

## **LGA/NARE: COVID-19 Workforce Update Issue 26: 13<sup>st</sup> February to 26<sup>th</sup> February**

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.

### **Roadmap to Lifting COVID Restrictions**

The Government has [announced the roadmap to lifting lockdown restrictions in England](#). In his statements the Prime Minister said that the threat of COVID-19 remains substantial, with numbers in hospital only now falling below the numbers seen at the peak of the first wave. He confirmed that the Government aims to offer the first dose of the vaccine to all priority groups by 15 April and a first dose to every adult by the end of July.

There will be a five-week interval between each step of the roadmap, allowing for the four weeks it takes to see the impact of any easing of restrictions in the data, plus an extra weeks' notice for any changes announced. Measures will be introduced nationally, rather than through the tiered approach we saw before Christmas, with the strategy being informed by "data not dates", and subjected to the following four tests:

1. that the vaccine deployment continues successfully
2. vaccines are effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths
3. infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations that put unsustainable pressure on the NHS
4. the assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of COVID-19 that cause concern.

From the 8 March all pupils will be able to return to school, supported by twice weekly testing for secondary and college pupils. Two people can meet socially outdoors, but the clinically vulnerable are advised to continue to self-isolate until at least the end of March. We also expect that the Government will amend regulations to allow for a broader range of COVID-safe canvassing activities in the run-up to the local elections. From 29 March the legal requirement to stay at home will be lifted, but many lockdown restrictions will remain in place including working from home and minimising travel. The rule of six will be reintroduced outdoors and two families from different households will be able to meet outdoors, with some outdoor facilities opening, including tennis courts and pools.

It's anticipated that from 12 April non-essential retail may be able to re-open, alongside 'close-contact services' and gyms. Pubs and restaurants could provide an outdoor only service, and public libraries, community centres, zoos and theme parks may be able to open their doors again.

If the conditions continue to be met, from 17 May the rule of six will be lifted outdoors and replaced by a maximum gathering limit of 30, Indoor hospitality, cinemas, hotels, performances and sporting events will then also restart. By 21 June all restrictions could be lifted.

**Today** the four UK Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) and NHS England Medical Director recommended that the UK alert level should move from level five to level four. This is welcome news that the material risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed within 21 days is gradually declining, following the reduction in COVID-19 cases and deaths in recent weeks. However, with level 4 meaning 'a COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation' and that 'transmission is high or rising exponentially', the CMOs and NHS England Medical Director are clear that health services across the four nations remain under significant pressure with a high number of patients in hospital.

## COVID-19 toolkit

Public Health England has updated its [campaign resource centre](#) following the roadmap announcement, and more materials will be published shortly. PHE has also recently published a new [stakeholder Q&A](#). Past copies of the Q&A and [associated social media assets](#) are also available, and this is frequently updated with short clips from announcements along with graphics, visuals and further videos.

## Vaccinations – Phase 2

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has today unveiled what Phase 2 of the vaccination prioritisation programme will look like. The JCVI is recommending vaccinating according to age, rather than profession. The next groups expected to be vaccinated are those aged 40 to 49, then 30 to 39, then 18 to 29. The JCVI decided that mass vaccination targeting occupational groups would be more complex to deliver and may slow down the vaccine programme, leaving some more vulnerable people at higher risk and unvaccinated for longer.

## Vaccinations of people on Learning Disability Register

Everyone on the GP Learning Disability Register should be [invited for vaccination](#) as part of priority group six. Previously, eligibility was restricted to people with severe and profound learning disabilities. The JCVI has reiterated its support for vaccination of those within residential care, assisted living and shared accommodation.

## Improving vaccination access and uptake

The NHS has written to Directors of Primary Care and Public Health, Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and community pharmacy sites to outline [further opportunities for PCN and Community Pharmacy vaccination sites to partner with community venues to deliver temporary vaccination clinics](#). The letter notes that a large number of community settings, including places of worship have expressed an interest in supporting the COVID-19 vaccination programme. This creates huge opportunity to make a tailored offer to communities to improve take-up.

## COVID-19 vaccine: tackling hesitancy and misinformation

As the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme expands beyond the top four priority groups, effective communications and engagement will be integral to its success. The LGA are running a communications webinar, taking place on Thursday 11 March 10.30am – 12.00pm, which will look at how councils and public sector partners can increase uptake of the vaccine by working to understand and tackle vaccine hesitancy and counter misinformation. [You can book your free place now](#)

## New COVID-19 behavioural change & Vaccine Hesitancy

The LGA have launched a series of [case studies and resources on COVID-19 behaviours including vaccine hesitancy](#). This resource consists of a collection of case studies from councils using behavioral science techniques. In the coming weeks, it will be developed to bring together learning with the latest academic research, guidance on how to apply in your own council, and important findings from related fields. If you would like to share your examples of great practice please contact [outbreakmanagement@local.gov.uk](mailto:outbreakmanagement@local.gov.uk).

## Workplace – Vaccination Hesitancy

The LGA has updated their COVID-19 Employment LAW and Workforce FAQs for councils to provide information on encouraging take up of the vaccine on their website – see [FAQ 22 of the COVID-19 employment law and workforce FAQs](#).

ACAS has published new advice on coronavirus vaccines and testing for workplaces which also provides helpful advice see link [www.acas.org.uk/coronavirusvaccine](http://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirusvaccine)

## Shielding Update

Following the addition of 1.7 million more people to the shielding list last week, [around 600,000 of that group are now being invited to book a slot at a vaccination centre or pharmacy service](#). Around 445,000 people aged 64 and above who have not yet been vaccinated are also being invited to receive their vaccinations.

## LG Inform COVID-19 Workforce Survey

Key workforce data has provided councils with intelligence to effectively compare progress and plan locally, regionally and nationally. The LGA has been running a fortnightly [COVID-19 workforce survey](#) since May. You can view how your authority's data has change over time in the [trend report](#).

## Schools

To support the announcement that schools will re-open to all pupils from the 8 March, the [Department for Education has published updated guidance on managing a school or early years setting, as well guidance for parents and carers and university students and those in higher and further education](#).

All primary school children will return on Monday 8 March, as staff continue to take two rapid COVID-19 tests each week at home. All secondary school and college students will take COVID-19 tests as they return to the classroom from the 8 March.

Secondary schools and colleges will have discretion on how to stagger the return of their students over that week to allow them to be tested on return. After an initial programme of three tests in school or college, students will be provided with two rapid tests to use each week at home.

Secondary school and college staff will also be provided with two tests to use each week at home. Protective measures across education will be strengthened. It is recommended that staff and students in secondary schools and colleges wear face coverings in all areas, including classrooms, where social distancing cannot be maintained as a temporary extra measure.

## Schools - DfE Rapid testing guidance

The DfE held a webinar to provide secondary schools and colleges with an update on the rapid testing programme and this is available to [watch](#) online.

A further DfE webinar will be held in March which will focus on transitioning pupils and students from testing on-site to testing at home. Further information about this webinar will be provided by DfE closer to the time.

For full guidance about the new testing arrangements, including information on funding and delivery arrangements, can be found on the DfE's google drive [rapid testing sharing platform](#).

## School testing case study

The LGA have [published a case study exploring the lessons learned from three schools that undertook pilots of daily COVID-19 testing](#) at the end of 2020. It is hoped the insights and experiences from these pilots will prove useful ahead of schools reopening.

## Care home visits

DHSC [has announced that care home residents will be supported to have indoor visits from a single, named individual from 8 March](#). Every resident can name one individual, who will be tested prior to each visit, and who will need to wear PPE and avoid close contact during their visit. The named visitor will be able to hold hands with the resident during the indoor visit and can make repeat visits under the conditions designed to keep residents, staff and visitors safe. Outdoor, pod and screen visits will continue in line with published guidance already in place.

## Organisation-based Testing Recording Update

A new spreadsheet for organisations such as schools and care homes, to [record the details of people who have been tested for coronavirus](#) on that day has been published.

The guidance provides information on completing and uploading the new version of the record-keeping spreadsheet from 26 February. After the organisation-based registration portal is updated, organisations will not be able to use the previous version of the spreadsheet to register tests, so should download now so they are prepared.

## Psychological First Aid training

Yesterday PHE launched a new online [Psychological First Aid \(PFA\) training course](#) on how to provide practical and emotional support to children and young people affected by COVID-19, or other emergencies or crisis situations. It aims to equip those completing the training to better identify children that are in distress and provide support to help them feel safe, connected and able to take steps to help themselves.

The course is available for all frontline workers such as teachers, health and social workers, charity and community volunteers and anyone who cares for or is regularly in contact with children and young people aged up to 25, including parents and caregivers. It's free, takes about three hours to complete (split into three sessions that the learner can complete at their own pace) and no previous qualifications are required.

## Local elections staffing and venue support due to COVID

The [Director for Constitution at the Cabinet Office has written to Returning Officers](#) acknowledging that staffing of polling stations, count locations and other electoral locations, and identifying suitable venues to host them, are two major delivery challenges for the elections on 6 May. The letter also sets out that Civil Servants, the National Citizen Service Network, and customers of Jobcentres can be accessed to help support elections. The offer of support will be on a demand-led basis, targeted towards the areas that need it. The letter also states that additional funding, announced on 5 February, may assist in securing venues that are not usually employed for election purposes. If Returning Officers are experiencing difficulties contacting owners of venues that are part of a national group or organisation, the Government is keen to assist where possible. [Returning Officers who would welcome support should complete this form by 12:00 on 3 March.](#)

## Electoral Commission Guidance - Safe delivery of elections

[Electoral Commission guidance](#) suggests that local authorities will need to consider a range of additional equipment and PPE to make the elections safe including, floor markings, additional signage, hand sanitiser, Perspex screens, face coverings for staff and voters, additional pencils, and additional cleaning materials. The LGA will seek clarity on how this guidance relates to the Government's [Polls Delivery Plan](#) including the additional funding that was announced on the 5 February for additional COVID-costs.

## 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.

## Non-COVID Updates ...

### Returners in Planning are ready to apply for council vacancies

The learners on the [Return to Work - Planning programme](#) are nearing the end of the training provided by PAS. This group have a diverse range of skills and background that would complement many local government planning departments. [Councils can share their current vacancies, at no cost, directly with the Returners by completing this survey.](#)

## Exit Cap Regulations Revoked Update

[The Restriction of Public Sector Exit Payments \(Revocation\) Regulations 2021](#) were laid before parliament yesterday and will come into force on 19 March. These regulations confirm the effect of the [Directions made on the 12 February](#) but are not retrospective.

The regulations contain an obligation for employers to make payments to employees (or to other persons including public sector pension schemes in relation to those employees) who left during the period between the original regulations coming into force (4 November 2020) and the date of these regulations coming into force, although exits after 12 February need not be capped as a result of the earlier Direction. These payments are the difference between what was paid and the exit payments that the employee would have been entitled to had the original regulations not been in force, in many cases this will consist of the payment of an unreduced pension.

Payments made by employers to employees or other persons under these regulations should include interest calculated in accordance with the [Judgment Debts \(Rate of Interest\) Order 1993](#). The LGA are in the process of clarifying with legal advisors what interest may be payable on pension benefits and strain costs. The [LGPS Scheme Advisory Board guidance](#) and [LGA guidance](#) provide further details.

## Local government 2021 pay claim

On Tuesday, we shared the [2021 pay claim for local government \('Green Book'\) employees](#) lodged by UNISON, GMB and Unite. The National Employers met yesterday and agreed that they will not be able to respond to the unions' claim until after the local elections on 6 May. The unions have been informed of this decision. I would like to remind you that regional pay consultation briefings will be held in March at which councils will be asked for their views on this year's pay round. Please contact your [regional employer organisation](#) for details of the event in your area.

## Commercial skills

The impact of the pandemic and changing investment guidance means councils are having to refocus their commercial activity. To help, the [LGA is running free online masterclasses on commercial business planning, adapting commercial strategy, governance for commercial activity and financial health for commercial activity](#) in February and March.

## Gender pay gap reporting enforcement postponement

Due to the impact of COVID-19, the [Equalities and Human Rights Commission](#) has announced that employers now have until 5 October 2021 to report their gender pay gap information for the 2020/2021, rather than 30 March 2021, as no enforcement action will be taken until that October date.

## LGR Consultations launched for unitary authorities

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, has launched eight consultations for unitary authorities in Cumbria, North Yorkshire, and Somerset following proposals received by councils in those areas. The consultation period will run for eight weeks until Monday 19 April and is available to complete on the [MHCLG consultation page](#). While the consultations are in progress, local elections for 'principal authorities' will be delayed in the areas concerned until May 2022. However, elections for local police and crime commissioners, as well as elections to any town or parish councils, will continue to take place this May.

## NGDP

Councils have just one month left to sign up to this year's National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) scheme. The NGDP is the LGA's flagship management trainee programme which offers councils a unique opportunity to grow their own local government leaders. Every year it provides the sector with high quality graduates ready to work on strategic projects which contribute to the delivery of your council's goals. NGDP graduates can offer councils a different perspective, innovative new ideas, and a diverse set of skills to the local government workforce. The programme is flexible to your needs, and graduates can be placed into a variety of schemes. You can [find more information and sign up on our NGDP webpage](#). Applications close 31 March 2021.

## National Minimum Wage

HMRC has produced [a webinar](#) for employers and commissioners within social care that considers aspects of working time that may cause confusion for employers, including time spent on travelling, waiting and breaks.

## **BREXIT Right to work for EEA citizens following the end of the transition period**

A number of councils have raised queries about the right to work of EEA citizens from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> June 2021 when the grace period for applying for “settled status” ends.

The Home Office has published updates to the [Employer’s Guide to Right to Work Checks](#) to support employers to undertake right to work checks. The key points are:

- Right to work checks for EEA citizens will not change until after 30 June 2021. Until then, EEA citizens can use their passport or national identity card to evidence their right to work.
- During this time, employers will not be expected to differentiate between EEA citizens who arrived before the end of the transition period (31 December 2020) and those arriving afterwards, in the grace period from 1 January to 30 June 2021.
- EEA citizens with status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) or the points-based immigration system may choose to use the Home Office online service to evidence their right to work.
- During the grace period employers cannot refuse to accept a passport or ID card from an EEA citizen or insist they use the Home Office’s online checking service to prove their right to work during this period.
- The leaflet [Understanding your right to work: EU, EEA and Swiss citizens](#) can assist employers in providing information to EEA citizen job applicants about the Right to Work process and their responsibilities.
- There is no mandatory requirement for employers to undertake retrospective checks on EEA citizens who were employed on or before 30 June 2021. Employers will maintain a continuous statutory excuse against a civil penalty in the event of illegal working if the initial right to work check was undertaken in line with right to work legislation and published guidance.
- It is recognised that some employers may wish to conduct retrospective checks to ensure the stability of their workforce. If an employer chooses to carry out retrospective checks, they must ensure that they do so in a non-discriminatory manner. [The ‘Code of practice for employers: Avoiding unlawful discrimination while preventing illegal working’](#) provides practical guidance on how to avoid unlawful discrimination when employing individuals and conducting right to work checks.

- The criminal offence of employing an illegal worker is generally reserved for the most serious cases of non-compliance with the Right to Work Scheme.
- New guidance on how to conduct right to work checks on EEA citizens after 30 June 2021 will be provided in advance of this date.

The NHS Employers have provided [a helpful guide for Employers](#) explaining the relevant rules and practice with regard to the EU Settlement Scheme. This resource provides guidance on supporting individuals to remain in the UK.

If you still are seeking clarification queries about the Right to Work Scheme can be sent to: [RighttoRentandRighttoWork@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:RighttoRentandRighttoWork@homeoffice.gov.uk) or contact the Employer Enquiry helpline on 0300 790 6268.

## Long term unemployment study

The Learning and Work Institute [have published research supported by the Local Government Association](#) into projections into long term unemployment post pandemic. The new projections by the Learning and Work Institute estimates that the number of long-term unemployed people across England could reach 1.2 million. This will include significant local variations, which the LGA says highlights the need for targeted, local solutions. Planning for recovery requires a partnership between national and local government, working with local employers, training providers, unions and voluntary sector. This will ensure all local areas can tackle rising unemployment, reskill people to find new work, increase businesses' ability to stay afloat and recruit again and identify and invest in sectors that have the potential to create new and decent jobs.

## Residents' satisfaction with Local Government

The LGA's latest survey into residents' satisfaction with local government has again showed some positive results. It is very encouraging to see that across many indicators – including trust, value for money and feeling informed – levels of satisfaction sit above the average recorded over the last nine years of polling. The results show:

- 67 per cent of people are satisfied with the way their local council runs things
- 67 per cent think their council keep residents informed
- 66 per cent trust their council
- 61 per cent think their council acts on the concerns of residents
- 52 per cent agree their council provides value for money
- 71 said they trust their council to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area, compared to 18 per cent who said the Government
- 70 per cent of respondents singled out councillors as people they most trust to make decisions about how local services are provided

The LGA also asked questions specifically about local government's response to the pandemic. This showed 83 per cent of respondents said their council is managing well to keep its services running, and 53 per cent are satisfied with the way their council is supporting them. [The LGA report provides a detailed analysis of the results.](#)

## England Social Worker Health Check Report 2020-21

The annual report assessing the [Standards for Employers of Social Workers](#) in England was published this week. One hundred and thirty-three councils took part and over 9,200 social workers had their say. The link to the National Social Worker Health Check Report can be found on the LGA [website](#) or downloaded [here](#) as a PDF.

The LGA will be circulating the regional reports in due course and organisations will be receiving their second bespoke reports in the next 2-3 weeks.

## Social Work Week - 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> March

Social Work England is holding a week-long series of free events exploring the impact of social work on society. Taking place from Monday 8 March to Friday 12 March, Social Work Week aims to provide a space for people to discuss what's next for social work, explore perspectives on equality, diversity and inclusion and how great social work practice enriches people's lives. Events are selling out quickly but there are still plenty of tickets available for events across the week, particularly for the larger keynote sessions. Visit the [Social Work England website to explore the programme and book](#).

And finally...

## National Local Government Apprentice of the Year Awards

### 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021

Based on the format of previous regional Apprenticeship Challenges, this exciting national event will provide the opportunity for apprentices to learn, network and showcase their skills, expertise, and initiative during a one-day event.

This [national event is open](#) to all level 2 and level 3 apprentices in local government in England (current apprentices or recently qualified within last 12 months).

For more information, please contact Jayne Cole, Events Coordinator, East of England LGA on [Jayne.cole@eelga.gov.uk](mailto:Jayne.cole@eelga.gov.uk).

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