

Title of meeting:	Employment Committee
Date of meeting:	September 2020
Subject:	Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report
Report by:	Rochelle Kneller - Assistant Director of HR
Wards affected:	N/A
Key decision:	No
Full Council decision:	No

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.
- Note the additional wellbeing activities specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Note the reduction in absence levels across the organisation.

3. Background

- 3.1. Members will be aware that the council has been operating many services differently and some were temporarily postponed as a result of coronavirus pandemic. This resulted in many staff working remotely or being redeployed to critical areas of need. During this time we have seen a reduction in overall absence levels.
- 3.2. The following section of the report will therefore note this quarter's sickness absence figures compared to last quarter (June 2020):
 - The level of sickness absence for this quarter has decreased from 10.01 to 9.33 average days per person per year

- Working time lost has decreased from 2.81 to 2.60 per cent (excluding schools).
- Long term absence has decreased from 6.02 to 5.74 average days per person per year. Short term absence has decreased from 2.51 to 2.28 average days per person per year.
- 11 directorates have seen a decrease in absence levels this quarter.
- 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).

3.3. Absence levels by directorates for the period from September 2019 to September 2020 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 Since the council moved into business critical as a result of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 we have been working hard to ensure we provide as much wellbeing information to our employees across all directorates throughout the council. This has involved working with colleagues in Corporate Services and Public Health to provide regular wellbeing updates that all link into the newly created coronavirus wellbeing intranet page.

4.2 The topics covered are;

- 10 top tips for looking after our mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Physical activity ideas and guidance
- Mindfulness
- Financial wellbeing
- Ways to keep children occupied and learning
- Keeping in touch
- Getting good sleep
- Employee assistance programme
- Young people's mental health
- 5 ways to wellbeing
- Stress awareness month
- Solent mind helpline
- Help for heroes self-care guide
- Support for pregnant women
- DSE and back care advice special
- Domestic abuse helplines and information
- Wellbeing service support
- Mental health awareness week

- Highlight/summary of the ways teams have been working innovatively to stay connected whilst working from home.
- Managing anxiety and worry
- Couch to 5k and the new NHS Better health campaign
- Virtual yoga classes
- Menopause guidance

- 4.3 As a result of the councils approach to supporting its employees, the recent staff survey showed some positives results with regards to people's wellbeing levels with 75% of staff who feel supported by the council and 87% of employees know where to access support for their wellbeing.
- 4.4 Due to the greater impact of coronavirus on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people and as part of the councils commitment to Black Lives Matter, a new staff network is being set up for our BAME staff. The network will support equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace and allow an opportunity for employees to share their views and experiences and work together to create an inclusive workplace for all. We had over 90 members of staff come forward to join the network and an initial series of meetings are now being organised. We will also look to establish networks for staff with disabilities and for LGBT staff in the near future.
- 4.5 New training opportunities for staff and managers have been promoted throughout the pandemic through a newly added programme that is available on Portsmouth learning gateway called Bookboon. Topics have included managing stress, building resilience, how to deal with uncertainty and making working from home effective.
- 4.6 Solent Mind have delivered a number of online training sessions for managing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace for managers and 43 people have attended. As well as training for managers we ran some bite size webinars for all employees on ways to manage their mental health and wellbeing, with over 40 members of staff finding these very helpful. Due to the positive feedback we will look to run more of these sessions in the future.
- 4.7 We have supported the Adult Services directorate by placing members of our Learning and Development team within the residential units to act as wellbeing champions. By doing this role they have provided staff members within the homes with wellbeing related information, set up mindfulness groups and been a listening ear to any concerns that staff have been experiencing and if required signposting to any relevant support services. The council's Staff Wellbeing Coordinator will also be meeting with the Local Government Association lead on mental health and

wellbeing of the adult social care workforce as they would like to include our examples of wellbeing work on their dedicated webpage for this topic.

- 4.8 The councils Occupational Health provider Cordell Health have continued to work closely with us. This ensures managers can easily refer employees who have concerns about their ability to work due to the coronavirus, with 139 calls taking place during the last quarter. They have also helped to inform our current risk assessments that colleagues in Public Health have compiled.
- 4.9 Work is underway between Public Health and Corporate services to provide the flu vaccination to staff. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic we will be unable to run clinics this year and instead we will be promoting the Flu voucher offer that staff can use at their local pharmacy. We will be working with colleagues in communications to promote the voucher scheme in September and encouraging those who are eligible for a free flu vaccination to access this at their GP surgery.
- 4.10 A number of new resources have also been created to aid managers and members of HR in supporting the wellbeing of employees, this has included updating the return to work form, leading during bereavement and complex grief guide, managing anxiety and worry, and a new wellbeing guide. Information relating to PTSD is also being sought.

5. Reasons for recommendations

- 5.1. To continue to improve employee attendance levels. To do this through monitoring sickness absence, understanding and engaging with the workforce to understand the reasons for improved attendance levels, continuing to improve employee wellbeing, which in turn will increase productivity, improve engagement and build a more resilient workforce.

6. Integrated Impact Assessment

- 6.1. Appendix 3

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

Appendix 2: Summary of reasons for absence

Appendix 3: 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:

Title of document	Location

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

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Signed by: