

Decision Maker: Employment Committee

Subject: Sickness Absence Update

Date of Decision: 1st October 2013

Report By: Jon Bell – Head of HR, Legal & Performance

Wards Affected: N/A

Key Decision: N/A

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) Advise members of the current sickness absence levels
- (ii) Update members on the matters considered by the Sickness Absence Working Group
- (iii) Advise members about actions currently being undertaken in the HR, Legal and Performance Service to support managers in tackling sickness absence

2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- (i) Note the current levels of sickness absence across the council and the on-going efforts of members and officers to reduce sickness absence

3. Current Sickness Absence Levels (as at 31st August 2013)

3.1 The current level of sickness absence is 9.5 days on average per employee per year. This represents a decrease since the start of the financial year, when the figure was 9.76 days on average per employee. A breakdown of absence levels by services is attached at Appendix A.

4. Sickness Absence Working Group

4.1 Employment Committee previously agreed, at the request of Trades Union representatives, to set up a working group to look into issues relating to sickness absence. Due to scheduling difficulties, this group has only met on 2 occasions, but the following matters were discussed:

- The council's offer in terms of employee wellbeing, including:
 - Employee assistance service

- Promoting exercise
- Feedback from staff in recent PULSE survey
- Arrangements for the recording of sickness absence and the reliability of data
- New Occupational Health arrangements
- Suggestions from staff about actions that could be adopted to help encourage attendance
- The council's absence management policy
- Work-related stress
- Influenza vaccinations

In addition, members of the group have met with individual Heads of Service to discuss their approaches to managing absence. Although the working group has been a helpful forum for sharing and discussing ideas that might help to reduce absence, the composition of the group and infrequency of meetings has meant that its capacity to significantly tackle the issue has been limited. Members are invited to consider whether the working group should continue to meet in its current form.

5. Actions to Support Managers in Tackling Sickness Absence

5.1 Members have previously been advised of a renewed focus on sickness absence within HR, and the actions being taken by HR staff to work with managers to help them tackle sickness absence within their teams. Although, by its nature, this is a "long game", there have been some significant successes. These include:

- In Adult Social Care there has been a renewed focus on "maximising attendance". All managers have attended workshops and looked at how to remove the barriers to managing individual cases, particularly long-term absences. A stronger and more proportionate management approach has helped to reduce average annual absence from 11.96 days to 10.84 days per employee since the start of the financial year.
- In Housing Management, targeted action by managers, supported by HR, has resulted in overall absence rates reducing to the lowest levels in over 2 years. Improvements to the quality of absence data have enabled better interventions, and specific support (e.g. back-care advice to Clean and Green Team) has helped to address the most common causes of absence.

5.2 The transfer of Public Health to the Council has provided an opportunity to review and improve the approach to employee wellbeing, and officers from

HR and Public Health are working together to do this. Further reports will be provided to Members on this topic in due course.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

A preliminary Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out.

7. Legal Considerations

There are no legal considerations arising directly from this report. Appropriate legal advice will be taken before any resultant changes to employment policies are made.

8. Head of Finance's Comments

There are no financial implications arising from this report

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Signed by: Jon Bell

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
None	

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

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Signed by: