

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR – CUSTOMERS, GOVERNANCE AND EMPLOYEES**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL WORKFORCE AVAILABILITY, SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING****Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform Elected Members of the current position of workforce availability and sickness absence for quarter 3 2020/21 and to seek approval for the ongoing actions contained in the Employee Health and Wellbeing Action Plan and any new actions identified as part of the Workforce Resilience and Recovery work stream.

Information

2. Members received a report at November's Committee which demonstrated that the level of workforce availability throughout the Covid-19 pandemic had remained relatively stable and comparable with four randomly selected dates prior to the outbreak. The level of availability fluctuated between 85 and 89% of the workforce and took into account people unavailable to work due to sickness absence, annual leave or for any other approved reason. This figure has dipped during this further lockdown period partly due to employees being encouraged to take more of their annual leave allowance but also because there are increased numbers of people self isolating. However, more positively, the figures are not reflective of the traditionally higher levels of sickness absence during the winter months when Covid related sickness absence is extracted. The average figure for workforce availability has dropped below 80% since the Christmas holiday period but it fluctuates daily. Managers have been reminded to ensure information is kept up to date on the Council's BMS system to ensure the accuracy of daily reports to Corporate Leadership Team to enable areas causing concern to be identified and relevant action be taken to address any shortfall in essential resourcing requirements.
3. The current situation continues to have an impact on people's mental and physical wellbeing and monitoring of this is ongoing. The Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group, chaired by Marje Toward, Service Director - Customers, Governance and Employees, has an identified workstream on employee health and wellbeing. This is being led by a manager from Children and Families department with input from colleagues from across the Council. This model of distributive leadership provides fresh perspective and an opportunity to bring together ideas which may previously have only operated within discrete areas of the workforce. An example of this would be adapting the social work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD) which incorporates a survey element and

will take place probably in April as part of national programme. Our intention is to tailor the survey to cover the whole Council so gain maximum benefit from our involvement in the programme.

4. Further developments through this workstream include the wellbeing information available to employees being re-positioned to make it more visible from the front page of the intranet and therefore more accessible. There is revised guidance and template documents for supervision which have been adapted and consulted upon by the group which are ready for approval and communicating and these will link directly to relevant training content on My Learning, My Career. A presentation was made to Central Joint Consultative and negotiating Panel on 28 January 2021 and trade union colleagues were supportive of the measures under consideration as part of the wider offer. Although these changes described above seem relatively minor, it is intended that they will add to the incremental improvement of the overall health and wellbeing support offer to our workforce.
5. Information contained in Appendices A to D indicate the annual 12 month rolling picture regarding sickness absence. The figure for **quarter 3 2020/21** is **9.02 days** a slight increase from **8.96 days** for quarter 2. The previous report highlighted that this did not reflect the overall improved attendance during the Covid outbreak due to the number of days absence being calculated as a 12 month rolling figure. The average figure with Covid related sickness absence removed reduced from **8.3** in quarter 1 to **7.82** days in quarter 2. Quarter 3 has seen a further improvement standing at **7.40 days** which places us closer to our stretch target of 7 days per annum per employee. The figures at the end of Q4 will allow for further analysis and present a full 12 month period where Covid related absence has been a significant factor influencing employee attendance.
6. Casework arising from the application of the Council's various employment procedures continues and there have been 2 dismissals under the Attendance Management procedure and 30 ill health retirements in quarter 3. Work continues with managers to ensure the focus on improving attendance is not diminished whilst attention is concentrated on the response to the pandemic and HR surgeries continue to be offered to managers virtually.
7. As reported to January's committee, the Council has received Timewise accreditation in recognition of the work on developing flexible working practices which meet both service need and individual aspirations for a positive work/life balance. We continue to work to fully understand the link between flexible working and attendance to enable us to utilise this information to improve sickness absence overall. Although the workforce availability figure, as mentioned above, has dropped during the second wave of the pandemic to under 80 per cent across all departments, we have developed a better understanding of the nature and duration of all absences as a result of the more detailed analysis undertaken. The unavailable for work figure includes sickness absence but also approved absence for annual leave and all aspects of paid and unpaid special leave. We continue to investigate different ways of viewing sickness absence levels not only looking at the days lost but also the reasons for this, the split between long and short term absence, the percentage of employees with no recorded absence and those whose absences would be considered to be long term, that is, over 28 days.
8. Members have previously expressed a particular interest in the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce. We are in the process of reviewing the number of contacts received by the trained mental health first aiders to understand the level of need and where

this arises, notwithstanding the need to maintain confidentiality. There have been some complex issues for the mental health first aiders to deal with and there is a need to ensure they receive the appropriate level of support themselves in fulfilling this voluntary role. Promotion of the package of support available to all employees continues on a regular basis.

9. In February for example, we promoted Time to Talk Day with a programme of events as outlined in the News article below;

“Join us for Time to Talk Day this Thursday 4 February 2021

This year’s Time to Talk Day is Thursday 4 February and the theme is ‘The Power of Small - a small conversation about mental health has the power to make a big difference’.

Time to Talk Day is special because it encourages everyone to be more open about mental health – to talk, to listen and to change lives and just having a small conversation about mental health has the power to make a BIG difference. We know that the more conversations we have, the more myths we can bust and barriers we can break down, helping to end the isolation, shame and worthlessness that too many of us with mental health problems are made to feel. Time to Talk Day is the day that we get the nation talking about mental health and although this year’s event might look a little different, at times like this, open conversations about mental health are more important than ever.

It’s more difficult to have our usual face to face conversations this year but there are many other ways to get involved with Time to Talk Day remotely and we have organised some fantastic online events for everyone to get involved with!

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

9am - 5pm Mental Health First Aiders

Our Mental Health First Aiders will be available all day if you wish to drop-in for an informal chat. Just click on this Teams meeting link to drop-in any time of the day.

10.30am - 10.55am Yoga at your desk with Suzanne

Take a pause from your day and join qualified yoga teacher Suzanne for a 15 minute seated yoga session which you can do at your desk! Yoga can help to relieve the tensions and stresses of life and is a great way to look after your physical and mental wellbeing so why not take some time out of your busy day to pause and to do some breathing exercises and gentle stretches together. Please note that this session has a maximum capacity of 30 people so please book your place.

11am - 12pm Mental Health and Wellbeing At Work and Beyond (a Microsoft Teams event)

Join us for an interactive presentation on mental health and wellbeing at work, and beyond. Intended to educate about mental health and focus on how we can all maintain good mental health whilst at work, this session will be presented by one of our Mental Health First Aiders Lucy Fox.

2pm - 2.25pm Yoga Session at your desk with Suzanne

Take a pause from your day and join qualified yoga teacher Suzanne for a 15 minute seated yoga session which you can do at your desk! Yoga can help to relieve the tensions and stresses of life and is a great way to look after your physical and mental wellbeing so why not take some time out of your busy day to pause and to do some breathing exercises and gentle stretches together. Please note that this session has a maximum capacity of 30 people so please book your place.

2pm to 4pm Workplace Chaplaincy Service

The Reverend Jo Tatum is a trained, trustworthy confidant with the time and willingness to listen and Reverend Jo will be joining us if you would like to talk to someone - about anything you like! This service is for all people whatever their beliefs and circumstances so if you have any issues on your mind or you are affected by the current pandemic or are feeling socially isolated then why not drop in for a chat as your chaplain is here to offer friendship and to listen. Their support is unconditional, non-judgmental, independent and confidential.

Feeling stressed? Need some time out to unwind? Why not try your hand (or mouse!) at this online jigsaw of Green's Mill, Sneinton on a lovely sunny day (Spring is on its way – honest!).

Here are some other useful links to some articles and courses we have for you in My Learning My Career which is available to all staff and includes a Career Development Portal to help you build your personal and career development:

- *Mental Health Interactive Course is a great introduction to understanding mental health and its importance in the workplace.*
- *How exercise can impact your performance at work is a short article on the benefits of exercise and the impact this can have on your performance at work.*
- *Coping with the pressure of work is a short course which helps to break down the causes of pressure at work and gives practical advice on how to manage it.*

If you would like any more information on how Nottinghamshire County Council supports Mental Health and Wellbeing, you can find details on our Mental Health First Aiders, our employee counselling service and other links to external sources for practical advice and support on our Mental Health and Wellbeing intranet page. (Links deleted for the purpose of publishing this report)”.

10. The work mentioned at Committee in November 2020 with Loughborough University has been further developed. This is a research study to investigate what employees need to assist an early return to work. The Council has been selected to be part of this pilot and is the largest local employer to be involved. This return to work support project has been launched to managers and their teams at the end of January with further communications published early February, seeking employees who fit the criteria, participation and engagement in the pilot exercise. A copy of the information supporting this programme of work with the associated communication published in February's Team Talk can be found in Appendix F. We will continue to refresh the information about the pilot on a monthly basis and information on the findings of this six month exercise will be brought to this Committee at a later date as the detail emerges.
11. The Employee Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, previously approved by Members, forms the basis of the work stream in the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group with a view

to further refreshing the offer. Discussions are continuing with the recognised Trades Unions and the various self-managed groups to ensure our support package meets the needs of all, any gaps in provision can be identified and the action plan retains its currency. An update on the action plan will be brought to the next Personnel Committee along with quarter 4 sickness absence performance information.

Other Options Considered

12. The Council continues to recognise that its workforce is its most valuable asset and needs to be prepared and protected during the current emergency and beyond through the range of activities identified here. We continue to build on the existing guidance, toolkits and risk assessments available to assist managers to support their team members. The Council's employee wellbeing offer is kept under constant review and has been extended throughout the pandemic as new needs are identified and fresh resources become available.

Reasons for Recommendations

13. The Council seeks to maximise the attendance and contribution of each employee to ensure it has the capacity to continue providing essential services to its most vulnerable citizens as the pandemic extends into 2021. The provision of an extensive support package for employees is one way to ensure the workforce remains engaged and continues to work effectively to meet the aims and objectives outlined in the Council Plan and various departmental strategies. It is also recognised as a positive recruitment and retention tool.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

15. There are no data protection or GDPR issues arising from this report as all the information contained is generic and cannot be attributed to individual employees.

Financial Implications

16. There are no direct financial implications arising from the content of this report. However, there is clearly a cost to the measures put in place to support and protect the workforce during the current situation. Developing a comprehensive package of support has contributed to making employees feel valued and ultimately will have a positive impact on turnover and recruitment.

Human Resources Implications

17. The Council recognises that its most valuable asset is its employees and it would have been unable to deliver and continue to provide services to its most vulnerable citizens without their invaluable and continuing contribution. The range of activities outlined in this report in terms of support and protection has enabled every individual to make their own contribution and ensured their positive engagement throughout. The work commissioned through the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group is identifying what the future of work will look like and what tools are required to successfully deliver this. The health and wellbeing of our employees is essential to assist the workforce move forward in a flexible and supported way, to take on new responsibilities, be enabled to utilise technology and to maximise the organisational and individual benefits of agile working.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

18. Work has been undertaken to understand the potential additional risk factors presented by Covid-19 to specific groups of employees including Black and Minority Ethnic employees and those with relevant disabilities and long-term health conditions. Targeted actions have been identified to address these specific issues most recently the promotion of Vaccination Conversation Events arranged by health partners to dispel concerns regarding the vaccines to people from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities. We continue to engage with the recognised Trade Unions and Council's self-managed groups and support networks to ensure we take full account of the concerns and needs of the entire workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 1) Agree to the continuing work to deliver the identified actions in the Employee Health and Wellbeing Action Plan and to the inclusion of any additions arising from the relevant workstream of the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group.
- 2) Agree to receive a further report in April 2021 which provides information on 2020/21 quarter 4 absence figures and workforce availability.
- 3) Agree to receive information regarding the Return to Work research project as this work develops at June's Committee.

Marjorie Toward
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Chief Executives Department

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (KK 16/02/21)

19. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Personnel Committee.

Financial Comments (SES 23/02/21)

20. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

HR Comments (JP 24/02/21)

21. The human resources implications are set out in the body of the report. Significant activity has been undertaken to develop support and initiatives to maximise employee attendance.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All