

HR Committee

23rd September 2021



Report of: Director of Workforce and Change

Title: Sickness Absence Update Report

Ward: N/A

Officer Presenting Report: Mark Williams, Head of Human Resources

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Recommendation

That the Committee notes the report and provides it views on the work being done to reduce and manage sickness absence.

Summary

The purpose of this report is to update on the latest sickness absence information and to seek the comments and observations of the committee on the report's findings.

The significant issues in the report are:

- Current average working days lost in the council is 8.1 per employee.
- When excluding COVID-19 from sickness calculations average working days lost (7.3) has dropped below than pre-COVID-19 levels and is the lowest it has been in the last 12 months.
- Absence levels remain within the median of Core Cities reporting average working days lost per FTE.
- From April 2021 we commissioned a new service provider to supply integrated occupational health, employee assistance and physiotherapy provision to support our requirements.
- Continuing to reduce sickness absence remains a priority.
- The Council continues to take preventative measures to reduce sickness absence through our Health and Wellbeing Plan and revised Workforce Strategy.

Policy

1. An engaged, healthy and supported workforce will have an impact on the quality of service that we provide to citizens and help achieve the corporate strategy priorities.

Consultation

3. Internal

Not required because this report is for information only.

4. External

Not required because this report is for information only.

Context

5. This report provides the HR Committee with an update on sickness absence levels across the Council and ongoing and developing activity to reduce and manage sickness absence and improve workforce wellbeing.

6. The attached report (Appendix A) covers the following areas:

- Current sickness (including absence reasons)
- Benchmarking with other local authorities
- Sickness trend
- Sickness breakdown by Equalities Categories (including against workforce proportions)
- Sickness breakdown by pay grade and deprivation
- COVID-19 related sickness
- Sickness excluding COVID-19 related
- Sickness Absence Casework

7. This report provides an update on absence trends for the Council and its Directorates over the last two years (1st July 2019 to 31st August 2021). It also presents an overview of the policies and practice in place to improve attendance, with a particular focus on supporting managers in this area, and ongoing and strengthened work on employee wellbeing.

Key Findings

8. Current average working days lost in the council is 8.1 per employee. Stress, Anxiety and Depression (31.6%), Musculoskeletal (11.6%) and COVID-19 (9.8%) account for over 53% of the total days lost in the council.

- Average working days lost have dropped are consistent with 12 months ago (8.2).
- Asian/Asian British 2.7% WDL (2.6% Workforce), Black/Black British 6.4% WDL (5.2% Workforce) or Mixed Heritage 3.4% WDL (3.3% Workforce) employees are having a higher percentage of working days lost than the percentage of employees in the workforce.

- Disabled employees account for 16.4% of all working days lost above the workforce representation of 9.1%.
- Female employees account for 66.8% of all working days lost which is above the workforce representation of 60.3%.
- Employees aged 16 – 24 account for 1.7% of all working days lost below the workforce representation of 3.8%.

9. When excluding COVID-19 from sickness calculations average working days lost (7.3) has dropped lower than pre-covid levels and is the lowest it has been in the last 12 months. This suggests that working from home has had an impact on regular sickness rates.

Managing Attendance

10. We have seen a rise in absence over the last 12 months due to absence related to COVID-19. Covid related absence is not considered as part of any formal action through our sickness absence policy.

11. HR are working pro-actively with managers to support them in managing all absence cases as well as where staff are self-isolating, clinically extremely vulnerable or require a Covid vaccination to work.

12. Absence levels remain within the median of Core Cities reporting average working days lost per FTE.

13. We continue to take preventative measures to reduce sickness absence through our Health and Wellbeing Plan and revised Workforce Strategy. We are actively monitoring sickness absence patterns for services relating to COVID-19 to ensure we act swiftly to any areas of increased risk.

14. From April 2021 we commissioned a new service provider to supply integrated occupational health, employee assistance and physiotherapy provision to support our requirements.

15. We are committed to supporting our employees at work and our health and wellbeing plan sets out the actions we will be taking this year to support our employees.

16. As part of a new Health and Wellbeing strategy, we maintain a rigorous and proactive approach to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce for those who return to the workplace and those who continue to home-work.

Proposal

17. That the Committee notes this report

Other Options Considered

18. None

Risk Assessment

19. Not required because this report is for information only.

Public Sector Equality Duties

- 15a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.
- 15b) The report provides analysis of the impact of sickness absence in relation to age, gender, sexual orientation, race and pregnancy and maternity related absence.

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal

Not required because this report is for information only.

Financial

(a) Revenue

(b) Capital

Not required because this report is for information only.

Land

Not applicable.

Personnel

Personnel

Not required because this report is for information only.

Appendices:

A Sickness Absence Thematic Report

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None.