



Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources)

Time and Date

2.00 pm on Monday, 8th December, 2014

Place

Committee Room 2 - Council House

Public Business

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**
 - (a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2014 (Pages 3 - 6)
 - (b) Matters Arising
4. **The six month (April - September 2014) Cumulative Sickness Absence 2014/15** (Pages 7 - 26)

Report of the Executive Director, Resources
5. **Agency Workers and Interim Managers - Performance Management Report Quarter 2 (1 July to 30 September 2014).** (Pages 27 - 38)

Report of the Executive Director, Resources
6. **Performance within the Revenues Service for the period April 2014 - September 2014** (Pages 39 - 44)

Report of the Executive Director, Resources.
7. **Performance within the Benefits Service for the period 1 April 2014 - 30 September 2014** (Pages 45 - 52)

Report of the Executive Director, Resources.
8. **Proposed voluntary ban on the release of sky lanterns from Coventry City Council owned land hired for events, or events organised and/or funded by Coventry City Council** (Pages 53 - 58)

Report of the Executive Director, Resources

9. **Any other items of public business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.**

Chris West, Executive Director, Resources, Council House Coventry

Friday, 28 November 2014

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Hugh Peacocke Tel: 024 7683 3080

Membership: Councillor D Gannon (Cabinet Member)

By invitation Councillor T Sawdon (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Please note: a hearing loop is available in the committee rooms

If you require a British Sign Language interpreter for this meeting
OR if you would like this information in another format or
language please contact us.

Hugh Peacocke, Governance Services Manager

Tel: 024 7683 3080

Email: Hugh.peacocke@coventry.gov.uk

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources)
held at 2.00 pm on Monday, 8 September 2014

Present:

Members: Councillor D Gannon (Cabinet Member)

Employees:

J Barlow, Resources Directorate
J Bilen, Resources Directorate
P Boulton, Place Directorate
J Crawley, Resources Directorate
C Knight, Place Directorate
S Lal, Resources Directorate
M Rossi, Resources Directorate
T Savill, Resources Directorate

Apologies: Councillor T Sawdon

Public Business

8. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interests.

9. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) meeting held on 30th June 2014 were signed as a true record.

10. 2013/14 Delegated Write Offs

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director, Resources relating to the exercise of delegated authority in the write-off of debt owing to Coventry City Council in 2013/14.

The Revenues and Benefits service was responsible for the collection of Corporate Income (including council tax and business rates) and Corporate Debt. A range of measures were employed to ensure the maximisation and collection of all income and debt owed to the Council. In certain circumstances it was appropriate and necessary to write off debts owing to the Council. Robust processes were in place within the Revenues and Benefits service to ensure that debt was written off and authorised in accordance with the Council's rules of delegated authority.

RESOLVED, that after due consideration of the report and the matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member

- 1. Reviews the level of write-offs authorised under delegated authority.**

2. **Agrees to receive a further report at the first meeting of the new municipal year 2015/16 to provide an update for the period April 2014 to March 2015.**

11. **Q1 Agency Worker report**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director, Resources, which provided performance information on the use of agency workers procured through the Master Vendor contract for the Quarter 1 period (1 April – 30 June 2014).

The Cabinet Member compared expenditure from Quarter 4 in 2013/13 and Quarter 1 in 2014/15 and considered Interim Manager spends for the same periods which were now procured through National Framework Agreement RM692.

RESOLVED, that after due consideration of the report and the matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member:

1. **Approves monitoring processes to continue for both Agency workers and Interim Managers**
2. **Endorses compliance with the corporate policy on the recruitment of Temporary Agency Workers through the Master Vendor, Pertemps for the Q1 period and Interim managers.**
3. **Reviews the Q1 spends for 2014/15 with the previous Q4 spends for 2013/14.**
4. **Instructs officers to continue to work towards reducing expenditure on the use of agency workers.**
5. **Approves that future orders are not accepted if no reason is given for the need for the agency worker.**
6. **Request officers that in future reports concerning agency workers monitoring, additional information be provided, on all agency worker contracts used outside of the Master Vendor contract.**

12. **12 month Cumulative Sickness Absence 2013/2014**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director, Resources concerning the 12 month cumulative sickness absence for 2013/14.

The report contained the levels of sickness for the 12 month period and the actions being taken to manage absence and promote health at work across the City Council.

RESOLVED, that after due consideration of the report and the matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member received the report providing sickness absence data for the 12 month period of 2013/14 and endorses the actions taken to monitor and manage sickness.

13. **3 month (April - June 2014) Cumulative Sickness Absence 2014/2015**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director, Resources concerning a 3 month (April-June 2014) cumulative sickness absence for 2013/14.

The report contained the levels of sickness for the 3 month period and the actions being taken to manage absence and promote health at work across the City Council.

RESOLVED, that after due consideration of the report and the matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member received the report providing sickness absence data for the 3 month period of April – June 2014 and endorses the actions taken to monitor and manage sickness.

14. **Final Hospitality Statement and Charity Appeal for the Mayoralty of Councillor Gary Crookes for 2013-2014**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director, Resources concerning the final hospitality statement and charity appeal for the mayoralty of Councillor Gary Crookes for 2013/14.

The report updated the Cabinet Member on how the budget was spent during the third and final quarter of the Mayoral Year. The amount of £46,659.03 was spent at the end of Quarter 3 and £68,236.82 at year end. This left a variance remaining of £2,359.18 from the annual overall budget.

RESOLVED, that after due considered of the report and the matters raised at the meeting, the Cabinet Member noted:

- 1. The outturn of £68,236.82 for the Mayoral year and approves the contents of the report which describes how the hospitality budget was spent on an event-by-event basis; and**
- 2. The final sum raised for the Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal.**

15. **Any other items of public business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.**

There were no more items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 2.35 pm)

This page is intentionally left blank



Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance & Resources)

1 December 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance & Resources) – Councillor Gannon

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director, Resources

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

6 month (April – September 2014) Cumulative Sickness Absence 2014/2015

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

To enable Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance & Resources) to monitor:

- Levels of sickness absence for the 6 month period of April - September 2014.
- The actions being taken to manage absence and promote health at work across the City Council.

Recommendations:

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance & Resources) is asked to receive this report providing sickness absence data for the 6 month period of April – September 2014 and endorse the actions taken to monitor and manage sickness.

List of Appendices included:

- Appendix 1 Coventry City Council – Days Lost per FTE 2003 - 2014
- Appendix 2 Directorate Summary Out-turn (April – September 2013 vs April – September 2014)
- Appendix 3 Coventry City Council Reasons for Absence (April – September 2014)
- Appendix 4 Days Lost per FTE, by Directorate (April – September 2014)
- Appendix 5 Coventry City Council Percentage Breakdown of Absence (April – September 2014)
- Appendix 6 Coventry City Council Spread of Sickness Absence (By Length of Days) (April – September 2014)
- Appendix 7 & 8 Summary of Occupational Health & Counselling Services Activities Undertaken (April – September 2014)

Other useful background papers:

None.

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No.

Has it, or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No.

Report title: 6 Month (April – September 2014) Cumulative Sickness Absence 2014/2015

1. Context (or background)

1.1 Annual and quarterly information is based on full time equivalent (FTE) average days lost per person against the FTE average days per person available for work. This is the method that was previously required by the Audit Commission for annual Best Value performance indicator reporting. The City Council continues to use this method to ensure consistency with previously published data.

1.2 This report gives the cumulative sickness absence figures for the Council and individual directorates.

1.3 Performance and Projections

FTE Average Days Lost	All Employees	All Employees (except teachers)	Teachers
2013/14 – Quarter 2	3.81	4.49	2.51
2014/15 – Quarter 2	3.91	4.58	2.48

Annual FTE Average Days Lost	All Employees	All Employees (except teachers)	Teachers
2014/2015 Projected	9.17	9.81	6.69
2014/15 Target	8.50	9.14	6.30

1.4 Indicative Cost of Sickness Absence

1.4.1 The indicative cost of sickness absence is calculated using a range of 12 separate salary bands (or levels) to produce an average daily cost of sickness for each band. These banded daily costs are then mapped against the projected sickness outturn to produce a total cost of sickness.

1.4.2 The table below shows the indicative cost of sickness for 2014/15 using this method of calculation.

2014/15	All Employees	All Employees (except teachers)	Teachers
Annual Cost	£11.3	£8.0m	£3.3m
Annual Target Cost	£10.9m	£8.1m	£2.8
Difference	£0.4m	-£0.1m	£0.5m

- 1.4.3 The costs provided in the 2014/15 Quarter 1 report used banded daily costs that were incorrectly scaled. In the Quarter 1 report the quoted overall annual cost for 'All employees' was given as £13.3m, with a target of £12.8m, giving a difference (above target) of £0.5m. Recalculating these figures, using the corrected daily costs, gives annual cost of £12.0m, a target of £10.9m and a corrected difference (above target) of £1.1m.

As given in the table above, the Quarter 2 projected annual cost of sickness absence for 'All Employees' stands at £0.4m above the target cost. This represents an improvement of £0.7m from the Quarter 1 position, consistent with a reduction in the projected days lost.

1.5 Reasons for Absence

1.5.1 Appendix 3 Illustrates that:

- The most occasions of sickness absence across the City Council in April – September 2014 is Stomach, Liver and Gastroenteritis accounting for **1,368** occasions. The amount of time lost through Stomach, Liver and Gastroenteritis was **3,874.52**.
- The amount of time lost through Stress, Depression, and Anxiety was **7,200.17** days, making it the highest cause of time lost. However, it is not possible to differentiate between personal stress and work related stress.
- The second and third most prevalent reasons for time lost due to sickness absence were Other Musculo-Skeletal Problems **7,058.63** days and Stomach, Liver and Gastroenteritis **3,874.52**.

1.5.2 A comparison of year on year figures across the authority reveals that:

- Quarter 2 (ending September 2009) out turn was **4.53** (average sick days lost per full time equivalent employee).
- Quarter 2 (ending September 2010) out turn was **4.47** days (average sick days lost per full time equivalent employee).
- Quarter 2 (ending September 2011) out turn was **3.96** days (average sick days lost per full time equivalent employee).
- Quarter 2 (ending September 2012) out turn was **4.05** days (average sick days lost per full time equivalent employee).
- Quarter 2 (ending September 2013) out turn was **3.81** days (average sick days lost per full time equivalent employee).
- Quarter 2 (ending September 2014) out turn was **3.91** days (average sick days lost per full time equivalent employee).

1.5.3 When comparing Quarter 2 (2014/15) out turn with last years in the same period (2013/14), it reveals that:-

- Reduction of the occurrences of absence by **555** based on comparison with the same period last year.
- Reduction of total days lost per FTE by **856.47** days based on comparison with the same period last year.
- Reduction of **6,126.97** working hours lost based on comparison with the same period last year out-turn.
- Reduction of **£291,912.67** in respect of cost of absence based on comparison with the same period last year.
- Stress has reduced by **1,722.66** days based on comparison with the same period last year.
- Muscolo-Skeletal has reduced by **88.82** days based on comparison with the same period last year.
- Infection, Colds and Flu has reduced by **623.95** days based on comparison with the same period last year.

1.5.4 The data provided within Appendices 2 and 4 reflects the new Directorates and establishments (The implementation of the Resources, People and Place Directorates). Therefore, due to the change in the structures and composition of Directorates, an accurate evaluation against last year's performance/statistics may not be directly comparable.

1.6 **Frequent and Long Term Absence**

1.6.1 Appendix 5 provides the breakdown between frequent and long-term absence levels during 2014/2015.

1.6.2 Appendix 6 provides a more detailed breakdown of the duration of absences.

1.7 **Dismissals through Promoting Health at Work Corporate Procedure**

1.7.1 During April – September 2014 there have been a total of **11** dismissals in accordance with the Promoting Health at Work Corporate Procedure. **9** dismissals have been due to ill health retirement and 2 dismissals have been where the City Council cannot continue to sustain the level of sickness absence.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

2.1 Activities during Quarter 2 from the HR Health & Wellbeing Team

2.1.1 The HR Health & Well Being Team aims to ensure a consistent approach to sickness absence management and is responsible for providing information on sickness absence to Directorate Management Teams/Senior Managers on a monthly basis and supporting managers in the application of the Council's Promoting Health at Work procedure.

2.1.2 Directorate Management Teams review summary absence reports on a monthly basis to monitor progress and determine actions needed to address any hotspots.

2.1.3 The Health & Well Being Team undertake proactive strategies to support the authority to reduce levels of sickness absence. They include:

- Robust approach is being taken to the management of sickness absence casework with the application of a revised model, resulting in no more than 4 meetings having to take place before a decision is made about an employees continued employment.
- A monthly system to alert Assistant Directors when employees hit a sickness absence trigger point and have not been seen as part of the Promoting Health at Work Procedure.
- Training is provided to managers to support dealing with both practical and procedural issues. An ongoing programme of training in carrying out return to work interviews and Promoting Health at Work meetings is taking place across the Council as a whole. During quarter 2, 51 managers/supervisors and team leaders undertook training.
- Training has allowed managers the opportunity to refresh their knowledge and understanding of taking an absence call, conducting effective return to work meetings and understanding the rational for making reasonable adjustments in the work place to facilitate an employee's return to work.
- The implementation of an intranet based absence toolkit '*Managing Absence - Your Guide*' along with a desk top icon for easy access. The purpose of the toolkit is to enable managers to deal with the routine "day to day" sickness absence management tasks. The toolkit contains a number of simple and easy to use guides. The toolkit also provides detailed FAQs, 'how to guides' and some straightforward 'golden rules' to help managers and links to relevant policies, procedures, checklists and scripts.

2.1.4 A number of service areas across the Council hold regular 'sickness summits' on a monthly, quarterly or as needed basis.

- 2.1.5 These serve as a useful mechanism to ensure absence levels remain a high priority and are well-managed for all parties, with the aim to reduce these levels for the Council and to enable services to be cost-effectively delivered to the public.
- 2.1.6 The purpose of 'sickness summits', are to provide an opportunity for Management with the relevant Head of Service / Assistant Director, to review sickness cases within a given area. This is to ensure cases are being addressed in a timely manner and are being robustly, consistently, fairly and appropriately managed through the application of the Promoting Health at Work process.
- 2.1.7 The summits provide an opportunity for Managers to share good practice and experience in managing absence levels, as well as to gain further advice, support and updates on changes to procedure and support the Council can provide to its employees, from their Lead HR Representative, HR Health & Wellbeing Team.
- 2.1.8 One of the particular key benefits of sickness summits has been to identify hotspot areas, or key issues/reasons for absence within service areas. This enables the advice, support and resources to be tailored to ensure these issues are addressed and managed and that our employees are appropriately supported. This has proved to be very useful in making a positive impact in the working environments and on attendance levels.
- 2.1.9 At the request of the Cabinet Member I can confirm that there are no outstanding casework from absence triggers generated from Quarter 2.

2.2 Be Healthy Be Well Initiative

2.2.1 The Be Healthy Be Well initiative is joint project between the HR Health & Well Being Team and Occupational Health & Counselling Support Team which was launched in January 2012. The primary aim of the initiative is to act as central source of information and encourage Council employees to get Fit and Healthy.

2.2.2 The initiative has delivered the following events in Quarter 2:

- Continuation of the events provided by Coventry Sports Foundation & Coventry Sports Trust, including open weekends for all Council employees and their families to experience free taster sessions such as Swimming, Indoor Football, Zumba, Badminton, Cycling, Boxercise, Pilates, Table Tennis, BoxFit, Squash & Spinning Classes.
- Free guided cycle ride in Coventry through Skyride.
- Special offers for membership with the British Military Fitness.
- Creation of the rolling club for all types of wheels (roller skates, skateboarding)
- Golf offer for all Council employees at Brandon Golf Course.

- Continued use of the mini table tennis located in the Contact Centre for staff to use in their own time provided by The English Table Tennis Association.
- Continuation with publication of the very popular & informative monthly Be Healthy Be Well newsletter to all employees. At the time of writing this report the newsletter had received over 8,000 since April – September 2014.
- Creations of the intranet page to advise and advertise promotion events for City Council employees.

2.3 Activities during Quarter 2 from the Occupational Health Team

- The Workplace Health Champion training of volunteers has commenced and the Health Champions are now participating in the Be Healthy Be Well and Health Promotion Programmes.
- From the 69 musculoskeletal cases closed in Quarter 2 (those who had been seen more than once), 76% demonstrated a significant (75%) improvement in both pain levels and functional ability, i.e. work and daily living activities. This shows a positive impact on musculoskeletal health.
- The flu vaccination programme has been organised and will be delivered in October and November to front line staff.
- Work has been carried out to support the DEN Groups event to raise awareness of people with disabilities on 3th November.
- The continuation of the MSK clinics for '**Keeping Well at Work**' for the People and Place Directorate.
- A Mental Wellbeing Toolkit is being developed as a 'quick click' to mental wellbeing information.
- Cancer Buddy Training was provided to employees volunteering to be Cancer Buddies.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

No consultation has been undertaken.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

None.

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

Sickness absence impacts on the ability of the Council to deliver its services with replacement cover required in many service areas at an additional cost to the Council.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications resulting from this report.

6. Other implications

There are no other specific implications.

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives/corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard)/organisational blueprint/LAA (or Coventry SCS)?

Sickness absence is one of the Council's corporate plan targets and performance is reported to Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance & Resources) on a quarterly basis with the final quarter containing the out turn report.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

The Promoting Health at Work strategy will require further development to examine more intensively issues such as working conditions, accidents, work related ill health, and industrial injuries in addition to managing absence. This will involve liaison with colleagues in the area of safety management and occupational health, and will also include analysis of sickness data to identify the relationship between specific causes of absence and occupational groups.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Human Resources

The HR Health and Wellbeing team and the Occupational Health and Counselling Service, support absence management across the whole City Council. The teams support managers to deal with sickness promptly and consistently within all directorates.

Information and Communication Technology

Improvements will continue to be made to the reporting process through Resource link management information to improve accuracy and detail of information in relation to all absences.

Trade Union Consultation

Consultation with the trade unions is ongoing. The trade unions are kept up to date on the latest absence figures and are actively involved in casework regarding sickness absence management.

6.4 Equalities/EIA

The application of the sickness absence management processes are continually reviewed to ensure compliance with the Council's duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. No equality impact assessment has been carried out as the recommendations do not constitute a change in service or policy.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None.

Report author(s):

Name and job title:

Jaz Bilen, HR Business Partner

Directorate:

Resources

Tel and email contact:

024 7683 1054

Jasbir.bilen@coventry.gov.uk

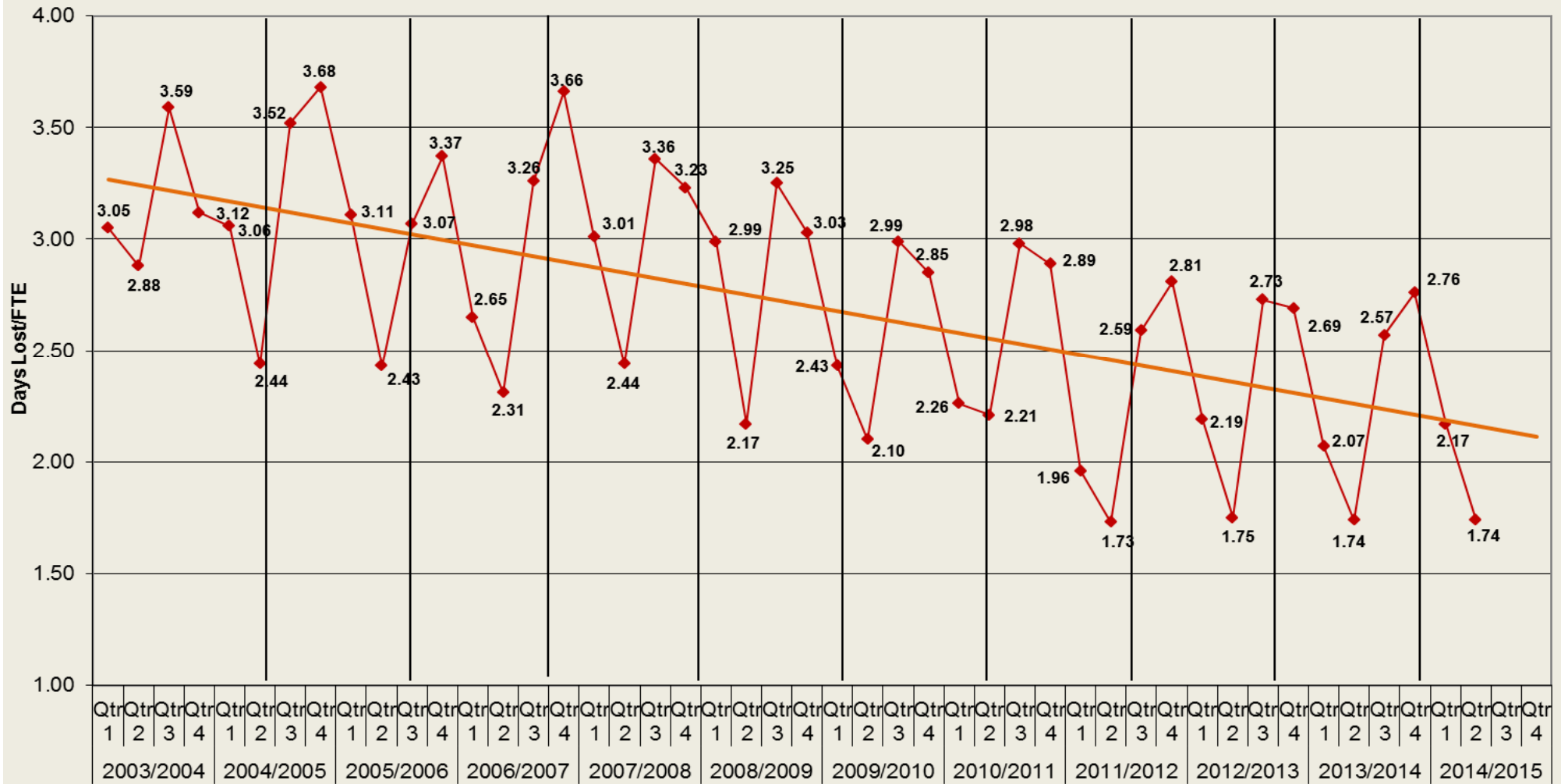
Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Jason Bratt	Senior Human Resources Adviser	Resources	13/10/2014	13/10/2014
Angie White	Occupational Health & Counselling Services Manager	Resources	13/10/2014	29/10/2014
Louise Hughes	Senior Accountant	Resources	01/10/2014	07/11/2014
Hugh Peacocke	Governance Services Officer	Resources	20/11/2014	20/11/2014
Names of approvers: (officers and members)				
Shokat Lal	Assistant Director	Resources	20/11/2014	20/11/2014
Julie Newman	Children & Adult Legal Service Manager	Resources	10/11/2014	11/11/2014
Councillor Gannon	Cabinet Member		14/11/2014	19/11/2014
Chris West	Executive Director	Resources	10/11/2014	

This report is published on the Council's website:

www.coventry.gov.uk/meetings

Coventry City Council
Days Lost per FTE
2003 - 2014



Corporate / Directorate Comparisons against Target

Appendix 2

Coventry City Council

April – September 2014	April – September 2013	Annual Target 2014/2015
3.91	3.81	8.5

This demonstrates an increase of 0.10 days per FTE compared to 2013/2014

Chief Executive's Directorate

April – September 2014	April – September 2013	Annual Target 2014/2015
1.17	2.25	5.0

This demonstrates a reduction of 1.08 days per FTE compared to 2013/2014.

Place Directorate

April – September 2014	April – September 2013	Annual Target 2014/2015
5.17	5.20	10.4

This demonstrates a reduction of 0.03 days per FTE compared to 2013/14.

People Directorate

April – September 2014	Annual Target 2014/2015
4.63	9.5

Due to the change in the structures and composition of Directorates, an accurate evaluation against last year's performance / statistics is not directly comparable.

Teachers in Schools

April – September 2014	April – September 2013	Annual Target 2014/2015
2.48	2.51	6.3

This demonstrates a reduction of 0.03 days per FTE compared to 2013/14.

Support Staff in Schools

April – September 2014	April – September 2013	Annual Target 2014/2015
3.77	3.54	9.0

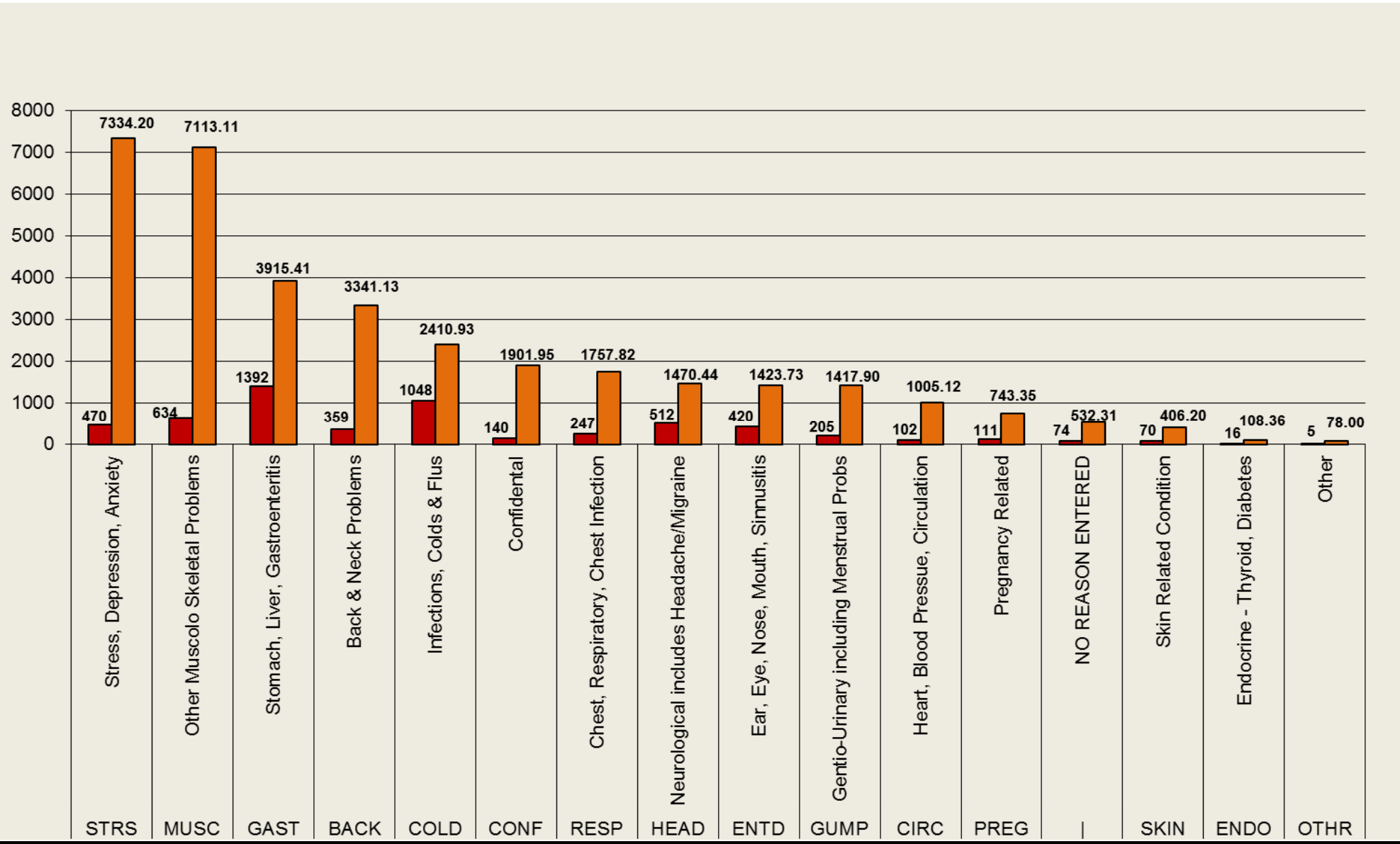
This demonstrates a reduction of 0.23 days per FTE compared to 2013/2014.

Resources Directorate

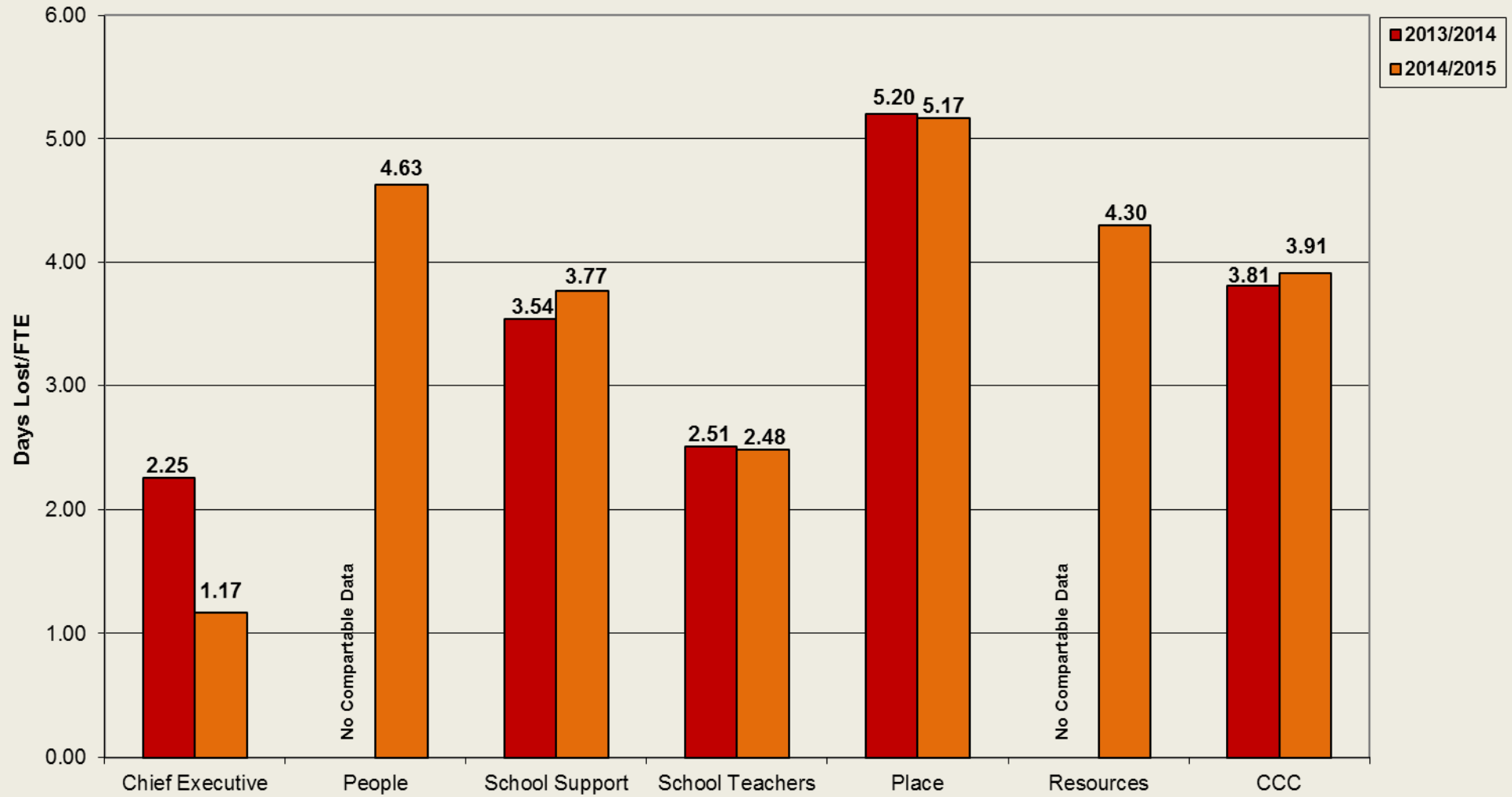
April – September 2014	Annual Target 2014/2015
4.30	7.5

Due to the change in the structures and composition of Directorates, an accurate evaluation against last year's performance / statistics is not directly comparable.

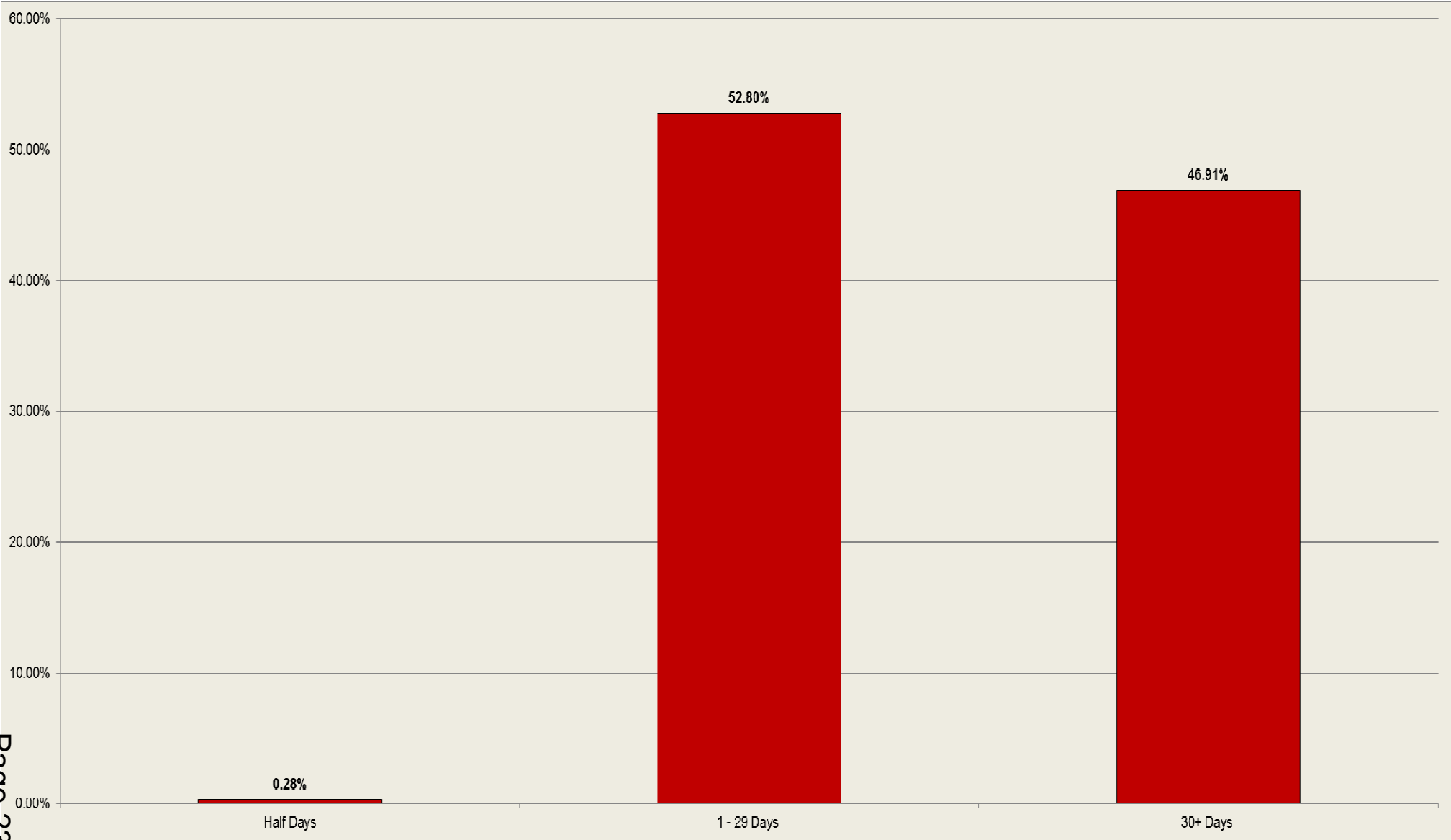
**Coventry City Council – Reasons for Absence
April – September 2014**



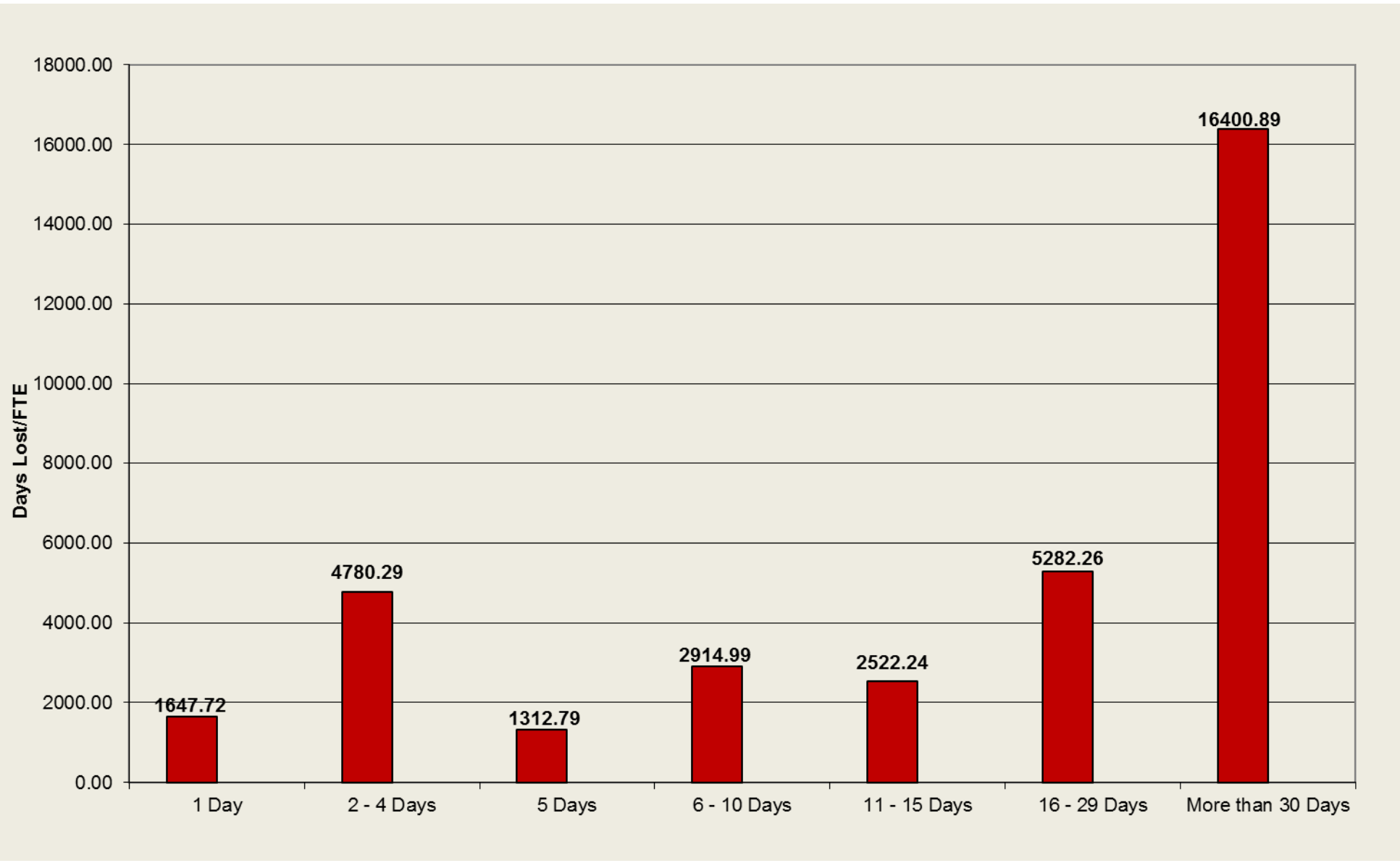
April – September 2013 vs. April – September 2014
Days Lost Per FTE



Coventry City Council
Sickness Absence – Percentage Breakdown
April – September 2014



Coventry City Council
April – September 2014
Spread of Absence by Length of Days



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
Promoting Health at Work Statistics
1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015

Activity	April- June 2014	July- September 2014	October- December 2014	January- March 2015	Total for Year
Pre-Employment health assessments	227	279			506
<u>April to June 2014</u> From the pre-employment assessments, required additional advice and guidance to be given to the employing manager. 21% of pre-employment forms were processed within 3 working days 100% clearance slips were returned to the Recruitment Team/School within 3 working days					
Sickness absence health assessments and reviews	472	443			915
Ill health conditions reported/investigated as work related	72	58			130
Work Place assessments carried out	6	6			12
Case conferences carried out	7	2			9
Vaccinations	36	11			47
<u>April to June 2014</u> Ill health condition reported as work related (breakdown): musculoskeletal; ... mental health/depression; ... stress related. Referrals to support services, work place assessments and case conferences were part of the health management plan. Advice on workplace adjustments, medical redeployment and ill health retirement were also given. 100% of employee ill health referral forms processed within 3 working days 36% reports sent to HR/schools within 3 working days					
Vision screening and other surveillance procedures	96	65			161
<u>April to June 2014</u> From the 96 screenings which took place required additional intervention to prevent a deterioration in health and maintain the employee in work.					
Healthy Lifestyles screens and follow up appointments	129	142			271
<u>April to June 2014</u> From the initial healthy lifestyle screens, were identified as having previously unidentified health problems, and required follow up appointments at the OHU and referrals to their GP.					
Self referrals	7	8			15

The above figures do not include income generation work for contracts, advice, support and guidance, telephone enquiries, health education training, developing policies, quality standards and guidance notes, etc., in support of the Managing Health at Work process.

COUNSELLING SERVICE
Promoting Health at Work Statistics
2014/2015

Activity	Apr – Jun 2014	Jul – Sep 2014	Oct – Dec 2014	Jan – Mar 2014	Total for Year
New referrals for counselling	148	137			281
Counselling sessions	648	637			1285
The table below provides a breakdown of reasons for referral					
Mediation					
This mediation helped to resolve perceived work related stress issues for an employee who was off sick.					
Anxiety Management group attendance including CBT	4	3			7
Numbers trained in managing mental health, stress and interpersonal issues in the workplace	37	17			75
Stress Risk Assessments (number of employees involved)	110	44			154
Service evaluation					
Number of employees completing questionnaire	56	23			79
Counselling helped avoid time off work (not on sick leave)	43	15			58
Counselling helped early return to work (on sick leave when counselling started)	8	7			15
Did not affect sickness absence	5	1			6

The above figures do not include advice, support and guidance, telephone enquiries, health education training, developing policies, quality standards and guidance notes, etc., in support of the Managing Health at Work process



Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources)

1 December 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) – Councillor Gannon

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director, Resources

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Agency Workers and Interim Managers – Performance Management Report Q2 (1 July to 30 September 2014).

Is this a key decision?

No. Although the matter within the Report can affect all wards in the City, it is not anticipated that the impact will be significant and it is therefore not deemed to be a key decision.

Executive Summary:

To provide the Cabinet Member with performance information on the use of agency workers procured through the Master Vendor Contract for the Q2 period 1 July to 30 September 2014; to compare Q1 2014/15 with Q2 2014/15 expenditure. To also consider Interim Manager spends for the same periods which are now procured through National Framework Agreement RM692 along with any additional off contract spends across the authority

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is asked to:

1. Approve monitoring processes to continue for both Agency workers and Interim Managers
2. Endorse compliance with the corporate policy on the recruitment of Temporary Agency Workers through the Master Vendor, Pertemps for the Q2 period; Interim managers and any off contract spends

3. Review the Q2 spends for 2014/15 with the previous Q1 spends for 2014/15 for spends with Pertemps and for Off-Contract spends during the same period.
4. Instruct officers to continue to work towards reducing expenditure on the use of agency workers.
5. Approve that future orders are not accepted if no reason is given for the need for the agency worker

List of Appendices included:

The information attached in Appendix I shows the total expenditure on agency workers by Directorates for Q2 2014/15 for spends with the Master Vendor supplier, Pertemps.

The information attached in Appendix II show the justification of new orders placed by Directorates for agency workers during Q2 2014/15 for spends with Pertemps.

The information attached in Appendix III shows a summary of the usage of agency workers in Q2 2014/15.

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it, or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:

Agency Workers and Interim Managers – Performance Mgt Report Q2 (1 July to 30 September); Interim Managers spends and off contract spends.

1. Context (or background)

The Master Vendor contract came into effect with our Master Vendor provider, Pertemps on the 2 December 2013. The Master Vendor supplies all suitable agency workers through their own agency or through a 2nd tier arrangement with other agencies on behalf of the Council using rates of pay based on an agreed pay policy and a negotiated mark-up rate with the Master Vendor. The information supplied by the Master Vendor on the agency spends gives detailed information on agency worker usage and spends.

Options considered and recommended proposal

The table in 2.1 below shows a comparison for Q1 for 2014/15 with Q2 2014/15 and indicates if there has been an increase or a decrease in spend. The Master Vendor Contract covers all agency workers with the exception of interim managers for HAY Graded posts; agency workers in schools; contractors and service contracts set up to supply services.

2.1 Table for comparison with Q1 2014/15 and Q2 2014/15 Agency Spend.

Directorate	Spend Q1 2014/15	Spend Q2 2014/15	Increase/decrease
People Directorate	£1,506,928	£1,518,886	Increase
Places Directorate	£131,593	£97,001	Decrease
Resources Directorate	£263,291	£221,544	Decrease
Chief Executives	£0	£0	£0
TOTAL	£1,901,812	£1,837,431	Decrease

Directorate Commentary on increased Agency worker Spend for Q2 2014/15**People Directorate**

Expenditure on Agency Workers increased by £11,958 in quarter 2 compared to quarter 1. This increase reflects the on-going need for experienced social workers to deal with higher workloads being experienced, particularly within the Referral and Assessment Service and in Children's Social Care, due to the unprecedented rates of referrals at the moment. There is on-going recruitment within Social Work with a view to reducing the need for agency workers in the longer term. This has proved successful in appointing newly qualified children's Social Workers. We have now launched the Do it For Daniel Campaign aimed at recruiting experienced Social Workers. At the time of writing this report to date we have recruited approx. 15 through the campaign.

2.2 Authorised Off- Contract spends

Directorate	Spend Q1 2014/15	Spend Q2 2014/15	Increase/decrease
People Directorate	£200,547	£612,285	Increase
Places Directorate	£412,014	£526,926	Increase
Resources Directorate	£0	£0	
Chief Executives	£0	£0	
TOTAL	£612,561	£1,139,211	Increase

Skylakes

During Q1 £189,205 was spent with Skylakes. Skylakes have supplied two teams of social workers, both of which have a Team Manager, to the Referral and Assessment Service since the end of March. A further team of social workers with a manager has been in place to support the Neighbourhoods since May. Skylakes provide their own administrative support to their teams.

The need for greater capacity in these front door services was due to an increase in the numbers of referrals, resulting in permanent social workers having unsustainable caseloads so that work could not be progressed in a timely way. During Q2, the spends were £611,000 representing a full quarter spend with Skylakes.

Catering Services

Due to Pertemps being unable to supply catering staff £1,285 was spent off contract in Q2. Discussions are in place with Catering Services and Pertemps to discuss how more catering staff can be procured through the agency. The Recruitment Team has worked with Catering to build up a bank of our own staff to cover vacancies and a meeting has been held with Pertemps to procure more second tier suppliers and to build up their own supply of catering workers. This should start to take effect during Q3.

Places Directorate authorised off contract spends Q1

West Midlands Highways Alliance for Professional Services

Places operate a Joint Professional Services Contract with Solihull and Warwickshire to procure professional agency staff and secondments to provide high level professional skills. This contract was part of the West Midlands Highways Alliance and has been set up to deliver the £115 million highways and transportation capital programme. Spends in this area for Q1 was £412,014 and in Q2 £517,884.

NSL – Parking services

NSL spends for Q1 were £29,153 and for Q2 this has reduced to £9,042. NSL agency staff were recruited to fill important vacancies following a restructure in the parking enforcement team, which is a self-financed function within the Council i.e. the NSL staff more than pay for themselves through the enforcement income they generate.

The spend with NSL in Q2 was significantly down on Q1 as this reflected the fact that the recruitment process was well under way and partially complete. All vacant posts have now been filled and therefore no spend is expected with NSL in Q3.

2.3 Unauthorised off contract spends

There was no unauthorised off contract spends during Q2.

3. Interim Management Spend for Q1 2014/15 and Q2 2014/15

Table 2.3 shows a summary of spend for Interim Management in Q1 2014/15 and Q2 2014/15. This relates to cover for Senior Hay graded jobs over £50,000 pa. The procurement of Interim Managers is generally through the national framework agreement RM692 for non-permanent staff started on the 1 December 2013. Prior to this date interim managers were procured through our preferred supplier list.

Directorate	Number of Managers in Q1	Total Spends in Q1	Number of Managers in Q2	Total Spend Q2
People Directorate	2	£46,425	2	£70,625
Resources Directorate	1	£28,600	1	£24,800
Place Directorate	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	3	£75,025	3	£95,425

People Directorate

An interim manager has been retained in People Directorate on a part time basis for a period of up to 18 months in order to ensure there is sufficient capacity to lead and deliver “The Better Care” programme of integration and transformation across Health and Social Care.

A senior Interim Assistant Director has been appointed to oversee Children’s Social Care.

These interims were not appointed through the National Framework Agreement for Interims but through a local arrangement.

Resources Directorate

An Interim manager is required to cover the vacancy of Head of Customer Services. This post is leading on the “Customer Journey Transformation” as part of the Kickstart Programme. The post has been advertised already but no appointment was made due to the lack of skills and experience in the area of transformation. Due to the critical nature of the Kickstart Programme a decision was made to continue with the existing arrangement of an Interim Manager for the time being.

Rebate

The cost of agency workers is made up of the pay rate for the work plus working time directive payments, national insurance payments and a margin or mark up to the agency. As part of the Master Vendor contract, fixed pay rates have been set corporately for each job category. Given that national insurance payments and the working time directive are fixed legislative requirements, Pertemp's procurement of agency workers is based on reducing agency mark ups in order to generate cashable savings.

The Management rebate income forecast for 2014/15 is £1,000,000. This is based on the previous years' total rebate and the expectation of the continued higher level of spends in the forthcoming months. For Q2 we received a rebate of £334,294 from Pertemps.

Strategic Management Board Comment

The Master Vendor contract was a planned strategy to work towards reducing the level of agency spends and to better understand where and how we use agency workers.

There will always be the need to use agency workers. However, it is acknowledged that current usage is still too high because of the need to cover sickness absence, short-term cover, and the need for cover in areas such as Children's Social Work and Benefits to cope with the increased demand for services. This results in the need for agency workers to provide capacity and scarce skills. We have now launched a recruitment campaign called 'Do it for Daniel' aimed at recruiting, over the next several months, a number of Social Workers which will help reduce the need for agency social workers going forward. We have already seen a number of our existing agency workers apply to transfer to permanent positions with us and at the time of writing this report we have recruited 4 agency social workers to permanent positions and in addition have made approx. 14 offers through the campaign with more still to be interviewed.

In terms of the cost of using agency workers, it is important to note that not all of the cost is in addition to normal staffing spend. Although agency cover associated with sickness absence in front line services is often an additional cost, in the case of agency cover for vacant posts the cost will be funded in part by the relevant staffing budget.

We now show any additional off contract spends in a separate table. Off contract spends occur generally where the Master Vendor has been unable to supply an agency worker so we are forced to go to a supplier not on the Master Vendor contract or where we need some very specialist skills.

Where opportunities exist for bulk recruitment campaigns to front line essential services, the Human Resources Recruitment Team will continue to work with service managers to establish registers of workers, who are available for casual, temporary or permanent work in order to reduce the use of agency workers. The Recruitment Team has successfully worked with Managers from Cleaning to undertake a recruitment exercise to build up a bank of cleaners and more recently catering staff. The team is working with Job Centre Plus, Remploy and the Council's Job Shop, as well as managers in the authority, to initially create opportunities for unemployed candidates to apply by holding 'open days' at the Job Shop and Remploy and giving them access to opportunities. This is with a view to trying to source our own workers for short term work therefore reducing

the need for agency workers and giving opportunity to the unemployed to find employment with the City Council. Temporary and casual work may lead to permanent work in the future for candidates and this will be a way of recruiting workers to a bank rather than advertising individual vacancies, as we currently do, or using agency workers to fill short term cover during periods of review etc.

The new contract with Pertemps came into effect on the 2 December 2013. The contract, is a joint contract with Warwickshire and Solihull following an extensive tendering process, and has now been fully implemented. The new contract is a hybrid Master Vendor arrangement which will provide the Council with additional advantages to the existing Master Vendor contract.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 The report sets out the steps the Council is taking to reduce expenditure on agency workers, particularly in those areas where they are used most intensively.
- 3.2 The report is able to accurately identify spend on agency workers and the reasons for spend.
- 3.3 Officers will continue to bring the monitoring information to the Cabinet Member and steps will continue to be taken to endeavour to reduce the level of expenditure.
- 3.4 Management Information has given the opportunity for the Recruitment Team to target large areas with high usage of agency workers to try and reduce the need for agency workers.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

Not applicable

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

Quarterly monitoring of expenditure on agency workers will continue throughout the contract. The cost of agency workers for the current reporting period from the Pertemps system is £1,837,431 which equates to 4.6% of the overall wage bill for this quarter (excluding schools).

Pertemps operate a live management accounts system which places the cost of agency workers in the period the work took place rather than the period of time in which the Council was billed for or paid the related invoices. The system shows the volume of agency activity/usage in a particular quarter irrespective of when invoices are paid. Therefore this information will be different from that which has gone through the Council's financial systems during Q1.

The Pertemps system only incorporates timesheets authorised by managers and therefore the costs for a particular quarter will increase throughout the year as more timesheets are authorised. We actively work with the master vendor to keep outstanding timesheets to a minimum.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / LAA (or Coventry SCS)?

The Agency Worker Contract arrangement provides good value for money in relation to the procurement of agency workers. It also provides firmer controls on the use of agency workers and has in place sound management reporting to see where spend is taking place to target recruitment, maximise resources, and reduce spend on agency workers.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

No risks identified

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Through the rigorous monitoring of the use of agency workers and alternative strategies for resourcing short-term work requirements, the dependency on agency workers should be reduced. The Council's Policy on the use of agency workers states that Agency Workers should only be used when:

- Proper recruitment processes have failed to secure an appointment and staff cover has become crucial to the delivery of services;
- Short-term temporary cover is required until proper recruitment processes have been completed and an appointment is made;
- Unplanned absences require immediate cover to ensure continuity of services;
- Unplanned, short-term or peak workloads occur.

Human Resources are proactively supporting managers to reduce agency spend.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

We have removed the equalities data for the next 2 quarters due to the incomplete equalities data the master vendor is able to provide at this time. We will be working with our master vendor to survey all our agency workers to make it mandatory for them to complete an equalities monitoring form which will incorporate a category of "prefer not to say" to try and increase the accuracy and the value of the data. No equality impact assessment has been carried out as the recommendations do not constitute a change in service or policy.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

Report author(s):

Name and job title:

Jane Crawley, Recruitment Manager

Directorate:

Resources Directorate

Tel and email contact:

Telephone 024 76 83 2145 jane.crawley@coventry.gov.uk

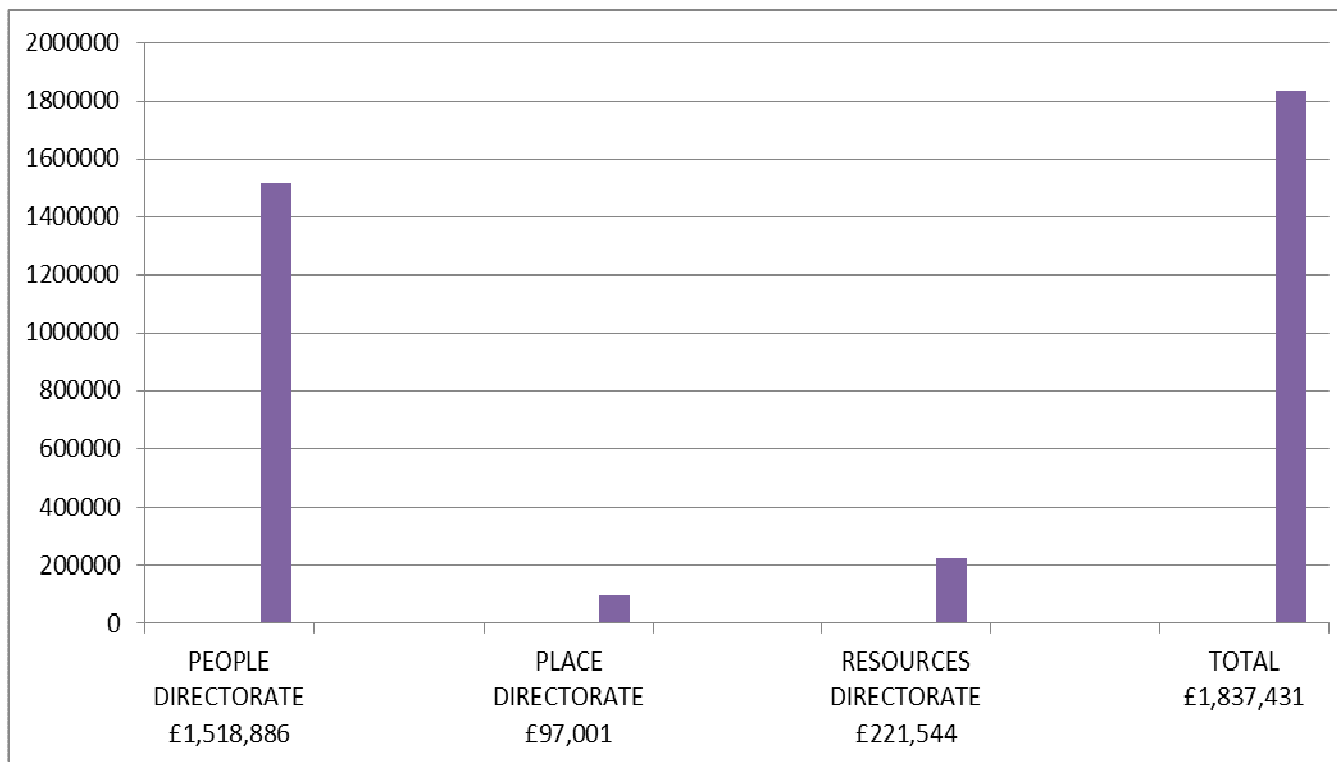
Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Jonathan Guy	Strategic Category Lead – Resources	Resources	4 November 2014	
Hugh Peacocke	Governance Services Officer	Resources	11 November 2014	11 November 2014
Other members				
Names of approvers: (officers and members)				
Human Resources & Workforce Services: Shokat Lal	Assistant Director, HR & Workforce Services	Resources	4 November 2014	
Finance: Rachael Sugars/ Kathryn Sutherland	Finance Manager	Resources	4 November 2014	
Legal: Julie Newman	Commercial Team Manager	Resources	4 November 2014	
Director: Chris West	Executive Director	Resources	4 November 2014	
Member: Councillor Gannon	Cabinet Member			

