

HR Committee

24th September 2020



Report of: Director: Workforce & Change

Title: COVID-19 Recovery Plan - workforce Implications

Ward: N/A

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

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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 responded quickly and effectively. Our 2020/21 Business Plan which has now been refreshed to include our Recovery Plan. This was endorsed at Cabinet on 1 September 2020. This report provides an update on the current workforce issues in respect of the COVID-19 recovery.

The significant issues in the report are:

- The Council's refreshed Business Plan includes a wide range of workforce related actions and these are reflected in the refreshed draft Workforce Strategy (see separate report).
- 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. Workplaces are COVID secure.
- 190 employees who were redeployed have now returned to their substantive roles. There are currently 35 employees who continue to be redeployed from their normal jobs to support the organisational recovery.
- The Council Furloughed 362 employees. This has now reduced to 111 employees as services return to normal. The casual worker retention scheme continues to support 188 casual workers whose monthly pay has ceased or diminished as a consequence of some services being scaled back or closed. The scheme will close at the same time as the national job retention (Furlough) scheme ends.

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 until 30 September 2020. Sickness absence related to COVID-19 will be discounted under the Sickness Absence Policy.

Consultation

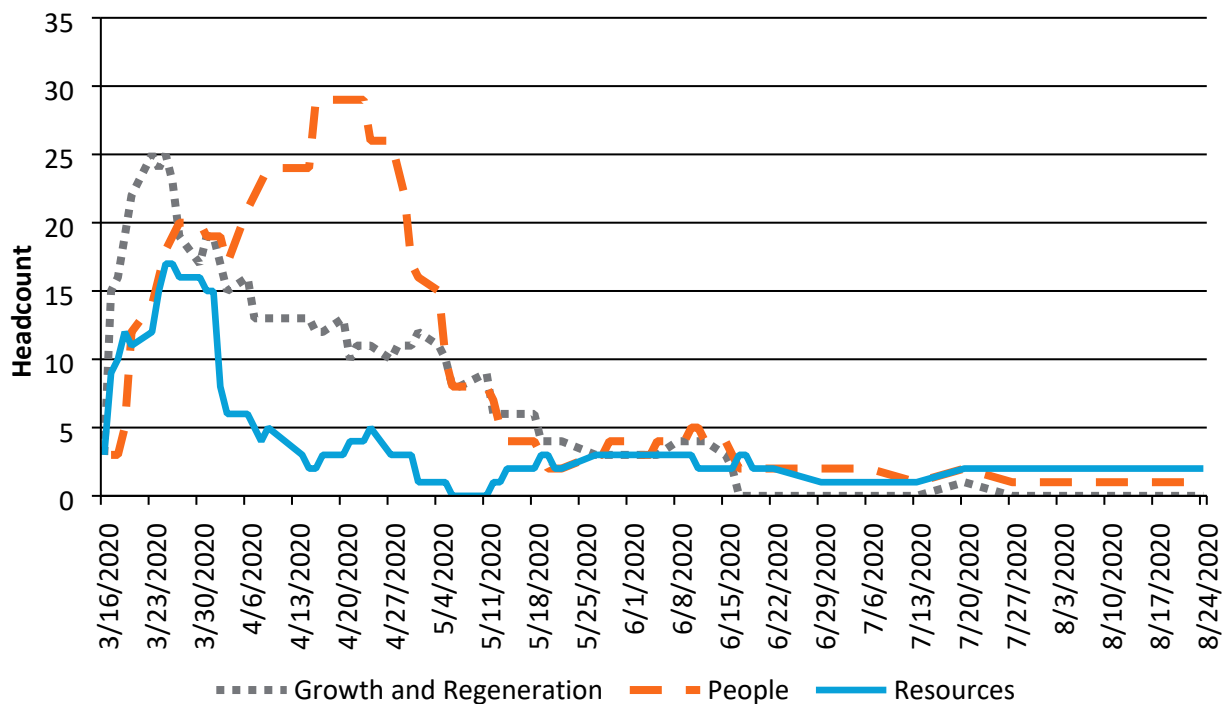
2. **Internal**
Corporate Leadership Board.
3. **External**
Not applicable.

Context

4. The organisation responded swiftly to COVID-19. Museums and Libraries closed on 19th March and the Government restrictions took effect on the 23rd March 2020. Frontline services have had to maintain service but also review and quickly adapt the way services are delivered.
5. From 23rd March to 31st July, an Incident Management Team was in place. The organisation is now in recovery and business plans have been updated to reflect the changing priorities and significant challenges that now face the Council and the City. A refreshed Business Plan for 2020/21 was endorsed by Cabinet on 1st September 2020. The plan includes a wide range of actions that affect the workforce. In particular, a key area of focus will be to equip staff with skills and knowledge to support critical services quickly in the event of a future major incident or lockdown. These are reflected in the new draft Workforce Strategy which is being considered at this meeting.
6. Offices are open in accordance with government guidance and are COVID secure. All sites are visited by the Health and Safety team and COVID secure certification provided by the Safety, Health and Wellbeing Manager. Schools in the city have also been supported on the same basis. The vast majority of office based staff continue to work from home where their job role enables this to take place successfully. To meet the requirements of the COVID secure guidance, desk capacity has been reduced by up to 80% in some areas. Staff have returned to offices where their job requires attendance and where staff have request to work in an office for health and wellbeing reasons this has been accommodated. We surveyed staff about working from home and a number of actions were taken in response, such as providing office equipment to help people work effectively from home, and providing further advice and guidance to support good mental health which might have been affected by extended periods of homeworking. The key findings were:
 - Over 1,000 respondents have been participating in online learning whilst home working.
 - More than 80% of respondents felt they were able to do all or most of their role while working from home.
 - 75% felt they were as effective or more effective when working from home.

- Nearly 80% requested additional equipment to make homeworking more effective.

7. A further pulse survey will be conducted shortly to assess what further support is needed.
8. Human Resources and Trade Unions have worked closely together since the outset of the Pandemic. Until the end of July 2020, weekly meetings took place with the Head of HR and trade unions to review ongoing corporate guidance and support and address any workplace issues. As the Council is now in recovery these meetings have now take place on a fortnightly basis. This has involved close working with Public Health protection and the fact that national advice on the use of PPE is updated very regularly.
9. Currently, 35 staff continue to be redeployed to support the organisational recovery. During the period of lockdown over 225 were redeployed. These staff have now returned to their substantive job roles.
10. Regular communications and updates are provided to all staff and managers and the HR team worked 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.
11. A range of measures were introduced to support staff with their health and wellbeing needs. This included a personalised risk assessment to support staff all in at risks groups. In particular a joint letter from the Council, Trade Unions and Staff Led Group was issued to all BAME colleagues. In addition, bespoke counselling provision has been offered to BAME colleagues in addition to our Employee Assistance Programme.
12. Daily reports continue to be provided on COVID-19 sickness absence the chart below shows the absence rate by directorate since March 2020.



13. A casual worker retention scheme to support casual workers whose pay has ceased or diminished as a consequence of service closure and reductions was put in place. 211 Casual Workers have accessed the scheme. The Council also utilised the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Furlough Scheme). Staff were furloughed due to service closure or where they were unable to work at all due to being extremely critically vulnerable or having full time caring commitments. All furloughed staff have continued to receive full pay although the scheme does not cover all employment costs. Initially, 362 were Furloughed and as at 11 September 2020 this has reduced to 111. The council's casual worker retention scheme will end at the same time as the Government scheme. A summary of service areas where staff the casual worker and furlough schemes have been applied are set out below:-

BCC - Furloughed Staff		
Directorate/Service	March - Headcount	September - Headcount
Growth and Regeneration	248	72
Economy of Place	200	69
Homes and Landlord Services	13	1
Management of Place	35	2
People	69	35
Adult Social Care	49	18
Children's Services	6	3
Educational Improvement	14	14
Resources	43	4
Commercialisation	5	4
Workforce & Change	38	0
Grand Total	360	111

BCC - Casual Worker Retention Scheme		
Directorate/Service	March - Headcount	September - Headcount
Growth and Regeneration	112	94
Economy of Place	72	71
Management of Place	40	23
People	26	26
Children's Services	1	1
Educational Improvement	25	25
Resources	73	68
Commercialisation	61	56
Legal and Democratic Services	12	12
Grand Total	211	188

14. 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.

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.