

LGA/NARE: COVID-19 Workforce Update Issue 27: 26th February – 12th March 2021

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

It is great to report the positive news that infection rates across England and Wales are decreasing. The latest [Office for National Statistics](#) estimates that just over 200,600 had COVID by the end of last week in England equating to around 1 in 270 people. Meanwhile, data out today shows that [the latest R rate for England](#) is between 0.6 to 0.8.

Vaccinations Update

[Latest figures](#) show that 23.3 million people in the UK have now received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and 1.4 million a second dose.

The LGA now provides the [LG Inform report on COVID-19 vaccinations](#), which tracks vaccine roll-out across English councils. We have updated the report with the latest published data. This includes:

- [Local authority broken down by Middle Super Output Area \(MSOA\)](#) (areas of around 7,000 residents on average), and
- [Parliamentary constituencies](#).

Vaccine misinformation

The LGA provided a webinar on vaccine communications and tackling hesitancy and misinformation you can view [the presentations given](#) by Birmingham City Council and Waltham Forest on the LGA website, with full case studies to follow.

The Government has launched [a new social media campaign to tackle false vaccine information](#), particularly those shared amongst ethnic minority communities. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has developed [a 'Check before you share' toolkit](#). The campaign is fronted by trusted local community figures such as imams, pastors and clinicians in short, shareable videos which include simple tips on how to spot misinformation and what to do to stop its spread, signposting

Lateral flow tests

Analysis from the DHSC has found that lateral flow tests (LFD) have a specificity of at least 99.9 per cent when used to test in the community and could be as high as 99.97 per cent. Specificity, which is a measure of how good the test is at detecting true negative cases, show that for every 1,000 lateral flow tests carried out, there is less than one false positive result. The analysis of LFD tests used data from community testing, rapid testing in educational settings and asymptomatic test sites.

Workplace testing

All businesses in England are now able to sign up to receive free rapid coronavirus tests under the Government's workplace testing programme. Since Saturday, businesses of all sizes, including those with fewer than 50 employees, have been able to register online to order lateral flow tests for their workers, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said. Businesses have until March 31 to register for the scheme, which will remain free until the end of June.

Impact of coronavirus on BAME people

The Women and Equalities Committee has published the Government's response to its report (December 2020) on the impact of coronavirus on BAME people. The report found that comorbidities pose a risk for BAME people in experiencing coronavirus more severely and, at times, with adverse health outcomes. The Government has welcomed the committee's recommendations.

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 COVID-19 workforce survey since May. You can view how your authority's data has change over time in the trend report.

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.

SOCIAL CARE

Social Care staff movement Guidance

The Government has published [guidance for care home providers on limiting staff movement between settings in all but exceptional circumstances](#) to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 infection. A [short summary](#) of the guidance can be found on the LGA website.

Testing for homecare workers

[The guidance setting out how homecare agencies in England can order regular tests for their domiciliary care staff has been updated.](#) All registered homecare agencies will be contacted with details of how to apply for test kits for their carers. Homecare agencies will be responsible for ordering and distributing tests to all homecare workers for them to conduct at home on a weekly basis. For more information on homecare agency testing, [you can sign up to DHSC's webinars](#) which are hosted every Tuesday and Thursday.

Social Work Health Check Report Update

[The latest National Social Work Healthcheck report was](#) published last week. The report looks at how employers can support their social workers, particularly in these difficult times. 133 councils participated and each council has received their own bespoke Healthcheck report (you can find out further information on the LGA's Workforce blog, [The best Healthcheck ever](#)).

Social Work Together

The LGA, in partnership with [Social Work England](#), the [Department for Education](#) and the [Department of Health and Social Care](#), is providing this free platform for councils and local authorities to quickly find and connect with qualified and registered social workers. This can be used to complement existing recruitment campaigns that councils have underway. [You are able to register here.](#)

Adult social care workforce - digital capabilities review

Skills for Care, IPSOS Mori and the Institute of Public Care (IPC) have been commissioned by NHSX to conduct a review on digital capabilities of the adult social care workforce to help determine policy priorities in relation to digital skills. From late April-May, council staff with a role in care commissioning, learning and development leads, frontline staff and care provider staff will be invited to complete a 15 minute online/telephone survey. Those participating will be rewarded with a £10 shopping voucher. Any organisations that have successfully invested in staff's digital skills are encouraged to send examples to t_rachel.walker@skillsforcare.org.uk. Please contact England.covid-eolc@nhs.net to request an invite.

SCHOOLS

School re-openings in England

On 8th March schools and colleges [opened more widely for pupils and students](#) in the first step in easing lockdown restrictions. The Department for Education (DFE) has published new guidance as part of the return to school:

- [Updated guidance](#) is available for parents and carers, students and university students, teachers and educational setting leaders about attending education settings from today.
- [Guidance on face coverings](#) has also been updated, clarifying FE sector guidance and outlining reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and students.

Schools testing support

The Department for Education (DfE) has produced additional resources to support schools with their communications as young people move to testing themselves at home. The resources include [posters, leaflets and flyers](#), and other resources which include [instructions and videos](#). The instructions for self-testing are available online in English and 12 other languages. DfE are encouraging schools to include the link to the translations in their testing communications. The Government also [updated guidance](#) for schools and councils on providing school meals.

Testing of staff and pupils in schools over the Easter holiday

The Government has announced that staff and students to keep testing through the Easter holidays to manage the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), as part of a regular habit of testing at home every 3-4 days (twice a week). NHS Test and Trace will be supplying test kits to schools and colleges to enable this to happen.

A letter template has been added onto the [secondary schools and colleges document sharing platform](#) to support schools communications to parents and carers. This covers testing for pupils over the Easter holiday and reporting results, as well as a reminder of the offer of parent and household testing.

DfE will also be hosting a webinar on Wednesday 17 March at 12pm for secondary schools and colleges on the move to testing at home and testing over Easter. Secondary schools and colleges can join the webinar by clicking on the following link: [At home coronavirus \(COVID-19\) testing webinar – Wednesday 17 March at 12pm](#).

Workforce fund for schools and colleges

[The DfE has also announced that the online form for schools to claim for the coronavirus workforce fund is now live.](#) This fund supports state-funded schools and colleges experiencing high staff absence rates and significant funding pressures. The [DfE has also published guidance](#) to help schools complete the form and claim eligible costs related to staff absences during the period 1 November 2020 to 31 December 2020. The deadline to submit a claim is 23:59hrs on 31 March 2021.

Early Career Framework for teachers

From September, the Government is funding an entitlement for all early career teachers in England to receive development support and training over two years instead of one, underpinned by the [Early Career Framework](#). Working with the Department for Education, we have provided a [summary update](#) to support the implementation and are organising a joint webinar on 29 April. Please save the dates in diaries and more information will be shared soon.

HMRC off-payroll working

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) are holding online interactive workshops to discuss the key elements of this April's changes to the [Off-Payroll Working \(OPW\) rules](#) for public authorities. It will answer questions that councils may have about the changes. The sessions will be held on Tuesday 16 March at 11.30am and Wednesday 17 March at 2pm, [with attendees being asked to sign up online.](#)

Local elections Update

This week a [new statutory instrument](#) came into force which amended relevant parts of the [Coronavirus \(Wearing a face covering\) regulations](#) and the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) 2020](#). This mandates the wearing of face coverings at polling, count and postal vote opening venues at the local elections. The amendment confirms that this cannot be used to prevent an entitled voter from voting. The amendment also allows for campaigning activities to take place for election purposes.

The Cabinet Office has also published a [joint statement from the UK Government, Scottish Government and Welsh Government](#) which outlines the measures in place to ensure every elector can safely have their say in the local elections on May 6.

Young people not in education, employment, or training

[There were an estimated 797,000 young people classed as not in education, employment or training \(Neet\) in the final quarter of last year](#), an increase of 39,000 compared with July to September 2020 and up by 34,000 on the figure for October to December 2019. The Office for National Statistics said the latest quarterly increase was the largest since July to September 2011.

Public Sector Exit Payments

On March 4th MHCLG issued a [letter](#) following on from the revocation of the Restriction of [Public Sector Exit Payment](#) Regulations 2020. It includes the withdrawal of the Ministerial letter of [28 October 2020](#) and confirmation that the [consultation on further reforms](#) is now closed. It also confirms that there will be no related changes to [pension](#) or compensation regulations without a fresh consultation exercise. The letter also refers to the possibility of further guidance being issued and we are urging MHCLG to confirm how interest should be calculated.

Following this announcement, the Judicial Review applications have been formally withdrawn and the hearing to which LGA was an interested party, has been cancelled. The LGA expects that further legislation to implement the policy to limit exit payments will be brought forward before the end of the year and the LGA will continue to seek an effective and fair implementation when it does.

Chief executives' pay claim 2021

The Association of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers ([ALACE](#)) has submitted a [pay claim in respect of local authority chief executives](#) that seeks parity with any headline increase that might be agreed for the main bulk of local government staff covered by the '[Green Book](#)' [NJC](#).

Flexible working

On International Women's Day, [the Minister for Women and Equalities, Liz Truss, called on employers to make flexible working a standard option for employees](#), to help level-up the UK, boost opportunities for women and reduce geographic inequality as we recover from COVID-19. It follows new research published by the Government-backed Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and jobs website Indeed, which shows offering flexible working explicitly in job adverts would increase applications by up to 30 per cent.

Firefighter pension cases

The Fire Brigades Union is launching a number of High Court [legal proceedings](#) seeking to speed up the payment of [pensions to firefighters](#) following an earlier court ruling. We are aware that Fire and Rescue Authorities are looking to implement remedy where they can but face a number of challenges due to the lack of guidance setting out how they should do so. We continue to encourage government departments to provide that guidance.

Budget 2021

The Chancellor delivered the Government's Budget on 3rd March and the LGA's [On-the-Day Briefing](#) summarises the key announcements for councils and provides an initial LGA view.

The Chancellor's statement included a number of announcements to further mitigate the impact of the pandemic, including an extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme until the end of September, further funding to be distributed by councils to support businesses, an extension to the universal credit uplift and funding to further support the vaccine roll-out. Amongst other announcements also of interest to councils included a mortgage guarantee scheme, a boost to the Culture Recovery Fund and funding to increase traineeships and boost skills. The launch of the [Levelling Up Fund](#) and [Community Renewal Fund](#) prospectuses are also an important way to help councils invest in their communities as we look to recover from the pandemic and as leaders of places, it is good that councils have been placed at the heart of the delivery of these schemes.

LGA/ADPH Annual Public Health Conference 2021: Rising to the challenge of COVID19, Tuesday 23 March and Wednesday 24 March 2021

The [Annual Public Health Conference](#), organised by the LGA and the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), will include sessions on the future of the public health system, the new National Institute for Health Protection, public opinion on public health, and how we redouble our efforts on tackling health inequalities.

Delegates will be able to put their questions and comments to a range of experts and peers. Keynote speakers include **Professor Chris Whitty**, Chief Medical Officer for England, **Baroness Dido Harding**, Interim Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, **Professor Linda Bauld**, Professor of Public Health, Edinburgh University, **Ben Page**, Chief Executive Ipsos Mori **Professor Devi Sridhar**, Professor of Global Health and **Rt Hon Matt Hancock**, Secretary of State for Health and Care.

[Register for the LGA/ADPH Annual Public Health Conference 2021](#)

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