

**Title of meeting:** Employment Committee

**Date of meeting:** 25 June 2019

**Subject:** Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report

**Report by:** Rochelle Kneller - Assistant Director of HR

**Wards affected:** N/A

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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## 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. 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 and promote employee wellbeing.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Members are recommended to:

- **Note the change to absence management and reporting following the introduction of the Business Intelligence (BI) system**
- **Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism**
- **Note the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance.**

## 3. Background

- 3.1. BI is the new corporate information tool that is available to all managers and employees in the council with responsibility for staffing and budgets. It enables managers to access information and reports directly about employees and finances, to assist them to fulfil their responsibilities to make timely, evidence-based decisions.
- 3.2. BI uses a different method to collate data from the EBS system compared to the previous reporting method. BI has the ability to find and match data entered into EBS, using the actual hours entered by the manager as its base figure. Previously this was not possible and it was necessary to make assumptions and use calculations to convert the hours recorded into a working days lost figure. The new BI system will therefore produce more accurate sickness absence data.

- 3.3. This is the first quarterly sickness absence report to use the absence statistics produced by BI. Due to this new system calculation, it should be noted that during this transition period it is not possible to draw a direct comparison between last quarter's figures and this quarter's figures, albeit that the new system is reporting the same statistics, the calculations used differ from previous quarters. A direct comparison will however be possible from next quarter.
- 3.4. The following section of the report will therefore note this quarter's sickness absence figures for future comparison purposes:
- The level of sickness absence for this quarter is 10.91 average days per person per year
  - Working time lost is currently 2.98 per cent (excluding schools)
  - Long term absence is 6.70 average days per person per year. With cancer and tumours being the main reason for long term sickness
  - Short term absence is 2.81 average days per person per year. With virus (colds, coughs and influenza) being the main reason for short term sickness
  - Out of 12 directorates, eight (excluding schools) are over the corporate target of an average 7 days sickness per person per year
  - The highest reasons for sickness absence are psychological (stress, anxiety and depression), virus and gastrointestinal
  - Musculoskeletal absences are divided into three categories; if these were collated they would become the second highest ranked reason for absence. Despite the change in the collation of data through the implementation of BI, these reasons have remained consistent over the last 12 months and have informed the wellbeing initiatives that are being undertaken.
- 3.5. Absence levels by directorates for the period from 01 May 2018 to 31 May 2019 are attached in Appendix 1. A summary of reason for sickness absence for the last year is attached in Appendix 2.

#### **4. Wellbeing**

- 4.1. The council appointed a Workplace Wellbeing Co-Ordinator, funded from the Public Health Transformation Fund. The post is responsible for promoting wellbeing across the council's employees, including at the council's remote locations. Using the data from the sickness absence statistics and national Public Health campaigns has allowed the Workplace Wellbeing Co-ordinator to launch a programme of activities and interventions to improve employee wellbeing across the council, specifically aiming at increasing mental health awareness and reducing stigma as well increasing physical activity and healthy lifestyles.
- 4.2. Evidence shows that one of most effective ways to improve mental and physical wellbeing is to increase activity, in order to help employees include this in their working day, initiatives such as lunchtime walks continue to be embedded at the council, with new walks being introduced at some of the outstations across the city. In addition, in February a campaign to encourage employees to use the stairs rather than the lifts to improve fitness was introduced. Research shows that using the stairs burns more calories per minute than jogging, reduces cardio risk by

more than 30%, helps control weight and builds muscle tone. It is also an easy way to build fitness into your life and create new healthy habits. To encourage uptake, communication messages were sent to all employees and new signage has been displayed around the lift areas at Civic Offices and other locations.

- 4.3. Mindfulness is an ancient practice which means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. It is simply a practical way to notice thoughts, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells and has been shown to improve emotional and physical wellbeing. Regular practice can reduce anxiety, stress, depression, tiredness and irritability. Mindfulness sessions on a Friday morning continue to be popular and additional sessions over lunch times have now commenced in outstations. Following requests from employees new lunch time sessions are to be set up within the civic offices.
- 4.4. A number of campaigns have been run in response to the feedback received during the February Employment Committee. During the February committee two Directors were in attendance and gave an overview of the actions being taken within their services. Specific reference was made to an ageing workforce and the links to increased risk of cancer and other long term illness as well as the continued need to support mental health within the workplace. Campaigns focusing on mental health have been introduced this quarter by providing training for managers, this has been a very popular course and we are in the process of commissioning Solent MIND to continue running regular sessions, ensuring new and existing managers have access to this training. Mental Health awareness week also took place focussing activities on the five ways to wellbeing; be active, keep learning, take notice, connect and give. As a result of this campaign a number of teams got together for the 'connect' theme and hosted tea and talk sessions and positive feedback has been received on these.
- 4.5. A campaign highlighting the importance of attending cancer screening appointments has been run this quarter. The campaign aimed to provide employees with information about the benefits of early diagnosis and reminded managers that employees are entitled and encouraged to take time off to attend cancer screening appointments. It is hoped that it will help identify cancer earlier and reduce the symptoms suffered by employees.
- 4.6. Wellbeing campaigns that will run annually are flu vaccinations and stay well in winter. HR are working with Trade Union colleagues on the next campaign which will focus on raising awareness within the organisation around menopause and the symptoms that employees may experience.
- 4.7. The Workplace Wellbeing Co-ordinator along with colleagues in HR and Procurement completed the tender process for the councils Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) contracts, which will commence in July 2019. As a result of the tender, Workplace Wellness were successful in their bid and will continue to deliver the EAP service for the council. As part of their new contract they will be running awareness sessions on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> June as well as a webinar on the 20<sup>th</sup> with over 150 managers and employees booked on to date.

4.8. The Occupational Health contract will see the council change to a new provider, Cordell Health Ltd, who are a social enterprise specialising in providing early intervention and specialist support to employees, HR and managers on health and wellbeing at work. Communications will be coming out towards the end of June promoting the new provider and also inviting managers to attend training on how to utilise the Occupational Health portal that Cordell Health Ltd will be using with the council.

**5. Reasons for recommendations**

5.1. To increase employee attendance at work. To do this through monitoring sickness absence and improving employee wellbeing, which in turn, will increase productivity, improve engagement and build a more resilient workforce.

**6. Equality impact assessment (EIA)**

6.1. A preliminary Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

**7. Legal implications**

7.1. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

**8. Finance comments**

8.1. 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 - May 2019

Appendix 2: Summary of reasons for sickness absence - May 2019.

**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: