

Appendix 6

COVID-19 related absence 1 March 2020 – 30 September 2020

The table below shows the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) days lost by the Council due to Covid-19 related absence between 1 March 2020 and 30 September 2020 as defined below:

- **COVID-19 - Sickness**

Employee has contracted coronavirus and is unable to carry out their role, or a suitable alternative, due to being unwell.

- **COVID-19 - Self isolating (unable to work from home)**

Employee (or someone in their household) has coronavirus symptoms. Employee is self-isolating, and is unable to carry out their role, or a suitable alternative, from home.

- **COVID-19 – Clinically vulnerable (unable to work from home)**

Employee (or a member of their household) is in a vulnerable group, i.e. over 70, pregnant or has an underlying medical condition. In line with Government advice, where the employee is unable to work from home and no suitable alternative work is identified, they will remain at home on full pay.

Reason	Total number of FTE days lost
Covid-19 Sickness	286
Covid-19 Self-isolation (unable to work from home)	196
Covid-19 Clinically vulnerable (unable to work from home)	2648
TOTAL	*3130

** Whilst the HR team has worked with managers throughout the pandemic to maintain accurate employee attendance records, it should be noted that it has not been possible to capture all Covid-19 related absences.*

The level of absence between 1 March 2020 and 30 September 2020 was unprecedented. In addition to Covid-19 related absence, a significant number of employees were moved away from their normal roles to support the Council's emergency response, for example the BECC, Community Hub, Meals at Home, etc. Despite this, the Council continued to deliver priority services with limited impact.

Between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020 all formal absence management processes were suspended, with no formal absence management action being taken in respect of Covid-19 related absences. The HR team are currently working with managers to address all outstanding absence triggers retrospectively.

During the pandemic the HR team has continued to provide support, both to individuals on a case-by-case basis and to the organisation as a whole. This has included regular staff communications, updates, and guidance in line with changing Government advice.

Throughout June and July 2020 the HR team worked with the Council's Occupational Health provider (Medwyn) to carry out risk assessments for 58 employees who were identified as having increased vulnerability to infection or poorer outcomes from Covid-19. These assessments identified personal demographics which may present a risk to the individual employee, for example underlying health conditions, age and ethnicity. As a result of these assessments, 55 employees were supported to safely return to the workplace.

In providing support to the organisation during the pandemic there have been many factors for the HR team to consider, including the impact of the lockdown and ongoing restrictions such as social distancing, self-isolation and shielding.

Some employees are fearful about contracting the virus and anxious about family and friends. Some have suffered bereavements, often without the chance to say goodbye or attend funerals.

Many of our employees have continued to work in essential and key roles in a range of challenging circumstances, with some working longer or more irregular hours to allow for effective social distancing. For some staff who were redeployed to support the emergency response, there has also been the requirement to deal with backlogs of "normal" work.

The continuing threat of the virus means that some employees continue to work whilst retaining caring responsibilities, whilst many are dealing with other personal and financial circumstances that may have an impact on their mental health.

There are also fears about job security, particularly where Council services remain suspended and many employees have ongoing concerns around attending the workplace, including using public transport and staying safe in the work environment.

The HR team continue to provide advice and support to the organisation where an employee tests positive, including liaison with Public Health England as necessary and safeguarding the health/dealing with the anxieties of colleagues.

The increase in mental health related absence during 2019-20 noted in Appendix A was recorded pre-Covid-19. The factors outlined above suggest that the pandemic (and measures taken by Government to control it) will have a significant impact on the mental health of our employees. It is very possible that these mental health implications will be felt for many months or even years.

There continue to be significant risks around escalating absence levels, fatigue of staff, concurrent incidents and coping with multiple priorities.