

# Sickness Absence – Thematic Report



## HR Committee

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021



## Contents

Current Sickness.....	3
Benchmarking with other local authorities .....	5
Sickness Trend.....	6
Sickness breakdown by Equalities Categories (including against workforce proportions) .....	8
Sickness breakdown by salary range and deprivation .....	10
COVID-19 related sickness .....	11
Sickness excluding COVID-19 related.....	13
Sickness Absence Casework.....	15
Managing Attendance.....	16

Draft

## Current Sickness

\*Data period: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020 – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021

*Average Working Days Lost = Total Working Days Lost / Headcount*

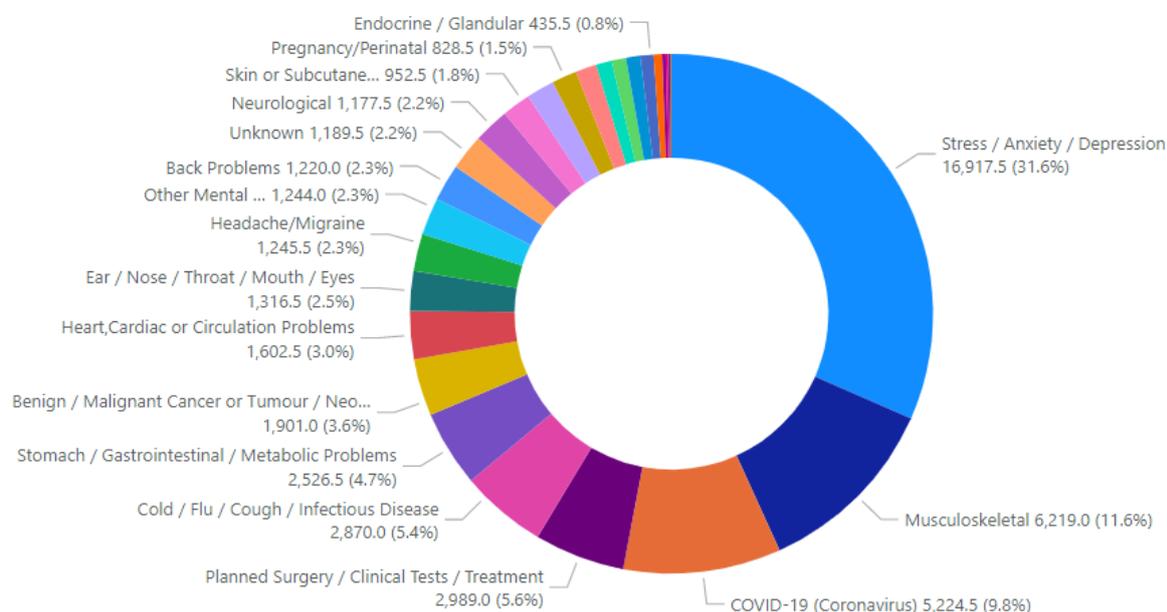
### Bristol City Council

Average working days lost during the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020 – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021 in the council was 8.1. This was 0.1 days more than the council target of 8. During this period 3022 employees had sickness absence this is 45.9% of the workforce, that means 54.1% of the workforce have not taken any sickness absence in the last 12 months.

Workers who have had long term absence (absent for 20 days or more) have a higher sickness absence rate than those who report short term absence (less than 20 days). 8.9% (585 employees) have had long term sickness absence in the last 12 months.

Stress, Anxiety and Depression, Musculoskeletal and COVID-19 accounts for 53% of the total days lost in the council. 9% of the workforce (590 employees) has had sickness absence relating to Stress, Anxiety and Depression that accounts for 31.6% of all working days lost. 5.5% of the workforce (362 employees) has had Musculoskeletal sickness absence that accounts for 11.6% of all days lost. 6.7% (440) of the workforce has had COVID-19 sickness absence that accounts for 9.8% of the total working days lost.

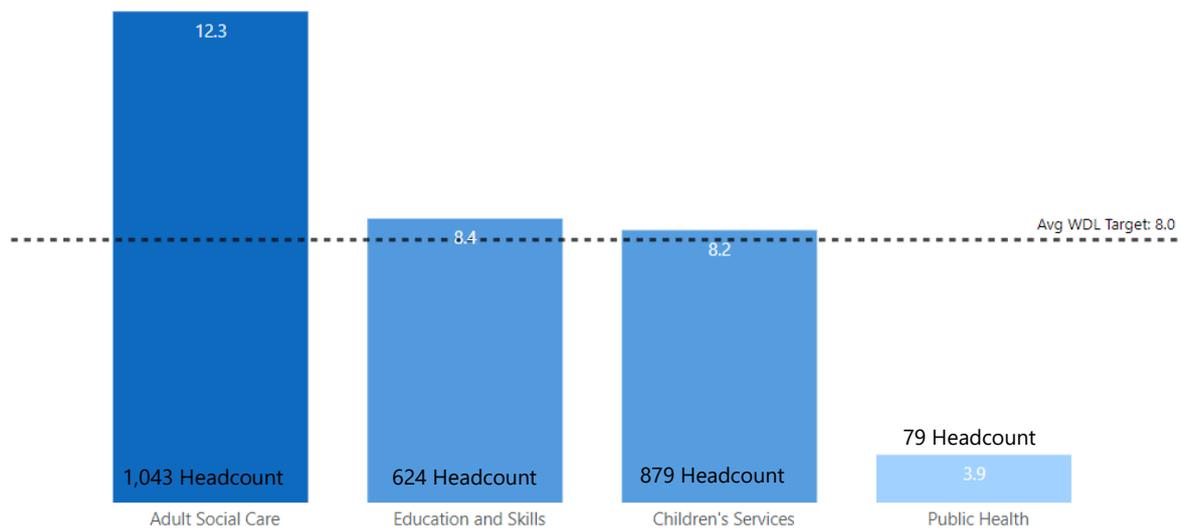
Fig1: Sickness Absence Reasons



## People

Average working days lost in People Directorate was 9.7. This was 1.7 higher than the council target. Fig2 below shows the breakdown of average working days lost by each Division in People.

Fig2: Average working days lost by Divisions in People Directorate



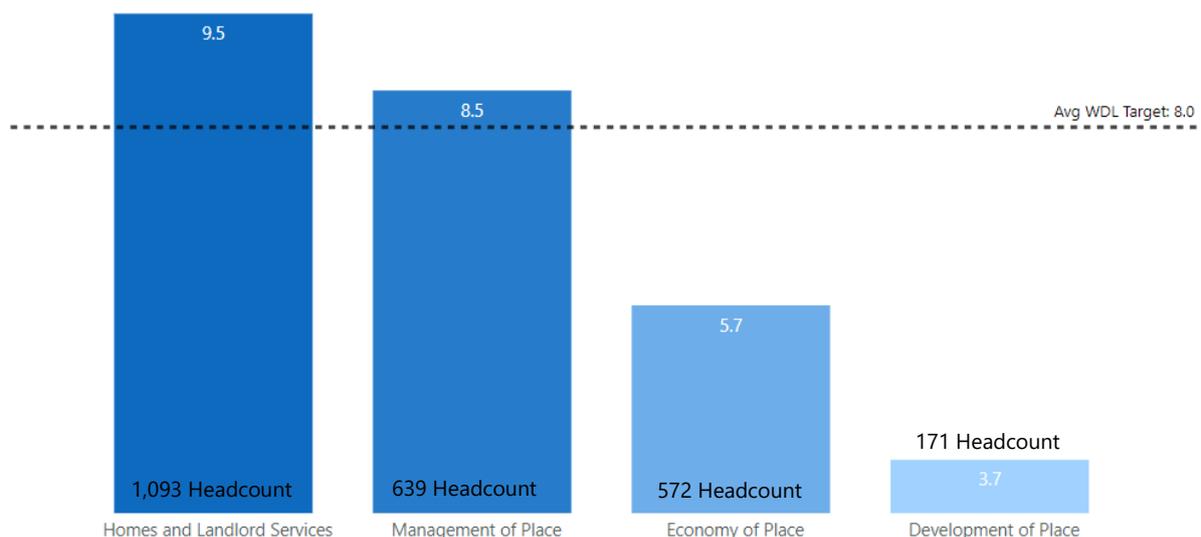
The top three absence reasons for People are:

- Stress, Anxiety and Depression – 34.1% (above the overall council percentage)
- Musculoskeletal – 11.5% (in-line with the overall council percentage)
- COVID-19 – 10.5% (above the overall council percentage)

## Growth and Regeneration

Average working days lost in the Growth and Regeneration Directorate was 7.9. This is just 0.1 less than the council target. Fig3 below shows the breakdown of average working days lost by each Division in Growth and Regeneration.

Fig3: Average working days lost by Divisions in Growth and Regeneration Directorate



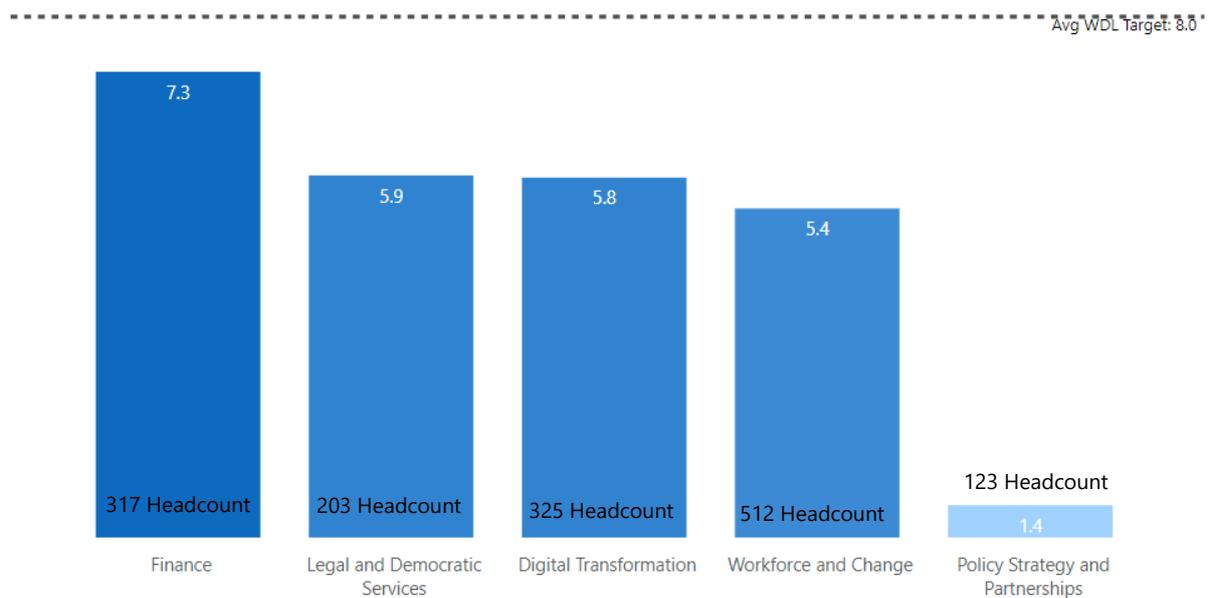
The top three absence reasons for Growth and Regeneration are:

- Stress, Anxiety and Depression – 27.8% (less than the overall council percentage)
- Musculoskeletal – 14.9% (above the overall council percentage)
- COVID-19 – 9.7% (in line with the overall council percentage)

## Resources

Average working days lost in the Resources Directorate was 5.6. This is 2.4 below the council target. Fig4 below shows the breakdown of average working days lost by each Division in Resources.

