

Agenda item:	16
Attachment:	A

HRA Board Cover sheet

24 March 2021

Title of paper:	COVID-19: Staff forum feedback raised regarding special leave
Submitted by:	Ian Cook
Summary of paper:	<p>At the last Board meeting the staff forum representative provided feedback regarding how staff are feeling at present with the latest COVID related lockdown. A number of comments were raised with regard to cover arrangements and the use of special leave.</p> <p>This paper provides an update on how we've listened and responded to those concerns.</p>
Reason for submission:	For information
Further information:	<p>The staff forum representative reported staff really appreciated the flexible working arrangements available during this lockdown period however noted for some staff the situation was challenging, particularly parents. The representative advised there were issues with cover for some staff due to sickness and the closure of schools. The representative enquired whether unlimited special leave would apply during this third lockdown period.</p> <p>Senior management has listened to these concerns with feedback detailed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have continued to highlight the options available to staff including working flexibly, taking annual leave or special leave and the importance of having a discussion with line manager to obtain the appropriate support. Whilst unlimited special leave has not been offered as standard for this third lockdown, we have advised staff to discuss the issue with line managers and additional special leave may be taken when agreed. This policy is in keeping with other arm's length bodies. • To ascertain if the need for special leave has increased, we regularly monitor staff absences and uptake of special leave.

	<p>This is to ensure, from a business continuity perspective, we have sufficient staff to be able to deliver our core objectives, and also consider how we can support staff further. The monitoring takes place on a weekly basis and is reported at the weekly COVID-19 steering group meeting with a full review on staff absence rates taking place regularly at Workforce Board. There have been very few instances of staff absence due to COVID-19 and only and only 9.6 FTE days special leave for caring responsibilities have been recorded stating COVID-19 as the related reason between 1 January 2021 and 28 February 2021.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst the uptake of special leave has been relatively low, we have however continued to hear anecdotal feedback through various forums that some staff are still struggling with childcare commitments and may feel unable to take time off or are worrying about letting the team down. We recognise the differing challenges facing everyone and acknowledge and appreciate the level of commitment our staff have shown throughout the pandemic. We have therefore continued to communicate the message that support is available and staff should be taking breaks and annual leave wherever possible to help manage the situation. • A key focus has also been promoting both mental and physical health and wellbeing on our intranet and in HRA news, with a dedicated wellbeing all staff videoconference held on 11 February. The HRA mental health framework has been published and we have mental first aiders available for staff to talk to. The free confidential employee assistance programme is promoted regularly as another means of support. We continue to encourage staff to talk to someone about how they are feeling and any concerns they may have and recognise the move out of lockdown and future return to offices may be challenging for individuals in other ways.
Budget / cost implication:	N/A
Dissemination:	Published with Board papers
Time required:	5 mins