

Title of meeting: Employment Committee

Date of meeting: 11 March 2024

Subject: Sickness Absence – Bi-annual Report

Report by: Rochelle Williams - 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 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. The Employment Committee is 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 and improve health and wellbeing.

3. Background

3.1. Sickness absence levels are now at their lowest since November 2021 and compared to the last sickness absence report presented in September 2023 overall absence levels are down by 576 working days. The detail behind this figure is set out below:

Sickness level type	August 2023 – average days per person	February 2024 - average days per person	Direction of travel
Overall sickness absence	9.89	9.75	
Long term absence	5.29	5.43	
Short term absence	2.76	2.66	

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

Directorate	Aug-23	Feb-24	difference
Portsmouth International Port	2.62	1.88	-0.74
Children and Families	2.66	2.47	-0.19
Economy, Planning and Transport	2.58	2.4	-0.18
Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services	3.1	2.99	-0.11
Finance and Resources	2.04	1.95	-0.09

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

Directorate	Aug-23	Feb-24	difference
Public Health	3.87	6.26	2.39
Culture Leisure and Regulatory Services	3.11	4	0.89
Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services	5.83	6.35	0.52
Economy, Planning and Transport	3.8	4.25	0.45
Corporate Services	1.8	1.86	0.06

3.4. In the period since the last report to the committee in August 2023, six directorates have seen a decrease in overall absence levels and the five directorates that have increased are Corporate Services, Culture Leisure and Regulatory Services, Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, Public Health and Economy, Planning and Transport.

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) has continued to be ranked as the highest reason for sickness absence, despite it being 142 days less compared to the same reporting period in 2023. Virus has continued to be ranked second and gastrointestinal is now ranked third, both of which is expected during the winter months.

4.2. For this reporting period musculoskeletal absences have continued to be divided into three categories – lower limb, upper limb and back and neck; if these were collated, they would become the second ranked reason for absence. In the last 12 months these absences have reduced by 859 working days, and we wanted to be able to demonstrate this before changing to Musculoskeletal - injury, fracture or operation and Musculoskeletal - back and neck as agreed at the previous employment committee meeting.

4.3. Heart disorders and cancer and tumours have also increased since the last report. As detailed in paragraph 6.5 and section 7 we have been running several activities and campaigns to try and raise awareness and encourage early detection of these types of illnesses.

- 4.4. Coronavirus is now ranked 7th and as detailed in the previous report, from 1 April 2023, Coronavirus is now only recorded as an absence reason if a positive test is provided by the employee. This has meant that staff who think that they might have Coronavirus but are unable to demonstrate a positive test when reporting as sick, would have their absence recorded on the system as 'Respiratory Illness' or the appropriate reason depending on symptoms.
- 4.5. Long-covid has continued to be recorded as a separate reason for absence and is currently ranked 18th and has reduced by 462 days since the last report.
- 4.6. 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. **Psychological - stress, anxiety and depression absences** - The directorates with the highest levels of absence due to psychological - stress, anxiety and depression reasons are Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, Childrens and Families and Adult Services.
- 5.3. Within Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, Green and Clean Operatives and Housing Officers continue to be the roles with the highest number of psychological absences, even though both have reduced since the last report.
- 5.4. Within Childrens and Families, the Social Worker role continues to have the highest levels of absence due to psychological reasons, despite levels continuing to decrease since the previous report.
- 5.5. Within Adult Services, Team Assistants and Care Assistants continue to be ranked as the highest roles and both have increased slightly since the last report.
- 5.6. An example of supporting psychological absence reasons within Childrens and Families is when the staff wellbeing coordinator attended their all-staff forum to provide information and advice on the tools and resources to help support their employees emotional and physical wellbeing.
- 5.7. Colleagues in HR have also been attending team meetings within the Childrens and Families, Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services areas to raise awareness of the support available via our new employee benefits and wellbeing platform Vivup.
- 5.8. All three service areas are the highest users of the councils Employee Assistance Programme and benefit from the network of Wellbeing Champions and mental health first aiders.

- 5.9. **Work related - Psychological - stress, anxiety and depression** - Now appears in the top 5 absence reasons in Adult Services and Childrens and Families, with roles such as Social Worker and Support Assistants seeing the largest increases.
- 5.10. Despite it increasing in both directorates it is a small number of employees within each of these areas. We are working with the management teams to ensure we are best supporting those individuals to return to work, as well as proactively working with the relevant service areas to explore options to try and limit the likelihood of further work-related absences.
- 5.11. **Musculoskeletal absences** - The directorates with the highest levels of absence due to combined Musculoskeletal reasons are Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, Adult Services, Economy, Planning and Transport, Housing. It's also important to note that these three directorates are some of the largest in terms of size of workforce.
- 5.12. We know that a large proportion of musculoskeletal absences 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 and we hope to demonstrate this when the absence reason names change in the next report.
- 5.13. In Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services roles that involve manual work such as Cleaners and Green and Clean operatives continue to have the highest absence levels, despite them both continuing to see a reduction in sickness since the last report.
- 5.14. Within Adult Services roles that involve moving and handling such as Support Workers and Care Assistants continue to have the highest levels.
- 5.15. Economy, Planning and Transport, Housing have overtaken Childrens and Families this reporting period as the third highest directorate. This is mainly due to an increase in absences within the Civil Enforcement and Passenger Assistant roles.
- 5.16. Adult Services and Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services continue to be 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. Economy, Planning and Transport, Housing are the fourth highest user of the Occupational Health service.
- 5.17. **Gastrointestinal and Virus** - Since the previous report there has been a slight increase of 101 days due to Gastrointestinal absences across the whole council and Virus has reduced by 136 days.

- 5.18. Areas that have seen an increase due to Gastrointestinal are Economy, Planning and Transport, Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services and Childrens and Families. With roles that are typically customer and client focused seeing the highest levels of absence.
- 5.19. Areas that have seen an increase due to Virus are Adult Services, Culture Leisure and Regulatory Services and Economy, Planning and Transport, Housing With roles that are either customer focused or involve working outdoors having the highest levels of absence.
- 5.20. Childrens and Families and Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services both saw decreases in Virus absences compared to the previous report.

6. Council wide activities and interventions to support attendance

- 6.1. In November 2023 we launched our new employee benefits and wellbeing platform. This is offered in partnership with Vivup, and brings together our staff benefits, health and wellbeing resources and some exciting new benefits designed to support the physical, financial, and mental wellbeing of our employees. As well as our extensive Employee Assistance Programme, the wellbeing offer now also includes:
 - **An online GP service** - where staff can receive diagnosis and advice, open referrals to specialist assessments and private fit notes and prescriptions.
 - **Your Care** - an engaging online wellbeing platform that encourages employees to be proactive with their wellbeing through completing health assessments, creating goals and having access to blogs, videos, recipes and more.
- 6.2. Vivup can be accessed via a desktop, web browser and an app and since we launched in November 2023 over 45% of the workforce have registered for the new platform, which is a higher utilisation rate in comparison to other local authorities who have similar service provisions.
- 6.3. To help support attendance and improve health and wellbeing, HR has continued to build on the new proactive and data driven approach and the proactively managing absence sessions have had 167 attendees since it's launch in June 2023, and is continuing to target managers in services with high levels of absence occurrences to attend them.
- 6.4. The managing workplace health and wellbeing module of the new managers' induction programme has continued to be well attended and positively received by managers. Since the previous report, a further 32 managers have attended taking the total to 137. More sessions for new managers are available throughout the year as well as a newly launched refresher workshop to help support managers that have been in the organisation for a number of years who would benefit from an update on the latest wellbeing practices and information.
- 6.5. In October 2023 we launched a new partnership with colleagues in Public Health, Portsmouth University and Health and Care Portsmouth to provide a

programme of blood pressure checks to staff at various locations across the city. This has included the Civic Offices, Portsmouth International Port and Housing Offices. So far 150 staff members have received a check with more dates booked in the coming months. One staff member who took part provided the following feedback:

"I just want to say thank you to everyone involved with the recent free blood pressure check here at the civic offices. I think this is an amazing idea bringing such a well-equipped team to be able to help each person's individual needs.

As a result, for myself I have the help and the support I need which is an outcome from this visit. The service I was given was simply amazing and supportive.

I'm pleased to see more sessions being arranged here at the civic and at other venues and I will certainly be banging the drum to get people to attend"

- 6.6. In October we launched our staff flu vaccination program. This enabled employees to receive their flu jab either via a digital flu voucher that they could claim at participating pharmacies or from various drop-in services provided by Lalys pharmacy. The program is still open until the end of February 2024 and so far over 250 staff members have received their vaccination, which is an increase on the previous year.

7. Wellbeing Campaigns and Lunchtime Learning

- 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 subject areas. 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 September 2023 have included:

- Cancer awareness
- Mental health awareness
- Blood pressure checks
- Flu vaccinations
- Men's health
- Neurodiversity support
- Menopause awareness and training
- Staying well over winter
- Support with finances
- Dry January
- Heart health

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

- 7.3. The Lunchtime learning programme has continued to run on a monthly basis and the topics are normally linked to the above wellbeing campaigns. The sessions that have ran since the previous absence report have included:
- Neurodiversity awareness
 - Supporting menopause at work
 - Prevent breast cancer
 - Vivup - our new employee benefits and wellbeing provider
 - Stress and anxiety relief
 - Apprenticeship week

8. Reasons for recommendations

8.1. To continue to improve attendance through interventions focused on prevention of ill health and promotion of healthy lifestyles and wellbeing. 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
- Appendix 3: Top 5 absence reasons per directorate

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
None	