

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Employment Committee
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	6 March 2020
<b>Subject:</b>	Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report
<b>Report by:</b>	Rochelle Kneller - Assistant Director of HR
<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

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

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Members are recommended to:

- Continue to monitor sickness absence, and ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism.
- Note the wellbeing activities undertaken to support attendance.
- Agree the corporate absence target for the organisation.

## 3. Background

- 3.1. As requested during the September Employment Committee, we have sought to compare absence levels with similar sized local authorities. This has been more complicated than anticipated due to the variances in recording, reporting and organisational structure. We therefore focused on Adult Services and Children's Services and those with similar reporting to PCC, details are attached at Appendix 1. We will continue to work with our public sector colleagues to understand if there are any initiatives that are having a significant impact on absence levels.
- 3.2. Members asked for consideration to be given to a new corporate target. The latest report published in June 2019 by the Local Government Association confirmed that an average of 3.6 per cent of working time was lost due to sickness and 8.8 days per FTE employee, 174 councils participated in the survey. I would therefore recommend that this information is used to set a new corporate target.

3.3. The following section of the report will therefore note this quarter's sickness absence figures compared to last quarter:

- The level of sickness absence for this quarter has increased slightly from 10.47 to 10.91 average days per person per year
- Working time lost has increased from 2.88 to 2.98 per cent (excluding schools).
- Long term absence has increased from 6.29 to 6.45 average days per person per year. Short term absence has increased from 2.76 to 2.90 average days per person per year.
- Out of 12 directorates, 9 (excluding schools) are over the corporate target of an average 7 days sickness per person per year.
- The highest reasons for sickness absence remain to be due to 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 (as was the case last quarter).

3.4. Absence levels by directorates for the period from February 2019 to February 2020 are attached in Appendix 2. A summary of reason for sickness absence for the last year is attached in Appendix 3.

#### 4. Wellbeing

- 4.1. Since the previous report in September 2019, the staff survey results have been produced and communicated to staff. The results have shown a clear improvement in wellbeing measures. There was a significant increase in the number of staff who know how to access support for their health and wellbeing (up 12.54%). An increase has also been seen in the number of staff who feel the council provides support for their physical health (up 5.82%) and mental health (up 9.96%).
- 4.2. During the last 6 months further wellbeing campaigns have been promoted throughout the council, these have involved raising awareness on suicide prevention, mental health, Stoptober, the menopause and Dry January. For Suicide prevention day in September and World Mental health day in October Portsmouth City Council's Public Health team produced new guidance on supporting someone with their mental health and looking after your own mental health. Employees within the council also received communication on the important role we can all play in preventing suicide this included encouraging staff to complete the online training 'We need to TALK about suicide'.
- 4.3. For Stoptober a number of teams across the council were provided with information and resources to aid staff who were interested in stopping smoking. The council also updated its Smoking at Work policy and Electronic Cigarette policy to clarify the areas outside of council buildings where staff should not be smoking or using electronic cigarettes.
- 4.4. In October 2019, information about the menopause was communicated to managers to help them to understand the topic and to support those with symptoms to be well at work. The message included guidance on the signs and symptoms as well as

useful signposting details. Further communications were then provided to all staff highlighting the advice available and directing employees to the new intranet page.

- 4.5. Due to a national supply shortage the yearly flu vaccinations were promoted a month later to staff and took place during November. Employees were given the opportunity of attending booked clinics or ordering vouchers and frontline social care workers were provided with free letters to use at either their local pharmacy or GP surgery. In 2019, there was a council wide uptake of 30% (down 3% from 2018). Over the last ten years, the vaccine has provided good coverage against flu and it is still the best way to protect ourselves, clients, family and colleagues.
- 4.6. A further 40 managers across the organisation have attended the supporting mental health and wellbeing training provided by Solent Mind, taking the total to 106. With psychological reasons being the largest cause of absence, this training provides managers with insight into the most common mental health conditions, spotting signs and symptoms of poor mental health and tools and resources to support staff. We also have 2 more dates that are fully booked in April and are also exploring further training opportunities on Mental Health First Aid for all staff.
- 4.7. The roll out of workplace wellbeing champions has continued throughout each directorate within the council with 24 members of staff now volunteering for the role. The purpose of the champion role is to help implement and support staff wellbeing and the ongoing programme at PCC, through raising awareness of wellbeing activities, promoting healthy lifestyles and positive mental health. Champions will know their work areas and colleagues so will be best placed to know what will work best in that environment and can pick out resources that fit their local environments.
- 4.8. Targeted initiatives are on-going in response to absence trends with psychological reasons and musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions being the highest reason for absence across the council. Virus and gastrointestinal have continued to be ranked third and fourth respectively with cancer now closely following in fifth.
- 4.9. In line with a national promotion on mental health and reducing stigma we ran a number of campaigns raising awareness of mental health in 2019, with mental health conditions increasing nationally we have also seen this reflect within the council increasing by over 2,000 working days lost. To help combat this increase we will join the 'employer time to change pledge' that involves a 12 month action plan that includes promoting support services available to staff such as the employee assistance programme (EAP) and Occupational Health (OH), rolling out further training for managers as well as staff on supporting employees with poor mental wellbeing and running a number of initiatives and campaigns supporting mental health.
- 4.10. A number of activities, awareness campaigns and training opportunities can account for MSK conditions reducing by over 3,000 days over the last 12 months and we plan on continuing these initiatives moving forward. Virus and gastrointestinal have remained constant throughout the year and contribute largely to short term absence throughout the organisation equating to over 8,000 days lost. More work will be done

in 2020 to promote the flu vaccinations as research suggests that it is still the best method of preventing flu related illnesses.

4.11. We have seen a clear correlation in absence levels as age increases for cancer, MSK and heart disorders and details can be found at Appendix 4. Whilst a number of these conditions can be difficult to prevent we will be promoting a number of campaigns on physical activity, healthy eating and cancer screening. We will also focus our resources on areas that we can be most effective, which includes managing short term absences to improve the attendance levels for the organisation.

## **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. Integrated Impact Assessment**

6.1. Appendix 5

## **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: absence comparators

Appendix 2: absence levels by directorate

Appendix 3: absence reasons

Appendix 4: absence by age and reason

Appendix 5: integrated 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:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
Local Government Workforce Survey 2017/18	<a href="https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publication%20-%20Local%20Government%20Workforce%20Survey%202017-18.pdf">https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publication%20-%20Local%20Government%20Workforce%20Survey%202017-18.pdf</a>