



Covid 19 Vaccination Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to staff and managers regarding arrangements for staff being vaccinated in line with Government guidelines and advice.

The policy sets out the Council's stance on employees being vaccinated and how the vaccination programme impacts our workforce.

The policy provides information about specific Government legislation which will mandate some staff to be fully vaccinated to be able to undertake their work.

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Introduction

As a response to the pandemic, a vaccine to prevent serious health effects from coronavirus has been developed and made available to the public. The purpose of this policy is to set out our organisation's stance on the vaccine as it affects our workforce and the related rights of our employees.

Individual opinions on vaccines can vary greatly and we appreciate that having a vaccine is generally a personal choice, dictated by personal circumstances. The Government has not made the taking of the vaccine mandatory for the whole population, however for some employees it has been deemed as mandatory to provide evidence of their vaccination status to be able to undertake their role (see 'Mandatory vaccination for staff required to work in Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered care homes' section of this document)

Wokingham Borough Council's stance on vaccination

As an employer, we have a duty to ensure the safety of our employees. In addition, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health, safety, and welfare at work of all their workers. Despite the extensive measures we have taken to ensure that our workplace and our working arrangements are, and continue to be, COVID secure, research has shown the vaccines help provide a greater level of personal protection and safety against serious illness (source: NHS.uk).

Because of this, the Council are actively supporting employees to take up the opportunity to have the vaccine when it is offered to them.

Treating colleagues with respect

The Council recognises that the subject of the COVID-19 vaccination programme can be divisive and lead to the expression of strong opinions. However, employees must remain responsible and respectful when communicating with their colleagues about COVID-19 vaccinations.

Employees must not act against colleagues in a way that could amount to bullying or harassment, for example mocking a colleague's views on COVID-19 vaccinations or forcing their own views on COVID-19 vaccinations on others.

The harassment or intimidation of colleagues because of their views or individual circumstances may lead to disciplinary action.

Any employee who is offended by, or concerned about, a colleague's behaviour in this regard should raise the matter with their line manager.

Making an informed decision

It is normal that some of our employees may have concerns about having the vaccine. We encourage all our workforce to make an informed decision by paying attention to official information sources such as the NHS. We also ask our employees to check the source of any information they read about the Covid 19 vaccines, as we are aware that there is a certain amount of information available which lacks credibility.

Vaccination Appointments

Wherever possible, employees should attempt to secure a vaccination appointment outside of their normal working hours, or as close to the start or the end of the working day as possible. If this is not possible, vaccination appointments will be treated in the same way as other medical appointments and staff should inform their line manager of the date/time of the appointment. Line managers may, at their discretion, ask employees to produce evidence of their appointment (for example an appointment card or email/text inviting them to a COVID-19 vaccination appointment).

Employees who may become unwell after receiving a coronavirus vaccination should take sickness absence in the usual way, adhering to Council's Leave policy.

Mandatory vaccination for staff required to work in Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered care homes

The Government has now passed laws to make it a legal requirement for staff regularly required to work in CQC registered care homes to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they have a medical or other exemption.

The Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) (No. 2) Regulations 2022 sets out this requirement which came into force on 6 January 2022. The requirement to be vaccinated will apply to workers aged 18 or over who enter the indoor premises of a care home to work. There is an exception where the worker can show that they have a genuine medical or other exemption.

New applicants to the Council (including agency staff) that fall in scope of the legislation will be informed if appropriate and will be required to provide evidence of their vaccination status. Existing employees that are in scope of the legislation will also be asked to provide evidence of their vaccination status.

The legislation requires staff in scope to have completed the course of doses of an authorised vaccine. For the approved UK NHS vaccines this is currently detailed as two doses to be compliant, this may be subject to change due to revised Government policy and legislation. For vaccines administered outside of the UK, please refer to the legislation for further guidance on vaccination compliance.

Employees that are in scope of the legislation should **not** enter CQC registered care homes as part of their duties unless they are fully vaccinated or medically or otherwise exempt. If you have any concerns, you should contact your line manager before entering.

For employees that refuse to be vaccinated or do not have an appropriate exemption and therefore are not compliant with the legislation, the following actions will be considered:

- Reasonable adjustments to roles in scope may be considered at the discretion of the management team, and only if service needs allow this to be considered.
- Alternative roles for employees who have not been vaccinated and do not have an appropriate exemption may not be available, but this will be explored.
- As a last resort, the Council may be left with no option to dismiss these individuals as the current legislation does not allow them to work in CQC registered care homes.

Data Protection

Data collected about our workforce's vaccination status will be held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purpose of ensuring that we comply with this new legal requirement.

Management must ensure that an individual's personal data, including data relating to their health, is handled in accordance with our data protection policy.

Any breach of confidentiality, which includes a line manager disclosing a worker's vaccination status to other colleagues who have no legal or business requirement to be informed of a colleague's vaccination status, will be treated very seriously, and dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedure.

Further information

Further help and advice can be obtained through emailing hrenquiries@wokingham.gov.uk

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