

HR Committee Report for Q4 2024/25

Note: As of 31 March 2025, East Herts Council employed 278.43 fte and had a headcount of 311.

1.0 Sickness Absence

At the end of Quarter 4, the total number of sickness days taken was 548.01 full time equivalent (FTE) days. Of these, 293.36 FTE days (53.5%) were due to short term sickness and 254.65 FTE days (46.5%) were due to long term sickness. The percentage of time lost due to short term sickness is 4.9% and the percentage of time lost due to long term sickness is 4.2% which equates to a total percentage lost time of 9.1%.

At the end of Quarter 4, the number of FTE days absent per FTE was an average of 9.09 days.

Short term sickness

Absences of less than four weeks are considered to be short term sickness absence.

77 employees (24% of the total headcount) had short term sickness absence during Q4 totalling 293.36 FTE days.

At the end of Q4, the number of short-term FTE days absent per FTE was an average of 3.46 days.

Short term absences that meet out trigger points are handled through our Absence Management Policy processes.

Long term sickness

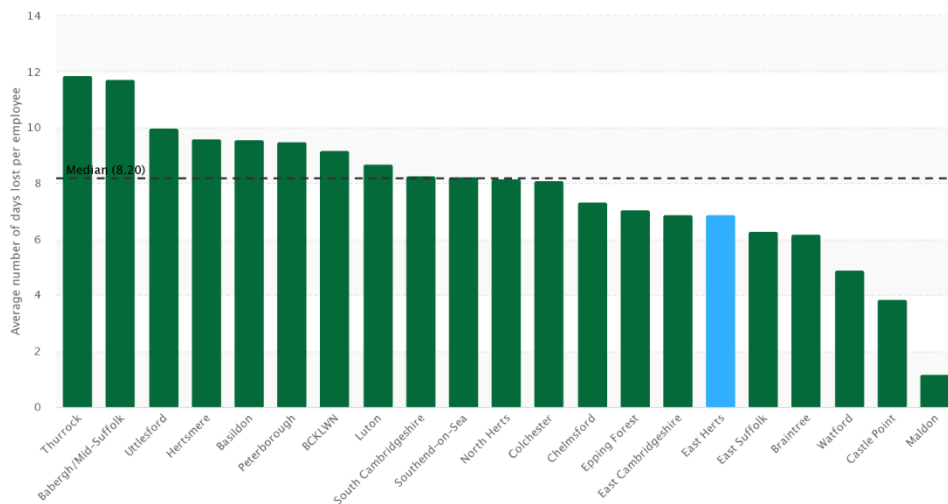
Absences in excess of 4 weeks / 28 consecutive calendar days are considered to be long term sickness absence.

11 employees (3.4% of the total headcount) had long term sickness absence during Q4 totalling 254.65 FTE days.

At the end of Q4, the number of long-term FTE days absent per FTE was 5.63 days.

All long-term absence is being managed with HR staff supporting the employee and manager to help get the member of staff back to work. We use our Occupational Health Service and Employee Assistance Programme to support this process, they provide helpful guidance and recommendations to help us accommodate return to work for the member of staff.

The benchmarking data for 31 March 2025 is not currently available. See graph below which compares average number of days lost per employee up to 31 March 2024.



2.0 Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment

Our biggest recruitment challenge this quarter were qualified accountants, Planning Officers and Environmental Health Officers. East Herts geographical position does mean that qualified staff have a large number of employment options within easy reach and the new standard blended working offer means that their options are now even bigger.

We have a Market Forces Supplement that is applied to hard to fill roles in Planning and Legal services, this is reviewed annually to ensure it is still relevant. We also have an agreement with LinkedIn to market our top 5 roles, this has helped with attraction. We are also reviewing the new environmental health apprenticeships being developed by East Suffolk Council as a possible future avenue for recruitment.

We have launched a new applicant tracking system which will improve our candidate journey from application to onboarding.

We continually review our offers against the market and adapt what we can given our financial constraints.

Recruitment to posts in other service areas is generally more straightforward and successful first time.

All recruitment requests must be accompanied by a business case and signed off by a panel consisting of Chief Executive, Head of HR and Section 151 officer. This ensures that we challenge ourselves to consider if we need to replace roles like for like, should we use the opportunity to reshape roles, do we really need the role etc.

There have been 13 new starters in quarter 4:

- 9 in BEAM
- 2 in Housing and Health
- 2 in Planning

Vacancies

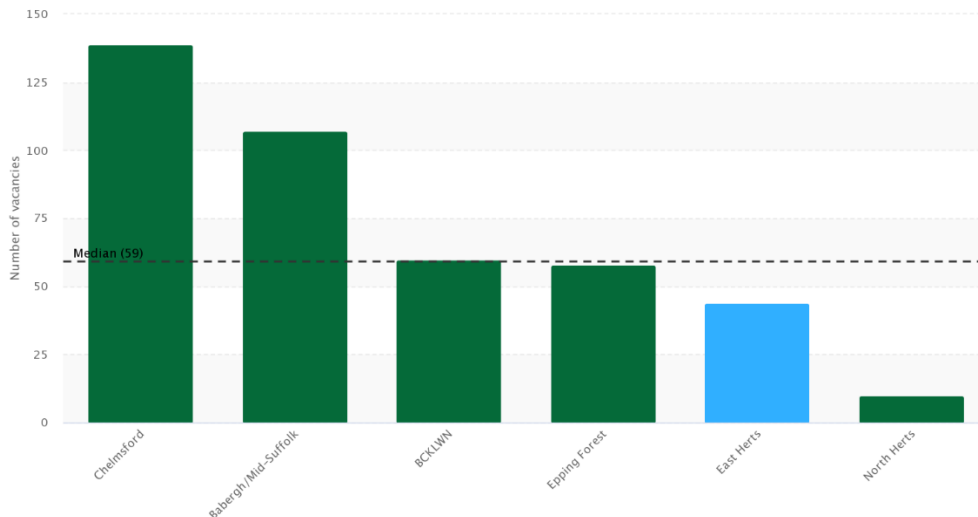
As of 31 March 2025, we had 53 posts unfilled for a variety of reasons. This represents 16.7% of posts.

These are the main reasons posts are vacant:

- Being held for budget savings
- Being held as a service review pending
- Being held as part of the decision- making accountability review (DMA)
- To be deleted following service review
- In the process of being recruited to
- Recruitment successful, job offer out but new member of staff has not yet started.

It takes almost twice as long to recruit to a post as it takes for someone to resign and work their notice which often account for the high vacancy number. Business critical posts get covered by agency / interim staff or through acting up arrangements that also offer staff development opportunities.

The benchmarking data for 31 March 2025 is not currently available. See graph below which compares number of vacancies up to 31 March 2024.



Retention – Turnover

There were 18 leavers in Q4 giving a turnover rate for the quarter of 5.6%. The turnover rate for the annual period 2024/25 is 18.2%. This is higher than our target of 14% although not unusual in local government, the national average across all sectors is about 15% with a lot of councils reporting rates of over 20%.

Reasons for leaving in Q4 included: To achieve promotion, retirement, changes in career, and for personal reasons.

The leavers were in the following teams:

- 2 in HR
- 2 in Operations
- 4 in Housing and Health
- 1 in Revenue and Benefits
- 1 in Communications, Strategy and Policy
- 1 in Strategic finance and property
- 1 in Legal and Democratic services
- 6 in Planning

Turnover has been notably higher in Planning and Environmental Health, largely due to a combination of external promotions and unique circumstances. While these changes bring disruption, they also present an opportunity to attract fresh talent.

Recruitment and retention related activity planned for Q1

- We will be reviewing our Market Forces Supplement taking into account salary survey data, information from relevant professional organisations and the implications of any national pay award.
- We will be reviewing our end to end recruitment process.

3.0 Learning and Development

The learning needed in our organisation is delivered by e-learning, one to one training or group-based learning remotely or in person.

HR is responsible for the corporate training budget, including professional training. We use training identified through annual employee reviews to scope the annual training plan. We are utilising the apprenticeship levy, with 4 officers currently completing a level 7 qualification and 1 officer completing a level 3 qualification. In Q1 this will expand with two more officers completing an IRRV qualification.

The annual mandatory e-learning training programme has continued for employees to complete in line with their performance review. These courses include Data Protection, Health and Safety, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Safeguarding. A mandatory course on preventing sexual harassment has now been added to ensure compliance with the new statutory requirements and increase the safety of all of our staff at work and in work related activities.

In addition to our mandatory programmes there are many other programmes that our staff can access to increase their knowledge and skills. We have renewed our contract with our e-learning provider for a further year.

Leading a Mentally Healthy Workplace Skills Bootcamp has been started for the H&S Advisor to lead the Mental Health provision supported by Unison and East Herts Together members. This is a targeted, high-impact programme delivered over 12-14 weeks. It is specifically designed to address the mental health needs and leadership challenges faced by organisations in Hertfordshire. It can benefit employees who aspire to progress and take on a leadership role in managing mental health within their organisation.

A management development carousel ran throughout 25/25 which consists of a series of training sessions, allowing managers to book on topics they'd like a boost on or to learn more about. This continued throughout Quarter 4.

Learning and Development planned for the next quarter:

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- We will be using the outcomes of this year's PDRs to allow us to have a strategic view of what development is required to enable us to maximise the use of our budget and how we best use our apprenticeship levy.
- We will also be trialling a 2 day Managers Essentials Bootcamp for new / relatively new Team Managers.

- Start to develop a simple train the trainer workshop for subject matter experts to enable them to develop their colleagues.
- We will also continue to review our staffing policies to ensure they are legally compliant and balanced in their approach and support ER processes; this is business as usual.
- We will have further Mental Health First Aid refresher training to those who wish to continue in their MHFA role.

4.0 Health and Safety

Accidents, Incidents and Near Misses

Background Information

Accidents are classified into two categories:

Non-Reportable Accidents

These are minor accidents such as cuts, minor contact injuries e.g., walking into the corner of a desk etc, slips, trips. Staff are encouraged to report these and can use the online self-service portal MyView or completing an accident report from the accident report pad. These are designated form BI510 accidents.

East Herts Council operates predominately back-office functions in a low-risk environment, the determination of low risk is based on the Health and Safety Executives definition, therefore, a high rate of accidents is not expected to occur.

Reportable Accidents

The **Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013**, often known by the acronym **RIDDOR**, is a 2013 statutory instrument of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It regulates the statutory obligation to report deaths, injuries, diseases and "dangerous occurrences".

Types of incidents that are reportable under RIDDOR?

- accidents resulting in the death of any person.
- accidents resulting in an absence from work over 7 days (excluding the day of the accident) e.g., degloving injury.
- non-fatal accidents requiring hospital treatment to non-workers. E.g., anyone not employed by the council.
- dangerous occurrences e.g., collapse, overturning or failure of any load-creating part of lifting equipment, failure of any closed vessel or associated pipework forming part of pressure systems, collapse of scaffold this is not a definitive list.

- Reportable diseases under RIDDOR are listed in regulations 8 and 9 of the regulations. Types of occupational diseases include occupational dermatitis, hand-arm vibration syndrome, occupational cancer etc.

Any reportable accident, incident or near miss arising from construction work e.g., building sites, new builds, demolition work or developments fall under the purview of the Health and Safety Executive.

Incidents and Near Miss Events

An incident is a broader term for any event, planned or unplanned, positive, or negative, that may or may not result in harm, damage, or injury. In essence, an accident is a specific type of incident that leads to a negative outcome.

Examples of incidents include, but are not limited to the effects of abusive, threatening behaviours, receiving obscene, aggressive, or threatening phone calls, correspondence, effects on the health of an individual arising from illness, health exacerbated by environmental factors e.g. excessive heat, air quality, extremes of temperature.

Colleagues are encouraged to report incidents and near misses in order to identify patterns and themes that allow the organisation to implement measures and controls to protect employee health and wellbeing. A new table has been introduced to report the number of Incident and Near Miss events occurring.

The Council also has the Employee Assistance scheme that offers confidential counselling, advice and support for any person affected by an incident, accident or near miss event.

Further support will also be available through the re-launched Mental Health First Aid provision following the successful participation in a 13-week Mental Health skills bootcamp.

Work Related Accidents

	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Target 24/25
H&S Employee Work Related Accidents (Not reportable to the HSE under RIDDOR 2013)	3	1	3
H&S Employee Work Related Accidents (Reportable to the HSE under RIDDOR 2013)	0	0	0

Work Related Incidents, Near Misses

	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Target 24/25
H&S Employee Work Related Incidents (Not reportable to the HSE under RIDDOR 2013)	0	4	3
H&S Employee Work Related Incidents (Reportable to the HSE under RIDDOR 2013)	0	0	0
H&S Employee Work Related Near Miss Events	0	0	0

Contract Management and Responsibility

The Council have outsourced a number of high-level services from waste collection and recycling, street cleansing, grounds maintenance and leisure services and employs contractors for capital projects.

However, health and safety responsibilities cannot be passed from one party to another by a contract. If something goes wrong the Council can and will be held accountable by the HSE and the Courts.

The Council therefore ensures that contractors have appropriate health and safety policies in place, monitor contractor performance and safety standards. In order to ensure that services are delivered safely the officers with contract oversight:

- Convene meetings to review performance.
- Monitor complaints received and undertake investigations.
- Undertake onsite inspections and reviews.

Heads of Service with responsibility for these functions are responsible for ensuring that effective management controls are implemented.