Fig4: Average working days lost by Divisions in Resources Directorate



The top three absence reasons for Resources are:

- Stress, Anxiety and Depression – 32.8% (above the overall council percentage)
- COVID-19 – 7.6% (below the overall council percentage)
- Cancer / Tumour – 6.5% (above the overall council percentage)

## Benchmarking with other local authorities

The method we use to calculate sickness absence is 'Average Working Days Lost per Employee' this in line with former audit commission definition for best value performance indicators.

*Average Working Days Lost = Total Working Days Lost / Headcount*

Different local authorities use different methodologies for calculating sickness absence. LGA in their Local Government Workforce Survey use the average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (full-time equivalent) employee. This is calculated by taking the total number of days absence over the reporting period and dividing it by the average number of FTE over the same period.

*Average Working Days Lost per FTE = Total Working Days Lost / FTE over the same period*

The table below are the latest sickness absence rates for 2020/21 for the Core Cities.

Local Authority	Average Working Days Lost per FTE
Bristol	9.60
Cardiff	8.60
Leeds	9.03
Nottingham	9.20
Newcastle	9.86
Sheffield	11.7

The Overall Average Working Days Lost per employee in the Civil Service as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 202 was 7.4, the BCC figure was 8.55. The current figure for BCC is 8.1.

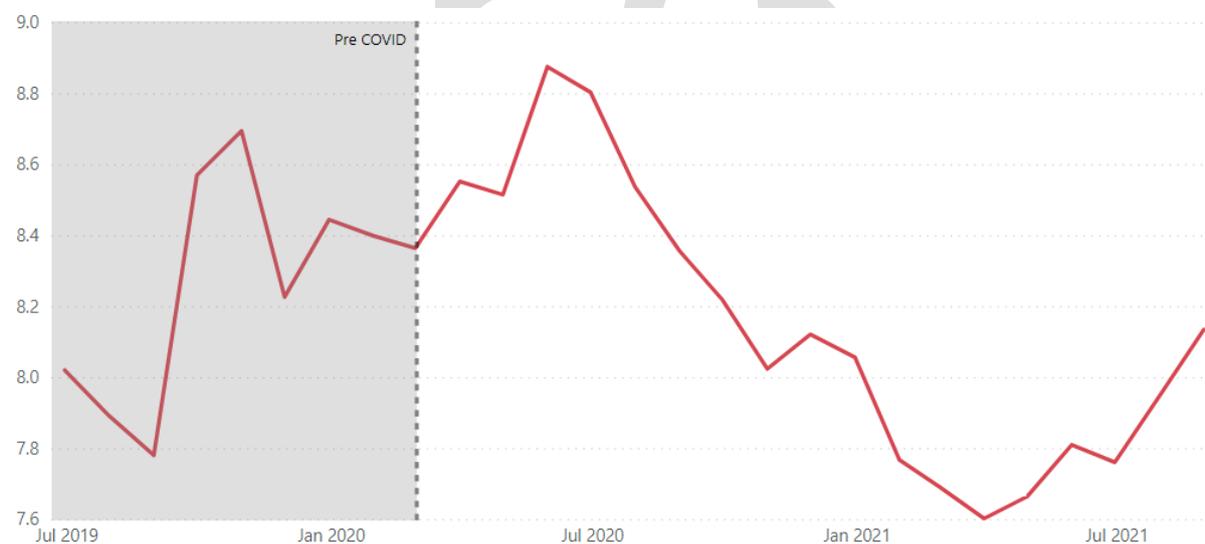
## Sickness Trend

*\*Each monthly figure is calculated from a rolling 12 month report*

### Bristol City Council

Average working days lost is currently 0.09 less than it was 12 months ago. To give this some context the headcount from 12 months ago is 0.5% less (33 employees) whereas working days lost have decreased by 1.5% (54,355 to 52,270).

Fig5: BCC average working days lost trend



### People

Average working days lost in the People Directorate have seen an increase of 0.1 from 12 months ago. Over the reporting period the headcount of People directorate has increased by 6.4% from 2467 in September 2020 to 2626 in August 2021. We have also seen an increase in the working days lost from 23,777.5 in September 2020 to 25,588.5 in August 2021.

### Growth and Regeneration

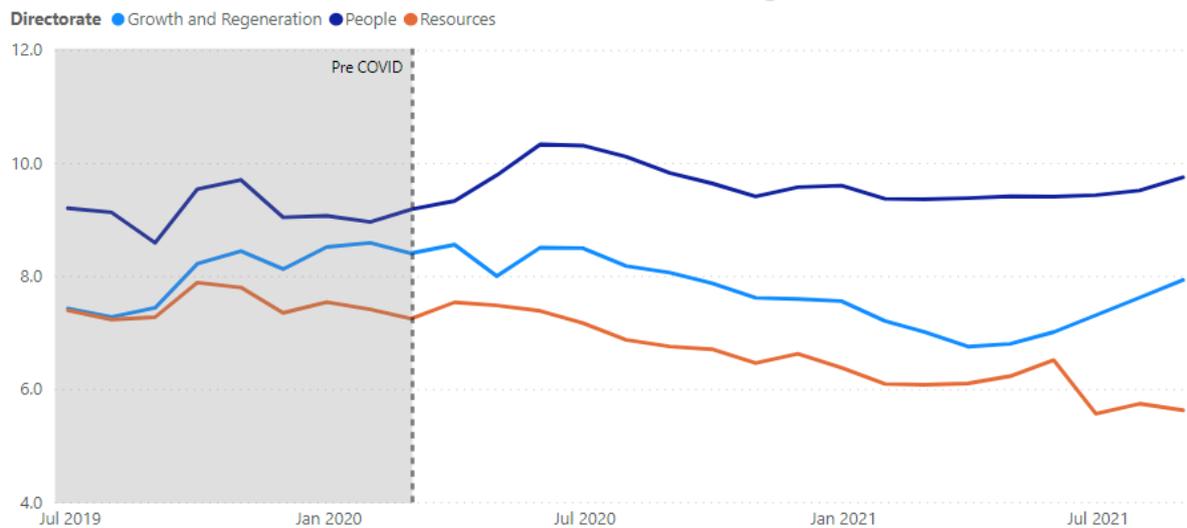
Average working days lost in the Growth and Regeneration Directorate has increased by 0.06 from

12 months ago. Over the reporting period we have seen an increase in headcount of 4.1% from 2378 in September 2020 to 2476 in August 2021. We have also seen an increase in the working days lost from 18,714 in September 2020 to 19,630.5 in August 2021.

### Resources

Average working days lost in the Resources Directorate have decreased by 1.1 from 12 months ago. Over the reporting period the headcount in Resources has reduced by 16.4%, 1770 in September 2020 and 1480 in August 2021. There has also been a decrease in the working days lost from 11,864 in September 2020 to 8,321.5 in August 2021. This is largely due to the TUPE transfer of Cleaning and Security employees to Bristol Waste in May 2021.

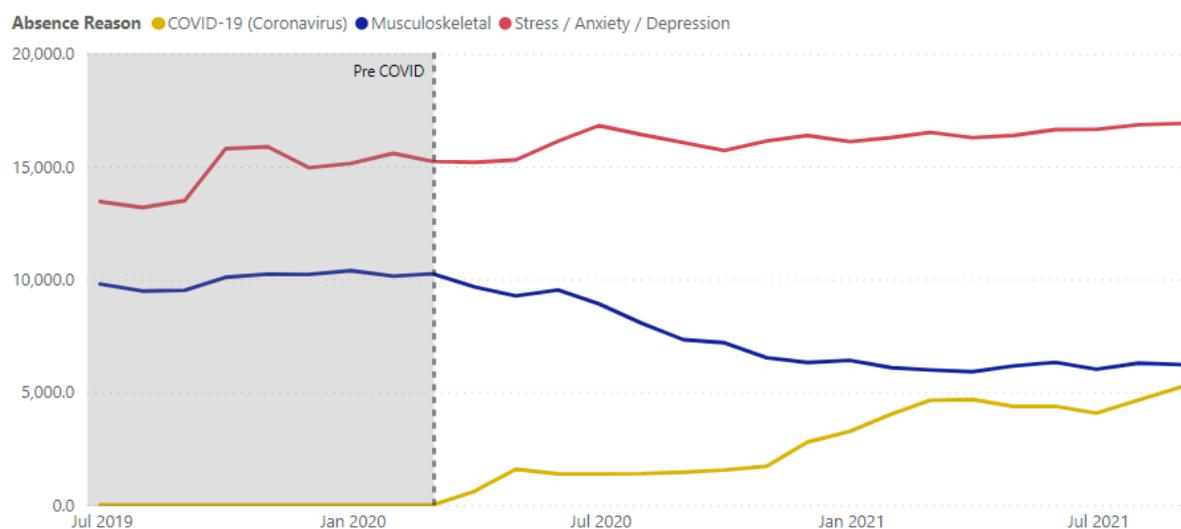
Fig6: Directorates average working days lost trend



### Absence Reasons

The trend of the top three absence reasons show that working days lost for Stress, Anxiety and Depression have increased by 7.7% from 12 months ago (15,714 to 16,917.5 days lost) and has been increasing since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. However Musculoskeletal related sickness has decreased by 13.5% from 12 months ago (7,192.5 to 6,219) and has been decreasing since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 related sickness has continued to increase over the last 12 months.

Fig7: Working days lost by absence reason trend



## Sickness breakdown by Equalities Categories (including against workforce proportions)

The below tables look at current percentages of working days lost compared to the workforce. All of the percentages in these tables exclude employees and days lost where the sensitive information value is unknown.

■ Above Workforce %

### Ethnicity

Category	BCC		People		Growth and Regeneration		Resources	
	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %
Asian or Asian British	2.7%	2.6%	2.4%	2.4%	3.5%	2.2%	1.7%	3.5%
Black or Black British	6.4%	5.2%	7.3%	6.8%	5.7%	4.0%	5.4%	4.5%
Mixed	3.4%	3.3%	3.9%	3.4%	2.2%	3.0%	4.9%	3.6%
Other Ethnic Groups	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%	0.6%	0.1%	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%
Prefer not to state	1.1%	1.5%	1.6%	1.3%	0.9%	1.6%	0.4%	1.8%
White	79.2%	80.4%	75.5%	77.2%	82.0%	84.8%	83.7%	78.9%
Unknown	7.0%	6.6%	9.0%	8.5%	5.8%	4.1%	3.9%	7.6%

At a more granular level from Ethnic Grouping, this table shows that overall Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British or Mixed Heritage employees are having a higher percentage of working days lost than the percentage of employees in the workforce. Across all three Directorates Black/Black British employees are having proportionally more working days lost than the percentage of Black/Black British employees in the workforce.

## Disability

	BCC		People		Growth and Regeneration		Resources	
Category	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %
Disabled	16.4%	9.1%	14.6%	9.1%	16.4%	8.4%	21.8%	10.6%
Not Disabled	70.3%	75.4%	68.4%	73.3%	72.5%	77.9%	70.8%	75.2%
Prefer not to state	4.6%	3.4%	4.6%	3.4%	5.0%	3.4%	3.6%	3.5%
Unknown	8.8%	12.0%	12.4%	14.2%	6.1%	10.4%	3.8%	10.7%

The table above shows that across the organisation disabled employees are having proportionately more working days off than the workforce percentage. The same is true for employees that prefer not to state if they are disabled.

## Gender

	BCC		People		Growth and Regeneration		Resources	
Category	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %
Female	66.8%	60.3%	86.2%	80.5%	44.5%	40.6%	60.2%	57.4%
Male	32.9%	39.4%	13.7%	19.2%	54.9%	58.9%	39.8%	42.4%
I use another term	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.6%	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%

The table above shows that across the organisation female employees are having a higher percentage of working days lost than the percentage of employees in the workforce.

## Age

	BCC		People		Growth and Regeneration		Resources	
Category	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %	WDL %	Workforce %
16 – 24	1.7%	3.8%	1.5%	2.7%	2.0%	4.4%	1.8%	4.8%
25 – 34	13.3%	18.7%	11.8%	18.8%	13.5%	19.2%	17.6%	17.7%
35 – 49	28.8%	34.8%	28.3%	34.8%	30.1%	34.9%	27.7%	34.6%
50 – 64	50.8%	39.4%	51.5%	39.9%	49.5%	38.4%	51.6%	40.3%
65 +	5.4%	3.2%	6.9%	3.7%	5.0%	3.0%	1.3%	2.6%

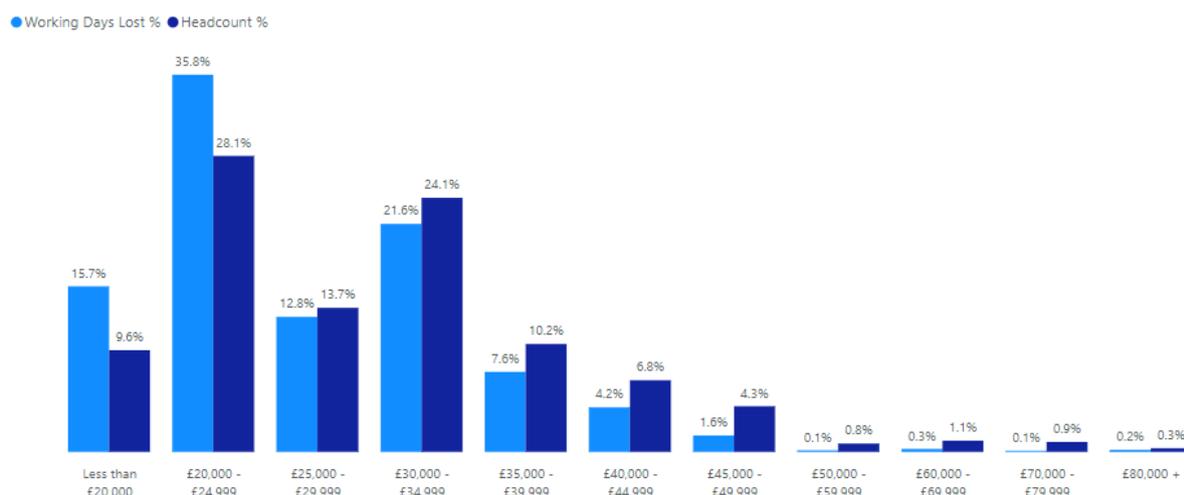
This table tells us that across the organisation our older employees are having proportionately more working days off than the workforce percentage. Sickness absence rates are higher among older workers than younger workers as they are more likely to develop health problems. The average age for the Councils is 45.

## Sickness breakdown by salary range and deprivation

### Sickness by Salary Range

There are significantly more days lost from employees with a salary of £24,999 or less. There are proportionally more working days lost (15.7%) from employees in the Less than £20,000 salary range compared to the headcount % (9.6%) in that range, for Musculoskeletal related sickness the working days lost % increases to 29.3% in the Less than £20,000 salary range. Fig7 below looks at the proportions of absence across all salary ranges.

Fig8: Working days lost percentages against workforce percentage by Salary Range



### Sickness by Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is responsible for publishing the IMD. It follows an established methodological framework in broadly defining deprivation to encompass a wide range of an individual's living conditions.

5.2% of Bristol City Council staff live in the most deprived areas of Bristol and these staff account for 7.6% of all working days lost. This percentage decreases to 7.3% for Stress, Anxiety and Depression related sickness and decreases to 5.1% for Musculoskeletal related sickness. However it increases to 17.4% for sickness related to Planned Surgery or Treatment. Of those employees who live in the most deprived communities, 80.3% of absence relates to those who earn less than £24,999 per annum.

Fig9: Working days lost percentage by Pay Grade for employees that live in Most Deprived Areas of Bristol



## COVID-19 related sickness

### Bristol City Council

Currently in our latest sickness report there have been 5,224.5 working days lost due to COVID-19 sickness in the last 12 months. After an initial peak in April 2020 (first started recording in March 2020) the absence figures due to COVID-19 have continued to rise. Currently Black and Minority Ethnic employees account for 14.8% of the working days lost for COVID-19 sickness. Disabled employees account for 17.2% of the working days lost for COVID-19 sickness. Employees aged 50 and over account for 52.2% of the working days lost for COVID-19 sickness.

Fig10: COVID-19 sickness working days lost



## People

The People Directorate currently has the most working days lost due to COVID-19 with 51.5% of all days lost (2,691 days lost).

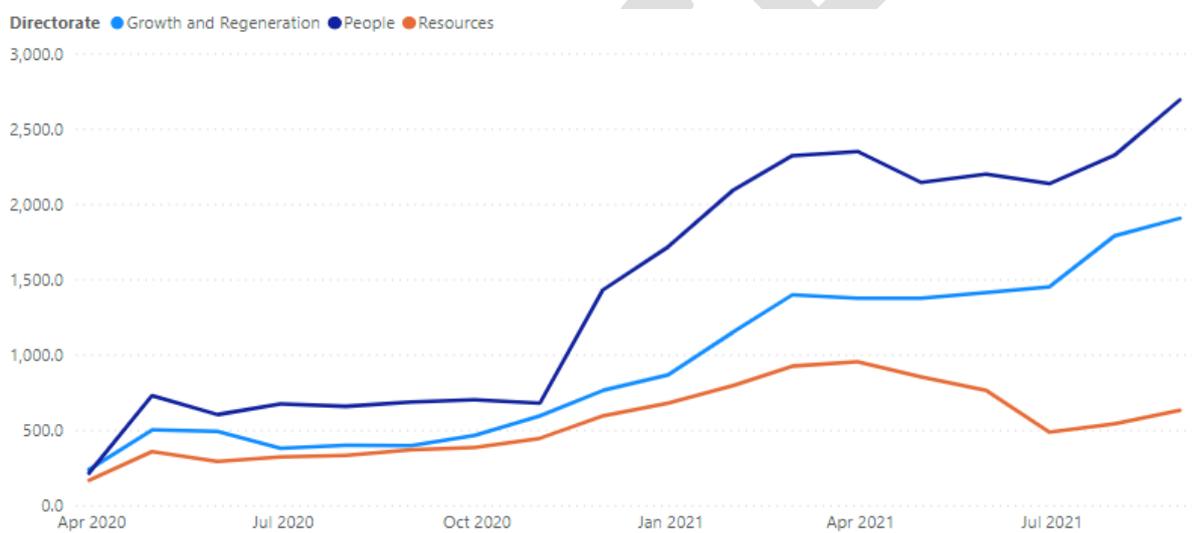
## Growth and Regeneration

Growth and Regeneration currently has the most working days lost due to COVID-19 with 36.5% of all days lost (1,904.5 days lost).

## Resources

The Resources Directorate currently has the most working days lost due to COVID-19 with 12% of all days lost (629 days lost).

Fig11: COVID-19 sickness working days lost by Directorate

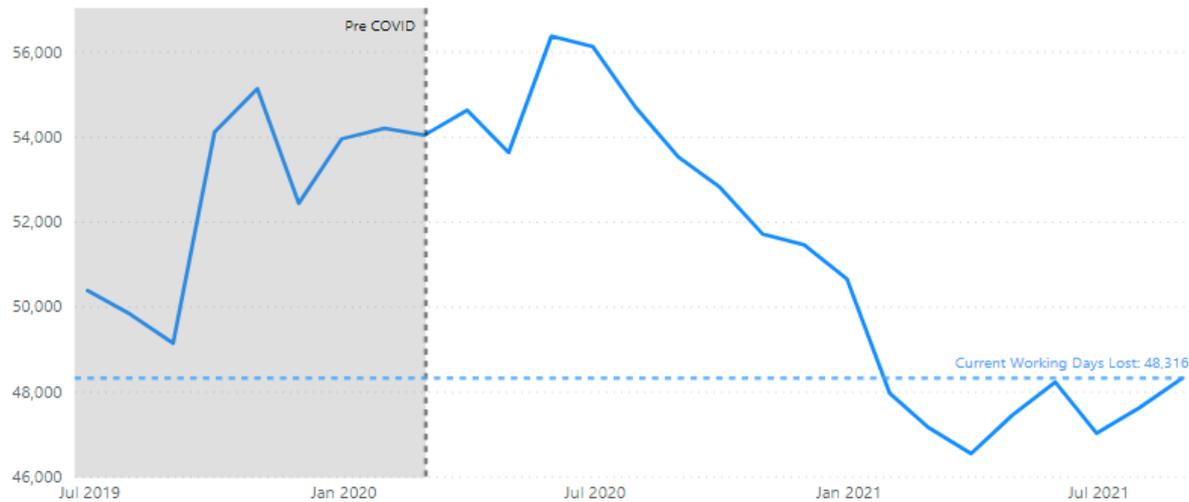


## Sickness excluding COVID-19 related

### Bristol City Council

If we exclude any COVID-19 related sickness from the working days lost calculation we find that the council's sickness level is one of the lowest it has been for more than two years. Total working days lost excluding COVID-19 are currently 48,316 with a current average working days lost of 7.3. It is common for sickness rates to drop slightly in the summer months but the decrease in days lost could also be attributed to a positive effect of more staff being able to work from home.

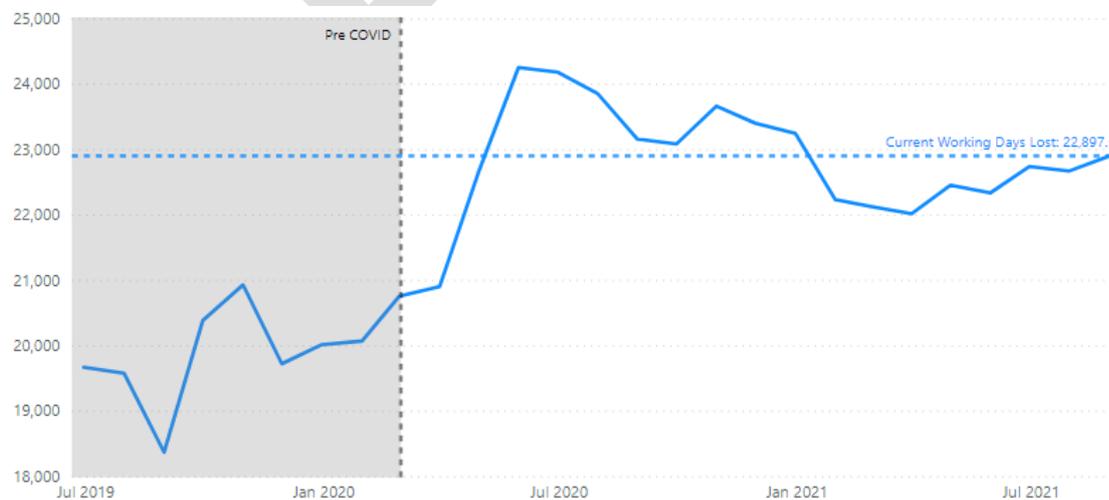
Fig12: Bristol City Council working days lost trend excluding COVID-19



### People

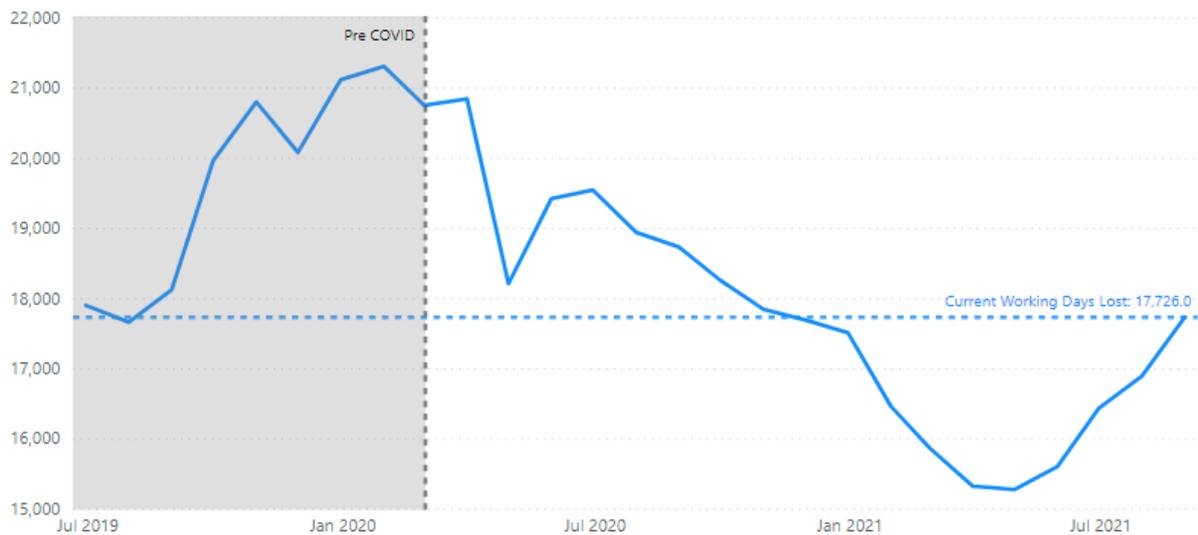
Working days lost excluding COVID-19 related sickness is currently 22,897.5 with an average days lost of 8.7. This figure is higher than any sickness rates pre-COVID although it was higher during the earlier months of the pandemic. The Education and Skills division has seen a month on month increase in working days lost. The People Directorate contains employees that work most closely with citizens affected by COVID-19 and this could be having a negative effect on their health and wellbeing.

Fig13: People working days lost trend excluding COVID-19



## Growth and Regeneration

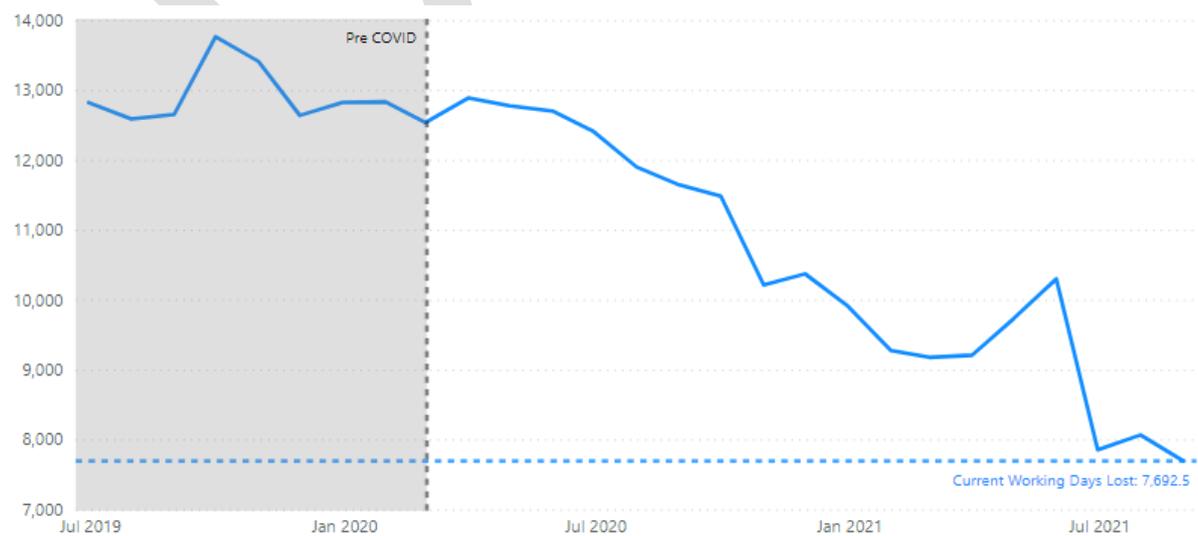
In Growth and Regeneration working days lost excluding COVID-19 related sickness is currently 17,726 with an average days lost of 7.2. This sickness rate for Growth and Regeneration is as low as it was more than two years, it was at its lowest in April 2021 however the number of working days lost have been increasing month on month since then, this increasing trend is consistent across Development of Place, Economy of Place and Homes and Landlord Services whilst Management of Place is still at it's lowest rate for over two years. *Fig14: Growth and Regeneration working days lost trend excluding COVID-19*



## Resources

Working days lost excluding COVID-19 related sickness in Resources is currently 7,692.5 with an average days lost of 5.2. This sickness rate for Resources is at its lowest for more than two years however some of this decrease in days lost is due to the TUPE transfer of Cleaning and Security Services employees to Bristol Waste.

*Fig15: Resources working days lost trend excluding COVID-19*



# Sickness Absence Casework

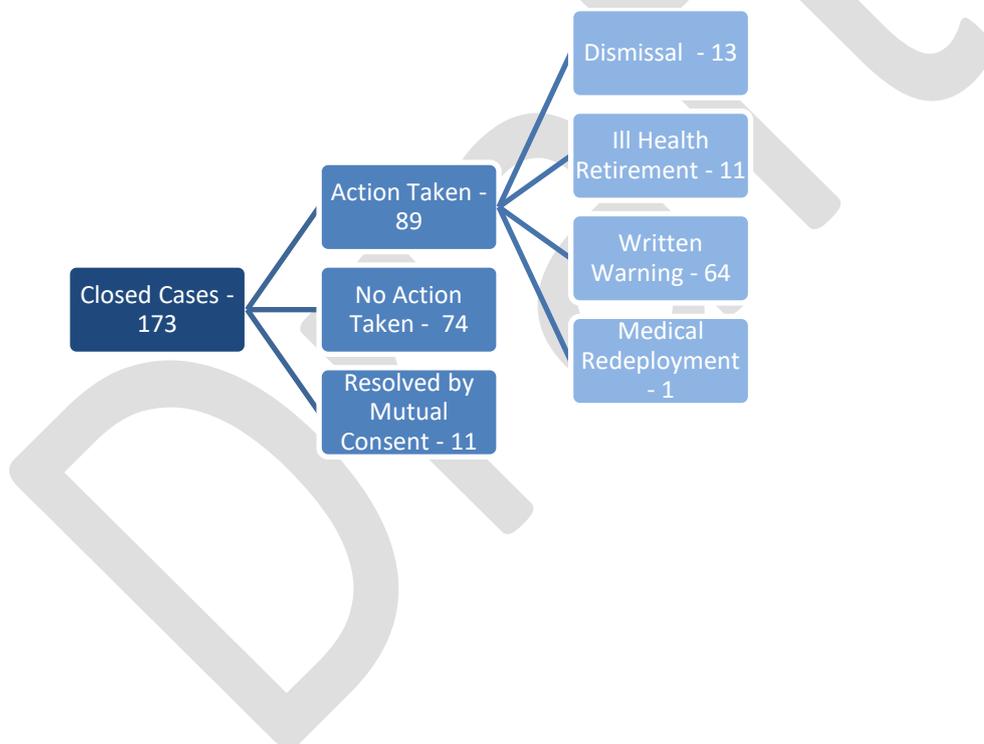
## Bristol City Council

In the last 12 months there have been 173 cases closed relating to absence. Of these 51.4% have had action taken, 42.8% have had no action taken and 5.8% have been resolved informally by mutual consent. See Fig17 for a detailed breakdown of case outcomes.

There are currently 58 open absence related cases recorded in the iTrent HR System. Of these 47 are for long term absence cases and 11 for short term.

We have a proactive approach to managing absence related casework which includes regular reporting of individual sickness to enable the HR Consultancy Team to provide targeted support to managers and employees. The aim of this is to resolve any sickness absence issues informally before a formal case needs to be raised.

Fig17: Outcome map of closed cases



## Managing Attendance

- We have seen a continued rise in absence over the last 12 months due to absence related to COVID-19. Covid related absence is not considered as part of any formal action through our sickness absence policy.
- HR are working pro-actively with managers to support them in managing all absence cases as well as where staff are self-isolating, clinically extremely vulnerable or require a Covid vaccination to work.
- We continue to take preventative measures to reduce sickness absence through our Health and Wellbeing Plan and revised Workforce Strategy. We are actively monitoring sickness absence patterns for services relating to COVID-19 to ensure we act swiftly to any areas of increased risk.
- From April 2021 we commissioned a new service provider to supply integrated occupational health, employee assistance and physiotherapy provision to support our requirements.
- We are committed to supporting our employees at work and our health and wellbeing plan sets out the actions we will be taking this year to support our employees.
  - Adapt mental health training for colleagues and utilise Mental Health First Aiders to spot the signs and offer support for those working remotely for a prolonged period of time. Introduce listening events and toolkits on how to have conversations.
  - Equip managers to support their teams whilst working remotely – with resilience and mental health support, linked to the five pillars of resilience model.
  - Raise awareness and increase take-up of mental health support mechanisms for colleagues, and adapt to meet needs arising through Covid lockdown. This includes stress risk assessments, Mental Health First Aiders, Employee Assistance Programme and signposting to support and resources such as Thrive Bristol.
- As part of a new Health and Wellbeing strategy, we maintain a rigorous and proactive approach to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce for those who return to the workplace and those who continue to home-work.