

TITLE	Agency & Temporary Worker Report Q4 2022/23
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Personnel Board on 14 th August 2023
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Sally Halliwell – Head of HR and OD

Executive Summary

This report contains information based on the end of Q4 for the financial year of 2022/23 and also the year on year position for 2022/23.

- It is important to recognise that there are specific scenarios where reliance on temporary workers is both a necessary and appropriate resourcing solution to meet service delivery needs especially in areas where staffing numbers are governed by statutory requirement e.g., in the care services. This obviously needs to be underpinned by commercial cost governance.
- As at end of Q4 there were 81 agency workers at a cost of £2,181,978
- Costs are slightly down, as a whole, when measured against the period for Q3

FY to date Agency Worker Spend	Q1 Total	Q2 Total	Q3 Total	Q4 Total
Adult Social Care	£518,181	£739,875	£675,441	£673,275
Chief Executive	£86,100	£100,723	£163,274	£139,530
Children’s Services	£687,974	£845,843	£917,419	£1,079,587
Place & Growth	£250,774	£305,060	£220,852	£76,184
Resources & Assets	£249,110	£270,097	£236,804	£213,403
Total	£1,792,139	£2,261,599	£2,213,790	£2,181,978

Analysis by Directorate

1. Adult Social Care and Health

There remain national difficulties in recruiting permanent Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Advanced Mental Health Practitioners (AMHPs) and Operational Commissioning Officers and this has required the directorate to use agency workers to ensure consistent, safe provision of services and maintain performance against KPI’s. To improve recruitment and retention, a salary review has been conducted and implemented from 1st July. Market supplements for AMHPs have also been introduced to support recruitment and retention in this area.

Agency staff have been used to cover time-limited, grant funded initiatives to respond to the impact of these pressures and income that is provided through central government which is required to be spent as part of programmes of delivery or other initiatives such as Winter Pressure funding. There have also been Invest to Save opportunities which have required additional support, on an interim basis, to deliver savings.

The long-standing agency staff have mainly been utilised flexibly across the whole service to meet the needs as they arise, cover vacancies that we have been unable to recruit, to cover during absences and to fulfil the roles created by grant funded initiatives.

Additional transformation funding in 2022/23 has also been used to secure agency support to drive demand down, review high-cost packages and contribute towards savings targets.

2. Children's Services

There continue to be challenges regionally, sub regionally and nationally in recruitment to the children's workforce. This includes social work, Educational Psychology and other key parts of the workforce such as Data and Intelligence and Commissioning. There is a national shortage of trained and qualified workers for particular roles eg the Doctorate level qualification for Educational Psychology has had a notable impact. We continue to be in competition with other LAs to attract, recruit and retain in these key roles.

We are responding creatively to these challenges by making early offers to undergraduates, recruiting trainees and growing our own social work workforce.

There has been a slight increase in spend within Q4 within this area due to sickness and maternity leave. Absence of this nature is often hard to fill through fixed term contracts.

A steering group has been created to look at social work recruitment, specifically within Children's services, to understand and benchmark against other Berkshire counties when it comes to packages being offered. Detailed data analysis from exit interviews has also been requested from the service to understand any staff churn.

3. Resources & Assets

A national skills shortage challenge continues to impact the Council's ability to recruit auditors however reliance is decreasing, and a review of the internal structure has helped to encourage and generate more interest from applicants. Recruitment strategies will continue to be developed to reduce reliance on agency workers through internal development and opportunities.

Agency workers are being used to fill vacancies in several departments including Income & Assessments while work is being undertaken to move to a permanent structure following consultation and the acquisition of funding for permanent recruitment.

Agency usage within the property team is being used to support specific projects whose cost is capitalised against the projects worked on.

4. Chief Executive Office

The reduction for spend within Q4 has been as a result of the removal HR consultancy now the permanent structure is in place. Additionally, we have been able to convert and agency workers onto contract with IT services which has been a positive.

A number of specialist IT and Digital interims have been brought in and engaged on very specific capital projects such as website replacement, corporate document management and HR/ Finance ERP system improvements.

5. Place & Growth

Within Place and Growth, Highways is a national sector that is underpinned by an agile, contracting labour force. Across the sector, due to the nature of national schemes and projects, specialists are interim in nature contracting when and where schemes are financed and as such, there are nationally very few specialists who undertake permanent placements. Most of the high-cost agency workers identified in the report fall into this category and as such, whilst we continue to apply good governance and replace contractors with permanent staff as and when we can, the nature of this industry remains reliant on agency workers. The reduction in Q4 is significant and this was due to the cessation of a number of high value agency placements.

Benchmarking

The costs associated with agency workers and interims are high across the Council and work has commenced to address this.

It is important to report to Personnel Board that benchmarking, on agency costs, has been undertaken across all 6 Berkshire Councils. An outcome of this benchmarking has resulted in Wokingham being one of the lowest spenders on agency contracts. The year-on-year position has increased by circa £765k however in comparison to other Councils again the increase is relatively low.

Moving forward

The corporate mandate of only hiring workers through the Matrix framework went live on 1st April 2023 and has been well received by all Managers and there is adherence to this. This has resulted in a reduction again of the number of off framework contracts across Wokingham.

A regular steering group is in place with HR, Finance and Procurement working in collaboration to try and reduce these costs where possible but also look at the governance in the appointment of agency workers and developing more enhanced conversations with DLTs through stronger partnership working.

The re-tendering of the agency contract is also due to commence soon with the current contract expiring in January 2024.

In addition to looking at how corporate functions can work more closely to improve the position when it comes to interims and agency workers the following areas and actions have also been addressed.

- A dedicated Agency Contract Manager, which is being funded through the rebate we get on agency workers from our supplier, commenced on 4th July 2023
- A full review of the supply chain has been undertaken, in each category, removing agencies that are not performing and adding specialist agencies in areas that are difficult to fill
- Matrix, our current provider, are being fully held to account and they have held a number of workshops to support Managers on agency appointments.
- Assessment of job titles and pay rates to ensure consistency and fairness in the market but ensure that day rates for roles are capped and not excessive.
- HR and Finance have agreed an amended governance of the appointment of agency workers and ensure that there is consistency with other forms of recruitment approval

but also value for money. A business case will need to be produced and signed off by the relevant Director, HR and Finance before an agency worker is engaged. This will enable more challenge from business partners.

- HR Business Partners will focus within DLTs and senior management meetings with each of their assigned areas so that there is full oversight and challenge in terms of tenures and the appointment of agency workers this will also include understanding whether or not permanent posts are being advertised on a cyclical basis, to test the market which will allow further justification for interim appointments if they are unable to successfully fill.

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