

Corporate Committee Update - Supporting our employees - Summary

Introduction

Since the start of the pandemic, the Council has worked hard on supporting our employees. This brief paper is intended to provide a summary of some of the major actions we have taken to support our employees and their families in these unprecedented times. It is not exhaustive and it is recognised that there is great practice going on in services - because the best support to individuals comes from the manager and is tailored to the needs of the individual. However, there are a number of things that we have done corporately to help our employees and our managers, and this summary covers some of those. A number of links have been included should Members wish to look in more detail at any or all of the specific items.

Actions taken

1. Trade Unions

HMT and HR have been meeting with Trade Unions on a weekly basis. These meetings provide the backbone of dealing with issues that are raised and the Council has put significant resource into these meetings and answering questions and dealing with issues raised by trade unions. Issues that have been discussed include sickness policies, dependency leave, PPE provision, disciplinaries and restructures amongst a host of other items. Whilst many issues have been resolved, there remain challenges in some areas, such as sick pay for workers who are employed by contractors and not the Council. <https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/message-from-the-chief-executive-update-from-meetings-with-the-trade-unions-on-coronavirus/>

2. Communications with Employees

We have established a detailed FAQ section on the intranet and populated it with the answers to questions that Trade Unions and employees are asking us. This is the “single source of truth” when it comes to HR questions. It is regularly updated as things develop. <https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/coronavirus-hr-faq-guidance/>

The Council has run a detailed survey on employee opinions and has committed to run them regularly throughout the pandemic. A second survey is currently being prepared and will be released shortly. The aim of this second survey is to capture thoughts to inform working groups on how staff will be able return to work, or continue to work from home if required. The working groups are aiming to create options and environments that employees will feel comfortable and confident about working in. <https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/pandemic-pulse-survey-results/>

The Chief Executive and Group Director of Finance and Resources have run online webinars, with great attendance. There is an HMT one with all HMT members shortly. The Chief Executive has issued regular updates to all employees.

3. Dependency Leave and Annual Leave

The Council recognises that employees may need significantly more dependency leave at the moment, which is why it was agreed very early on to allow employees to take 30 days in 2020/21, rather than the usual 5 days. This leave is on full pay.

We have also amended our annual leave carry over policy to allow employees to carry over 20 days from 2020/21 to the following two years.

4. Sickness Policy

All COVID-19 related sickness will be excluded from sickness triggers and sickness management actions. Trends in absence are that the week on week cumulative increases are gradually falling. The Council has about 40,000 absence days per year for all employees and all sickness reasons. Currently for Covid-19 sickness and self isolation there have been circa 10,000 absence days since 1 March 2020.

5. Self-Isolation

Where employees who are not sick need to self-isolate, we ask them to work from home if they can. If they cannot, leave is granted on full pay.

6. Working from Home

The Council has been, and remains, very clear that all employees that can work from home should do so until further notice. This continues to be the case despite Government announcement regarding returning to work. The Council has worked extremely hard to ensure, as much as possible, that employees have the ICT

equipment that they need to work from home. This has included couriating items to employees who need them for critical work tasks. There has also been considerable information from HR and Health and Safety to employees.

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/ict-blog-equipment-you-need/>

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/top-ten-tips-for-your-health-and-wellbeing-while-working-from-home/>

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/equipment-for-home-working-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

7. Training and Learning

It has not been possible to run face to face training courses, so the Organisational Development team has set up a Learning From Home calendar

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/hackney-learning-at-home-new-training-calendar/>

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/hackney-learning-from-home-online-workshops/>

8. Redeployment

The Council recognised early on that demand on some services would reduce, whilst on some it would increase. A redeployment team and process was established to match surplus employees to jobs.

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/message-from-the-chief-executive-update-on-staff-redeployment/>

9. Employee Assistance Programme

We have communicated with employees regularly about this core element of our support package, and we have negotiated with our provider to extend it to agency workers for the next 12 months. <https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/whats-new-from-the-employee-assistance-programme-eap/>

10. Mental wellbeing

This has been a critical focus over this time and a dedicated and detailed intranet page with advice, assistance and links has been created for employees.

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/support-your-mental-health-during-covid-19/>

11. Casual and Sessional Workers

We have protected the pay of casual and sessional workers, paying them an average of their recent work, even if they cannot work. This is discretionary however the Council felt it was the right thing to do. This group of workers includes, for example, Music Tutors in HLT, casual registrars and casual library workers.

12. Parking Exemptions

These have been provided for key workers including key council employees so that they can continue to work. <https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/temporary-parking-exemptions-for-key-workers-in-the-boroughs-response-to-coronavirus/>

13. Planning for the next phase

A number of groups have been set up to plan for the next phase of this pandemic. The Chief Executive covered this in his summary here

<https://intranet.hackney.gov.uk/message-from-the-ce-your-qas-and-the-next-phase-of-working-for-the-council/>

The Director of ICT and Customer Services, as the Corporate Resilience Lead, is the overall lead for the next phase work.