

Finance and Resources Committee

10am, Tuesday, 21 November 2023

Workers and COVID

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To review and note the response to the motion by Councillor Mumford, submitted and approved at the Finance and Resources Committee on 21 September 2023 entitled "Workers and Covid".

Dr Deborah Smart

Executive Director of Corporate Services

Contact: Nareen Turnbull, Service Director, Human Resources

E-mail: nareen.turnbull@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 5522

Report

Workforce Dashboard

2. Executive Summary

2.1 This report provides a response to the following motion by Councillor Mumford, submitted and approved at the Finance and Resources Committee on 21 September 2023 which was:

By Councillor Mumford - Workers and Covid
“Committee:

- 1) Notes with concern the increased rates of Coronavirus in Scotland, and especially the spread of new variant BA.2.86 in Edinburgh;
- 2) Notes that for many people, particularly disabled and clinically vulnerable people, the pandemic has never gone away, and that the lack of precautions and guidance has a significant impact on their lives and freedoms;
- 3) Recognises that many people are still impacted by long-covid, affecting their capacity for full-time work and/or study;
- 4) Notes that the Covid Pledge is intended to protect workers, service users and customers from Covid-19 through health and safety law, risk assessments and following best practice public health advice.

To request a report within one cycle setting out:

- a) the current protections and guidance for workers, service users and residents from Covid-19;
- b) any future plans or precautions Edinburgh Council has around Covid-19 which go beyond the commitment to follow national guidance;
- c) the implications for the Council of signing and implementing the Covid Pledge ([covidpledge.uk](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/covidpledge)).

3. Background

3.1 The HR Workforce Dashboard report of 21 September 2023 incorporated data in relation to COVID absence within the City of Edinburgh Council and set out current support and protection in place. This report further details this and responds to the motion above.

4. Main report

4.1 Scottish Government Rules and Restrictions

4.2 There are currently no COVID-19 rules or restrictions in Scotland. We are now living with COVID-19 as one of a number of respiratory infections. However, the Scottish Government sets out things you can do to stay well and protect others:

- try to stay at home if you have symptoms.
- if you have symptoms and do need to go out, wear a well-fitting face covering.
- get the vaccine if offered to give you the best possible protection.
- wash your hands regularly.
- meet in well-ventilated spaces.
- support [Distance Aware](#), for anyone who prefers others to take extra care around them.

4.3 City of Edinburgh Council – Current Position and Arrangements

4.4 Detailed below are the current top 6 absence reasons which includes COVID. From 3 October 2022, all absences related to COVID are treated in line with any other sickness reason and recorded as sickness absence.

Absence Reason	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	Average	Top 6%
Stress	1.1%	1.0%	1.2%	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	1.0%	29%
Musculo Skeletal	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	21%
Infection	1.1%	0.6%	0.8%	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	9%
Gastro-Intestinal	0.4%	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	9%
Covid	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	5%
Cancer	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	4%

Table 1 – Sickness Absence Reason Summary - 2023

4.5 We continue to monitor absence reasons as well as Public Health Scotland data in relation to infection rates and guidance. Public Health Scotland statistics release on 26 October 2023 notes that the overall number of emergency hospital admissions associated with RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus), influenza and COVID-19 have increased during the reporting period (16-22 October). COVID-19 admissions decreased, while influenza and RSV admissions increased. The largest proportion of admissions were for RSV. ICU/HDU admissions continue to be low. In addition it was noted that the national flu and COVID vaccination programme is well underway.

4.6 With regards to the City of Edinburgh arrangements, we would confirm:

- the rollout of the vaccination programme for eligible staff is underway.
- we have reinforced to staff that with all infectious and contagious illnesses we encourage people to stay at home.
- those who are well enough and able to do so are advised to work from home.
- for those who cannot work from home then Managers should help to consider alternatives, or whether sickness absence is recorded.
- alternative arrangements and reasonable adjustments will be considered for those who require them.
- we will continue to monitor national data and guidance and implement where advised.
- we will ensure that workplace health, safety and welfare requirements are implemented and monitored. This includes offices, depots, workshops, schools, care homes and cultural venues. Some aspects are outlined further below:

Ventilation

Whilst there are no longer coronavirus restrictions in Scotland, workplaces need to be adequately ventilated, this is a requirement of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. Windows or other openings may provide sufficient ventilation but, where necessary, mechanical ventilation systems will be provided and maintained. We will ensure compliance with our health and safety duties in this regard.

Temperatures in indoor workplaces

Personal preference makes it difficult to specify a thermal environment which satisfies everyone. For workplaces where activity is mainly sedentary, for example offices, the temperature should be at least 16 °C. If work involves physical effort, it should be at least 13 °C (unless other laws require lower temperatures). Requirements for schools are set out in [The School Premises \(General Requirements and Standards\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 1967](#).

Sanitary conveniences and washing facilities

Sanitary conveniences and washing facilities should be available at accessible places. These should clean and be adequately ventilated and lit. Washing facilities should have running hot and cold or warm water, soap and clean towels or other means of cleaning or drying. If required by the type of work, showers should also be provided.

4.7 COVID Pledge

4.8 The COVID-19 Safety Pledge asks employers to sign and display the pledge, agreeing to the three main points which are:

1. We pledge to protect our workers, service users and customers from Covid-19.
2. We will assess our physical environment and working practices according to Health and Safety law, including Risk Assessments, in order to ensure that they are designed to safeguard against the spread of infection.
3. We will abide by best public health advice and ensure that all workers who test positive for Covid are both asked to self-isolate and given adequate support to stay at home.

4.9 In general the City of Edinburgh Council supports and would promote the 3 points, however there are aspects in relation to the details of these and expectations that are not fully clear or set out and therefore could result in agreeing to aspects which the Council could not live up to, such as:

- Re-introduction of sick pay provision for COVID.
- Provision of masks and air filters.
- Re-introduction of Covid-specific risk assessments of the workplace.

4.10 We are fully supportive of the general principles of the Pledge and the health and wellbeing of our colleagues and service users is paramount. As a result we would suggest that as well as arrangements set out at 4.6 above, we will:

- ensure regular winter communications with colleagues promoting support and good practice.
- liaise with our Occupational Health providers to develop a series of winter messages and pro-active measures for colleagues to consider.
- consider guidance and support issued by the Scottish Government and wider agencies as well as the general aspect of the Pledge – including support for other respiratory and winter based illnesses.
- continue to monitor absence and community prevalence levels and respond accordingly and where necessary bring back any further measures for consideration by Committee.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 To continue to monitor COVID absence and community prevalence as well as ensuring compliance with national guidance and good practice and rollout a series of preventative winter messages to support and inform colleagues. CLT and Trade unions currently receive a weekly report produced from I-trent.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Costs in relation to health and safety requirements are contained within current budgets.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 The impacts of this report have been considered in relation to equality, human rights (including children's rights) and socio-economic disadvantage implications and there are no identified environmental impacts relevant to this report.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 The City of Edinburgh Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and committed to work towards a target of net zero emissions by 2030 for both city and corporate emissions and embedded this as a core priority of the Council Business Plan 2023-27. The Council also declared a Nature Emergency in 2023.
- 8.2 The impacts of this report have been considered in relation to the three elements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 Public Bodies Duties and there are no identified environmental impacts relevant to this report.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 None of the the recommendations in the report impact on an existing policy of the Council. Workforce related risks are monitored through directorate and council wide risk registers.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 None

11. Appendices

- 11.1 None