

HR Committee

17th February 2022



Report of: Director: Workforce & Change

Title: COVID-19 recovery and 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. This report provides an update on our work since the last meeting of the Committee on 16th December 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).
- Now that COVID-19 is moving into an endemic phase we will be reviewing our guidance and advice in relation to sickness absence with trade unions taking into account the advice from the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE).

Policy

The Council's HR policies have been modified where appropriate to reflect the current circumstances.

Consultation

1. Internal

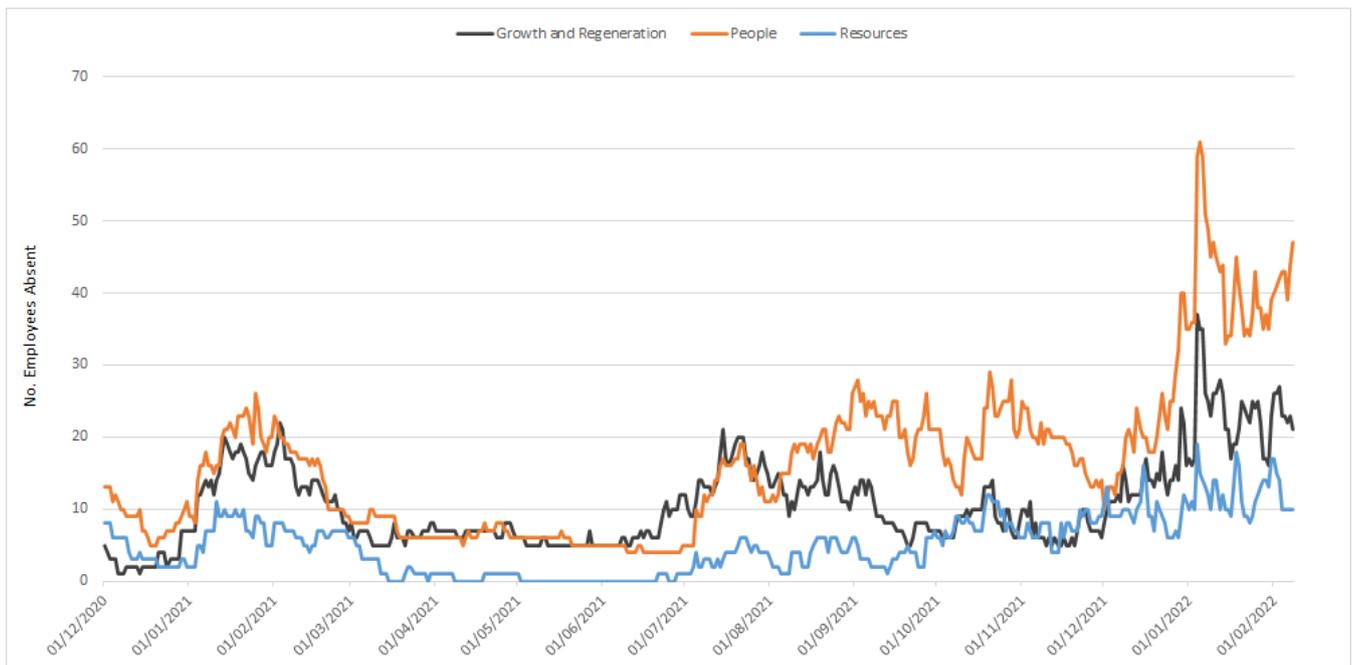
Regular meetings are held with the trade unions who support the approach that is being taken regarding the management of workplaces. Managers are kept regularly apprised of the plans and have a chance to discuss at the monthly Leadership Forum.

2. External

None.

Context

3. 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 in core buildings. These arrangements will be reviewed by the Corporate Leadership Board in March. The option to relax further social distancing measures will be considered. There are wider implications in relation to the rationalisation of the office estate which will be considered as part of any further easing of workplace restrictions.
4. 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 as part of controlling building occupancy levels), 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.
5. Three hybrid meeting rooms are now in place at City Hall and are working effectively. Meeting rooms can also be used now at all offices. The expansion of hybrid meeting facilities will be considered as part of the office rationalisation programme. The requirements of services will be taken into account.
6. Daily monitoring of absence due to COVID-19 continues. We are currently reviewing our guidance on the management of COVID Absence moving forward, taking into account NICE clinical guidelines and are consulting the trade unions on these changes. Absence rates due to COVID have fluctuated in line with rate of infections. The chart below shows the sickness absence rate by directorate in the last 12 months:



7. 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

8. That the Committee notes this report.

Other Options Considered

9. None as this report is for information only.

Risk Assessment

10. 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.