

# Agenda supplement for items 9 & 12 for Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 7 June 2016

9. **Westhill Farm (Pages 3 - 6)**

Briefing note provided by the Westhill Farm Steering Committee

12. **Report of the Equality and Diversity Review Group (Pages 7 - 22)**

Suggested amendments to the Equality and Diversity report  
Appendix 1 – Equality and Diversity project scope  
Appendix 2 – Figures 1-9 (large)

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## Introduction to **Westhill Farm Project**

Oxford City Council Scrutiny Committee,  
Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016

**Westhill Farm**  
SHOTOVER PARK COMMUNITY PROJECT

Westhill Farm comprises a small farmhouse and parcel of land in the Shotover Park within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Farm is situated in beautiful ancient woodland three miles from the city centre, and close to some of Oxford's most disadvantaged communities (notably Barton, Wood Farm and Blackbird Leys).

Westhill Farm was home to successive Shotover Park Rangers from 1938 until 2011, however the use of the land as a small-holding goes back many hundreds of years. The farm falls within the planning authority of South Oxford District Council, however the land is owned by Oxford City Council.

Between 1930 and 1937 Oxford Preservation Trust acquired the freehold to over 180 acres of land on the south slopes of the Shotover Hill from Christ Church and Brasenose Colleges. In 1952 the Trust conveyed the land, including Westhill Farm, to the Mayor Aldermen and Citizens of Oxford (now Oxford City Council) to maintain and manage as a public open space, with appropriate restrictive covenants in place to ensure the long term management of Shotover Park for the people of the City.

The covenant states:

*"The Council or its assigns will... use and preserve the property hereby conveyed... as and for the purpose of an open space or park in its natural state to which the public may be allowed access and will not use the property hereby conveyed or the said land belonging to the Council in any other manner or at any time erect any buildings of any kind on the said property or land or any part thereof except that such part of the said property or land which is suitable for agricultural purposes may be used for the purpose of agriculture and such use shall not be deemed to be a breach of this covenant."*

Oxford City Council vacated the property (it is unclear what alternative plans were in place for the building, but our understanding is a policy change meant the Ranger was no longer allowed to live there), and just a few months later, in May 2011, Westhill farmhouse was subject to an arson attack which left the building without a roof. The property has since been left in a derelict state, without adequate protection from the elements, and what remains of the farmhouse has deteriorated further. The site subsequently has become a liability to the council and a hazard to the public, and is scheduled for demolition in June.

Since 2012 a small, dedicated group of volunteers - to whom Oxford City Council has granted a licence to the land and barn - has developed a vision and business plan to restore the site to be a working model farm, based on permaculture principles. The model farm would become a space for education and training for all ages, for discussion and community events, and a sustainable, productive site.

The full business plan, letters of support, newsletters, reports, articles and other background documents, can be found here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B6UTdhC6IB4TSWpWNnNrRGk00TA>

**SUMMARY: Westhill Farm Project, by and for the Oxford Community**  
-a not-for-profit community project offering a no-cost benefit for the people of Oxford as well as enhancing the Country Park in accordance with the requirements of Natural England for its management as an SSSI.

Our vision for Westhill Farm is to develop a working farm as a space for active education and life-long learning, as an incubator for new social enterprises and entrepreneurs, as a contribution to the sustainability and biodiversity of Shotover Park, and as a space for community courses and events. The site will be developed to enable activities and services over five phases culminating in the opening of a new eco-build, fit-for-purpose farmhouse/educational facility in 2020.

Demonstrations, courses, apprenticeships and mentoring schemes will be run on site alongside local charities for the benefit of all groups, especially disadvantaged sections of the local community. We hope that the first generation of young adults to work with us will become part of the long-term operation – and to eventually run the project in years to come.

Westhill Farm Project will contribute to the realisation of each of Oxford City Council's corporate objectives, particularly to the creation of *stronger and more active communities, a cleaner and greener Oxford, and a vibrant and sustainable economy*. Westhill Farm Project also fully enables the fulfillment of the Development and Management Plan of the Shotover Country Park, as well as Natural England's strategic priorities, and supports the Oxford Strategic Partnership Programme.

The business case outlines a commercial model that seeks to use both generated income and charitable grants to support socially excluded groups. Many activities will be free to all as they will either be gifted through volunteer support, or as a result of the site's location and development.

Westhill Farm Project proposes to constitute a Community Interest Company (CIC). This enables it to assume ownership of the property and thereby assume full responsibility for the cost of building, renovation and on-going maintenance. It is believed that by assuming this responsibility; it significantly removes the tenancy management implications for OCC.

### **Our Core Values**

**Participation and opportunity** - To provide opportunities for socially excluded groups to access growing activities –from agriculture to horticulture and gardening; and growing people as they deepen their connection with nature. Emphasis will be on physical and mental wellbeing and outdoor education.

**Learning and educational experiences** - To provide a facility and participatory activities for the benefit of learning through experience.

**Building collaboration** – through teamwork and taking this spirit back into the community

**History and heritage** - To create an historic working farm sympathetic to the history of the site, and re-establish farm activities replicating heritage crafts and traditional skills.

**Exemplary design** - To create a pioneering learning environment demonstrating the most innovative design methods of agro-ecology, eco buildings and designing for biodiversity; applied with the highest ethical standards.

### **Key Challenges and areas we require OCC support...**

Risks to the Project's success have been identified and assessed in terms of likelihood and potential impact in order to identify priorities that need addressing. The full risk assessment and risk mitigation strategies are detailed in the business plan, available on request, however the following risks represent issues that specifically concern Oxford City Council.

#### **Risk 1. Oxford City Council deny continuation of Rights of Residency for the site**

Whilst we are sad to see the old farmhouse removed, we recognise that it represents a risk to the public. However it is important for the site to retain residential rights in order for the project to be

financially and organisationally viable. We are concerned that if permission to replace the farmhouse is not granted, then the city will lose this opportunity altogether.

There are a number of reasons why it is so important to retain residential rights on the farm. First is for security; the site has a history of vandalism and arson. Only last summer the compost toilets built as part of the project were burned down. We strongly believe that having someone living on site is by far the most cost effective way of ensuring security, particularly as more investment is made to restore the farm. Secondly the Shotover Management Plan requires grazing animals to restore the land and make it productive. Keeping a small number of animals on site is only viable if there is someone living there to manage them; once rights to live on site are taken away, the farm may never be fully restored. And thirdly, we strongly believe that by managing the model farm in a sustainable and traditional way - with grazing animals and residency on site - we are conserving and protecting the land as it has been used for centuries. In doing so we are protecting the heritage of the area, in a way that impacts positively on the most deprived and disadvantaged communities in Oxford today.

**We request that Oxford City Council grants continuation of the rights of residency on site so that Westhill Farm project might begin a formal planning application with South Oxford District Council BEFORE demolition takes place.**

### **Risk 2. Oxford City Council refuses to grant the Westhill Farm Project a long term lease to the land.**

The vision of Westhill Farm project is to make a long term, intergenerational contribution to the Oxford community. Restoring an ecologically fragile site to be productive and resilient takes time, investment and patience. Westhill Farm aims not only to restore the land, but also to facilitate the process of community empowerment, and develop a self-sustaining culture of responsible land stewardship in Oxford.

**We request that Oxford City Council grants Westhill Farm Project a Lease of no less than forty years in order to realise long term social and ecological impacts.**

### **Risk 3. Overload to local roads due to increased visitors to the park to attend Westhill Farm activities**

Westhill Farm is accessible by road along The Ridings. It is essential that this access remains in order for the site to be fully accessible for less able members of the community. In accordance with our sustainable vision, staff, volunteers and visitors will travel to the farm on bicycles via Brasenose Woods, or walk down the hill from the car park on Old Road. We are committed to not increasing traffic on The Ridings beyond previous usage by the resident park ranger. However road access to Westhill Farm is essential for the project to be accessible and inclusive.

### **Risk 4. Key stakeholders object to the project**

It is possible that various key stakeholders block or in various ways prevent the realisation of Westhill Farm Project. Key influential groups include Oxford City Council, Oxford Preservation Trust, South Oxford District Council, Shotover Preservation Society, Shotover Wildlife Preservation Group, Natural England, and local residents.

All key stakeholders, including but not limited to the above, are considered key strategic partners in Westhill Farm Project and integral to the vision. We will create a stakeholder committee to ensure regular consultation and participation. We believe that our vision and actions are in keeping with the covenant to maintain the farm for public benefit and agricultural use.

**We request that Oxford City Council continues to work closely with the Westhill Farm Project, to support the realisation of our business plan, and support our engagement with stakeholders and potential user groups around Oxford.**

*We hope that Oxford City Council recognises the enormous potential and significant opportunity*

*that Westhill Farm Project represents.*

*We hope the Scrutiny Committee will allow us to speak at the forthcoming Committee meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> June and respectfully request the committee to consider the following questions:*

- 1) Is the community asset of Westhill Farm site, and the farmhouse specifically, at risk of further degradation and damage if the farmhouse is not replaced by a building with residential status?
- 2) Would Oxford City Council be willing to give permission for the Westhill Farm project to replace the community asset farmhouse building with a similar size building with residential status if the project manage the liabilities and costs? If so Westhill Farm project request that the decision to demolish the farm building is paused until such time as a response is given to the business plan requirement that the farm building can be rebuilt with residency or OCC commit to support the application of a replacement building.
- 3) If OCC does not agree to the Westhill Farm project business plan what alternative plans does OCC have that will support the OCC strategic objectives to the same extent as the Westhill Farm project business plan.

*For more detail please see our full business plan, but if you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact a member of the project Steering Committee.*

*Finally we would like to take this opportunity to invite you visit the site, to meet with our team, to contribute towards our vision for the farm and project.*

Sincerely,

**Westhill Farm Steering Committee**

Contact:

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Clare Ridley: 07712011284 [clare.ridley@ntlworld.com](mailto:clare.ridley@ntlworld.com)

**To: Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 7 June 2016**

**Report of: Scrutiny Officer**

**Title: Equality and Diversity report – suggested amendments**

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the following amendments put forward by the Chair of the Review Group, before the Equality and Diversity report is submitted to the City Executive Board.

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[Add after recommendation 12]:

Leadership from the highest levels of the Council could be useful for signalling to the workforce just how much value senior leaders place on building an inclusive, diverse workplace. Employees will take diversity more seriously if Council leaders show they want the most inclusive workplace and cascade that message down the organisation. The Review Group suggest that the Council identifies senior leaders who could visibly act as Diversity Champions. These Diversity Champions would not need to report one or more of the equality characteristics, although significant advantage could be gained if they did. Linked to this role, the Review Group suggest the plotting of a year-long calendar of regular activities where Diversity Champions can visibly lead employees to place a strong emphasis on diversity. Leading celebrations such as Black History Month, Pride, International Day of Persons With Disabilities, International Transgender Day of Visibility, and International Women's Day, would help to embed equality in the workplace, especially when celebrations involve people at all levels of the Council.

***Recommendation – That the Council identifies one or more Diversity Champions at senior levels who would help to embed equality in the workplace. These Diversity Champions could lead on communicating the importance of diversity and monitoring within the organisation and co-ordinate a calendar of activities in support of celebrations such as Black History Month, Pride, etc.***

The Review Group suggest that the Council also appoints a single elected councillor to visibly oversee and externally represent the Council's equality and diversity work. This would also help in reinforcing messages about diversity, inclusion, and monitoring to the Council workforce.

***Recommendation – That the Council identifies an elected member to oversee and externally represent the Council's equality and diversity work.***

[Amend paragraph 72 to include]:

Data shows under-reporting by Council employees, particularly among the LGBT workforce, which is very small. The Review Group suggest that the Council prioritises building confidence in monitoring by making extra efforts to explain to the workforce why key pieces of personal information are monitored. Offering monitoring opportunities at regular intervals is centrally important, to emphasise the Council's prioritisation of monitoring and because people's level of impairment, sexuality, and gender identity are not fixed.

[Add after recommendation 14]:

Some recommendations in this report would benefit from Council employees significantly increasing disclosure over a short-term horizon. The Review Group suggest that the setting of targets for increasing disclosure rates, for example across an eighteen-month window, would further emphasise the Council's prioritisation of monitoring and help to mobilise extra resources.

***Recommendation – That the Council sets targets for increasing disclosure rates to reduce data gaps for sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity over a fixed period of time (e.g. eighteen months).***



## Project Scope – Equality & Diversity Review Group

<b>Review Topic</b>	‘Equality and Diversity’
<b>Lead Member</b>	Councillor Tom Hayes
<b>Other Review Group Members</b>	Councillor Altaf-Khan Councillor Sian Taylor Councillor David Thomas
<b>Officer Support and allocate hours</b>	Scrutiny Officer support – approx. 2-4 days per month for up to 4 months (mid-October to early-December and mid-February to mid-April). Additional support from Organisational Development, Learning and Human Resources.
<b>Background</b>	<p>Oxford City Council is an employer committed to increasing the diversity of its workforce and providing an inclusive work environment with equality of opportunity for all employees. However, some groups with protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010) are under-represented.</p> <p>The Council produces an annual workplace equalities report and monitors performance against the following targets (results as of June 2015):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The percentage of employees with a disability - 8.52% (target 10%);</li> <li>- The percentage of black and minority ethnic employees - 7.2% (target 9%). This figure rises to &gt;12% when staff from white European and other ethnicities are included.</li> </ul> <p>The Scrutiny Committee has previously focused on the employment of staff from BME groups. Applications from BME groups have increased in recent years but appointment rates remain proportionally lower.</p> <p>One third of the workforce is female but many services have an even gender profile (the exceptions being direct labour services). In 2014/15, 38% of new recruits were female.</p> <p>Under 1% of employees have self-declared as LGBT and this number has been stable for many years.</p> <p>The Council will need to manage changes to the age profile of its workforce as working lives, including manual working lives, are extended and rates of employees with a disability may increase.</p>
<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Scrutiny members want to understand whether there is more that could reasonably be done to promote equality and diversity within the Council’s workforce.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee prioritised a review focusing on ‘equality</p>

	and diversity' when agreeing its work programme for 2015-16.
<b>Purpose of Review</b>	To identify how the City Council promotes equality and diversity within its workforce and what further steps is feasible. Key lines of enquiry are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What barriers are faced by under-represented groups in recruitment and career progression at the City Council;</li> <li>- How does the Council prevent and address discrimination, including specifically discrimination against LGBT employees.</li> </ul>
<b>Indicators of Success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The production of an evidence-based report with recommendations to the City Executive Board aimed at improving outcomes;</li> <li>- Identifying and assessing Council policies and practices that impact on equality and diversity, including any gaps or opportunities;</li> <li>- Good quality engagement with under-represented groups or their representatives;</li> <li>- Detailed consideration of two specific issues or strands relating to the topic of equality and diversity;</li> <li>- The majority of recommendations to the City Executive Board are agreed.</li> </ul>
<b>Out of scope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broader community engagement activities, consultation and the provision of Council services to diverse groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology/ Approach</b>	Evidence gathering could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inviting written and verbal evidence from stakeholders and experts;</li> <li>- Reviewing employment, recruitment and application data to identify inequalities and under-represented groups, including in particular types of jobs and at different grade levels;</li> <li>- Employee focus groups;</li> <li>- Issuing a call for evidence to City Councillors, other interested parties and/or the public;</li> <li>- Desk research / literature review, including of relevant Council policies;</li> <li>- Considering what could be learnt from other organisations;</li> </ul>
<b>Specify Witnesses/ Experts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chris Harvey – OD, Learning &amp; HR Support Manager;</li> <li>- Jarlath Brine – OD &amp; Learning Advisor;</li> <li>- Justine Thorne – HR Manager;</li> <li>- Caroline Glendinning – Unison Branch Secretary;</li> <li>- Martin Naish – Unite the Union Equalities rep.;</li> </ul> <p><i>Other witnesses TBC</i></p>
<b>Specify Evidence Sources for Documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Corporate Equality Scheme 2012-15 – Oxford City Council;</li> <li>- Annual Workplace Equalities Report 2014-2015 – Oxford City Council;</li> <li>- Applicant and recruitment equalities data by service;</li> <li>- Employment equalities data by service and pay grade.</li> </ul> <p><i>Other document evidence sources TBC</i></p>

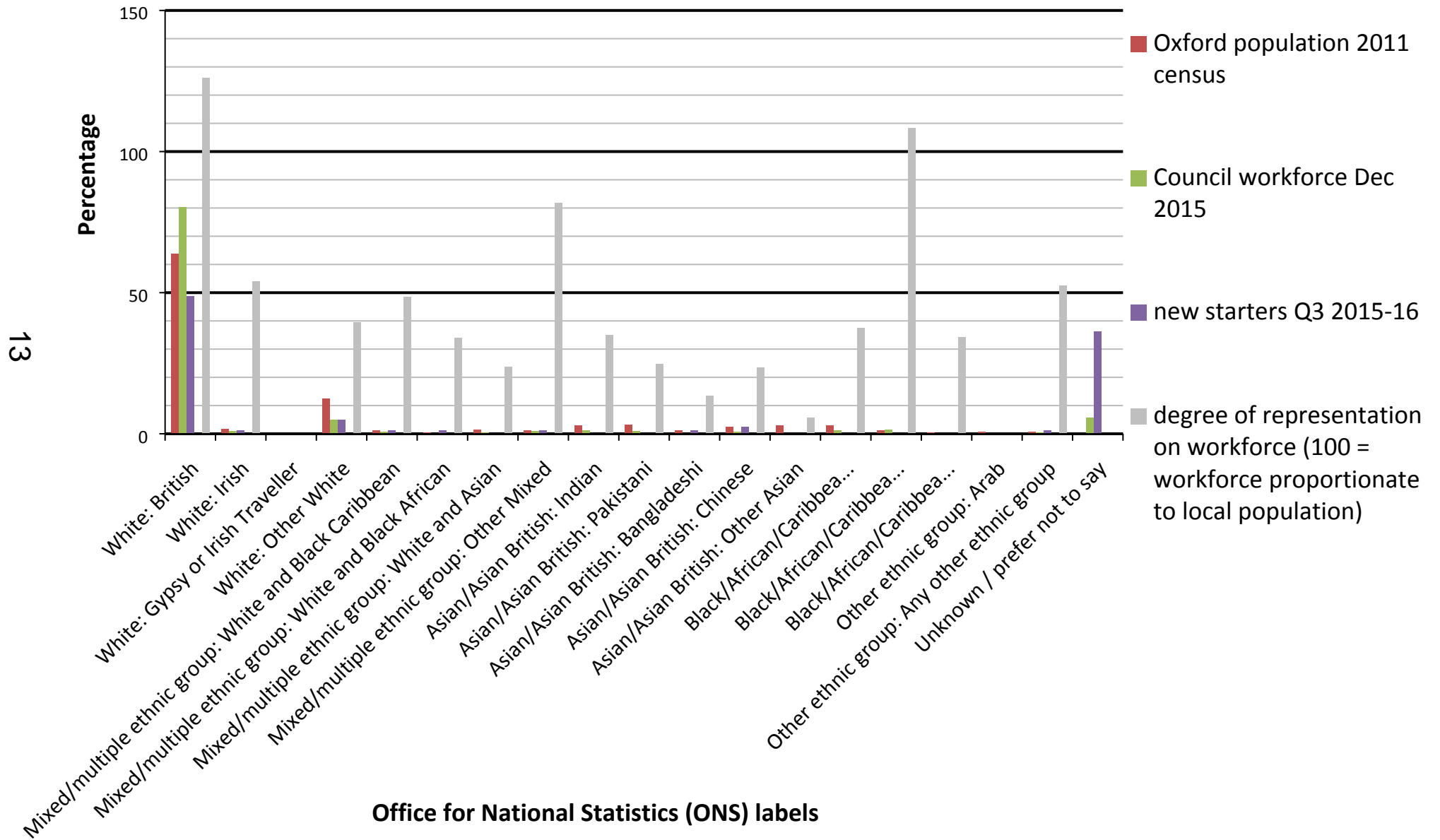
<b>Specify Site Visits</b>	N/A		
<b>Projected start date</b>	26 October 2015	<b>Report published to Scrutiny Committee</b>	24 March 2016
<b>Meeting Frequency</b>	Monthly	<b>Projected completion date</b>	14 April 2016 CEB

### **Draft outline of meetings and indicative dates**

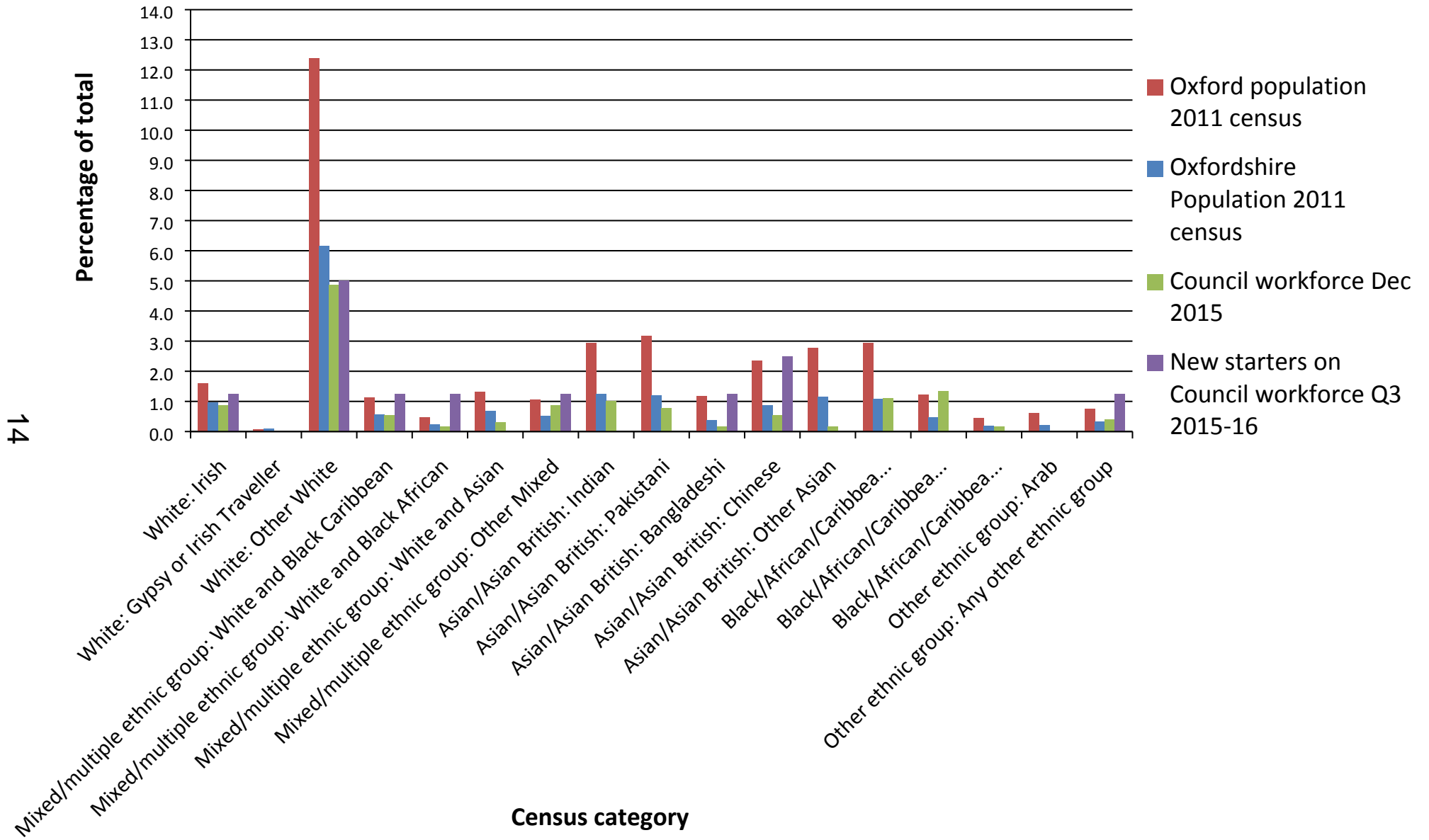
<b>Meeting one – 26 October 2015</b>
Scoping meeting to agree the purpose of the review.
<b>Meeting two – 19 November 2015</b>
Meeting to engage with key witnesses / experts and plan further evidence gathering methods and sessions.
<b>Meeting three – w/c 8 February (TBC)</b>
Evidence session.
<b>Meeting four – w/c 29 February (TBC)</b>
Evidence session.
<b>Meeting five – w/c 14 March (TBC)</b>
Meeting to reflect on evidence gathered and consider a draft report and recommendations.

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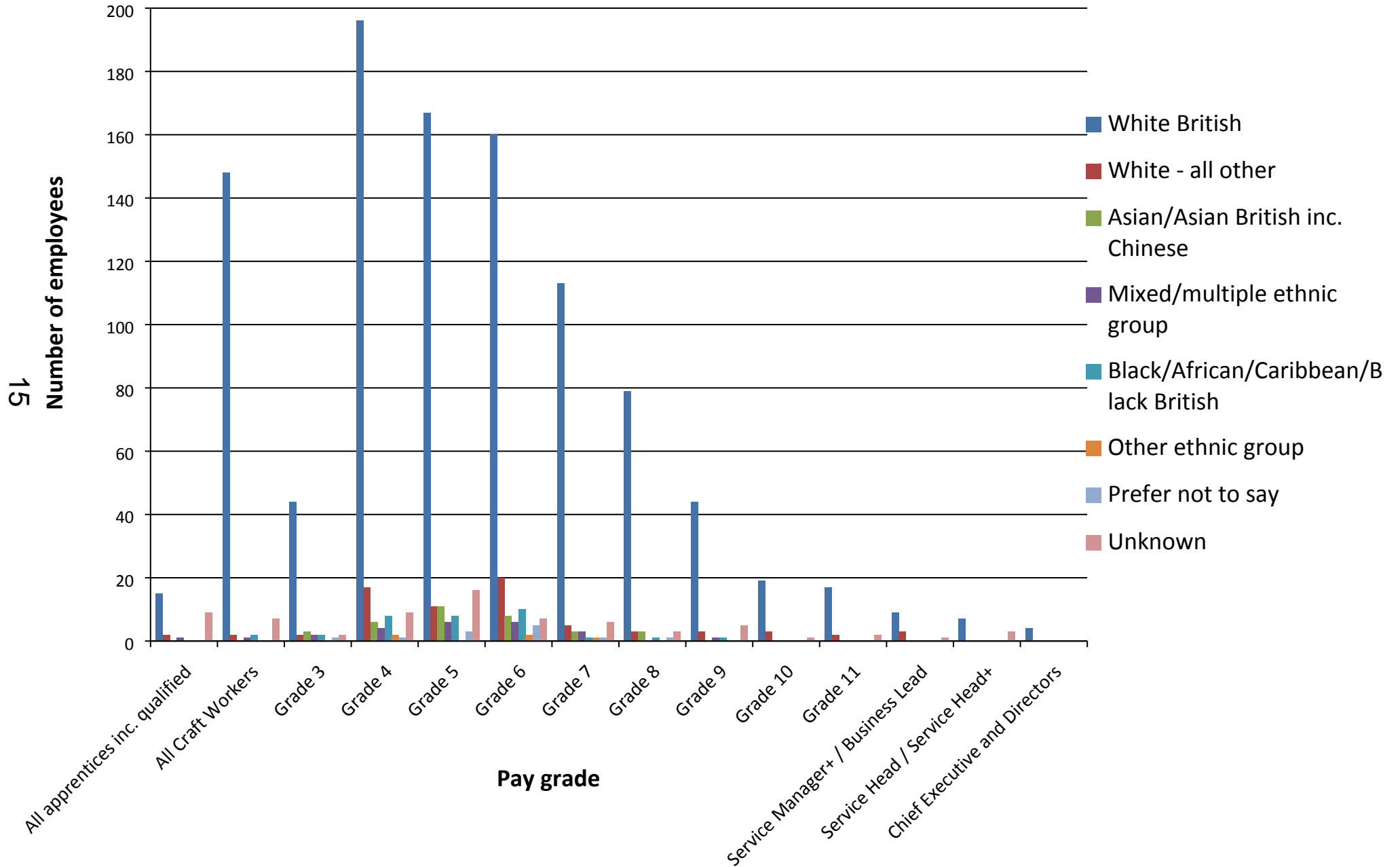
**Figure 1: The degree of representation of different ethnic groups on the Council workforce based on the Oxford population**



**Figure 2: Minority ethnic groups on the Council workforce compared with the Oxford and Oxfordshire populations**



**Figure 3: Ethnic groupings on the Council workforce by pay grade**



**Figure 4: The proportion of BME and White Other employees in each Council service area**

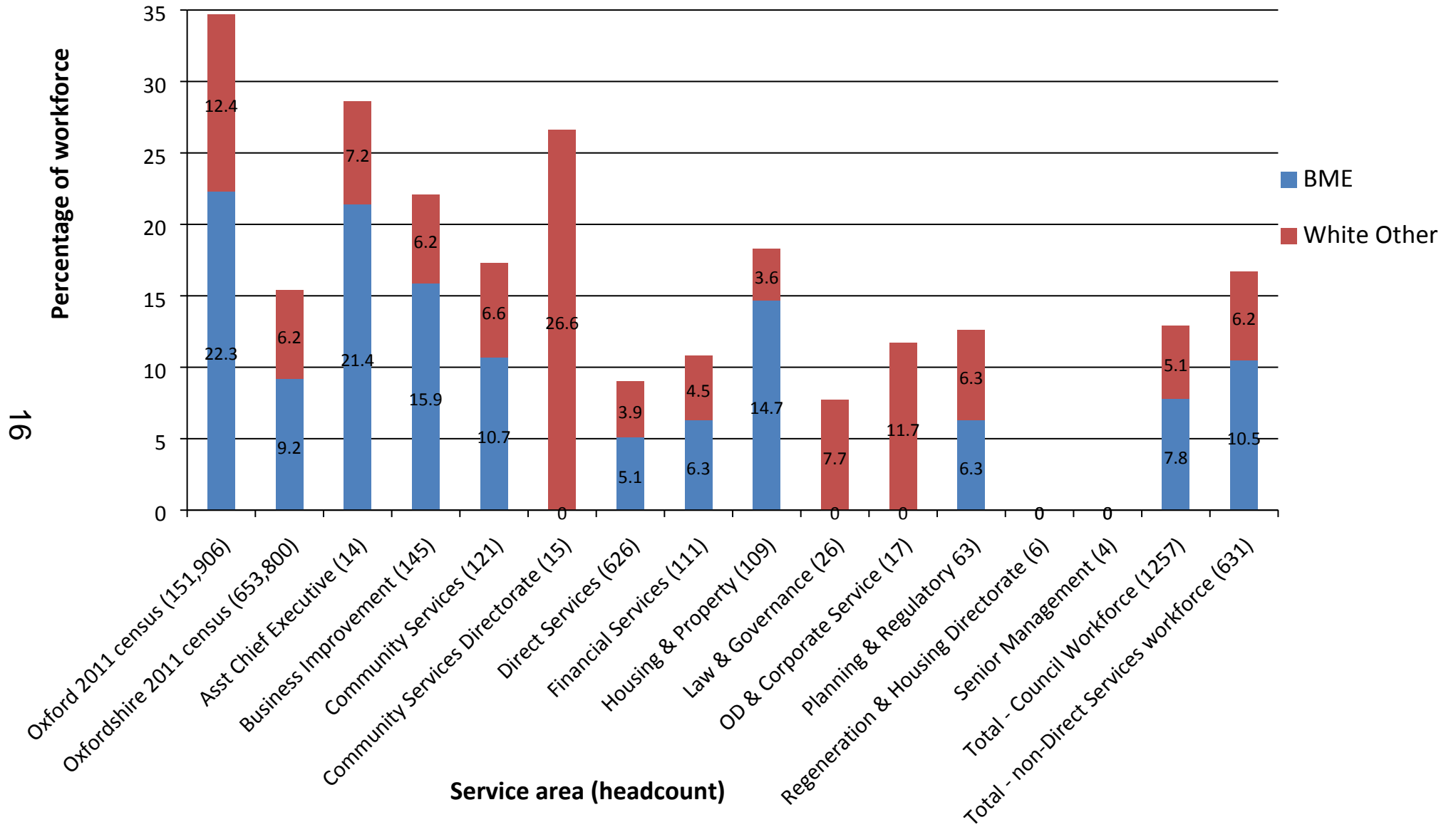
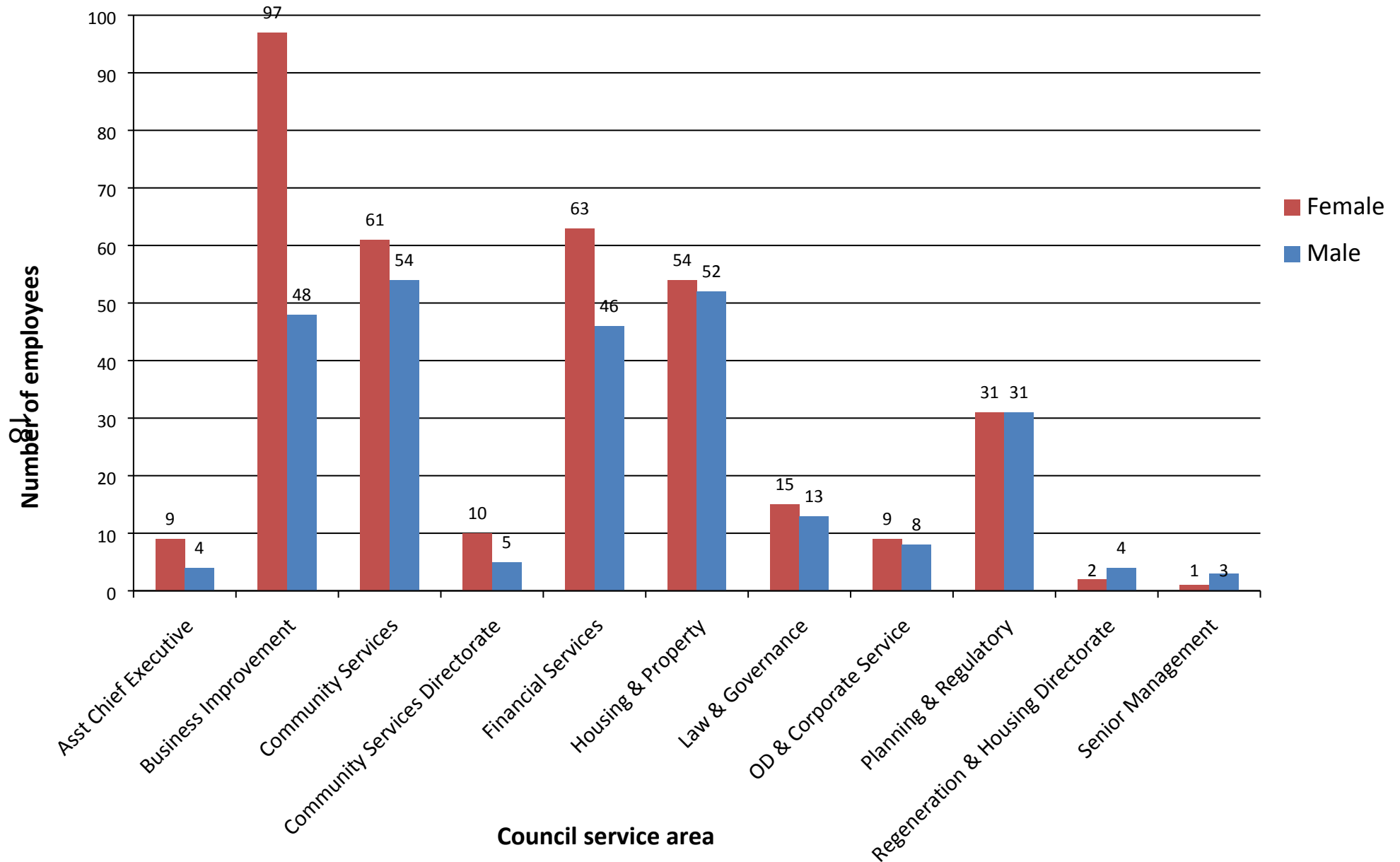




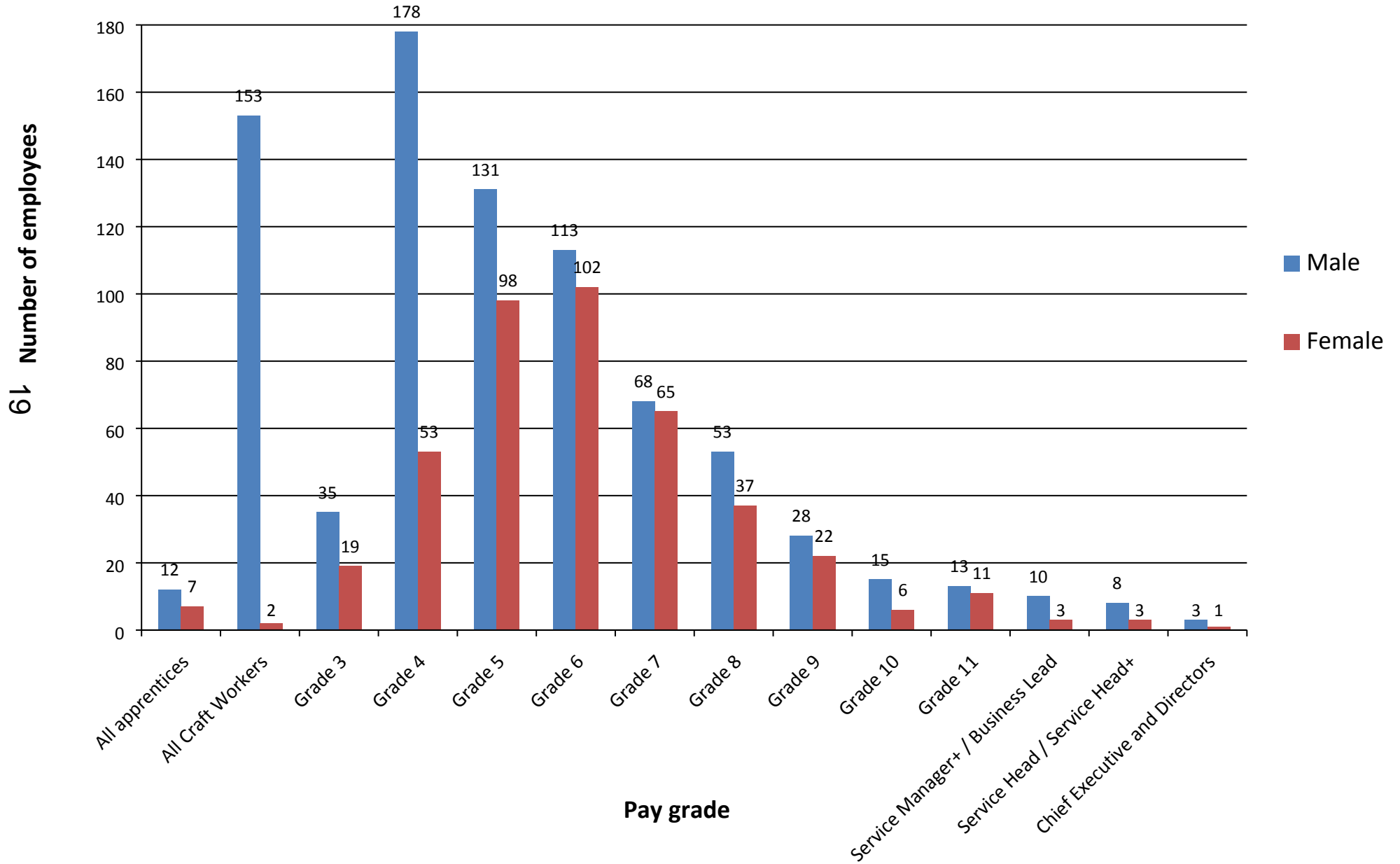
Figure 5: Gender composition of the Council workforce



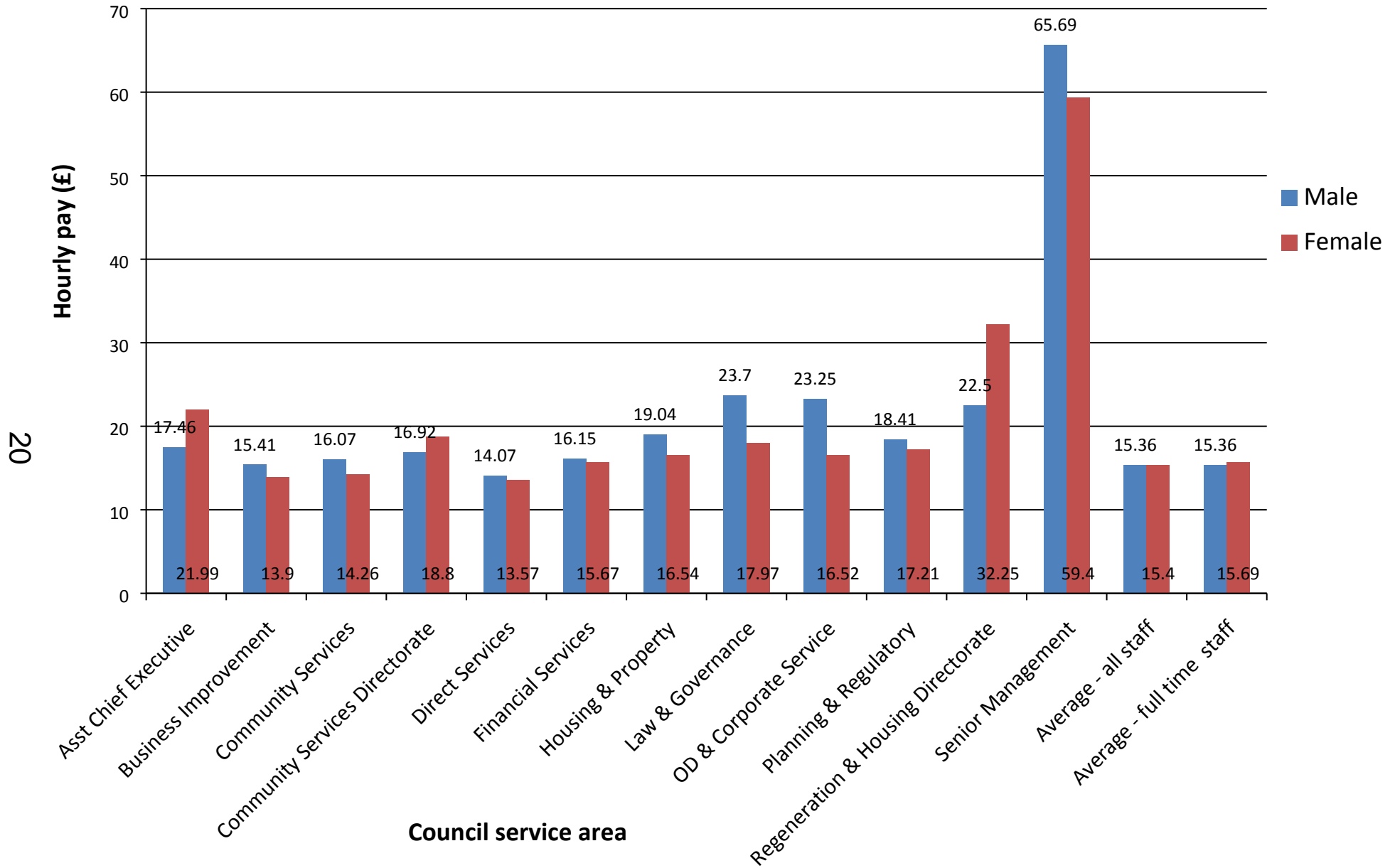
**Figure 6: Gender balance of Council service areas  
(excluding Direct Services)**



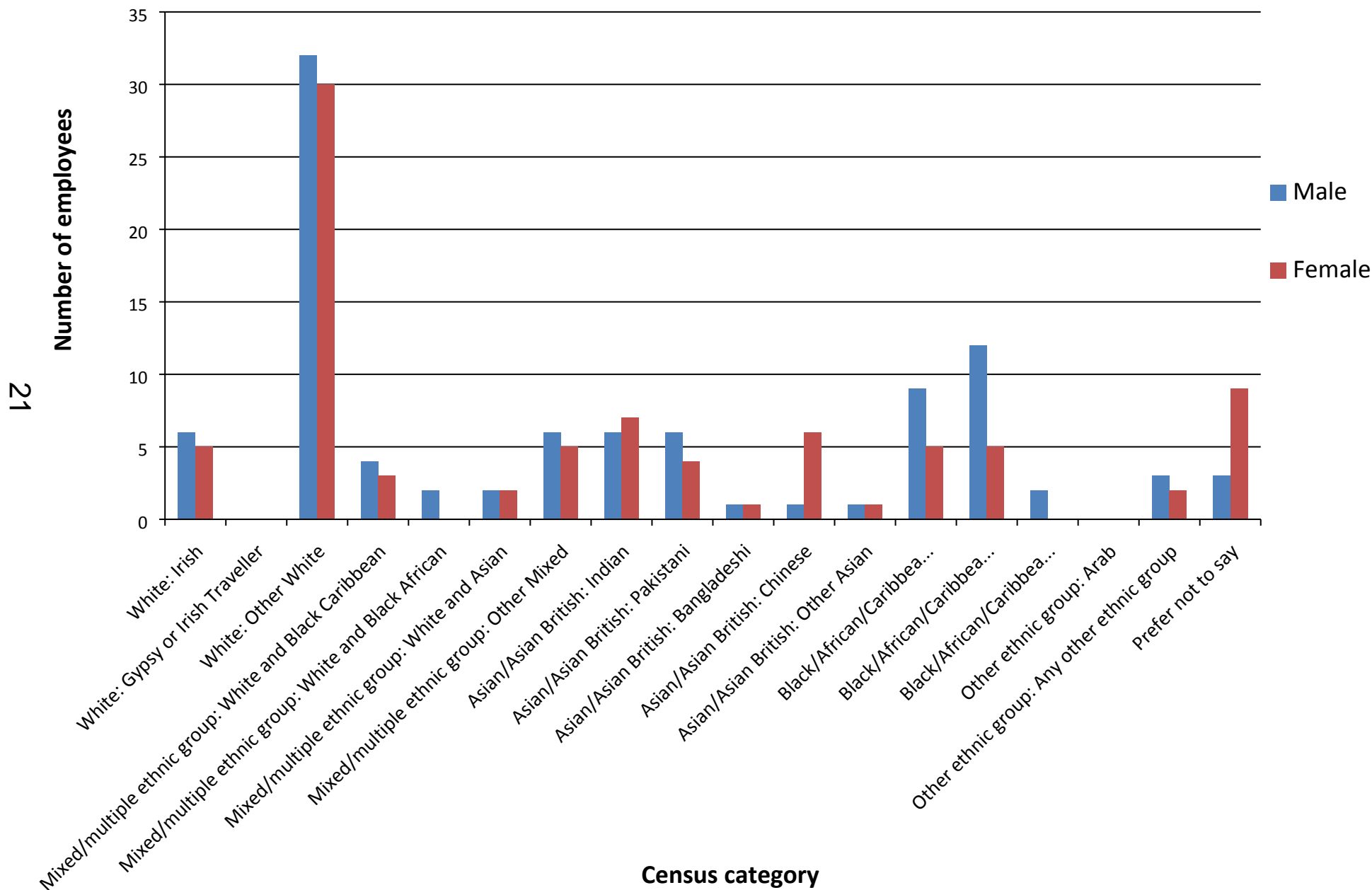
**Figure 7: Gender balance of the Council workforce by pay grade**



**Figure 8: Average hourly pay by gender and service area**



**Figure 9: Gender balance of minority ethnic groups on the Council workforce**



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