

# HR Committee

16<sup>th</sup> December 2021



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

**Title:** COVID-19 recovery and 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. Mandatory provisions regarding the wearing of face coverings on public transport and in shops were introduced on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021 in response to the Omicron variant. This report provides an update on our work since the last meeting of the Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021.

## The significant issues in the report are:

- Social distancing measures in workplaces and a requirement to wear face coverings in when moving around remain in place and will be reviewed again in March 2022. This review will take into account infection rates, the advice of the city's Director of Public Health and our obligations to our employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act.
- The risk of exposure to COVID-19 remains high in workplaces especially given the Omicron variant. We will continue to manage the risks in accordance with current best practice guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

## Policy

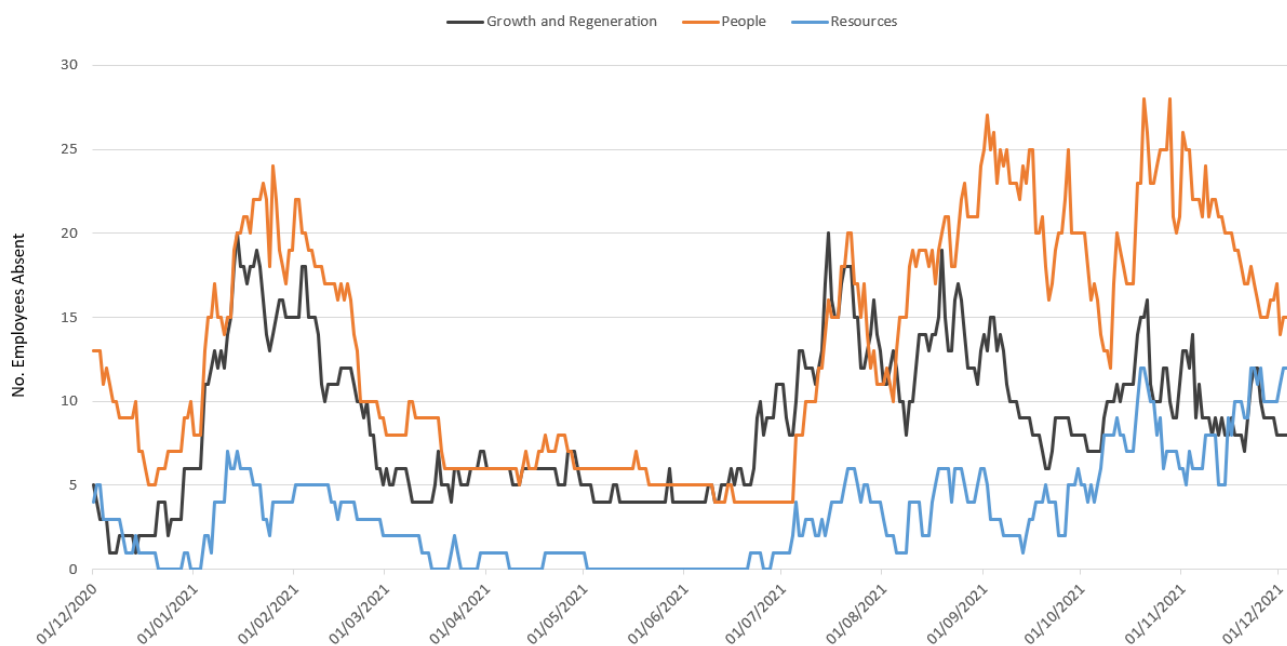
1. The Council's HR policies have been modified where appropriate to reflect the current circumstances. For example, sickness absence related to COVID-19 is discounted under the Supporting Attendance Policy.

## Consultation

2. **Internal**  
Regular meetings are held with the trade unions who support the approach that is being taken regarding the management of workplaces. Managers are kept regularly apprised of the plans and have a chance to discuss at the monthly Leadership Forum.
3. **External**  
None.

## Context

4. We are continuing to take a measured approach to opening workplaces which takes account of the current rate of COVID-19 case rate in the city; the advice of the city's Director of Public Health and our obligations to our employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act. We have increased the availability of desks in our core buildings whilst retaining social distancing measures. Heads of Service are now responsible for managing their allocated zones in accordance with our future workplace principles. There are also no restrictions on employees being permitted to work in offices but they are required to undertake an online induction course and book allocated desks before coming to work. These arrangements were reviewed by the Corporate Leadership Board in October and it was agreed that they would remain in place until the end of March 2022. However, the current arrangements for using workplaces are under continuous review give the emergence of the Omicron variant.
5. We continue to require staff to wear face coverings when moving about in workplaces. We continue to maintain social distancing measures in offices (including desk spacing), maintaining good ventilation and promoting good hygiene measures. As part of our work to reduce COVID cases we are continuing to encourage all staff to get both vaccine and booster doses and take a lateral flow test twice a week if they are attending the workplace
6. Three hybrid meeting rooms are now in place at City Hall. Meeting rooms can also be used now at all offices.
7. Daily monitoring of absence due to COVID-19 continues. Absence rates due to COVID have been risen in line with the rate of infection increasing. The chart below shows the sickness absence rate by directorate in the last 12 months:



8. 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.

### Proposal

9. That the Committee notes this report.

### Other Options Considered

10. None as this report is for information only.

### Risk Assessment

11. Not required because this report is for information only. However, the return to workplace project has a detailed project plan and risks are managed appropriately as part of the project.

### 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. However, the return to the workplace project has a comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment in place.

### **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.