

Title of meeting: Employment Committee

Date of meeting: 9th March 2023

Subject: Sickness Absence – Bi-annual Report

Report by: Rochelle Williams - Assistant Director 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 and causes of sickness absence across the council and the actions being taken to improve attendance and promote employee health and wellbeing.




2. Recommendations

2.1. Members are recommended to:

- Note the change in absence levels across the organisation.
- Note the levels and causes of sickness absence across the council and by directorate.
- Note the activities and interventions undertaken to support attendance.

3. Background

3.1. Compared to the last sickness absence report presented in July 2022 overall absence levels are down by 2,056 working days. The detail behind this figure is set out below:

| Sickness level type | June 2022 – average days per person | January 2023 – average days per person | Direction of travel |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Overall sickness absence | 11.37 | 11.10 |  |
| Long term absence | 6.27 | 5.68 |  |
| Short term absence | 2.82 | 3.32 |  |

- 3.2. The areas that have seen the largest increases in short term absence include:

| Directorate | Jun-22 | Jan-23 | difference |
|--|--------|--------|------------|
| Portsmouth International Port | 2.01 | 3.91 | 1.9 |
| Adult Services | 3.96 | 5.01 | 1.05 |
| Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services | 3.29 | 3.94 | 0.65 |
| Public Health | 1.88 | 2.42 | 0.54 |
| Regeneration | 2.45 | 2.95 | 0.5 |

- 3.3. The areas that have seen the largest decreases in long term absence include:

| Directorate | Jun-22 | Jan-23 | difference |
|--|--------|--------|------------|
| Education | 4.51 | 3.05 | -1.46 |
| Executive | 2.15 | 0.71 | -1.44 |
| Housing, neighbourhood and building services | 7.6 | 6.43 | -1.17 |
| Corporate services | 1.96 | 0.95 | -1.01 |
| Adult Services | 9.48 | 8.65 | -0.83 |

- 3.4. In the period since the last report to the committee in July 2022 seven directorates have seen a decrease in overall absence levels and four directorates have seen an increase.

- 3.5. Absence levels by directorates for the rolling year are attached in Appendix 1.

4. Causes of sickness absence

- 4.1. Since the previous report psychological (stress, anxiety and depression) is now the highest reason for sickness absence. Coronavirus is now ranked 2nd and Musculoskeletal (Lower Limb) continues to be ranked 3rd.
- 4.2. Although psychological (stress, anxiety and depression) reasons are ranked as the highest cause of sickness absence representing 16.61% of days lost, it is important to note that this is non work related. Psychological reasons for absences that are work related are ranked lower and represent 4.36% of days lost.
- 4.3. Coronavirus is still prevalent in our communities and still impacts on our workforce as sickness absence and is the second highest ranking cause of absence. In settings where staff are in contact with those who are clinically vulnerable infection prevention and control measure remain in place as does workplace testing. When staff in these settings test positive for coronavirus they are required to abstain from work for a period of 5 days.

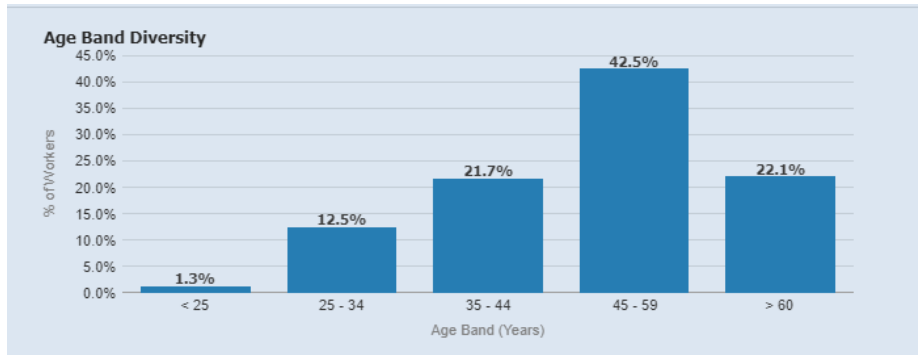
- 4.4. Musculoskeletal absences are divided into three categories – lower limb, upper limb and back and neck; if these were collated, they would become the highest ranked reason for absence. All three categories of musculoskeletal absence are ranked in the top ten reasons for absence.
- 4.5. The period covered by this report shows that within the top ten reasons for sickness absence there is a high proportion of viruses (excluding coronavirus), respiratory conditions and gastrointestinal absences. These reasons for absence mirror the pattern of reported illness in the population at large and are typical for the time of year as confirmed by public health monitoring in the Health Protection Forum.
- 4.6. In the previous meeting members requested further information on absences listed as Blank and Substance misuse. Blank is currently ranked as the 18th reason for absence, this relates to sickness absences that don't have an absence reason recorded against it. This is down 570 working days compared to the previous report to the committee in July 2022, and we are continuing to work with services to ensure that the appropriate information is added. Substance misuse is currently ranked 23rd and this relates to two cases, both of which have returned to the workplace.
- 4.7. Please also note that Coronavirus and Long Covid continue to be split into separate absence reasons.
- 4.8. The full list of reasons for sickness absence for the last year is attached in Appendix 2.

