

# Impact of Covid on our Staff



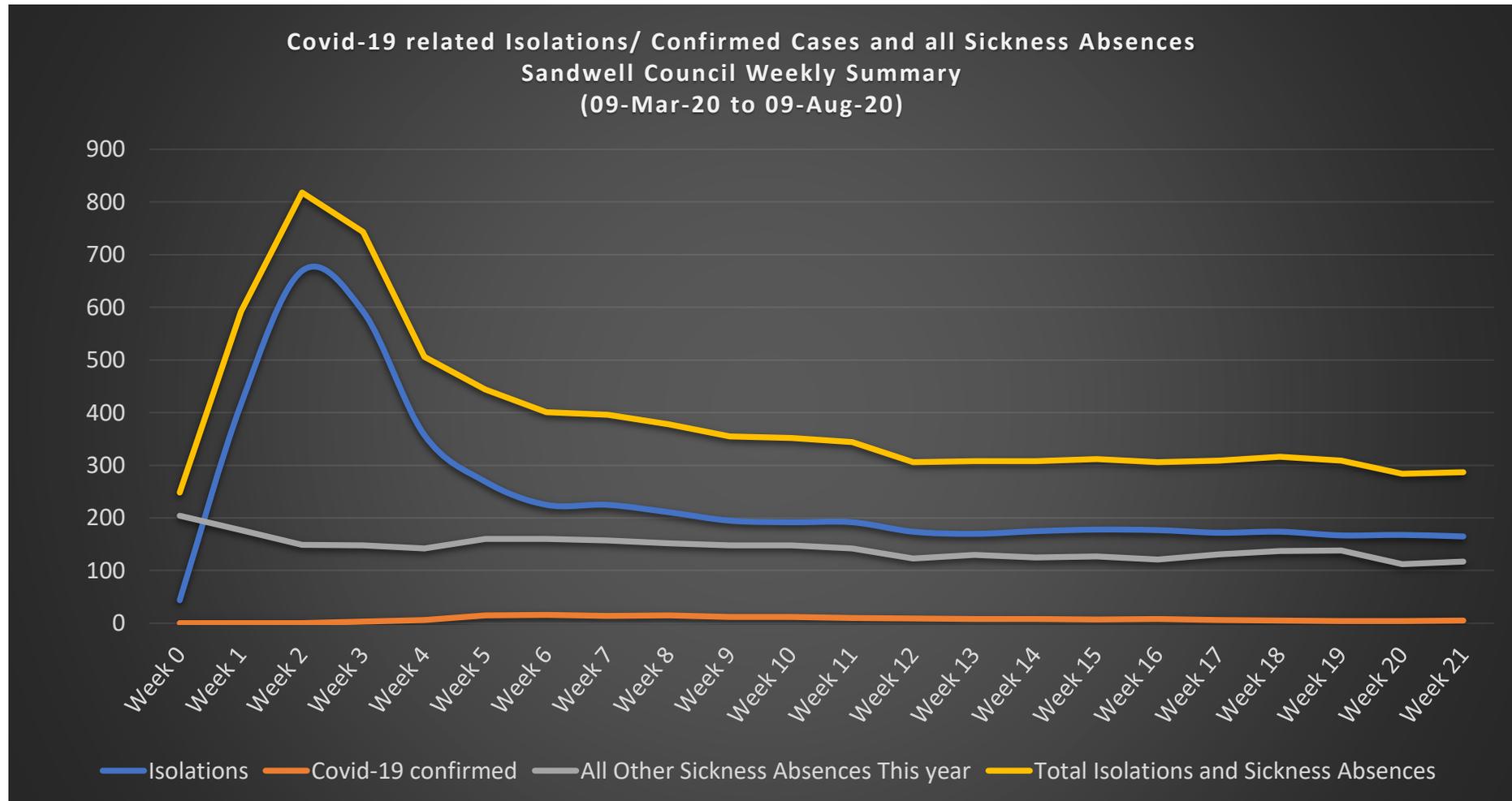
# Sources of Intelligence

- This chapter focuses on the impact of Covid on the council's staff
- Drawn from staff surveys, HR data, staff focus groups and the virtual staff conferences in July
- Led by the Staff Impact Working Group



# Sickness Absence Sandwell Council

The chart shows the actual number of employees either isolating due to the coronavirus; off sick with confirmed Covid-19 and for all other sickness absence reasons. The number of employees going into isolation accelerated in week 1 and peaked in week 2, with the number of new cases progressively declining after the initial peak and the curve flattening from week 8 onwards.

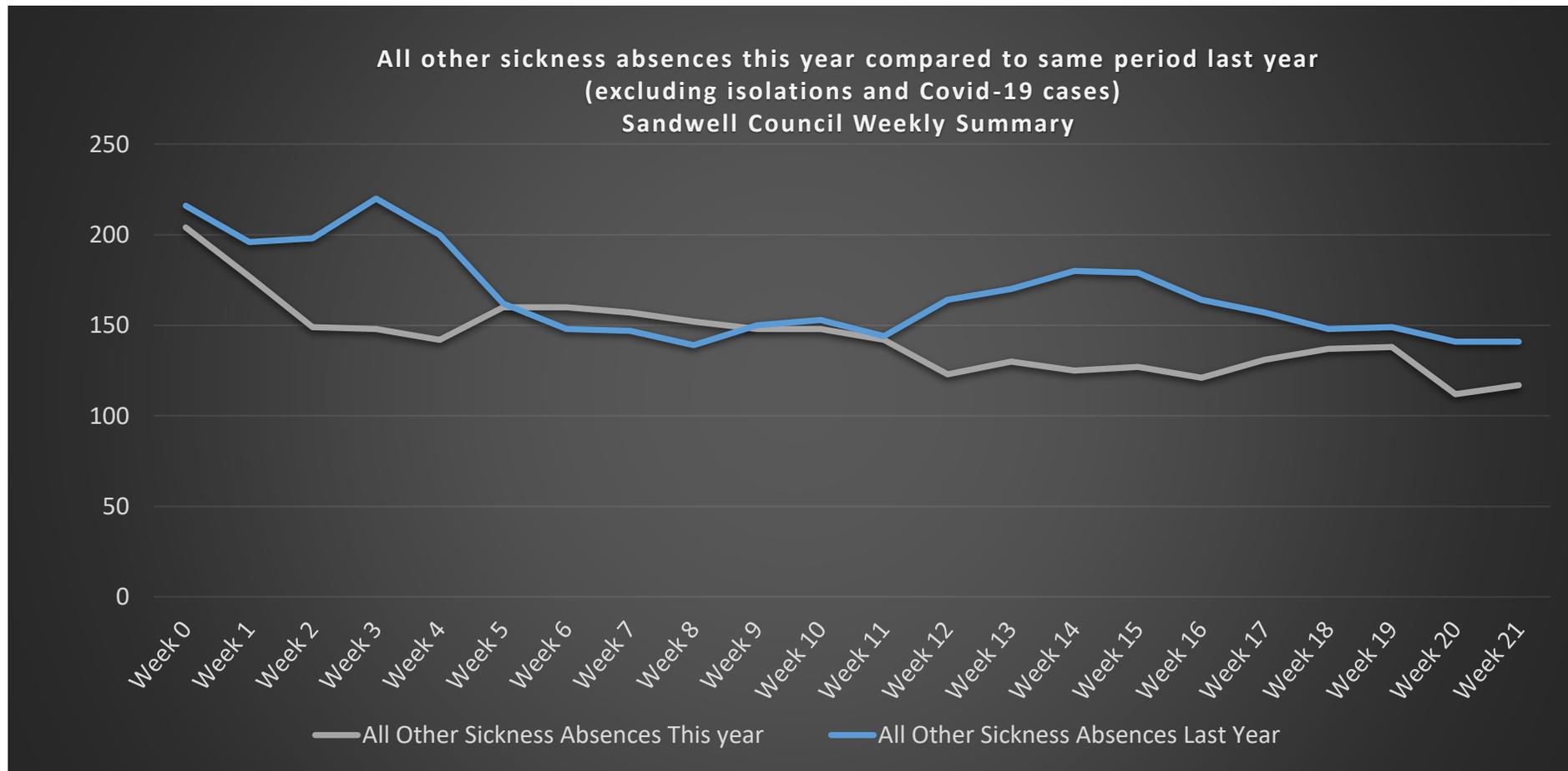


# Sickness Absence Sandwell Council

The chart shows the actual number of employees off sick week-by-week this year compared to the same period last year. For consistency of comparison, isolations due to coronavirus and confirmed covid-19 cases have been excluded.

On whole the number of employees reporting sick each week since the lockdown began in March this year was lower compared to the same period last year. The exceptions are weeks 6 to 8 which show a small weekly increase this year compared to last year.

On average 60 fewer employees reported sick between weeks 3-5 of the lockdown compared to the same period last year. Similarly on average 46 fewer employees reported sick between weeks 12-16 of the lockdown compared to the same period last year.



# A new style of working

- The Workplace Vision Survey was completed between April and June at the height of the pandemic
- At that time, 88% of staff were working at home and a further 6% were doing a combination of home and office
- This was a massive shift in the style of working within a very short time frame
- Through the surveys and focus groups, we have found that staff are very proud and positive about how we have responded to the pandemic as an organisation
- Considering so few of us worked permanently from home, we have seized the challenges of delivery services from home and adapted well. The technology has mostly been reliable in assisting this.
- However, in the July employee survey, only 65% said they would like to WFH on permanent basis



# Wellbeing and mental health

- In the July employee survey, staff rated themselves as pretty healthy in regards to their mental health and wellbeing- 7 out of 10
- Staff have appreciated having the potential to balance home and work life and many have enjoyed not having a commute
- However, some people have experienced hugely increased workloads and back to back virtual meetings
- The practice of separating home and work life has been more difficult working at home
- Balancing caring responsibilities and work has placed added pressure on staff but most managers have been flexible
- The sense of isolation of some staff working from home has increased over time
- For various reasons, some staff have found working at home very stressful and have requested to work from the office when they can
- A quarter of staff have experienced a close bereavement



# Things that have gone well

- Most managers have been managing flexibly/ sympathetically
- Staff found that communications have been consistent and good
- The virtual staff conferences were liked by all members of the focus groups, asking for more in the future
- Technology allowing remote working has mostly worked well



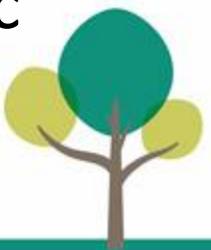
# Some of the difficulties experienced

- balancing caring responsibilities has been hard and some managers have not been as flexible or accommodating as they could be
- IT has been an issue for some staff, telephony and printing mentioned specifically
- The major limitation of the current communication methods is that not every front-line employee is online and therefore is not getting the same level of staff communication. There is a clear need to devise proper mechanisms for communicating with actual front-line employees.



# Concerns/worries expressed

- Job insecurity concerns post Covid/ financial insecurity of council
- Uncertain when coming back to work and to what building
- Need to be clear about what the new normal will be like and put training in place
- Reassurance needed over social distancing/ safety in workplace when do return to work
- Home environment may not be conducive for everyone
- Concern about returning to work when vulnerable/shielding
- Concern about safety of BAME employees working in the community
- Concern that IT has let some services down – telephony/ printing etc



# Staff suggestions for improvement

- Focus groups suggested that there was a need for more training for managers and staff
- Need to be clear about what the new normal will be like and put training in place
- Managers needed training on how best to manage staff during this COVID pandemic, and what is expected of them as a manager during the pandemic
- Staff require training on how to get the most of the IT software they have available, so that they can become more comfortable with the software and start to maximise its benefits
- Clear mode of communication for those staff that do not have remote access



# Actions already being taken

- An Intranet page was created as a central access point for any wellbeing and training support. It also provides the latest information regarding COVID 19
- Reviewing SMART working guidance. This ensures that the working guidance answers any questions that staff may have in regards from WFH
- WFM toolkit
- Increase in dates and access to iACT managers/colleague training. The iACT course gives participants a good understanding of mental health and wellbeing issues
- ICT support package (Tips and Tricks) e.g. Training for MS Teams/Webinars



# Key messages/recommendations

- Staff have coped well with adapting quickly to a new working style and maintaining service delivery in adverse circumstances
- Recognise that this style has not suited everybody equally for a variety of reasons
- Need to now define the new operating model and embed in the organisation
- Balancing needs of staff with the needs of the organisation
- Continue to listen to staff voice through regular pulse surveys
- Augment communications mechanisms in light of remote working, particularly with the frontline and those without remote access

