

Title of meeting:	Employment Committee
Date of meeting:	23 November 2021
Subject:	Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report
Report by:	Peter Budd - 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 and in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Note the change in absence levels across the organisation.

3. Background

- 3.1. Members will be aware that the council continues operating many services differently because of the coronavirus pandemic. Many staff have adopted a hybrid approach to their work and are working from home where possible. Compared to the start of the pandemic overall absence levels are down, however they have increased in some areas during the last two quarters.
- 3.2. 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 decreased slightly from 9.47 to 9.03 average days per person per year.
 - Long term absence has decreased from 6.67 to 6.04 average days per person per year.
 - Short term absence has increased from 1.56 to 1.70 average days per person per year.

- 3 directorates have seen a decrease in absence levels this quarter.
- 8 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), Coronavirus is now ranked 2nd and Musculoskeletal (Lower Limb) is ranked 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 Nov 2020 to Oct 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. This quarter has seen the launch of the 2021 staff flu vaccination programme. This included providing details on how staff could apply for an e-voucher to use at participating pharmacies, to date 485 employees have requested an e-voucher using the councils online booking form. The communications also contained details of the eligibility criteria for the free NHS flu programme that staff could also access, as well as information on the Covid-19 vaccination and booster programme. The e-voucher scheme is still open to employees and can be accessed on the Flu Vaccination intranet pages
- 4.2. The campaigns that we have promoted this quarter included Stoptober and World Mental Health Day. Stoptober detailed the support and resources available to anyone who was looking to stop smoking and World Mental Health Day involved promoting support and resources available to manage our mental health. We also asked staff to share what they do to support their mental health, with the replies helping to form part of a new intranet page to help inspire others on what they could also do to improve their mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.3. The In the Know Wellbeing special for November focused on stress awareness and highlighted online talks to help overcome stress, as well as encouraging staff to pick one action each for their Physical, Mental and Emotional Wellbeing to carry out every day. Another feature of the update focused on Movember, and this included information on how all staff can take part in raising awareness on mental health, suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer.
- 4.4. To help our employees who having caring responsibilities, we launched a new carers support network group on Wednesday 13th October. The group will continue to meet via MS Teams on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. The aim of the sessions is to provide an opportunity to talk about what's important to you, share helpful information and support each other in a friendly environment

- 4.5. Training opportunities that have been promoted this quarter have included sessions provided by Solent Mind on managing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. These sessions are aimed at managers and supervisors and will be taking place in November and December. We will also be running One Talk on Taking control of your mental health, this is available to any staff member and will be running in November.
- 4.6. The Learning and Development team have also created a new training opportunity for managers and supervisors on Managing wellbeing in a hybrid team. The sessions will initially be available in November, December and January and the focus of the workshops will be on effective skills and behaviours for managers.
- 4.7. The Councils Lunchtime Learning programme continues to provide talks on a monthly basis. September included a talk from the Good Mental Health Coop on managing anxiety and in October, the councils People Handling and Back Care Advisor ran a session on Posture awareness and back care. Each talk continues to be well attended with an average of 40 staff members attending each virtual session.

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: