

# HR Committee

17<sup>th</sup> December 2020



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

**Title:** COVID-19 - workforce update

**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 responded quickly and effectively. Further national restrictions were introduced on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and the City was placed into Tier 3 restrictions from 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020. This report provides an update on the current workforce issues.

## The significant issues in the report are:

- 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.
- There are currently 81 employees who have been redeployed from their normal jobs to support the organisational response to the current restrictions and supporting the city-wide response.
- 283 employees have been furloughed in the revised national job retention scheme which was introduced from 1 November 2020. 69 casual workers have now been included in the scheme.
- Fast track COVID-19 testing has been introduced for all critical and workers and staff in schools who are symptomatic.

## 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, the emergency carers leave entitlement has been increased until 31 March 2021. Sickness absence related to COVID-19 will be discounted under the Sickness Absence Policy.

## Consultation

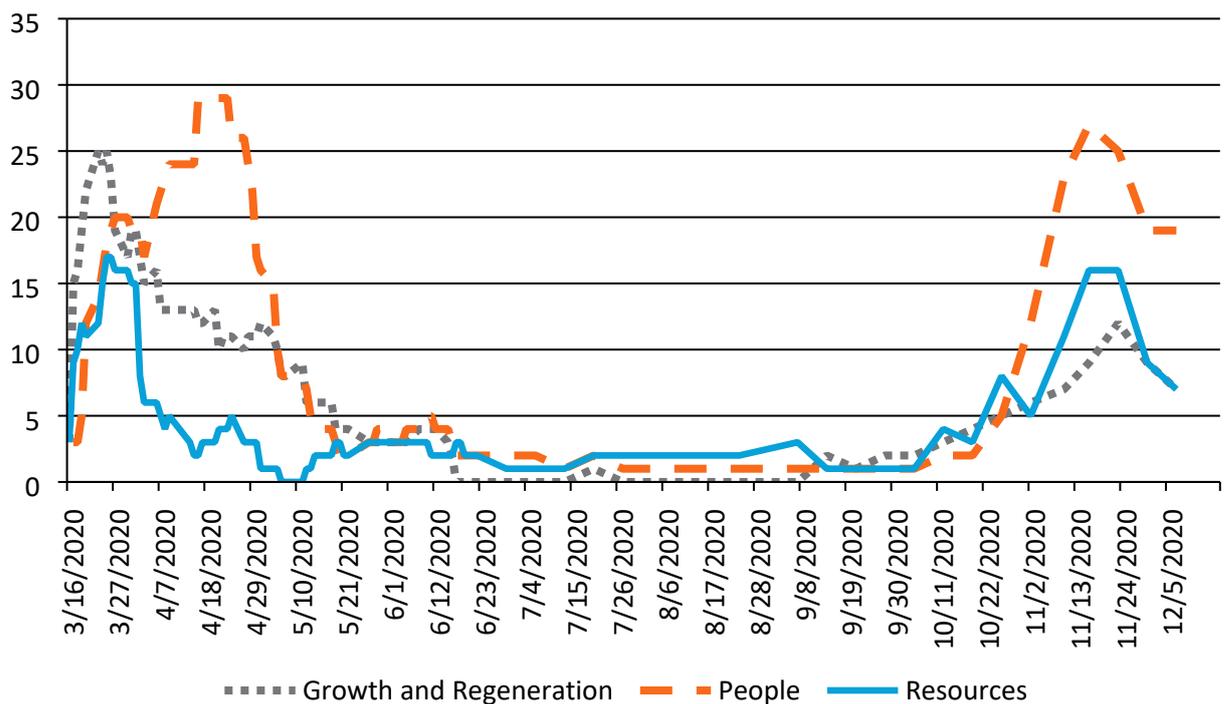
2. **Internal**  
Not applicable.
3. **External**  
Not applicable.

## Context

4. The organisation responded swiftly to COVID-19. Museums and Libraries closed from 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Libraries have introduced a click and collect service from 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020. Frontline services have had to maintain services but have also had to review and quickly adapt the way services are delivered. Staff from teams in central services have also been redeployed to assist with the response.
5. Offices have remained 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.
6. Human Resources and Trade Unions have worked closely together since the outset of the Pandemic. Weekly meetings have been introduced with the Head of HR and trade unions to review ongoing corporate guidance and support and address any workplace issues.
7. Currently, 81 staff have been redeployed to support the organisational response. Services where staff have been redeployed to include Homelessness, Revenues and Benefits, Citizen Services and Neighbourhoods and Communities. Our priority has been to redeploy staff including casual workers to help our response, 283 staff have been Furloughed. 69 casual workers have also been Furloughed were they are not able to be offered work.
8. 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. We also introduced weekly Head of Service returns as part of the response to latest restrictions and this includes reporting on employee wellbeing and the supply of PPE.
9. A range of measures were introduced to support staff with their health and wellbeing needs. A new revised personalised risk assessment to support staff all in at risks groups has now been

agreed with trade unions and was published to all staff.

- Through working with our partners in the NHS we have been able to provide Critical Workers and members of their household with access Fast Track testing if they become symptomatic. This service is in addition to the NHS website online booking service and can be accessed quickly. We have recently extended this service to all Maintained Schools and Academies in the City. This service also provides transport to a test centre if this is required by an employee or a member of their household.
- Daily reports continue to be provided on COVID-19 sickness absence the chart below shows the absence rate by directorate since March 2020.



- Employees at all levels in the organisation have responded and adapted to COVID-19 very positively through their work. The HR, Internal Communications and OD teams have responded quickly and effectively to the latest restrictions and we have been successful at supporting the organisational response. This has meant that some other work has had to be re-prioritised.

### Proposal

- That the Committee notes this report.

### Other Options Considered

- None.

### Risk Assessment

- 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.