

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Employment Committee
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	28 February 2017
<b>Subject:</b>	Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report
<b>Report by:</b>	Jon Bell - Director of HR, Legal and Performance
<b>Wards affected:</b>	N/A
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Full Council decision:</b>	No

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## 1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to update Employment Committee about levels of sickness absence across the council and actions being taken to manage absence.

## 2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- **Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism.**
- **Note the actions detailed in section 3 of the report**

## 3. Background

- 3.1 In the period since the last update in November 2016 the level of sickness absence has increased from 8.46 to 8.75 average days per person per year. This is against the corporate target of an average 7 days per person per year. The principle cause of this increase is an increase in the amount of absence in Adult Social Care, and further information about this is provided in section 3.7 below.
- 3.2 Analysis of data indicates that since the last report there has been a slight increase in the amount of long term absence from 4.82 to 4.90 average days per person per year. Short term absence has for the first time in some months seen an increase from 2.29 to 2.51 average days per person per year over the same period.
- 3.3 Absence levels by Directorates for the period from 01 February 2016 to 31 January 2017 are attached in Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Of the 14 Directorates, eight (excluding schools) are over the corporate target of an average 7 days per person per year. The number of Directorates that are over an average 10 days per person per year has reduced to one in the last quarter.

- 3.5 A table of reasons for absence over the last four years is included in Appendix 2. The analysis of the data indicates that the main reasons for absence have remained the same, with the three main reasons; musculoskeletal; anxiety, stress and psychological and colds, flu and virus, accounting for 51.72% of absences in the last 12 months. This compares to 53.8% in the period 01 November 2014 to 31 October 2015.
- 3.6 At the last meeting, members requested further clarification about the recording of absence, in particular why some absences were reported as being "blank". Members are advised that when an absence is recorded the manager is required to select a reason for the absence from a list of options. However, the design of the system meant that it was possible for a manager to leave the field empty (causing the absence to be unhelpfully reported as "blank"). Changes have now been made to the software to correct this feature. However, it will take some time for historic records to be corrected, and so the "blank" line will continue to appear in reports for the next few issues.
- 3.7 The majority of the increase in absence levels is attributable to a significant increase in absence levels in Adult Social Care. Since the last Employment Committee Adult Social Care has re-distributed services amongst its senior management team. As a result of this change the directorate has identified a significant amount of absence that was incorrectly entered onto the Oracle system. Appropriate action has been taken to address this issue. Also, two residential units have been subject to a norovirus type outbreak during December and January. The combination of the above has contributed towards the 10% increase in headline sickness absence figures in this Directorate.
- 3.7.1 Adult Social Care are continuing to brief and train staff new to absence management and will be creating a Senior Resources Role who's duties will include responsibility for managing attendance.
- 3.8 Members also requested further information about the use of back-to-work interviews and other aspects of the council's absence management arrangements.
- 3.8.1 Although the format of back-to-work interviews is not prescribed, it is highly recommended that managers do hold a discussion with returning absentees to understand the reasons for absence, any underlying causes (e.g. conflicts at work, domestic issues etc.) and the steps that could be taken to improve attendance in future. The notes from such discussions are important documents as they may be referred to in the event that further management action is taken in respect of the employee's attendance. As such, they should be stored on the employee's electronic file.
- 3.8.2 Managers are provided with comprehensive monthly reports about sickness absence in their areas. HR Officers work with managers to ensure that appropriate action is being taken in all cases, and that absences are not allowed to "drift".

3.8.3 Managers are separately notified, through the self-service system, of any absences that have reached 21 days.

3.8.4 HR have and will continue to provide briefings to service management teams to ensure that managers are familiar with policies and procedures, and are properly-supported in managing absence. These cover topics such as:

- How an employee should report sickness
- Handling return to work interviews
- How to handle 'fit notes'
- What to consider when reviewing an employee's absence record
- The procedures and process for formally managing short and long term absence
- The Role of Occupational Health
- Phased returns to work
- Equality Act 2010
- Absence in Probation
- Access to additional services such as EAP and the back-care specialist

#### **4. Reasons for recommendations**

The continued monitoring of sickness absence and the identification of good management practices is an important part of maximising attendance, which will in turn increase productivity, improve engagement and build resilience.

#### **5. Equality impact assessment (EIA)**

A preliminary Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

#### **6. Legal implications**

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

#### **7. Finance comments**

There is no significant cashable saving resulting from the reduction in sickness absence. However there will be an improvement in productivity in terms of total days worked.

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Signed by:

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Sickness Absence by Directorate 31 January 2017

Appendix 2: Summary of reasons for absence

Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

.....  
Signed by: