

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

1. To inform Elected Members of the current position of workforce availability and sickness absence for quarter 2 2020/21 and to seek approval for the ongoing actions contained in the Employee Health and Well-being Action Plan and any new actions identified as part of the Workforce Resilience and Recovery work stream.

Information

2. Members received a report at July's Committee which demonstrated that the level of workforce availability throughout the Covid-19 pandemic had remained 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 dipped slightly in August due to employees being encouraged to take some of their annual leave allowance. Attached in appendix F is the figure for week commencing 19 October 2020 with the average total standing at **86.45%**. This reflects the impact of more employees taking annual leave which results from working parents wanting time off during October half term. Since the announcement of Nottinghamshire moving to Tier 3 and then a second national lockdown, we have moved from weekly to daily reporting of the figures to the Corporate Leadership Team.
3. The impact of the current situation on people's health, particularly their mental well-being continues to be monitored. 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. This is being led by a manager from one of the large service departments with input from colleagues from different service areas. This will provide a fresh perspective and an opportunity to bring together ideas which may previously have only operated within discrete areas of the workforce potentially extending the support available to the whole directly employed workforce.
4. Information contained in Appendices A and D indicates the annual 12 month rolling picture regarding sickness absence. The figure for quarter 2 2020/21 is **8.96 days reduced** from 9.55 days the previous quarter. The previous report highlighted that this did not reflect the overall improved attendance during the Covid-19 outbreak due to the

number of days absence being calculated as a 12-month rolling figure. The average figure with Covid-19 related sickness absence removed reduced from 8.3 in quarter 1 to **7.82** days in quarter 2.

5. Casework arising from the application of the council's various employment procedures has resumed and there have been 3 dismissals under the Attendance Management procedure and 23 ill health retirements in Quarter 2. 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.
6. 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. The availability to work figure as mentioned above, has stayed relatively constant around the high eighties percent. The unavailable for work figure includes sickness absence but also approved absence for annual leave and all aspects of paid and unpaid special leave. As previously stated, we have tried to adopt a different way of viewing sickness absence levels not only looking at sickness absence in terms of those not in work either long term or regularly absent short term. The understanding of workforce availability will provide new insight into the reasons for absence.
7. The residual joint work with Public Health colleagues is continuing and is intended to enhance our existing package of support for employees. This includes the work on domestic abuse, the winter flu vaccination programme and various health promotion initiatives. The following update on flu vaccinations was posted on the Council's intranet on 16 October:

"Staff flu vaccine update

Thank you to everyone who has requested a flu voucher or booked onto one of the flu clinics. We have already vaccinated 430 staff and have over 400 more appointments scheduled at clinics around the county.

We have had an incredible demand for staff vaccines this year and have issued 500 Boots vouchers and been working hard to secure an additional 500 vouchers through Healthy Performance to cope with extra requests. Everyone on our waiting list should receive a voucher in the next few weeks. Please ensure that you redeem your vouchers as these have been paid for by the Council but bear in mind that local pharmacies are experiencing high demand this year so you may need to be patient. It's still early in the year for flu – we usually encourage people to get their vaccination before December when flu infections usually start to increase".

8. Members have previously expressed a particular interest in the mental health and well-being of the workforce. We have trained a further seven mental health first aiders drawn from nominees made by the three self managed groups. We also promoted World Mental Health Day on Saturday 10 October, again posting information on the Council's intranet:

"Mental health problems can affect anyone, at any time and tomorrow is a great day to show your support for better mental health and looking after your own well-being.

World Mental Health Day 2020 is significant in the current climate. The months of lockdown and loss have had a huge impact on us all and prioritising mental health has never been more important than it is now.

The [Mind website](#) has lots of useful information and resources, including a [calendar](#) which has lots of different things you can do each day for better mental health.

You can also take a look at [Time to Change's video #AskTwice](#).

Our changed way of working has, for many, meant that there is a lack of face-to-face interaction with colleagues, there are still ways we can connect, such as scheduling catch-up calls with colleagues, switching our cameras on during phone-calls or meetings and arranging more social chats over a virtual lunchbreak.

Time to Change also have an information booklet around '[Wellness Action Plans](#)' or WAPs which allow you to reflect and identify what keeps us well and what can impact our well-being during this time.

Mental Health First Aiders

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has affected all of us in so many ways, including having to find new ways of working, it's very much 'business as usual' for our mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs) who are always available to offer a first port of call and signposting service to employees who would like to talk to someone about their mental health.

Since the start of this pandemic our MHFAs have been busy, not just lending a listening ear to those who need it, but they have also been undertaking additional training so that they are fully prepared to help anyone with mental health issues which may have arisen during this crisis.

In addition to this, the MHFAs support network will be increasing its numbers over the next few weeks and months to ensure that support is always there for you if you are having mental health difficulties or would just like someone to talk to. They are also recruiting members from our three staff networks; Black Workers Network, Disabled Employees Support Network and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Staff Network.

If you would like to speak to a Mental Health First Aider they can be contacted by telephone, email or by Instant Message on MS Teams or Skype. Their details are available on the [Mental Health First Aid intranet page](#).

And don't forget the courses available on [My Learning My Career](#)"

9. The employee health and well-being action plan, previously approved by Members, will form the basis of the work stream in the Workforce Resilience and Recovery Group with a view to further refreshing the offer. The workstream will be undertaken by people drawn from across the Council to provide new perspective on the current arrangements. 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 addressed to ensure the action plan retains its currency and relevance.
10. We used the platform of Learning at Work Week from 5 - 11 October to showcase a range of learning opportunities using a different topic each day. On Friday 9 October

Health and Well-being was the targeted focus of the learning content showcased.

Other Options Considered

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

Reasons for Recommendations

12. The Council needs 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 through autumn and into the winter months.

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. 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

14. 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

15. 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

16. The Council's 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 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 will identify 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

17. 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. 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 Well-being 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 March 2021 which provides information on 2020/21 quarter 3 absence figures and workforce availability.

Marjorie Toward
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Chief Executives Department

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (KK 26/10/20)

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

Financial Comments (RWK 26/10/20)

19. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from the report.

HR Comments (JP 02/11/20)

20. Activity outlined in the report supports the provision of essential services and maximises staff 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