

LG/NARE: COVID-19 Workforce Update Issue 29: Week Ending 23rd April

The LGA is providing COVID-19 advice which can be accessed via our [home page](#) you will see a range of information explaining our work with government on the [COVID19 Hub](#).

LGA workforce Team continues to provide workforce advice on COVID-19 [here](#)

Employment Advice can be accessed via the LGA Workforce Employee Relations Unit (ERU) the [latest bulletin](#) provides updates on a range of COVID-19 issues.

COVID-19 General Update

[COVID-19 was no longer the leading cause of death in both England and Wales in March](#), new figures from the Office for National Statistics show. It was previously the leading cause of death each month from November to February. Meanwhile, the latest [NHS Test and Trace figures](#) show that 18,050 people tested positive for COVID-19 in England at least once in the week to April 14, down 9 per cent on the previous week and the lowest number since the week to September 2.

One dose of vaccination effective against spreading virus

The [University of Oxford and the Office for National Statistics have today published a study that reveals that one dose of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines is 74 per cent effective against symptomatic infection](#). It is based on a sample of more than 373,000 adults from across the UK who produced more than 1.6 million swab test results between December and April.

Around [two-thirds of people in England aged 70 and over are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19](#), having received both doses. For people aged 80 and over the figure is 83.3 per cent, while for 75 to 79-year-olds the estimate is 78.3 per cent.

It is good to see [NHS England data showing that uptake has tripled among ethnic minority groups – from 1.89 million as of February 7 to 5.78 million as of April 7](#).

Moderna Vaccine rolls out

[People in England have begun to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine this month](#). Along with the Pfizer jab, it will be used by the NHS for some of the appointments rearranged for under 30s who were due to receive the AstraZeneca jab. Separately, a study looking at whether the Astrazeneca and Pfizer coronavirus vaccines can be safely mixed for the first and second doses is being expanded to include the Moderna and Novavax vaccines. [Led by the University of Oxford, the Com-Cov study will seek to recruit adults aged over 50](#) who have received their first vaccination in the past eight to 12 weeks.

Sharing practice: Vaccine uptake tools

Colleagues at Hertfordshire County Council have published [a series of helpful tools and templates to support local authorities and partner organisations engaging with under-vaccinated groups](#). These and other valuable resources can also be found on our [Testing, Tracing, and Outbreak Management Knowledge Hub](#) (registration with a.gov.uk email address required) which we continue to update.

Health & Care staff eligible to use vaccination booking service

NHS England has confirmed that [frontline eligible health and social care workers will be able to use the National Booking Service again by 19 April to book in vaccinations](#). When using the online or telephone vaccination service, social care workers will need to self-declare their eligibility at the point of booking and will be asked for identification, such as work photo ID, and written confirmation of eligibility from their local council or employer, when they attend their vaccination appointment.

Care home staff: vaccinations as a condition of deployment

The [Department of Health and Social Care \(DHSC\) has launched a consultation on making vaccination a condition of deployment for care home staff](#). The five-week [consultation](#) will close on May 19 and will seek views on the proposal, any potential impact it could have on staffing and safety, how it could be implemented and who could be exempt before a decision is expected to be made this summer. The [DHSC said nearly half of care homes for older residents in England are not meeting the threshold, recommended by experts from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies \(SAGE\), that 80 per cent of staff and 90 per cent of residents need to be vaccinated](#) to provide a minimum level of protection against COVID-19 outbreaks. DHSC Director of Adult Social Care Delivery, Stuart Miller has written to councils encouraging them to take part in the consultation. There will be a range of views on these complex issues and the tricky balance to strike in terms of the rights of the workforce and the rights of residents. Consideration will also need to be given to the impact of such a policy on recruitment and retention and the impact that would have on resident care. There is also a question about why compulsion should apply in care homes for older adults, but not to NHS and care staff working in any other setting. The LGA will be discussing this with councils and our wider partners as we consider this issue further.

Vaccination advice for pregnant women

[The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation \(JCVI\) has advised that pregnant women should be offered the COVID-19 vaccine](#) at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group. Based on [Real-world data from the United States](#), the JCVI advises that it is preferable for pregnant women in the UK to be offered the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines where available. The JCVI are clear that there is no evidence to suggest that other vaccines are unsafe for pregnant women but indicated that more research is needed.

Surge testing

A 'significant cluster' of the South African COVID-19 variant has been found in two areas of south London where surge testing has been implemented. Wandsworth and Lambeth will see additional testing after 44 confirmed and 30 probable cases were identified. Additional testing and genomic sequencing will also be rolled out in Barnet and Southwark in London and Sandwell and parts of Birmingham where cases of the variant first identified in South Africa have also been found.

COVID-19 variant

Public Health England said a new coronavirus variant, first detected in India, has been found in the UK. It said 73 cases of the B.1.617 variant – which has two mutations which could be a cause for concern – have been confirmed in England.

COVID-19 webinar: Surge testing and local outbreaks

LGA webinar in partnership with LGcomms takes place on Wednesday 28 April, 2.00-3.30pm. It will look at the lessons learned from experiences of local outbreaks and rapidly deploying surge testing in recent months, to help you prepare should you find yourself in this same position. Surrey County Council and Manchester City Council will share their approaches and learnings, alongside colleagues from the Department of Health and Social Care. You can [book your free place](#) now.

Universal testing offer

Everyone in England, including those without symptoms are now able to access free, regular, rapid COVID-19 testing twice a week. A new 'Pharmacy Collect' service will provide an additional route to regular testing and anyone aged over 18 without symptoms will be able to visit a participating local pharmacy and collect a box of seven rapid tests to use twice a week at home. Updates will be made to the NHS COVID-19 app in England to coincide with the universal testing offer and information on testing can be found at [NHS.UK/get-tested](https://www.nhs.uk/get-tested). If testing at home, individuals will need to register their results online or by calling 119.

PPE

The [Department for Health and Social Care \(DHSC\) has extended the provision of free personal protective equipment \(PPE\) to health and social care providers from the end of June 2021 until the end of March 2022.](#) The expectation of clinical experts is that PPE usage will remain high throughout the next financial year and will help protect the health and wellbeing of health and social care workers, as well as their patients and clients.

Local elections – face coverings

The Cabinet Office (CO) has updated its [Approach to elections](#) guidance to clarify the rules around wearing of face coverings in polling stations. Face coverings are mandatory for poll workers, observers and voters, unless exempt. However, if steps are taken to create a physical barrier or screen between poll workers and members of the public then staff behind the screen will not be required to wear a face covering.

The CO has also published a collection of [Security guidance for elections](#). The guidance provides advice on good security practices for candidates and returning officers or electoral administrators.

Local election indemnity guidance

The Government has issued [updated guidance](#) to local Returning Officers regarding legal indemnities for election administrators, in case of legal challenge due to COVID-19.

Local elections – political leadership

Some councils will experience changes in political leadership, which lead to a change of control, no overall control or require working with a new leader/mayor and/ or a new cabinet (or equivalent) following May's elections.

The LGA have produced a [Change of Political Leadership Hub](#) which provides advice, brings together access to support networks and case studies from councils that have been through this experience. The Hub contains practical tips and guidance for members and officers at pre-election stage, immediately after the election and also in the longer term.

Reopening - customer contact details

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick has written to councils highlighting government [guidance on re-opening businesses and venues](#), in particular the guidance on outdoor structures, and to encourage councils to take a pragmatic and proportionate approach to enforcement in this area. The Government has updated the [guidance for councils on enforcing COVID-secure regulations to reflect changes to the national restrictions](#). [The Government has also issued updated guidance](#) on the requirements on certain businesses to collect contact details for staff, customers and visitors to their premises. The requirements apply to [settings and venues](#) where customers and visitors spend a longer period and include the need for all members of a group visiting hospitality premises to log their details, rather than just one member of the group as was previously the case. The Government has published [new guidance on eased restrictions for restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services](#). This also extends to listed buildings and historic visitor attractions.

Reopening – COVID-19 Marshals

The [National Counter Terrorism Security Office](#) has shared details of its e-learning course on 'Action Counters Terrorism' awareness which is available for COVID-19 Marshals, as well as other council officers. The course takes up to an hour and covers six topics, including how to identify and respond to suspicious activity. When signing up, you will need to provide the name of your council and the name of your COVID-19 Marshals. Once this has been completed, a PIN code will be supplied.

Reopening - community centres

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has updated [the guidance for those managing community centres](#), village halls and other community facilities - and separately for [green spaces](#) - on safely re-opening to reflect changes to national lockdown rules.

COVID-19: good council practice

The LGA have updated their website so that a wide range of resources focusing on [good council practice can be found in one new hub](#). The LGA will continue to build on this range of resources to help councils as they navigate the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

Teacher vacancies – free national job listing site from DfE

All councils in England can now take advantage of Teaching Vacancies, the free national job listing service from the Department for Education, to list vacancies on behalf of schools following successful pilots in 14 local authority areas. Councils will be able to sign up to the service now – by emailing teaching.vacancies@education.gov.uk with the header 'Local authority sign up' - and will then be able to post vacancies later this month. This is a change that local authorities have wanted to see for some time. It is an excellent initiative to boost teacher recruitment and will help to ensure schools attract applications from a diverse and wider talent pool.

Employing veterans – NI Incentive to recruit

[A National Insurance contributions holiday is now available for organisations that employ armed forces veterans](#). The policy allows employers to claim National Insurance contributions relief for veterans they have hired during their first year of civilian employment after leaving the armed forces. The move is part of the government's commitment to help further incentivise employers to take advantage of the wide range of skills and experience that ex-military personnel offer. Employers - including councils - will be able to claim National Insurance contributions relief on the earnings of qualifying veterans and [guidance on how employers can claim back national insurance is available](#).

Level 3 Adult skills Courses free to the over 24 year olds

Education Secretary [Gavin Williamson has announced that adults aged over 24 can access fully-funded courses to achieve a first full level 3 qualification](#) (equivalent to A-Levels) as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. Almost [400 qualifications](#) are available to take from today, backed by £95 million in government funding in 2021/22. The qualifications on offer range from engineering to social care to conservation and are *available to any adult who has not already achieved a qualification at Level 3* (equivalent to A-levels). Councils are encouraged to raise awareness about the initiative among their residents and through their own employment and skills services.

Skills and jobs inquiry launched

The [Treasury Select Committee has launched a new inquiry into jobs, growth, and productivity after the pandemic](#). It will explore the policies which can be effective in helping people to reskill, move between occupations and sectors and take advantage of new opportunities. The LGA have set out why [local government is the natural partner of central government to address our unemployment and skills challenge we face and to ensure that those out of work as a result of the pandemic are supported back into employment](#) as quickly as possible. The deadline for submissions to the inquiry is Monday 17 May.

Kickstart Regional data published

[The Department for Work and Pensions \(DWP\) has published data by region and sector on the number of Kickstart work placements created as of 11 March](#). The scheme provides funding to employers to create job placements for 16 to 24 year olds on universal credit (UC). We continue to call on the Government to extend the [Kickstart scheme](#) so it can support young people not on UC and for the duration of scheme to be extended beyond December 2021 so that more young people benefit from a work placement as the economy reopens.

Visa extensions for health and care workers

[The Government has announced that free one-year visa extensions](#) will be automatically granted to eligible overseas health and care workers whose visas were due to expire before 1 October. This extension will cover healthcare professionals working in the NHS and the independent health and care sector and will be free of all fees and charges, including the Immigration Health Surcharge. Those benefiting from this extension will need to complete an online form to verify their identity. The government will also ask their employers to confirm their eligibility.

EU Settlement Scheme Update

Councils are playing a key role working with local partners and communities in raising awareness of the 30 June deadline for applications to the [EU Settlement Scheme](#). Updated guidance on the scheme now includes [guidance for reasonable grounds for late applications](#). Along with [resources aimed at older EU, EEA and Swiss citizens](#) and their carers, family members and friends, the Home Office recently announced a further £4.5million of funding to four organisations primarily focused on working with vulnerable people resident in care homes, including the Association of Adult Social Services (ADASS). The Home Office has also recently completed a follow-up audit for local authorities supporting looked after children through the scheme to understand the numbers of children and barriers to apply, with a series of webinars for social workers and other staff to follow.

Local Skills Improvement Plans – 8 Local Trailblazer areas

The [Skills for Jobs Further Education White Paper](#) confirmed a new business-led approach to prioritising skills provision across local areas through the development of new Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). The DfE has [opened applications](#) to pilot LSIPs in up to eight local 'trailblazer' areas. Bids must be led by an established employer representative body. While not open to councils, they can play a useful role in forging links between employer and further education providers. Applications are also live for the Strategic Development Fund to explore how providers can work together more effectively, alongside employers and other partners, to respond to local skills priorities. This will be piloted in 12-16 areas, which will include the LSIP trailblazer areas. Local authority providers are listed as an eligible provider. If you would like to share your views on this with the LGA, please contact jasbir.jhas@local.gov.uk

Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Consultation

Following the announcement in the Spring Budget, the Government has launched a [consultation into flexi-job apprenticeships](#). This is targeted at employers within certain sectors (including creative industries, digital and construction) to take on apprenticeships so they can move more easily from one employer to another. The consultation seeks views on how flexi-job apprenticeships could work in practice and the future role of apprenticeship training agencies, which we know continue to be used by councils. The LGA would encourage councils to respond directly and share your thoughts with Jamie.saddler@local.gov.uk and jasbir.jhas@local.gov.uk.

