

HR Committee

18th February 2021



Report of: Director: Workforce & Change

Title: COVID-19 - workforce update

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. Further national restrictions were introduced on 5th January 2021. This report provides an update on the current COVID-19 issues.

The significant issues in the report are:

- Comprehensive advice has been provided to employees, volunteers and managers on how to manage the health and safety implications and risks of exposure to COVID-19 and is updated regularly in line with national advice. BCC workplaces are COVID Secure.
- There are currently 66 employees who have been redeployed from their normal jobs to support the response to the current restrictions.
- 302 employees are currently furloughed in the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. 175 casual workers are now included in the scheme.
- Frontline health and social care workers have been vaccinated. Colleagues have been prioritised in accordance with the Joint Committee on Immunisation and Vaccination priority list and this work is ongoing.
- Lateral flow testing is now available to all frontline staff who are unable to work from home. Fast-track COVID-19 testing continues to be in place for all critical workers and staff in schools who are symptomatic.

Policy

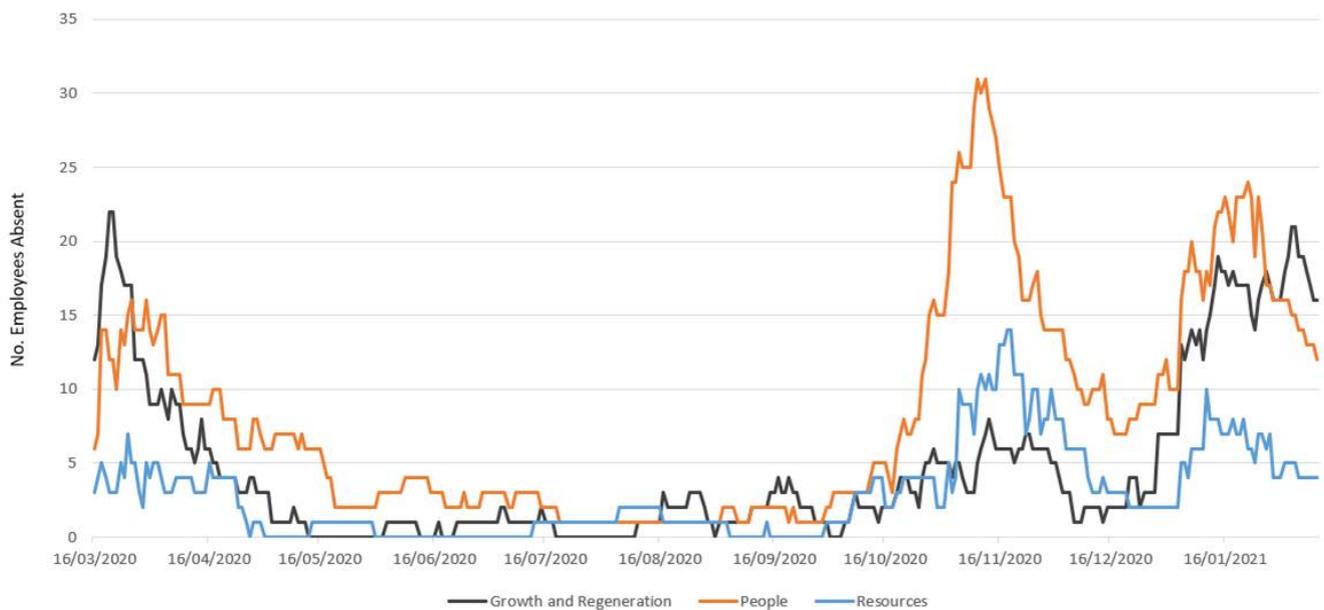
1. The Council's HR policies have been modified where appropriate to reflect the current circumstances. For example, the Emergency Care Leave entitlement has been increased until 31st March 2021 and sickness absence related to COVID-19 is discounted under the Supporting Attendance Policy.

Consultation

2. **Internal**
Not applicable as this report is for information only. Regular meetings are held with the trade unions to discuss and seek resolution of emerging issues.
3. **External**
Not applicable as this report is for information only.

Context

4. The organisation responded swiftly to COVID-19. Museums and Libraries have been closed since 5th November 2020. Frontline services have maintained the full range of services by adapting the way they are delivered. Staff have been redeployed across the Council to assist with the response.
5. Council workplaces have remained open in accordance with government guidance and are COVID Secure. All sites – including schools – have been visited by the Council's Health and Safety team and COVID Secure certification provided by the Head of Safety, Health and Wellbeing. The vast majority of staff continue to work from home.
6. Currently, 66 staff are currently redeployed to support the Council's response in services including Homelessness, Revenues and Benefits, Citizen Services and Neighbourhoods and Communities.
7. Whilst our priority is to redeploy staff including casual workers to help our response, 302 staff are currently furloughed, including 175 casual workers where work could not be offered.
8. We have provided our frontline health and social care staff with COVID vaccinations. We will provide an updated at the meeting on the number of vaccinations delivered to frontline workers across the Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group. The programme started in December 2020. We are working closely with our health partners and neighbouring councils to deliver the programme, which includes promotional work and providing information and guidance on the vaccine.
9. Lateral flow testing is now available to all staff who do not work from home. This is entirely voluntary. Tests are available seven days a week from 9am-8pm. Staff are welcome to have their test during their working time if their appointment is during their contracted working hours.
10. Daily monitoring of absence related to COVID-19 continues. The chart below shows the sickness absence rate by directorate since March 2020:



11. Employees at all levels in the organisation – including those within the HR, Internal Communications and OD teams - have responded and adapted to COVID-19 very positively through their work in supporting the Council’s response to the pandemic. Inevitably, this has led to the re-prioritisation of some work.

Proposal

12. That the Committee notes this report.

Other Options Considered

13. None as this report is for information only..

Risk Assessment

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

Public Sector Equality Duties

- 15a) 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.

15b) 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.