

Agenda item:

Title of meeting: Employment Committee

Date of meeting: 15th September 2015

Subject: Sickness Absence - Quarterly Report

Report by: Jon Bell - Director of HR, Legal and Procurement

Wards affected: N/A

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this quarterly report is to update and inform Employment Committee on actions being taken that have an effect on the levels of sickness absence across Services.

2. Recommendations

- **To continue to monitor sickness absence, on a quarterly basis, and to ensure appropriate management action is taken to address absenteeism.**
- **To continue to offer a range of interventions around the three main reasons for sickness absence to assist employees to manage their attendance at work.**
- **To support Public Health flu vaccination campaign for 2015 by working with Corporate Communications to develop marketing initiatives to maximise the uptake of flu vaccinations, especially where Directorates have contact with NHS defined risk groups or have particular low uptake in 2014.**

3. Background

- 3.1 In the period since the last quarterly update in June 2015 the level of sickness absence has decreased from 8.73 to 8.65 average days per person per year. This is against the new corporate target of an average 7 days per person per year. Members will note the reversal in trend from the previous quarter, when an increase in sickness absence levels was reported. The overall trend over recent months is downwards.
- 3.2. Absence levels by Directorates for the period from 01 August 2014 to 31 July 2015 are attached in Appendix 1.

- 3.3 Of the 14 Directorates, nine (including schools) are over the corporate target of an average 7 days per person per year. Four Directorates are over an average 10 days per person per year.
- 3.4 Since the last Employment Committee the Leader of the Council has written to Directors where levels of absence are over the corporate target (an average 7 days per person per year) to encourage them to redouble their efforts to reduce absence levels.
- 3.5 Analysis of data indicates that over the last quarter there has been a slight decrease in the amount of long term absence from 4.70 to 4.69 average days per person per year. This continues the trend in long term absence, which has reduced from 5.88 to 4.69 average days per person per year since August 2012. Short term absence has been stable at around 2.57 average days per person per year over the same period. A summary of the analysis has been included in Appendix 2.
- 3.6 At the last meeting, members asked for further analysis to be carried out about the support provided to employees who were sick, including surveying affected staff. Public Health has been commissioned to carry out this work and the results will be presented at a future Employment Committee.

4. Occupational Health

4.1 Fit for Work

The New Government Fit for Work service to provide an occupational health assessment and general health advice to employees, employers (mainly small and medium sized organisations) via General Practitioners (GPs) went live across the country on 22 July 2015.

At present the Council has not received a notification from a GP regarding a personalised return to work plan and managed support for an employee via this service.

5. Health and Well-Being

5.1 Interventions

A table of reasons for absence over the last three years is included in Appendix 3. The analysis of the data indicates that the main reasons for absence have not changed dramatically, with the three main reasons; musculoskeletal; anxiety, stress and psychological and colds, flu and virus, accounting for 52-55% of all absences in each of the last three years.

5.2 Assisting staff to manage stress and anxiety

In response to current corporate absence levels identifying 'stress, anxiety and psychological' as a contributory cause of work related sickness absence, a

Stress Management course, provided via Solent NHS has been delivered for Managers. In total, there were 64 attendees from 9 Directorates.

5.3 Building your Resilience

A 'Building your Resilience' course, aimed at supporting council employees experiencing pressure in their job roles, is being offered. The course looks at causes and symptoms relating to pressure/stress, and considers positive psychology, the different reactions to pressure and practical resilience techniques based on an understanding of personality types and different responses to pressure/stress to help build resilience.

As a result of the high demand for the 'Building your Resilience' course further dates are being considered. It is apparent that Directorates with the highest levels of sickness absence (Children's Social Care and Adult Services) are promoting attendance on this course.

5.4 People handling and back care

The People Handling and Back Care Advisor provides a range on interventions to assist employees with back care and musculoskeletal issues. This includes the provision of 'local back care link' courses for shift leaders who undertake manual handling risk assessments, as well as Posture Awareness courses at the Civic Offices. Some of those undertaking the back care links course are converting to local back care trainers.

1:1 back care supervision is also provided by the People Handling and Back Care Advisor.

5.5 Flu vaccinations

NHS Choices have indicated that over time, annual flu vaccinations decrease the impact of potential outbreaks of flu epidemics. Public Health co-ordinated the flu vaccination campaign for 2014. The cost of vaccinations were covered by Services

5.6 In 2014, 903 members of staff took advantage of the vaccination campaign which equated to a final uptake of 22.7%. The internal flu jab survey in January 2015 showed a high degree of satisfaction with the vaccination programme although a number of changes will be made to enhance the service and increase the uptake. These will include:

- Developing materials to dispel some of the myths surrounding flu and flu vaccination, including evidence of effectiveness
- Developing the booking system to include voucher booking
- Working with key services to maximise uptake amongst staff for example adult and children's social services

5.7 Members will be aware that a flu vaccination programme provides a number of potential benefits to staff, clients and services as it prevents; periods of sickness absence due to staff illness with influenza or due to caring for a family member with influenza, at a time when services may be stretched, and assists with the protection of vulnerable clients in the Council's care from influenza infection and influenza related illness.

The provision of a flu vaccination also demonstrates the Council's role as a responsible employer and provider, committed to staff and client health and wellbeing.

5.8 The Employment Committee supported the recommendations to continue with the offer of free flu vaccinations to employees in 2015 at the last meeting. In response, Public Health has written to Directors, outlining last year's uptake, the benefits of providing flu vaccinations, as well as the potential cost to the Director budget.

The maximum cost of 100% vaccination uptake at £10.72 per vaccination will be £41,154. Although every effort will be made to maximise uptake, Public Health have estimated that it is unlikely that this will exceed 40% as some staff members will be vaccinated at their GP. At 40% uptake the cost would be £16,461.

6. Reasons for recommendations

The continued monitoring of sickness absence and the identification of good management practices is an important part of maximising attendance, which will in turn increase productivity, improve engagement and build resilience.

7. Equality impact assessment (EIA)

A preliminary Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

8. Legal implications

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

9. Finance comments

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.

.....
Signed by:

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Sickness Absence by Directorate

Appendix 2: Analysis of levels of absence year by year

Appendix 3: Summary of reasons for absence over the last three years

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
NHS Choices - The Flu Jab	http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/pages/flu-influenza-vaccine.aspx

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

.....
Signed by: