

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

1. To provide Elected Members with updated information on workforce availability and sickness absence for quarter 4 2020/21. In addition, the report seeks approval to continue to identify new actions to add to the Employee Health and Well-being Action Plan to support the Council's workforce as we develop a new hybrid working model to define the future of how, where and when work is delivered.

Information

2. Members received a report to Personnel Committee on 10 March, which demonstrated that the level of workforce availability had increased since the dip at the beginning of 2021. Previous reports have indicated that availability had remained relatively stable throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The level of availability has fluctuated between 85 and 89% of the workforce and takes into account people unavailable to work due to sickness absence, annual leave or for any other approved reason. This figure has risen to between 89 and 93% during May 2021 with some slight fluctuations around the Easter holidays in April and over the two May Bank Holidays as employees continue to be encouraged to take their annual leave to provide rest and recuperation from the intensity of the current ways of working. The Corporate Leadership Team continue to receive daily information regarding the levels of workforce availability to ensure accurate resource planning is in place to continue to meet the demands of the pandemic alongside increased delivery of "business as usual".
3. The current situation continues to have an impact on people's mental and physical well-being 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 well-being. A further Workforce Well-being Check In survey of all Council employees was undertaken at the end of April 2021 and there is a report to this Committee on today's agenda providing information on the results of the survey, the number of returns and what further steps will be taken in response to the responses provided. Whilst still broadly positive with a similar level of response to the previous survey conducted in May 2020, there are reported levels of increased anxiety about the future return to offices as well as specific individual concerns which are being addressed.

4. Information contained in Appendices A to D indicates the annual 12 month rolling picture regarding sickness absence. The figure for **quarter 4** 2020/21 is 8.68 days, down from the previous quarters of **9.02 days** in **quarter 3** and **8.96 days** for **quarter 2**. The average figure with Covid related sickness absence removed reduced from **8.3** days in quarter 1 to **7.82** days in quarter 2. Quarter 3 saw a further improvement standing at **7.40 days** and **quarter 4** has reduced again to **7.07 days** which places us just 0.07 over our stretch target of 7 days per annum per employee as agreed by this Committee. This provides a full 12 months' information where quarter on quarter the level of sickness absence has reduced where Covid-related absence, including reaction to vaccinations but not long covid, has been removed.
5. The rolling 12 months of data provides useful insight into absence trends. We have considered the 12-month period prior to the pandemic and will continue to monitor absence levels to see if the current level of improvement can be sustained for the next twelve-month period.
6. Appendix B shows the breakdown of reasons for absence with Stress/Depression being the highest in all departments except Place. We have undertaken previous work to reduce the use of "other" as an absence category and this work will continue to ensure we have the most accurate information regarding the reasons for employee sickness absence. Further work will be undertaken to understand why "Not assigned" is continuing to be used as this is not an absence category and is used when nothing is input into the selected field on BMS.
7. The identified actions below are put in place to provide managers with a range of tools to enable them to support their teams and individual employees. These include:
 - Training Mental Health First Aiders, workplace buddies and promoting these services along with the Workplace Chaplaincy
 - Involvement in national initiatives such as Time to Talk
 - Increased content on the intranet pages signposting where support can be accessed
 - Creating development packages for managers to enable them to more effectively support their team members experiencing poor mental health
 - Involvement in 2 Midland Engine funded pilots with Loughborough and Derby universities. The first is a 6 month pilot of how people can be supported to return to work after a period of longer term absence. The second is a three-year study specifically relating to sharing resources around supporting people experiencing issues with their mental health.
 - Currently exploring committing to the green ribbon campaign This is Me, looking at the standards of the Thrive at Work scheme and adopting the principles of Every Mind Matters
 - Daily content published on the Council's intranet during Mental Health Awareness Week which ran from 10th to 16th May 2021 including the launch of the Workforce Well-being Newsletter which delivers well-being advice and support direct to employees' inboxes
 - Targeted content for Learning at Work week from 16th to 23rd May offering learning opportunities to encourage self help and awareness of well-being issues

- The offer of access to the NHS resource for a free Talking Therapy open day taking place on 26th May to professionals working across Nottinghamshire which provides support to employee well-being or to access employment support for people struggling with their mental health and who are anxious about returning to their workplace.
- Commissioning of trauma counselling for targeted groups of employees.

Further measurement and analysis of the various identified actions is required to understand what makes a difference to our employees and to determine the numbers of people accessing the various support measures. This will further inform future actions required.

Other Options Considered

8. The Council recognises 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 well-being offer is kept under constant review and has been extended throughout the pandemic as new needs are identified and fresh resources become available. The actions are supported by the provision of accurate real time employee data and information to ensure that the actions we put in place are targeted and relevant to the Council's workforce.

Reasons for Recommendations

9. The Council seeks to support and enable its workforce through a comprehensive support package 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 further 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 current and emerging Council Plans and various departmental strategies. It is also recognised as a positive recruitment and retention tool.

Statutory and Policy Implications

10. 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

11. 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

12. There are no direct financial implications arising from the content of this report as any costs arising from engagement in regional and national programmes of work will be met from existing service budgets. 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

13. 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 ongoing 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 continuing 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 well-being 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

14. 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 and we continue to encourage employees to take up the offer of vaccination when offered to do so. 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 outlined in this report and include them in the Employee Health and Well-being Action Plan and along with any further additions arising from the employee survey and the relevant workstream of the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group.
- 2) Agree to receive a further report in September 2021 which provides information on quarter 1 2021/22 absence figures and workforce availability.
- 3) Agree to receive information regarding the newly added items to the action plan including the Midlands Engine sponsored pilot ProWork research project at September's Committee.

Marjorie Toward
Service Director – Customers, Governance and Employees

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (KK 16/06/21)

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

Financial Comments (SES 16/06/21)

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

HR Comments (JP 17/06/21)

17. 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