5. Reasons by directorate and interventions to support attendance.

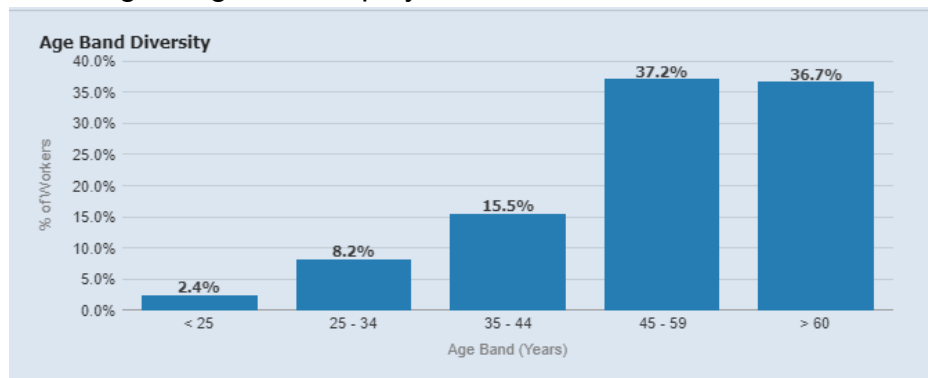
- 5.1. Appendix 3 shows details of the top 5 absence reasons per directorate. The following section provides more analysis on the absences within those areas:
- 5.2. **Musculoskeletal absences** - The directorates with the highest levels of absence due to combined Musculoskeletal reasons are Adult Services, Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services and Regeneration. There are several factors that could be leading to these absences, we know from the cases that we support that a large proportion are due to issues and injuries caused outside of the workplace and individuals requiring operations due to the biochemical and mechanical changes associated with aging. The age ranges across the council are:

| | <25 | 25 - 34 | 35-44 | 45-59 | >60 |
|---------------------|------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| Council wide | 4.1% | 14.2% | 22.1% | 39.1% | 20.5% |

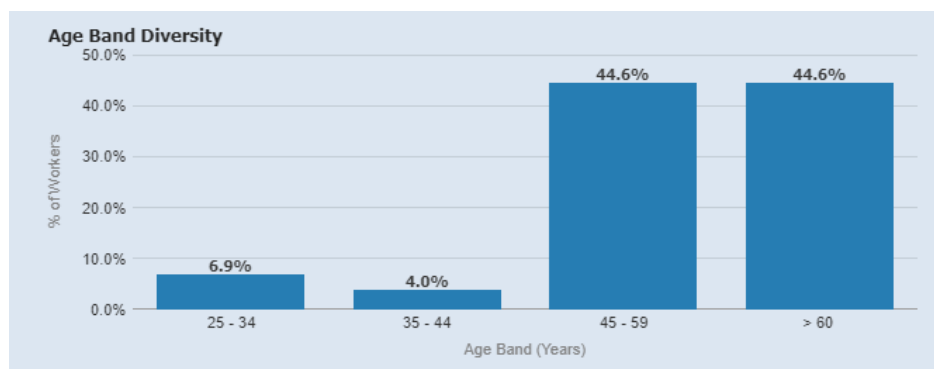
5.3. Within Adult Services roles that involve moving and handling such as Rehabilitation and Reablement Assistant and support workers have the highest levels. The age ranges for employees in these roles are shown below:



5.4. In Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services roles that involve manual work such as Cleaners and Green and Clean operatives have the highest absence levels. The age ranges for employees in these roles are shown below:



5.5. In Regeneration the roles with the highest absence are Passenger Assistants and Civil Enforcement Officers. The age ranges for employees in these roles are shown below:



5.6. An example of supporting attendance in relation to Musculoskeletal absence has happened within Adult Services in January 2023 when following an accident, and foot surgery (MSK lower limb) the employee was not likely to return to work for at least four months. The length of absence was starting to have an impact on the individual's emotional wellbeing and impacted on the service by having less

resource available. In order to assist with an earlier return to work, the manager liaised with Human Resources and referred the staff member to Occupational Health. They met with the employee and provided the manager with a report that recommended some reasonable adjustments and workplace risk assessments that it would make it possible for the staff member to return to work sooner. The manager was able to implement these by swapping the individual into a temporary role doing other activities within the same service, assisting in a much earlier return to work and improving the employee's mental wellbeing.

- 5.7. Adult Services and Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services are the directorates with the highest usage of the councils back care advisor and have the highest attendance on posture awareness courses. They are also the highest users of the councils Occupational Health service. Regeneration is the fourth highest user of these services.
- 5.8. **Psychological - stress, anxiety and depression absences** - The directorates with the highest levels of absence due to psychological - stress, anxiety and depression reasons are Childrens and Families, Adult Services and Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services.
- 5.9. Within Childrens and families the social worker role has the highest levels of absence due to psychological reasons. Social workers also have the highest levels of work related psychological - stress, anxiety and depression absence.
- 5.10. Within Adult services the Rehabilitation and Reablement Assistant role and social workers have the highest levels of absence.
- 5.11. In Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services roles such as Housing officers and Green and Clean operatives have the highest levels.
- 5.12. To help support the mental health of employees within these directorates and across the council, Solent Mind have continued to deliver one-hour interactive wellbeing training sessions. Since the last employment committee 9 workshops have taken place with 144 staff members having attended at least one of the following titles:
 - Dealing with Change - Thriving in times of uncertainty
 - Beat the Burnout
 - Taking Control of your Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - Building Resilience and Coping with Stress
 - Mental Health and Wellbeing Overview
 - Men's Mental health
 - Menopause and Mental Health

- 5.13. All three service areas are the highest users of the councils Employee Assistance Programme.
- 5.14. These services also benefit from the network of Wellbeing Champions which is covered in more detail in paragraph 6.9 below.
- 5.15. **Coronavirus** - The directorates with the high levels of absence due to Coronavirus are Adult Services, Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services and Childrens and Families
- 5.16. Within Adult services roles such as Care assistants, Rehabilitation and Reablement Assistant and support workers have the highest levels. It's important to note that in settings such as these where staff are in contact with those who are clinically vulnerable, infection prevention and control measures remain in place as does workplace testing. When staff in these settings test positive for coronavirus they are required to abstain from work for a period of 5 days.
- 5.17. In Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services roles such as Cleaners and Support Assistants have the highest absence levels.
- 5.18. The roles in Childrens and Families that see the highest levels of absence are Social Workers and Residential Social Services Officers.

6. Council wide activities and interventions to support attendance.

- 6.1. To help support attendance Human Resources has been modifying the way they operate to enable a more data driven approach so that they can work with a more preventative focus. This has involved being more proactive in liaising with managers and teams, identifying trends with absences, highlighting cases we believe could be preventable whilst continuing to support managers to try and ensure that staff who are off sick get the support they require and can return to work as soon as they are able to do so.
- 6.2. To also help support and manage the wellbeing of our employees we have been undertaking activities and interventions targeting services whose staff don't always have access to or whose roles don't involve working with IT and where there are high levels of sickness absence. This included running a campaign of wellbeing days from November 2022 to January 2023, where staff were offered health checks within service areas such as Adult Services, Childrens and families, Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services, Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, Regeneration and The Port.
- 6.3. Each health check involved a 20-minute appointment where each employee was offered the opportunity to have their weight, height, BMI, waist and blood

pressure measured. They also answered questions on nutrition, physical activity, smoking, drinking, sleep, emotional wellbeing and were given advice and information where appropriate. In total 153 health checks were completed across 14 days and these took place in the following locations:

- Portsmouth international Port
- The White house children's home
- Central Library
- The Learning Place
- Somerstown - Green and Clean
- Buckland - Green and Clean
- Paulsgrove - Green and Clean
- Senseplus - Henderson road and New road
- Royal Albert Day centre
- Regeneration
- Civic Offices

6.4. We will be monitoring those areas to measure the success of the campaign and assess whether they should return on a yearly basis and if it should be rolled out to other areas as well.

6.5. Since the previous employment committee meeting, we have delivered our flu vaccination campaign. This involved promoting the free NHS programme, of which over 60% of our workforce was eligible for and detailing the options for those who didn't meet the criteria via the NHS to receive a vaccination via an e-voucher or drop in at a local pharmacy. As of February 2023, 106 staff members had utilised this option with vouchers still available until the end of March.

6.6. In January 2023 to help increase knowledge and upskill our management population we launched our new managers' induction programme. Titles and objectives of the 3 modules include:

- **Setting the context for management within PCC** - The session aim is to provide new managers with context of how the council operates and what we expect of our management population in the complex and fast changing modern workplace.
- **HR policy and Process** - The objectives of the session are to increase awareness of when and who to contact in HR, feel more confident in using and applying employment policies and processes to effectively manage a team and be more aware of how to manage absence, performance and recruitment.
- **Managing workforce health and wellbeing** - The objectives of the session are to increase awareness of the wellbeing policy and the manager resources available, as well as practical tips and examples on how to identify signs and indicators that individuals may be struggling with their

wellbeing; helping managers to feel more confident in being able to have a conversation about someone's wellbeing and signpost to support services

- 6.7. These sessions are also available to existing managers who may benefit from a refresher and so far 56 managers have attended four sessions with a further 145 currently booked onto future dates.
- 6.8. In February 2023 we launched a new dedicated intranet page for managers on Managing workplace health and wellbeing. This new resource now hosts all the resources and services available to managers in one place so that it better enables them to manage sickness absence and wellbeing within their teams.
- 6.9. We are currently in the process of reviewing our Wellbeing Champion programme. As of February 2023, we have 75 wellbeing champions across the council with at least one in each directorate, but we want to make sure that those who volunteer for the role are still able to meet the role's objectives in supporting the health and wellbeing of their team and colleagues.
- 6.10. Following feedback from employees we are exploring the possibility to increase the number of support groups we run in the council. We currently have the Race equality network and Carers support group, but staff would also like to see support groups in place for the menopause, long covid and dads' support.

7. Wellbeing Campaigns

- 7.1. We have continued to promote monthly wellbeing campaigns across the council. These involve promoting information and support services, running events and activities and providing training opportunities on particular topics. Several topics are also aligned to the council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy aims, public health objectives and council priorities. The list of wellbeing campaigns that we have promoted since July 2022 have included:
 - Suicide prevention day
 - Know your numbers
 - Stoptober
 - Breast Cancer awareness month
 - World mental health day
 - Menopause day
 - Movember and men's health
 - Long Covid
 - Loneliness
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Being active
 - Dry January

- Brew Monday
- Cervical Cancer screening
- Time to talk day

7.2. We will be continuing to run wellbeing campaigns throughout the year to meet our corporate priorities and focus on topics such as stress awareness, mental health, physical activity, menopause and men's health.

8. Reasons for recommendations

8.1. To continue to improve attendance through interventions focused on prevention of ill health. To do this through monitoring sickness absence data, working with staff and managers to understand which interventions have the biggest impact on improving attendance levels, continuing to improve employee wellbeing, which in turn will increase productivity, improve employee engagement and build a more resilient workforce.

9. Integrated Impact Assessment

9.1. This report does not require an Equalities Impact Assessment as there are no proposed changes to PCC's services, policies, or procedures included within the recommendations.

10. Legal implications

10.1. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

11. Finance comments

11.1. 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

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: