

Title of meeting:	Employment Committee
Date of meeting:	24 November 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 (September 2020):
 - The level of sickness absence for this quarter has decreased from 9.33 to 9.22 average days per person per year.

- Working time lost has decreased from 2.60 to 2.57 per cent (excluding schools).
- Long term absence has slightly increased from 5.74 to 5.88 average days per person per year. Short term absence has decreased from 2.28 to 2.06 average days per person per year.
- 10 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 November 2019 to November 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 During the last quarter the council has continued to provide regular wellbeing updates to all employees. These updates have included information on how we can all manage our physical and mental health as well as encouraging staff to take part in national campaigns such as the new Better Health initiative, clean air day, Stoptober and world mental health day.
- 4.2 World Mental Health day included promoting the Time to Change employer pledge which the council signed up to earlier in the year and is a commitment to changing the way we think and act about mental health at every level of this organisation. We have put into place an action plan to help us achieve this, including:
- providing training opportunities to managers and staff
 - promoting open and honest mental health conversations within the workplace
 - raising awareness of the support that is available and encouraging early access for those with mental wellbeing issues
 - promoting national mental health campaigns
 - expanding the wellbeing champion programme
- 4.3 Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services, and Cllr Chris Atwell, Cabinet Member for Communities and Central Services, each talked about our Time to Change pledge and the importance of mental wellbeing during recent recordings as part of the campaign.
- 4.4 Portsmouth City Council's wellbeing champion programme has recently been recognised by the Local government Association (LGA). The LGA's lead on mental health and wellbeing of the adult social care workforce was informed of the work

we have been doing in supporting our staff and as a result have compiled a case study which is now live on their dedicated webpage on the topic.

- 4.5 Three more webinars on taking control of your mental health and wellbeing have been organised for November and December and are available to all employees, the 1 hour webinar will explore ways for participants to take control of their mental wellbeing and allow the chance for those who attend to share what has been working for them. Further training on managing and supporting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is also being explored.
- 4.6 Vita Health group, the councils Employee Assistance programme will also be running two online webinars for staff to attend to help promote and provide a wider understanding of the practical benefits of the Employee Assistance Programme and how to make the most of this service, especially during these challenging times.
- 4.7 The Lunchtime learning sessions returned on Wednesday 4th November with a record number of attendees and will be delivered virtually going forward to allow the opportunity for more employees from across the council to take part. The bite-sized sessions will each have a different focus and aim to give staff the opportunity for personal development, to learn new skills, or to broaden their knowledge of the council and its teams.
- 4.8 The council is now signed up and registered as a Hidden Disabilities Scheme. The Learning and Development Team are putting together a short piece of training for front line staff. This training will be piloted in mid-November before being rolled out across the council.
- 4.9 The training is being developed in a format which will enable us to produce e-learning and develop other digital delivery approaches. Once the training pilot has been completed communications will be issued to the senior management group promoting the scheme internally. Details of the training will then be issued in 'all staff' communications channels; this will be followed by a full training roll out, starting with customer facing staff.
- 4.10 The annual flu campaign was promoted to staff in September. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic we were unable to run clinics this year and instead we're aiming to promote the Flu voucher offer that staff can apply for and use at their local pharmacy. However due to the large national demand and prioritising those most at risk the Flu vouchers have been put on hold until January 2021. This has resulted in a new system being set up for staff called PharmOutcomes, this new system will allow staff to book their free vaccine by contacting their local pharmacy or supermarket and ask to book a flu vaccination appointment. During this time the

council's Public health team and staff wellbeing coordinator have been supporting colleagues in Adult social care to ensure frontline social care workers can receive vaccines via an NHS letter.

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

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

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Signed by: