

Title of meeting:	Employment Committee
Date of meeting:	2 March 2021
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 have been temporarily postponed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. This has resulted in many staff working remotely or being redeployed to critical areas of need. Overall absence levels are down, however they have increased in some areas during the last quarter.
- 3.2. The following section of the report will therefore note this quarter's sickness absence figures compared to last quarter (December 2020):
 - The level of sickness absence for this quarter has increased from 9.22 to 9.45 average days per person per year.
 - Working time lost has increased from 2.57 to 2.59 per cent (excluding schools).

- Long term absence has increased from 5.88 to 6.47 average days per person per year.
 - Short term absence has decreased from 2.06 to 1.62 average days per person per year.
 - 7 directorates have seen a decrease in absence levels this quarter.
 - 3 directorates have seen an increase in absence levels this quarter
 - The highest reason for sickness absence remains to be due to psychological (stress, anxiety and depression), however Musculoskeletal (lower limb) and Coronavirus are now listed 2nd and 3rd.
 - 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 February 2020 to January 2021 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 and resources on Domestic Abuse, NHS screening and Long Covid as well as national wellbeing campaigns such as Movember and Dry January.
- 4.2 The last quarter has also seen a particular focus on mental health. With the ongoing restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic and the winter months, we know that this time of year can be more difficult for people and we have provided information on managing your wellbeing over the festive period, beating the winter blues, dealing with loneliness and promoting details of the national mental health campaign Time to Talk Day.
- 4.3 The Time to Talk Day is an annual event that is run by Time to Change and encourages everyone to talk openly with friends, family and colleagues about mental health. We realise that with the current restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic this year's events is especially important. As part of the campaign we have provided managers and employees with a number of activities and resources they can use to get together virtually and start talking.
- 4.4 As part of our Time to Change action plan and our commitment to creating a more open and understanding culture around mental health in the workplace, we have procured further training for the next two years. These sessions will be provided by Solent Mind and will cover topics on Taking control of our mental health as well as Managing and Supporting Mental health and Wellbeing in the workplace. The

sessions will run regularly throughout the year and can be booked via the Portsmouth Learning Gateway.

- 4.5 We have been working with Vita Health group, the councils Employee Assistance programme (EAP) to provide more specialist mental health support for our staff. As well as being able to access all the useful features of the standard EAP, we have implemented a new process so that if required, employees can also access Psychological treatment support within the EAP for more severe mental health conditions.
- 4.6 A further wellbeing resource have been created to help managers in supporting staff with their mental health. This document is linked into the manager essentials intranet pages and brings together numerous resources to provide information on signs and symptoms to look out for, how to have conversations about mental health and step by step details on self-help resources and national and local mental health support services.
- 4.7 Portsmouth City Council's Wellbeing Champion programme continues to grow with particular increases in Adult services and the Education teams, bringing the total to 49 employees across all directorates now volunteering for the role. The champion's role is to help implement and support staff wellbeing and the ongoing programme at PCC through raising awareness of wellbeing activities across the council, promoting healthy lifestyles and positive mental health.
- 4.8 The Lunchtime learning programme has continued to be very well attended with an average of 45 attendees per session. Over the last quarter we have provided talks on Covid-19, Money and Energy advice, Civil Service Sports Council and Domestic abuse information and advice.

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: