

# HR Committee

30<sup>th</sup> April 2020



**Report of:** Director: Workforce & Change

**Title:** COVID-19 – workforce Implications

**Ward:** N/A

**Officer Presenting Report:** Mark Williams (Head of Human Resources)

**Contact Telephone Number:** 07795 446270

## Recommendation

That the Committee notes the report.

## Summary

COVID-19 has been the most significant incident the Council has had to manage in living memory. The council has responded quickly and effectively. This report provides the Committee with an update on the workforce implications of COVID-19 and the organisational response to the Pandemic.

## The significant issues in the report are:

- Council employees have experienced sickness absence due to COVID-19 and some colleagues have also had to self-isolate. Some employees are shielding as they are in the high risk group. Testing is now available and is being prioritised for key workers who are self-isolating or symptomatic with COVID-19.
- Comprehensive advice to employees, volunteers and managers on how to manage the health and safety implications and risks of exposure to COVID-19 is in place and is updated regularly in line with national advice.
- 181 employees have been redeployed from their normal jobs to support the organisational response to the Pandemic.
- A casual worker retention scheme has been proposed to support casual workers whose monthly pay has ceased or diminished as a consequence of some services being scaled back or closed.
- Large numbers of staff have been enabled to work from home very effectively at short notice. We will be building on this and other rapid changes we have made in our organisational improvement plans.

## Policy

1. The council's HR policies and procedures have in some instances being relaxed to support both colleagues and managers in response to the Pandemic. For example, emergency carers leave provisions have been relaxed and sickness absence related to COVID-19 will be discounted under the Sickness Absence Policy.

## Consultation

2. **Internal**  
Not required because this report is for information only.
3. **External**  
Not required because this report is for information only.

## Context

4. The organisation has had to respond swiftly to COVID-19. Museums and Libraries closed on 19<sup>th</sup> March and the Government restrictions took effect on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. Frontline services have had to maintain service but also review and quickly adapt the way services are delivered.
5. Human Resources and Trade Unions have worked closely together at the outset and issued a joint statement to all staff and managers which stated:-

*In these unprecedented times the joint trade unions have agreed with the Council that:*

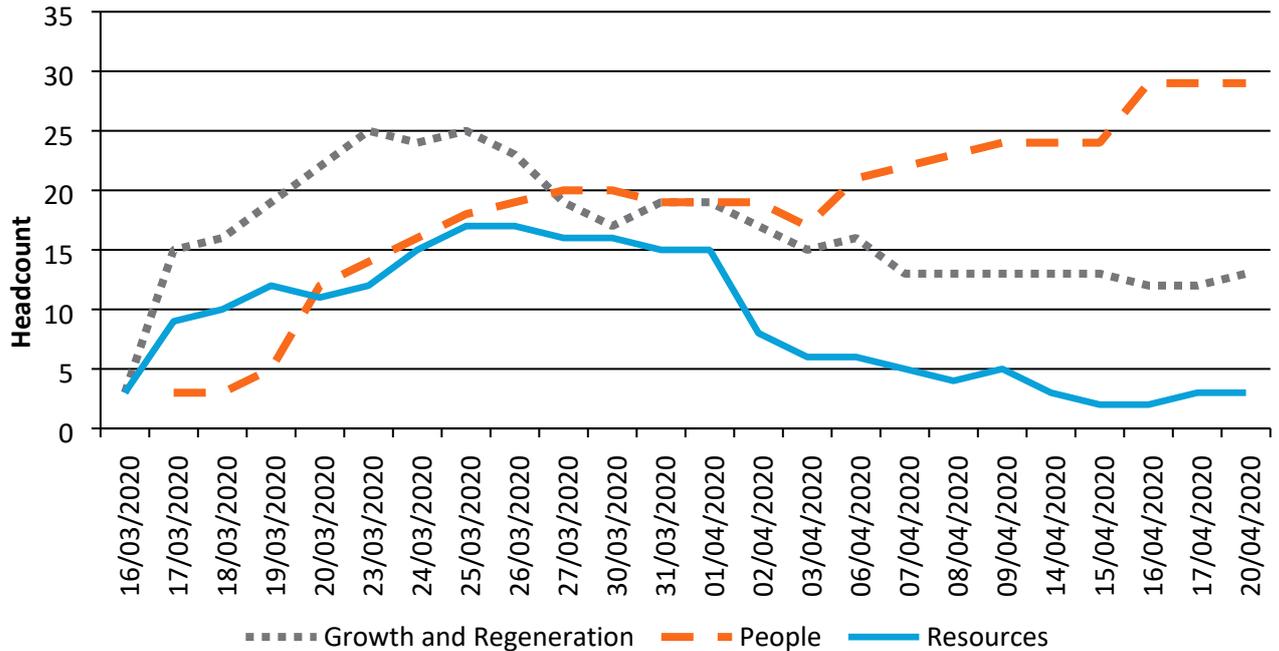
- *In line with advice from the National Joint Council for Local Government Services, sickness trigger points will be adjusted/discounted for absence due to Coronavirus and self-isolation.*
- *The 6-day limit on Emergency Care Leave will be lifted until further notice.*
- *If necessary colleagues can be temporarily redeployed to cover other essential services subject to health and safety considerations*
- *Colleagues should work from home where they are able to, especially those that are in the categories deemed 'at risk' by Public Health England (If colleagues are in any doubt they should speak with their manager as a matter of urgency).*