Health and care reform – importance of place-based leadership

The King's Fund has today published a report on the importance of place-based leadership in health and care reform. A key recommendation of the [Developing place-based partnerships: The foundation of effective integrated care systems \(ICS's\)](#) report is that ICS's will need to build up from and be supportive of place-based partnerships, including health and wellbeing boards.

Workforce Improvement Support: Strategy Workforce Planning

As part of the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) improvement grant the LGA is providing up to 25 councils with targeted support on Strategic Workforce Planning in 2021. To apply for this fully funded support offer please follow the link [WFP2021](#)

Have your say on Care and Health Improvement priorities

The Care and Health Improvement Programme (CHIP) is seeking your input into a light-touch review to explore the effectiveness of the current improvement support, and to understand what the future improvement needs of the sector may be in a post-COVID environment (includes workforce needs and priorities). The LGA are using the current [CHIP priorities](#) as the starting point for this, but you may think there is scope for other priorities and there is scope to say this. If you are willing to share your views [please complete our short survey](#).

Youth Employability Coaches

The [Department for Work and Pensions has announced the recruitment of 150 new Youth Employability Coaches](#) which will be specially trained to support young people to into work, particularly those without formal skills or qualifications. They will be able to access intensive support and mentoring training for up to six months, as well as access to apprenticeship placements and suitable job opportunities.

Exit payments

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has written to chief finance officers asking them to submit annual exit payments data for the period 2014/15 to 2020/21 by April 26. Please contact Lorraine.Bennett@local.gov.uk if you would like to discuss the data returns further.

Recognising and celebrating public health heroes

It has been a tough year for public health professionals. [In a new blog on the LGA website](#), Marcial Boo, chief executive of the UK Public Health Register (UKPHR), writes about the launch of a [new toolkit for employers to support the development of public health staff](#) and how to nominate them for the [UKPHR Public Health Heroes award](#).

Advice on disciplinary structures for Chief Executives

The Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for local authority chief executives has [issued advice to councils](#) on the structures and committees that should be established so that any potential disciplinary issues can be quickly considered. These are set out in the JNC's [Conditions of Service Handbook](#) and include the setting up of an Investigating and Disciplinary Committee, an Appeals Committee and an Independent Panel.

Workforce NJC Joint Statement: COVID-19 Update 14th April

The National Joint Council for local government services has issued a [further general update](#) on various COVID related issues including joint advice on shielding, long Covid, vaccinations and self-isolation.

Teachers' Pay 2021 (England)

The national employers ([NEOST](#)) [written evidence to the STRB can be found on our one stop page](#). Officers gave oral evidence in March, ahead of the STRB submitting its recommendations to Government 'as soon as is practically possible in May'. We hope to be able to consult councils on the draft STPCD by early July.

Teaching National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)

This [LGA fact sheet](#) provides you with an overview of the reformed suite of NPQs to be introduced in September 2021 along with some DfE responses to FAQ's.

Chief officer pay 2021

The unions representing local authority chief officers have [lodged a pay claim for 2021](#) which seeks parity with any pay award reached for the main bulk of staff covered by the '[Green Book](#)' NJC. The National Employers will respond in due course.

LGA Annual Conference 6-8 July 2021

Bookings are now open for the virtual [LGA Annual Conference 2021](#) taking place on Tuesday 6 to Thursday 8 July. Places can be booked on the [Annual Conference website](#)

BREAKING NEWS>>>>>>>

Local Government Apprentice of the Year Announced!

The first national Local Government Apprentice of the Year competition, which took place this week, was a huge success with over 100 local government apprentices taking part. The winner was the brilliant **Karla Overington!** The LGA in partnership with East of England LGA and South West Councils ran this inaugural event for all councils in England. The event highlighted the vast array of talented people who through apprenticeships are able to develop and progress whilst working for local government. Highlights from the day and list of all the other winners will be available next week.

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