %	1.5%	6.0%	8.5%	6.8%	8.0%	6.8%
	Less than 1 yr service Turnover %	0.3%	1.2%	2.7%	5.0%	3.7%	2.2%

\*Note - BC estimated turnover based on legacy authority information.  
 \*\* Turnover is calculated over a 12 month period. For BC turnover figures are projected based on rate at Q1

### 3.2 Sickness Absence



A total of 4,776 standard days were lost due to sickness absence during Q2. The current average across Buckinghamshire Council from April to September is 3.37 standard days per FTE, based on 6 months-worth of data or 6.74 days per employee if we project forward on current data for a 12-month period. This compares with a public sector average of 8 days per employee in March 2020, a UK average of 5.8 days, and a private sector average of 4.3 days per employee (CIPD Public Sector Health and Wellbeing at Work Report 2020).

Although muscular skeletal is the highest reason for absence, with the significant reduction in cough, colds and other typical illnesses mental health illness has now become a significant contributor to our overall absence reasons and makes up 30% of all our sickness absence.

Mental Health illness absence includes the following sickness categories:

- Stress (9%)
- Depression (8%)
- Anxiety (6%)
- Other Mental Health Reasons (3%)
- Depression/Stress (2%)
- Work Related Stress (2%)

The challenges around managing mental health is well documented and is a societal as well as an organisational issue which has undoubtedly been made worse by the pandemic.

Our occupational health providers have also advised of the need to keep an eye on muscular skeletal problems as people are now anecdotally less mobile. There is a trend that working from home has led to people being inclined to move less. The Council has also focussed on this with a series of reminders to take breaks, to go for a walk and take exercise - further details below.

#### **4. Health and Wellbeing**

We have been acutely aware of the need to support our employees during the pandemic and have had a continuous roll out of varied health and wellbeing interventions throughout the year. Our Employee Assistance provider, PAM Assist offers 24/7 on-line support and one to one counselling sessions for staff, but have also run specialist webinars on:

- resilience in isolation
- working well remotely
- working from home and being active
- maintaining a positive mind-set during difficult times

These have been actively taken up by staff and feedback has been very positive.

In addition, PAM have arranged specialist team reflective sessions and anxiety workshops for front line teams and Mental Health and Bereavement counselling has been rolled out with the support of Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Mental Health Trust and the specialist bereavement charity Cruse.

Weekly employee communications have referred to health and wellbeing resources, hints and tips – including dealing with financial worries, healthy eating and making time to get out for a walk or exercise each day as part of physical wellbeing. We have arranged on-line mindfulness, yoga and exercise classes and promoted the role of our employee mental health first aiders and wellbeing champions. Full details have been made available on The Source. A ‘Health and Wellbeing Special’ communications has gone out in January 2021.

Staff have found the regular vlogs and all staff communications from the chief executive enormously supportive and have really valued her efforts to maintain a personal connection with them throughout the year.

During the Tier 4 lockdown before Christmas and the full lockdown in January 2021 ‘All Staff Live’ events have been held with the Chief Executive with 1793 employees dialling into the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 session.

## **5. Together Survey**

The Together Survey is a quarterly light touch pulse check which tracks engagement, change management, wellbeing and resilience trends. It is designed to maintain regular conversations about engagement rather than longer less frequent surveys that can swamp with information and lose momentum. We have been running these surveys for our unitary workforce since December 2019.

Engagement, Change Management; Wellbeing and Resilience are the main indices; but because of the pandemic we introduced a ‘Covid-19 and its impact’ set of questions in April, and a fifth index to measure how people were feeling about ‘our new council,’ in September, in response to employee experience issues that had been raised by employee reps in relation to unitary integration.

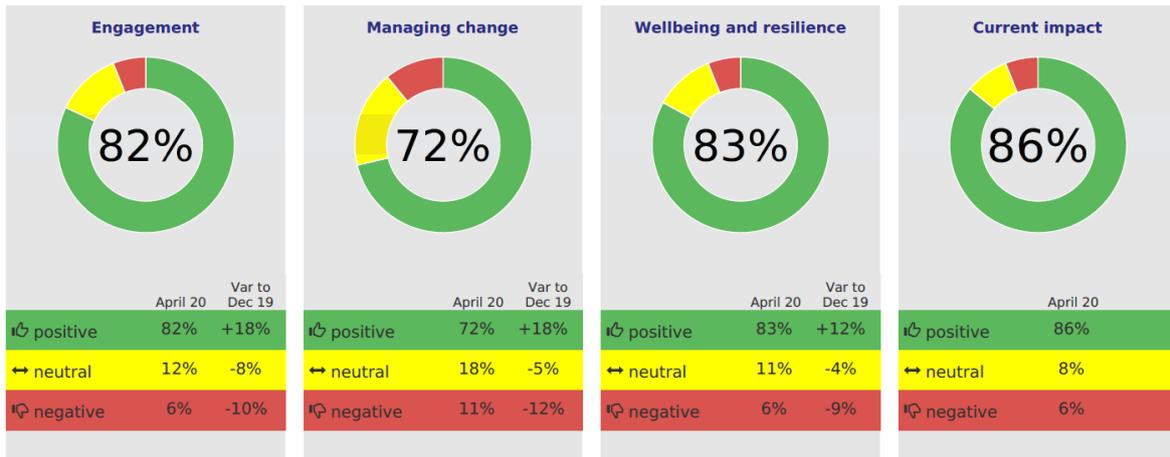
Overall results throughout the year have been hugely positive and demonstrate very high levels of engagement against the external backdrop of unitary change, our response to Covid and our plans for service improvement. These are all significant and will present pressures in terms of resilience and wellbeing. Our ability to regularly listen to and engage with staff and understand how our own workforce responses compare to others in similar circumstances, is important.

Results for the 3 surveys carried out in April, July and September are summarised on the next page:

### **5.1 April 2020**

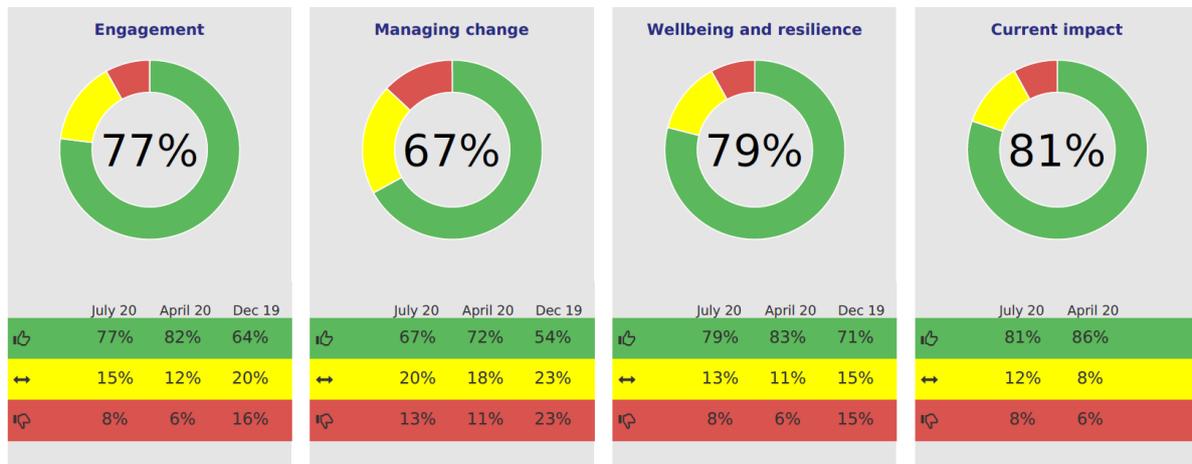


Index results:



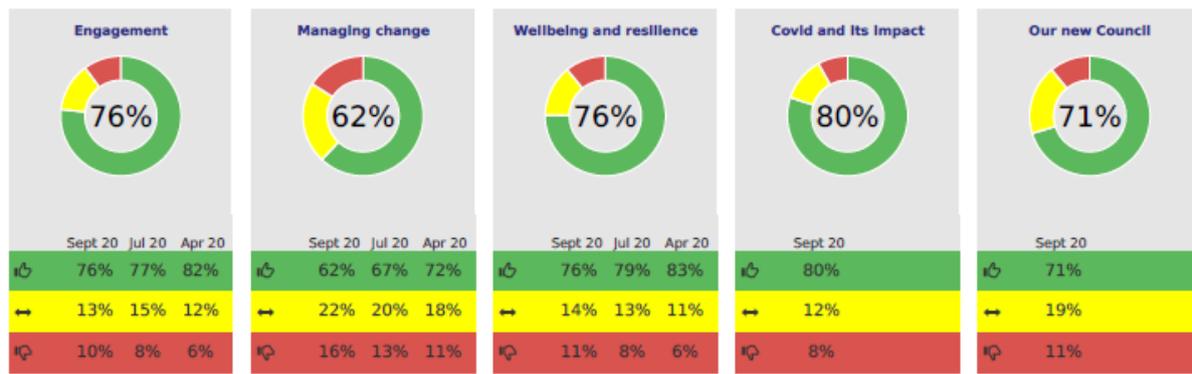
5.2 July 2020

Index results:



5.3 September 2020

Index results:



**5.4 External benchmark scores** show that we are continually performing very positively against the external norms below. The benchmark figures set out below are averages generated from a broad range of UK public and private sector organisations, which include a number of councils (please note there are no external benchmarks for covid impact or new council)

- Engagement 64%
- Managing Change 57%
- Wellbeing & Resilience 76%

### 5.5 Trends

April and July results showed a 54% response rate, and September was up to 60%, (with 2399 employees taking part). This was up from a 22% response rate in December 2019 and shows a very positive story about employees wanting to engage with the new organisation.

