



People, Performance and Development Committee
22 September 2020

Covid-19 - Staff Wellbeing

Purpose of the report:

To provide the Committee with an update on wellbeing provision for staff as we move through the next stages of the Covid-19 pandemic.

To respond to the Committee's request at its previous meeting for information on how the council has responded to staff displaying ill health during the pandemic as well as to outline the support in place in response to potential delayed effects.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of this report.

2. Background

- 2.1 Due to the many differing circumstances of staff (e.g. working in the community, home schooling, caring for elderly relatives, living alone, shielding), as well as the many different types of roles and ways of working (e.g. front line, office based), wellbeing provision has throughout been designed to ensure all staff are catered for. Tracking the effectiveness and identifying any additional levels of support required has been done through insight from service managers, HROD Business Partners, Trades Unions and employee networks, as well as direct feedback from staff themselves.
- 2.3 The council's HROD team leading the wellbeing provision has worked with colleagues across Health and other organisations to ensure that an evidence-based approach is taken and that we are accessing the necessary specialist professional advice and guidance.

- 2.4 Many staff have continued to work in front line roles and workplaces where they have face to face contact with residents; conversely, many have been working from home. Government guidelines have been adhered to for safe working in all cases.
- 2.5 Cumulative data collected since March 2020 related to staff affected by Covid-19 is shown below.

	Self Isolating	Shielding	Grand Total
Covid-19 Positive	49		49
Self Isolate Able to Work	958	180	1134
Self Isolate Unable Work	962	126	1087
Grand Total	1819	305	2109

Data as at 26.08.2020

This includes all staff who have reported as self-isolating and able/unable to work during the period since lockdown began, so will include people who may have been self-isolating for only 7 or 14 days, depending on their circumstance. Staff who have recorded 80+ days absence have been interpreted as those who have been shielding.

There has been one Covid-19 related death in service to date.

3. Response Phase

A summary of the actions undertaken during the response phase is provided below.

3.1 Wellbeing Hub on 'Jive'

This includes information for both managers and employees, covering a range of subjects from managing bereavement to managing wellbeing whilst home working and links to internal policies and procedures as well as Government/PHE information.

3.2 Bereavement Support

Family Liaison for death in service: This service provides support for the families, friends and work colleagues of those who have died in service. Employee volunteers are fully trained as a Family Liaison Support Officer to provide guidance and manage practical tasks between employees and the organisation. The service has been well received and volunteers have supported a number of family, friends and colleagues who have not only lost a loved due to Covid-19 but also from other circumstances.

Bereavement Guides: Three key guides have been published: Grief in Isolation, Traumatic Bereavement and Coping with Talk of Death and Dying. More specifically, a guide 'Thinking of You' has been developed for coping with the death of a colleague.

3.3 Risk Assessments

There are a number of assessments which have developed to protect and support staff, both during the lockdown and for returning to workspaces.

Service Risk Assessments: have been produced for all services and reviewed in preparation for office based staff returning to the workplace on a limited basis from 14 September; Risk Assessments are designed to take into account the specific needs of different services, teams and the buildings in which they work.

Return to Work Risk Assessments: have been developed to support individuals returning to the workplace, (e.g. for staff unsafe at home or for physical or mental health reasons during the lockdown phase of the pandemic, as well as for staff returning to offices).

Stress Risk Assessments: are used to proactively understand the level of stress risk faced by individuals and teams. It enables immediate and collaborative remedial action and where necessary gain support from the relevant teams, e.g. Wellbeing, Health & Safety, HR Advisory.

For individuals working from home: a self-assessment has been developed that assesses both safety, risk and wellbeing, the results of which are discussed with line managers.

For staff in vulnerable categories (including BAME staff): a risk assessment specifically designed for staff in vulnerable categories has been designed in conjunction with Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS (SABP). This has been well received and is being widely used for continued monitoring of our vulnerable colleagues.

3.4 Support for Psychological Wellbeing

Working closely with our Occupational Health Provider and Employee Assistance Programme, a Covid-19 support line for both managers and staff has been available to provide immediate support and guidance.

Psychological support services are available, from the basic level of therapy (counselling) through to PTSD/Trauma management. We have worked in close collaboration with professionals from SABP and seek ongoing advice in relation to the psychological wellbeing provision, putting in place additional resources and support where necessary to manage varied needs.

3.5 Staff Support Networks

Carers/Parents Network: to support staff who have caring responsibilities for elderly and/or disabled relatives and/or children, in particular those who have needed to continue working from home.

Disability Network: for those with visible, invisible and neuro diverse disabilities in the workplace, many of whom have IT accessibility as well as special equipment needs, all of which would normally be available in the workplace. The group has been supportive in finding solutions and resources to help individuals with disabilities to work from home.

MEGA Network: it is recognised that Covid-19 has particularly affected BAME groups. The MEGA network group has been open in promoting support services, as well as raising concerns, to gain the right levels of support for BAME staff.

Deaf/BSL Network: this group has been instrumental in working with IT and other services in supporting hard of hearing and impaired vision staff with accessibility to IT to enable their continued working whilst at home.

4. Recovery Phase

4.1 Recognising and in response to feedback from staff, we are putting in place mechanisms for staff previously working from home to work from a council building, on a limited basis and in accordance with Government/PHE guidelines, from 14 September. Returning to Work Guiding Principles are appended to this report; the actions put into place for staff wellbeing in relation to returning to workplaces are outlined below.

4.2 Review of provision developed in Response Phase

The wellbeing provision developed during the response phase is being reviewed to ensure it is fully evidence-based and fit for purpose for this next phase. This includes updating corresponding policies and procedures to ensure that all information is accessible, relevant, in line with organisational strategy, EDI objectives and follows current Government and PHE guidelines.

In addition to this, we are working with colleagues across the region to source and provide support for **financial health** in light of the anticipated economic downturn and the potential impact on our staff.

We are also working with regional groups to prepare for a potential second wave and the additional support that may be required in response.

4.3 **'Long-Covid-19' Implications**

Emerging research and evidence is indicating long term physical and mental health effects and repercussions for some people who have contracted the Covid-19 virus. We are working with regional partners to review this and develop support for staff who may have been affected.

4.4 **Flu Vaccine**

Provision is in place for all staff who are not currently eligible for a free vaccine to be able to access one, funded by SCC, through either Boots or Community Pharmacies. This will be actively promoted from September.

4.5 **Eye Test/Care Programme**

Promotion of free eye testing and glasses for VDU use to encourage those staff working from home, who may have increased screen time due to virtual meetings, to have their eyesight checked regularly.

4.6 **Wellbeing Conversation Toolkit**

This has been designed to help managers having wellbeing conversations with team members and to support wellbeing whilst working remotely or returning to office spaces. Incorporated within this is a homeworking wellbeing and safety checklist for staff to review their wellbeing and working conditions and inform a discussion with their line manager to make any necessary adjustments to enable safe and well working from home.

4.7 **Wellbeing Champions**

A network of Wellbeing Champions across the organisation is being developed to support wellbeing and resilience at a local level within directorates, teams and services. The Champions will act as ambassadors for wellbeing, signposting to information and will also support the dissemination of communications for wellbeing provision, services and support.

4.8 **Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA)**

A network of MHFA is being set up to provide managers and staff with the right level of mental health support and advice; the First Aiders will also be trained to triage when dealing with a mental health crisis. The MHFA will act as first response to a mental health crisis or for staff with emotional distress.

4.9 **Wellbeing and Resilience Workshops**

A number of resilience, stress management and managing in crisis workshops have been held and will continue, with bespoke workshops organised up for services/teams as required.

5. Financial and Value for Money Implications

- 5.1 Covid-19 has necessitated the provision of unprecedented levels of support for staff working in extraordinary circumstances and, whilst much of this has been provided in-house or in partnership with colleagues across the system, there has inevitably been an additional cost to budgeted wellbeing provision. This has been met through existing HROD budgets as well as corporate Covid-19 funds.

6. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Wellbeing provision throughout the pandemic has been designed to be inclusive and diverse to make it accessible and relevant to all staff. Ongoing feedback from Employee Networks helps us to continually assess the offer to ensure we can support in particular staff groups who may be disadvantaged or at greater risk.

7. Risk Management Implications

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report.

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Sources/background papers: None