*All colleagues are asked to remember that they and the Council have a duty of care to keep themselves, their colleagues and our service users safe and healthy. If this means working differently managers and trade unions will support them in doing so.*

6. Weekly meetings take place with the Head of HR and trade unions to review ongoing issues and address any workplace issues. The health and safety team also meet with senior safety representatives weekly to review guidance and discuss health and safety issues. This has involved close working with Public Health protection and the fact that national advice on the use of PPE is updated very regularly.
7. The HR team is part of the Incident Management Team and manages and oversees all requests for additional staffing sources staff for redeployment. Currently, 181 staff have been redeployed

at the time of writing this report.

8. Regular communications and updates are provided to all staff and managers and the HR team work collaboratively with the internal communications team to ensure up to date advice is provided. There are dedicated resources on the staff internal web pages which include FAQs, guidance on home working and health and well-being resources.
9. Daily reports are provided on COVID-19 sickness absence the chart below shows the absence rate by directorate since March 2020.



10. We have recently undertaken recruitment campaigns for both social work and care worker roles to ensure that service levels can be maintained throughout the Pandemic. Our care worker recruitment campaign was also included our commissioned providers in the City. Both campaigns have been successful. A number of social workers who recently left the council have also voluntarily returned to assist in supporting services which has also been very beneficial.
11. COVID-19 testing for employees in key worker roles with COVID-19 symptoms and those are self-isolating commenced with effect from 20 April 2020. Testing is being prioritised for colleagues in health and social care roles.
12. A casual worker retention scheme to support casual workers whose pay has ceased or diminished as a consequence of service closure and reductions is being put in place. The proposed scheme provides a monthly payment based on average earnings during 2019/20 for those staff that have worked in either January, February or March 2020. Colleagues affected can still work and the retention payment is adjusted if work has been undertaken. The scheme will be finalised on 23<sup>rd</sup> April which follows the publication of this report. A verbal update will be provided at the committee meeting.
13. Employees at all levels in the organisation have responded and adapted to COVID-19 very positively through their work. This has enabled services to adapt to changed circumstances rapidly. Also, large numbers of staff have been able to work successfully from their homes using

their work devices. Research will be undertaken to build on and develop the best practice as the organisation moves forward. Leadership Forums now operate online and leaders are very positive about the future and are committed to new ways of working.

14. Responding to COVID-19 has had significant implications for the workload of the HR Leadership team and this has meant that some aspect of the work programme for the team have had to be re-prioritised.

### **Proposal**

15. That the Committee notes this report.

### **Other Options Considered**

16. None.

### **Risk Assessment**

17. Not required because this report is for information only.

### **Public Sector Equality Duties**

- 16a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
  - i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
  - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
    - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
    - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
    - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
  - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
    - tackle prejudice; and

- promote understanding.

16b) Not required because this report is for information only.

### **Legal and Resource Implications**

#### **Legal**

Not required because this report is for information only.

#### **Financial**

##### **(a) Revenue**

##### **(b) Capital**

Not required because this report is for information only.

#### **Land**

Not applicable.

#### **Personnel**

Not required because this report is for information only.

### **Appendices:**

None

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

#### **Background Papers:**

None.