

COVID-19 Workforce Survey

Research Report

Relating to the week ending 6 August 2021



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Summary

Background

This report is part of a series of monthly surveys of all councils in England and Wales collecting key workforce data on how the sector is responding to COVID-19. An online survey was emailed to heads of human resources, or a nominated contact, in councils from England on the second Wednesday of the month. The data requested related to the week ending the preceding Friday. The intention is that this collection is the single national source through which such data is gathered, and it will, as appropriate, be shared with government departments and others in addition to providing comparator information for councils.

This report relates to the survey sent out on 11 August 2021 and covers the week ending 6 August 2021. The overall response rate was 46 per cent and covered around a third of the total workforce.

Key findings

- Just over nine out of 10 councils (91 per cent) reported that they had at least one member of staff unavailable for work. In total, respondents reported there were 17,710 staff unavailable for work in the week ending 6 August 2021, four per cent of the current workforce.
- Of those councils with at least one member of staff unavailable, 20 per cent reported that they had at least one member of staff off sick with 'long COVID'.
- Twenty per cent of London boroughs had requested and used the 'reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation for critical staff' scheme. Twenty-five per cent of county councils has requested to use the 'self-isolation exceptional exemptions' scheme (for health and social care).
- When asked whether individual services had enough staff to run them normally or not, the top three worst affected areas were adult social care (directly employed), with 72 per cent of councils reporting some level of disruption, children's services, with 63 per cent reporting some level of disruption, and public health, with 54 per cent reporting some level of disruption.
- When asked to assess the council overall, in terms of whether they had enough staff to run services normally or not, 57 per cent of councils reported they were not operating normally.
- More than seven out of 10 councils (72 per cent) had either previously used or were currently using redeployment (both formal and informal) in cases of high absence due to COVID-19. More than three-fifths (63 per cent), had also hired, or were currently hiring temporary/casual staff.

Introduction

Councils face significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, trying to support vulnerable people, their wider communities and businesses. It has required a joined-up approach between government departments, health agencies, local resilience fora and national agencies like the Local Government Association (LGA), all working with and through councils. The LGA and the National Association of Regional Employers (the collective body comprising all the regional employers organisations) joined forces to coordinate an approach to workforce data collection in the sector.

To provide councils with the intelligence to compare progress effectively and plan locally, regionally and nationally, a workforce survey was sent out to all heads of human resources in England. Findings from the survey give councils a stronger position to build capacity in partnership with others; help the LGA and associations understand the workforce situation in authorities and give them the evidence needed to ask government for support and resources; and help shape government thinking as we emerge from lockdown.

Methodology

On 11 August 2021, the LGA's Research and Information Team sent an online survey to all heads of human resources, or their nominated contact, in England (a total of 333 councils). The survey was in the field for two weeks. A total of 152 councils responded, which is a response rate of 46 per cent.

Table 1 and **Table 2** provide a breakdown of responses by authority type and region. Whilst these results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this group of respondents, rather than representative of all heads of human resources, this level of response means that the results are likely to provide a good indication of the position of the sector more widely.

Type of authority	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
District	181	77	43
County	24	16	67
London borough	33	15	45
Metropolitan district	36	19	53
Unitary	59	25	42
All	355	152	46

Table 2: Response rate by region

Region	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate %
Eastern	50	31	62
East Midlands	39	13	33
London	33	15	45
North East	12	9	75
North West	41	16	39
South East	70	19	27
South West	33	14	42
West Midlands	33	12	36
Yorkshire and Humber	22	17	77

Technical notes

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number of respondents who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

COVID-19 Workforce Survey: week ending 6 August 2021

This section contains analysis of the full results from the survey.

Size of local authority workforce

Current headcount as at 6 August 2021

The total headcount for those councils that responded stood at 471,020 on 6 August 2021. The headcount figure includes all permanent, fixed-term, temporary and casual staff.

Table 3: Change in headcount from 1 March 2020 – 6 August 2021	
	At 6 August
County	111,785
District	69,086
London borough	56,927
Metropolitan borough	91,444
Unitary	85,500
English single tier	233,871
All councils	414,742

Base: all respondents (152 councils – 16 counties, 77 districts, 15 London boroughs, 19 metropolitan boroughs, 25 English unitaries, 59 English single tier)

Unavailable for work

Councils were asked to indicate the number of staff that were unavailable for work in the week ending 6 August 2021. Of councils that answered the question, 128 (91 per cent) reported that they had at least one member of staff unavailable.

In total there were 17,710 staff unavailable for work in responding authorities in the week ending 6 August, four per cent of their current workforce. The median number of staff unavailable for work was 55 and the mean was 139.

	No. of councils	% of councils	Total no. staff	Median	Mean
County	15	100	4,457	227	297
District	59	86	2,389	17	43
London borough	13	93	1,477	54	79
Metropolitan borough	18	95	4,357	131	168
Unitary	23	96	5,030	145	272
English single tier	54	95	10,864	132	202
All councils	128	91	17,710	55	139

Base: all respondents (141 councils – 15 counties, 69 districts, 14 London boroughs, 19 metropolitan boroughs, 24 English unitaries, 57 English single tier)

Reason staff were unavailable for work

The 149 councils that reported they had one or more member of staff unavailable for work in the week ending 6 August 2021 were subsequently asked to indicate the reason for them being unavailable, and 127 (85 per cent) were able to provide the reason.

In the week ending 6 August, 69 per cent of staff were unavailable because of 'Non-COVID sickness' and 11 per cent were unavailable due to 'Self-isolation (other)'. Reasons for 'self-isolation (other)' included being in an at-risk group, because the staff member believed they were symptomatic or because the staff member shared a household with someone who was symptomatic. Eight per cent of staff were unavailable due to 'Confirmed/suspected COVID'.

Table 5: For those staff currently unavailable for work, what is/are the reason/s?

	Non-COVID sickness	Confirmed/Suspected COVID	Self-isolation (Track and trace)	Self-isolation (Other)	Caring for dependents/ at risk relative/ someone who is sick	Other reason
	% staff	% staff	% staff	% staff	% staff	% staff
County	72	6	2	16	1	3
District	82	7	4	5	2	0
London borough	83	10	0	6	1	0
Metropolitan borough	73	8	4	9	0	6
Unitary	54	8	1	11	0	24
English single tier	66	8	2	10	0	14
All councils	69	8	2	11	1	9

Base: respondents with unavailable staff (127 councils – 15 counties, 58 districts, 13 London boroughs, 18 metropolitan boroughs, 23 English unitaries, 54 English single tier)

Those councils that had staff unavailable were asked how many had been unable to work for more than six months as a result of what has been termed 'long COVID'¹. Of the 118 councils that answered the question, 34 (29 per cent) reported that they had at least one member of staff off work with long COVID. In total there were 90 staff unavailable due to being off with long COVID. The median number per authority was two and the mean was three.

In the United Kingdom it is estimated that 945,000 people living in private households (1.46% of the population) were experiencing self-reported "long COVID" symptoms as of 4 July 2021. Of those, 380,000 (40.2%) first had (or suspected they had) COVID-19 at least a year previously.²

¹ Respondents were directed to the following link in order to help them define what was meant by 'long COVID': <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/long-term-effects-of-coronavirus-long-covid/>

² [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest insights - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandlife/articles/coronavirus-covid-19/latest-insights)

Table 6: No. of staff unavailable for work due to 'long COVID' (week ending 6 August)

	No. of councils	% of councils	Total no. staff	Median	Mean
County	8	89	12	1	2
District	8	11	19	1	2
London borough	4	50	10	2	2
Metropolitan borough	8	62	32	2	2
Unitary	6	38	17	3	4
English single tier	18	49	59	3	3
All councils	34	29	90	2	3

Base: respondents with unavailable staff (118 councils – 9 counties, 72 districts, eight London boroughs, 13 metropolitan boroughs, 16 English unitaries, 37 English single tier)

Councils were asked whether they had requested to use the “reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation for critical staff” scheme. The majority of councils had either not requested to use the scheme or did not know, but 20 per cent of London boroughs and 17 per cent of English unitaries had requested and used the scheme.

Table 7: To your knowledge, has your authority requested to use the 'reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation for critical staff' scheme?

	Requested and used	Requested but refused	Not requested	Don't know
	% councils	% councils	% councils	% councils
County	6	0	50	44
District	6	1	58	34
London borough	20	0	33	47
Metropolitan borough	0	0	47	53
Unitary	17	0	35	48
English single tier	12	0	39	49
All councils	9	1	50	41

Base: all respondents (150 councils – 16 counties, 77 districts, 15 London boroughs, 19 metropolitan boroughs, 23 English unitaries, 57 English single tier).

Councils with adult social care responsibilities were then asked whether they had requested to use the ‘reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation for critical staff’ scheme. Again, the majority of councils had either not requested to use the scheme or did not know, but a quarter (25) of county councils had and 13 per cent of London boroughs had requested to use the scheme.

Table 8: To your knowledge, has your authority requested to use the ‘self-isolation exceptional exemptions’ scheme (for health and social care)?

	Yes	No	Don’t know
	% councils	% councils	% councils
County	25	44	31
London borough	13	40	47
Metropolitan borough	5	42	53
Unitary	4	38	58
English single tier	7	40	53
All councils	11	41	49

Base: respondents from councils with adult social care responsibilities (74 councils – 16 counties, 15 London boroughs, 19 metropolitan boroughs, 24 English unitaries, 58 English single tier).

Service disruption

When asked whether individual services had enough staff to run them normally or not, the top three worst affected areas were adult social care (directly employed), with 72 per cent of councils reporting some level of disruption, children's services, with 63 per cent reporting some level of disruption, and public health, with 54 per cent reporting some level of disruption.

When asked to assess the council overall, in terms of whether they had enough staff to run services normally or not, 60 per cent of councils reported they were not operating normally.

Table 9: Please select the status of the services to the show if there are enough staff to run the service normally or not.

	Base	Operating normally	Operating with minor disruption	Operating with moderate disruption	Operating with severe disruption
	No. councils	% councils	% councils	% councils	% councils
Adult social care (directly employed)	82	28	43	26	4
Bereavement services	101	67	26	7	0
Children's services	75	37	39	21	3
Environment health	133	56	29	10	5
Household waste (doorstep collection)	113	47	35	13	4
Housing and homelessness services	131	69	22	8	2
Planning	141	67	23	9	1
Public health	95	46	28	21	4
Revenue and benefits	128	70	20	10	0
Schools	51	51	25	22	2
Trading standards	76	47	41	8	4
Overall council	150	40	44	15	1

Base: all respondents which run the relevant service (base varies by service).

Councils were asked what contingencies/mitigations they had used in case of high rates of absences due to COVID-19. More than seven out of 10 councils (72 per cent) had either previously used or were currently using redeployment (both formal and informal). More than three fifths (63 per cent), had also hired, or were currently hiring temporary/casual staff.

Table 10: During the pandemic, what workforce contingencies/mitigations, if any, have been used already, are currently being used, or are planned in case of high rates of absence due to COVID-19

	Base	Used previously, but not currently	Used currently	Planned if needed	Don't know
	No. councils	% councils	% councils	% councils	% councils
Reducing services	135	35	11	24	30
Staff Overtime	138	15	35	28	22
Redeployment (both formal and informal)	147	48	24	16	12
Hiring temporary/casual staff	142	15	47	18	20
Borrowing staff from partner organisations	119	9	3	24	64
Other	28	0	0	4	96

Base: all respondents (base varies by contingency).

Annex A: Questionnaire

COVID - 19 Workforce Collection

Q2.1 How many staff did you have on 6 August 2021?

Please enter a whole number without a comma or decimal place. Please include all staff including temporary, casual, full-time and fixed term.

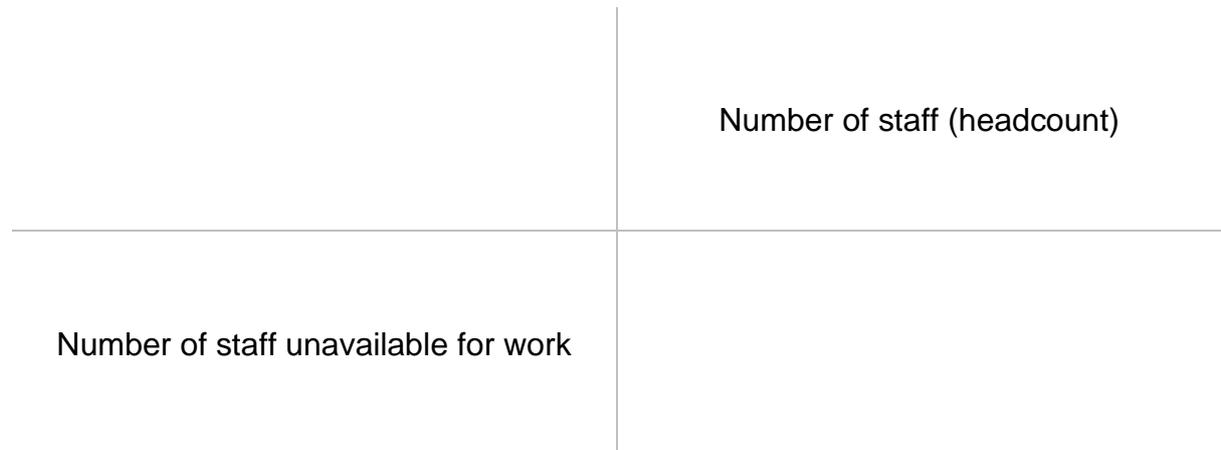
	Number of staff (headcount)
Headcount of staff on 6 August 2021 (including temporary/casual staff)	

Q3.1 How many staff, if any, are currently (6 August 2021) unavailable for work?

Please enter the headcount. If none, please enter zero. If you do not know please leave blank.

For staff unavailable for work please only include staff who are off sick (non-COVID and COVID), or unavailable due to self-isolation. Please do not include

staff who are on annual leave, maternity/paternity leave and other non-sickness or COVID-19-related leave.



Answer this question only if there were staff unavailable for work

Q5.1 For those staff currently unavailable for work, what is the primary reason?

Please provide the number of staff unavailable broken down by reason for week ending 6 August 2021.

If none please enter "0". If you do not know please leave blank.

**Self-isolation (other) can be due to any of the following: Being in an at-risk group; Believe they are symptomatic; Share a household with someone who is symptomatic*

For staff unavailable for work please only include staff who are off sick (non-COVID and COVID) and or unavailable due to self-isolation. Please **do not** include staff who are on annual leave, maternity/paternity leave and other non-sickness or COVID-19-related leave.

	Number of staff (Headcount)
Total staff unavailable	
Non-COVID sicknesses	
Confirmed / Suspected COVID	
Self-isolation (contacted by track and trace)	
Self-isolation (other - see above)	
Caring for dependents/at-risk relative/someone who is sick	

Other (please enter below)

Q3.2 As far as you are aware, in the week ending 6 August, how many staff have been unable to work for more than six months as a result of what has been termed 'long COVID' (see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/long-term-effects-of-coronavirus-long-covid/>)

Number of staff (headcount)

Don't know

Q New – To your knowledge, has your authority requested to use the 'reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation for critical staff' scheme?

Please tick all that apply

	Requested and used	Requested but refused	Not requested	Don't know
Reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation for critical staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Display only if “requested and used” selected

QNew - Please list the posts for which the scheme was requested and used

Please write in

--

Display only if “requested but refused” selected

QNew - Please list the posts for which the scheme was requested but refused

Please write in

--

Q New – To your knowledge, has your authority requested to use the ‘self-isolation exceptional exemptions’ scheme (for health and social care)?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Self-isolation exemption scheme (for health and social care)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4.1 Please select the status of the services to show if there are enough of the right staff to run the service normally or not (at the current level of demand).

This is to allow us to understand whether staff capacity (including redeployed staff) is enough to run the service. It will give us a feel of the pressure points for some of the highest profile service areas.

	Operating normally	Minor disruption	Moderate disruption	Severe disruption	Don't know	Not applicable
Adult social care (directly employed)	<input type="radio"/>					
Bereavement services (cemeteries and crematoria)	<input type="radio"/>					
Children's services	<input type="radio"/>					
Environmental health	<input type="radio"/>					
Household waste (doorstep collection)	<input type="radio"/>					
Housing and homelessness services	<input type="radio"/>					
Planning	<input type="radio"/>					
Public health	<input type="radio"/>					
Revenue and benefits	<input type="radio"/>					

Schools	<input type="radio"/>					
Trading standards	<input type="radio"/>					

Q4.2 In summary, how would you assess the council overall, in terms of whether there are enough staff overall to run services normally or not?

- Operating normally
- Minor disruption
- Moderate disruption
- Severe disruption
- Don't know

QNew During the pandemic, what workforce contingencies/mitigations, if any, have been used already, are currently being used, or are planned in case of high rates of absence due to COVID-19?

	Used previously, but not currently	Used currently	Planned if needed	Don't know
Reducing services (stopping/reducing non-statutory services)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff overtime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Redeployment (both formal and informal)

Hiring temporary/casual staff

Borrowing staff from partner organisations

Other (please specify)

Q9.1 Please enter the details of the person nominated to provide this data for your authority or amend the details we hold below if necessary.

- Name _____
- Authority _____
- Job title _____
- Email address _____

Q9.2 Please provide details of a secondary contact who we can email any notifications and reports which they might find useful.

- Name _____
- Job title _____
- Email Address _____

Q10.1

Once you press the 'Submit' button below, you will have completed the survey.

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. You are in control of any personal data that you have provided to us in your response. You can contact us at all times to have the information changed or deleted. You can find our full privacy policy here: [click here to see our privacy policy](#)



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