



Report of the Strategic HR&OD Manager

Equalities and Future Generations PDC –24 November 2020

HR&OD - Update

Purpose:	To provide an overview report on “the implications of COVID on staff.
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For Information	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since the outbreak of Covid-19 a series of measures have been introduced to support our workforce.
- 1.2 As requested, the following is an overview of the Council’s responses to support employees as a result of COVID, specific measures in respect of remote working and an outline of any future plans for staff policies.

2. Council Responses to Support Employees

2.1 Supporting Principles

At the outbreak of Covid-19 the following key principles were established to support the workforce in this unprecedented situation:

- A duty of care to ensure that employees and their dependents remain healthy
- An exception that employees will be flexible in working arrangements to maintain council services
- A request that employees make themselves available for redeployment to maintain continuity of essential services.

2.2 Communication and Engagement with Employees

Recognising that this is a fast-changing situation, an Employee FAQ document has been produced found via the following link;
<http://www.swansea.gov.uk/staffnet/covidFAQs#general advice and support>

This document is reviewed regularly to reflect the appropriate HR and Health & Safety advice and guidance. This take into account guidance received from the National Joint Council, Joint Council for Wales, and decisions made as a local response by the Council's Corporate Management Team.

2.3 Engagement with Trade Unions

2.3.1 Trade Union Meetings

Previous to Covid-19, monthly meetings were held with Trade Unions to consult on employment related issues. These meetings were subsequently held weekly and now fortnightly and the remit extended to discuss and consult on Health & Safety as well as employment-related issues.

In addition to responding to a range of ongoing issues, included in the items discussed and agreed are; process for the management of Employee Relations cases and employee consultations, specific workforce issues in Social Services and future annual leave arrangements.

2.3.2 Consultation On Service Area Risk Assessments

As service areas have returned to full or partial service, consultations have taken place with Trade Union representatives with a view to reviewing and agreeing to risk assessments to ensure the safe return of employees to the workforce.

2.3.3 Consultation on Support for BAME Workers

In recognition of the specific impact Covid-19 has had on BAME communities, consultations have taken to place to ensure that the Council's BAME Workers are supported. This has resulted in a specific communication to identified BAME workers offering support.

In addition, a specific risk assessment for BAME Workers has been developed and in uses. This risk assessment has been recognised and adopted across Wales as an example of good practice.

2.4 Support for the Principle of No Detriment

On commencement of Covid-19 an Executive decision was made that no employee should find themselves in immediate financial difficulty as a result of the pandemic. This was discussed and agreed at Executive Control Group (ECG) on 26th March and further discussed at ECG on 1st April (evidenced in email).

The Council therefore decided to streamline the process for paying staff during this period by introducing an average pay approach for a three month period, April to June. The initial period of average pay ended at the end of June however the Council remains alert to the principle of ensuring no ongoing financial hardship and will consider further issues as they arise, and at its own cost, as Covid-19 risks are set to remain for the foreseeable future.

This also includes the work the Council has done or will be doing on behalf of Welsh government in paying the £500 social care bonuses, the SSP top up to those care staff needing to isolate who are employed elsewhere who would not otherwise benefit from the council's more generous sick pay scheme arrangements and the self isolation payments, all of which benefit wider groups than just our own staff. The latter three are all operated on behalf of Welsh Government and for which the Council expects to be fully reimbursed by grant.

2.5 Agile/ Remote Working

As a result of Covid-19 there are, at time of writing, 1,574 employees (excluding schools) working from home. These are employees that were, in the most part, based in the Civic Centre or Guildhall.

To support employees in that new working environment employees have been supported through the following measures;

- A risk assessment process to ensure safe working in their home environment.
- Guidance for employees and Managers on what to consider in working at home.
- Support to employees in purchasing equipment for use in working from home.

In the longer-term, work is continuing to develop an "Agile Working Policy" reflecting on the experiences of continuing to work from home.

2.6 Future Policy Development

In addition to the Agile Working Policy, work is continuing to develop HR&OD Policies and to consult with senior management and Trade Unions. This includes a policy for supporting employees in domestic abuse situations, a subject that is of particular relevance during this time.