Our highest index scores tend to relate to the statements around

- How people feel the organisation had handled the covid-19 response
- Levels of motivation
- Feeling happy to be working for Buckinghamshire Council
- Having a positive working relationship with their line manager
- Feeling trusted and enabled to get on with their job
- Feeling as connected and as in touch with their team as they would like to be
- Feeling their manager is supportive

Relatively speaking, our lower scores relate to the questions around

- managing change
- pressures in role
- feeling valued
- feeling listened if voicing concerns
- feeling that BC cares about employee wellbeing
- finding it easy to build connections across BC

The relative highs and lows need to be considered in the context of our significant change journey from unitary and into Better Buckinghamshire. The programme of change is a reality and will impact on staff as they are more directly affected, and we need to be mindful about how we manage this. A highlight is for the question *'Overall I am happy to be working for Buckinghamshire Council'* to which 80% of staff responded positively. Taken together these are strong results and something which the Council can be proud of.

## 5.6 Actions from together surveys

The design of this pulse survey is to provide real time information about sentiment so that local, targeted and specific actions can be taken to address highlighted issues. Each Directorate will respond uniquely to its own results however there are some common themes for action including:

- Ensuring that regular Coaching for Performance one-to-ones and check-ins are taking place and being prioritised
- Re-emphasising how important staff wellbeing is and promote ways in which people can look after themselves and each other whilst working remotely during the winter months.
- Encouraging staff to seek support from Employee reps, Mental Health First Aiders and from PAM Assist (employee assistance programme).
- Encouraging teams to plan in some team social time which people are missing from not being in the office; and encourage teams whose work crosses paths to join up for 'getting to know you' meetings
- Ensuring directorate and service priorities are articulated regularly and clearly, and people's goals are clearly and explicitly aligned to them

## 6. Feedback from Employee Reps

Qualitative feedback from employee reps about how they feel about Buckinghamshire Council is summarised below.

### Positive highlights include:

- Excellent communications and all staff briefings from leadership and Chief Executive in particular
- Continued focus on health and wellbeing has been well received
- Collaborative values in pulling together for the new council and dealing with the Covid pandemic
- Pride associated with the work of the council
- Diversity seen in the workforce and positive about the focus on the Equality and Diversity groups
- Flexible working arrangements and plans for continued flexible working in future seen positively
- Roll out of new technology, windows 10 and support around technology has been good

### **Areas that still present concern:**

- Clarity around organisational structure and awareness - management roles, who does what, where people are etc
- SAP – further confidence in using and understanding and the need for more training & support
- Further improvements to ICT document sharing
- Issues around pace, urgency, workloads, and shifting priorities between Covid and BAU as the external environment changes
- Remote working and impact it has on ability to bond and socialise with colleagues
- Impact of restructuring which is causing some anxiety.

Quarterly meetings between Chief Executive, CMT and employee representatives allow these issues to be regularly discussed and addressed.

## **7. Conclusions**

The journey for our new workforce is exciting but 2020 was a challenging year and 2021 looks set to follow in a similar way. The Council has however established a clear vision of what is wanted for our new workforce in terms of culture, leadership behaviours and programmes of employee support; and HR and OD have processes in place to actively drive these strategic aims as well as respond with agility to shifts in the demand relating to the pandemic. Monitoring engagement and wellbeing through regular pulse surveys and workforce metrics helps to understand staff issues and concerns. Regular communication channels and programmes to support health and wellbeing ensures that we address and manage concerns as they arise.

### **Legal and financial implications**

None

### **Corporate implications**

Better Buckinghamshire Programme and HR process to support organisational change

### **Consultation and communication**

NA

## **Next steps and review**

Continue with existing arrangements as part of HR&OD strategy and People Plan

## **Background papers**

Links to formal Shadow Executive papers on PayScale, Rewards, Terms and Conditions and Values PACT and People Framework (second item in report pack).

[Main Payscale, Rewards and Terms and Conditions PDF 160 KB \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) SE 12th Nov 2019



Supplement Main  
Payscale Rewards and

[To Follow reports PDF 1 MB \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) SE 3rd Dec 2019



Supplement To  
Follow reports 031221

## **Your questions and views (for key decisions)**

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by

01895 837236 (Democratic & Electoral Services)

[leslie.ashton@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:leslie.ashton@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

