

**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 provide Elected Members with an update on the current position of workforce availability and sickness absence for Quarter 1 2021/22 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 June's Committee which demonstrated that the level of workforce availability throughout the Covid-19 pandemic had remained relatively stable. 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 recently due to more colleagues using carried over annual leave but also because there are increased numbers of people self isolating. Since the easing of lockdown restrictions, we have moved from daily to weekly reporting to Corporate Leadership Team. This is still sufficiently frequent 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. A regular Newsletter has received positive feedback; it provides tips and information on how employees can manage their health and wellbeing whilst at work, be that at home, in an office or in our communities.
4. Further developments include renewing our lapsed membership of the Business Disability Forum which provides a range of advice and information on how managers can support people with long term health conditions whether they fall under the legal definition of the Equality Act 2010 or not. We are also working towards accreditation for Thrive at Work which requires the Council to evidence how it supports people maintain good mental health.

5. Information contained in Appendices A to D indicates the annual 12 month rolling picture regarding sickness absence. The figure for **Quarter 1 2021/22** is **8.49 days** a slight **decrease** from **8.68 days** for Quarter 4 2020/21. The average figure with Covid related sickness absence removed increased in Quarter 1 to **7.34 days** from **7.07 days** in Quarter 4. The figures will continue to be monitored to allow for further analysis to ascertain whether the current overall improvement can be sustained and how far hybrid working has been a factor in supporting the reduced levels of sickness absence.
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 26 ill health retirements in Quarter 1. 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 absences requiring attention continue to be highlighted to managers and HR surgeries continue to be offered virtually.
7. Members have previously expressed a particular interest in the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce. We are reviewing the number and type of contacts received by the trained mental health first aiders to understand the level of need and whether further training is required. 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 and maintain appropriate boundaries in fulfilling this voluntary role. Part of the review is considering how information is gathered to provide an evidence trail to protect both the employee and the trained mental health first aider. We are adding to the existing package of support through our developing engagement with a local National Lottery funded charity Bipolar Lift.
8. The Health and Safety update report mentions the new ISO 45003 standard and joint work will be undertaken to identify the benefits of using this first global standard which provides practical guidance on managing psychological health in the workplace. It provides guidance on the management of psychosocial risk, as part of an occupational health and safety management system and includes information on how to recognise the psychosocial hazards that can affect workers, such as those that arise from home working. It offers examples of effective, simple actions that can be taken to manage these and improve employee wellbeing.
9. 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 stringent criteria to participate and engage in the pilot exercise. We have extended our involvement as there remain relatively low numbers of employees who met the criteria who are prepared to participate. Once the findings have been evaluated, they will be reported back to this Committee as part of this updated report.
10. Appendix E provides additional information on the nature of absences across our workforce. It is important to note that in Quarter 1 over 56% of employees had no sickness absence and of the remainder, 12.4% of recorded absence had extended beyond 28 days, classified as long term absence. Whilst we do not ignore long term absence and the figures in paragraph 6 indicate continued management of longer term cases, managers need to focus on the 30% of absence ranging from 1 to 28 days to wherever possible preventing it from becoming long term.

We are aware of issues where employees are awaiting surgery or treatment for chronic conditions but are experiencing delay in their treatment due to the pressure on the NHS in responding to the continuing impact of Covid.

11. The employee health and wellbeing action plan (Appendix F), 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 are identified and the action plan retains its currency.

### **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**

17. Work has been undertaken to understand the potential additional risk factors presented by Covid-19 to specific groups of employees. 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 November 2021 which provides information on Quarter 2 2021/22 absence figures and workforce availability.

**Marjorie Toward**  
**Service Director – Customers, Governance and Employees**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

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**Constitutional Comments (KK 24/08/21)**

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

**Financial Comments (SES 24.08.21)**

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

**HR Comments (JP 31/08/21)**

20. 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