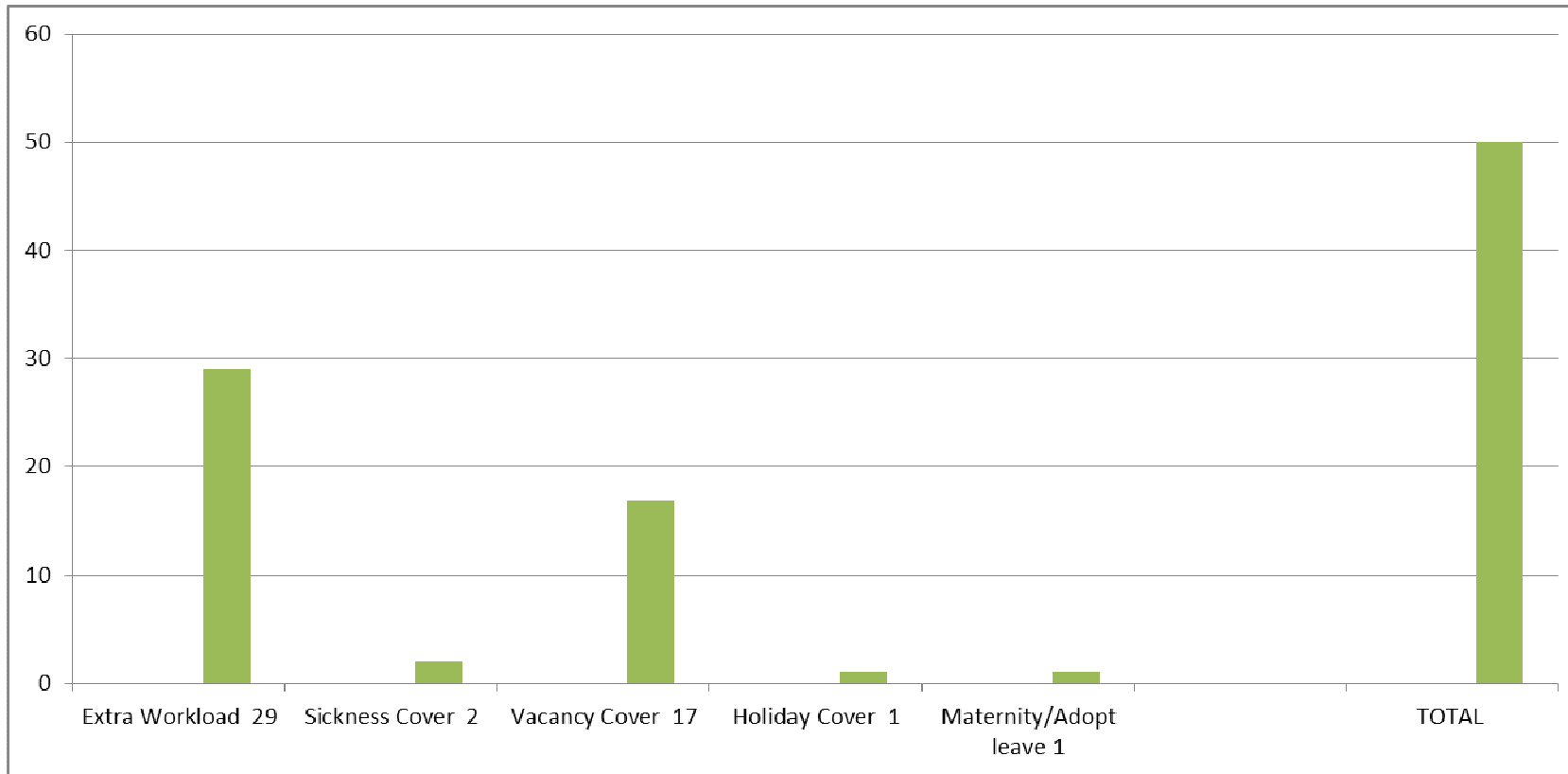
This report is published on the Council's website:

www.coventry.gov.uk/meetings

APPENDIX I - AGENCY SPEND BY DIRECTORATE - JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2014



APPENDIX II - ORDER JUSTIFICATION QUARTER 2: JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2014



APPENDIX III - SUMMARY OF USE OF AGENCY WORKERS BY DIRECTORATE AND STRATEGIES IN PLACE FOR REDUCING DEPENDENCY ON AGENCY WORKERS
Q2 JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2014

Directorate	Q1 April to June 2014 Expenditure by Service Area	Q2 July to September 2014 Expenditure by Service Area	State Usage of Agency Workers in Q2	What Strategies are in place for Reducing Dependency on Agency Workers
People Directorate	Total Expenditure for People Directorate Q1 <u>£1,506,928</u>	Total Expenditure Directorate Q1 <u>£1,518,886</u>	Expenditure on Agency workers increased by £11,958 in Quarter 2 compared to Quarter 1. This increase reflects the on-going increased requirement for experienced social workers to deal with the higher workload being experienced, particularly within the Referral and Assessment Service and Children's Social Care, due to the continuing and unprecedented rates of contacts	There is on-going recruitment to vacancies within Social Work, with a view to reducing the need for agency workers in the longer term.
Place Directorate	Total Expenditure Q1 <u>£131,593</u>	Total Expenditure Q1 <u>£97,001</u>		
Resources Directorate	Total Expenditure Q1 <u>£263,291</u>	Total Expenditure Q1 <u>£221,544</u>		
OVERALL TOTALS	Q1 £1,901,812	Q2 £1,837,431		

Cabinet Member Strategic Finance and Resources

1 December 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) – Councillor Gannon

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of Resources

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Performance within the Revenues Service for the period April 2014 – September 2014

Is this a key decision?

No. Although the matter within the Report can affect all wards in the City, it is not anticipated that the impact will be significant and it is therefore not deemed to be a key decision.

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) on performance and developments within the revenues service during the period April to September 2014. The revenues service is responsible for the collection of more than £116 million of Council Tax from 137,345 domestic properties, more than £122 million of non-domestic rates from 8,234 properties and more than £90 million of corporate income. The service has a target to collect 96.0 per cent of Council Tax and 98.5 per cent of Business Rates in 2014/15, and to reduce Council Tax arrears by 40 per cent. .

The service also has an operational target to reduce the level of Corporate Debt outstanding for more than six months (without an arrangement in place) to below £0.4 million and for Housing Benefit Overpayment debt to remain under £9.9 million by the end of March 2015.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is requested to:

- 1) Note the performance of the revenues service for the period 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2014;
- 2) Agree to receive a further report at the first meeting of the 2015/16 municipal calendar to provide an update for the period April 2014 to March 2015.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it, or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:

Performance within the revenues service for the period April 2014 – September 2014

1. Context (or background)

The revenues service is responsible for the collection of more than £116 million of Council Tax from 137,345 domestic properties, more than £122 million of non-domestic rates from 8,234 properties and more than £90 million of corporate income.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal**Council Tax Collection**

2.1 The revenues service collected 54.9 per cent of Council Tax during the period April 2014 to September 2014, and collection is the same in percentage terms, as in the same period last year. The operational target for the year is 96.0 per cent and the service is currently forecasting to achieve a collection rate of 95.1% by the end of March 2015.

2.2 The Service has seen a significant increase in recovery action during the period. Indications are that it is becoming more difficult to collect money from people, particularly with lower incomes:

- The amount of debt being sent to Enforcement Agents (previously bailiffs) is up by 28% in value;
- The amount of council tax support (CTS) awarded is £700,000 less than at the same point in 2013/14. This indicates that people are coming off CTS and often moving in to lower paid jobs.
- There have been significant increases in the number of reminders, summonses and liability orders issued.
- There is a 9% increase in the amount of work being received by the team – mainly due to increased recovery activity and an increase in the number of residences liable across the City (new property, as well as now charging for empty properties).

2.3 Although collection is the same in percentage terms, when compared to the same period last year, the service has collected an additional £2.3 million. This represents a 3.7 per cent increase in the actual volume of money collected. The overall collectible debit for 2014/15 currently stands at £116.1 million – a 3.9 per cent increase on the £111.8 million in 2013/14.

Council Tax Arrears

2.4 At 1 April 2014, £12.169 million of council tax was outstanding in relation to liabilities for previous years (prior to 1 April 2014). As at the end of September 2014 this balance has been reduced by 20 per cent to £9.750 million. The operational target for the year is to reduce council tax arrears by 40 per cent and ensure that arrears brought forward (including arrears from this current year) do not exceed £11.34 million at 1 April 2015.

Business Rates

- 2.5 The Service has collected 54 per cent of business rates in the first half of 2013/14, which is a reduction on the same time last year. Businesses now have a statutory right to 12 instalments to pay their business rates – it is likely that this accounts for part of the reduction in collection. Further analysis is being undertaken to establish why the projected collection rate is currently 95.5 per cent and not the target rate of 98.5 per cent. The overall collectible business rates debit has increased by 1.7 per cent in 2014/15 from £120.5 million to £122.5 million. This provides valuable income for the Council since the regulation changes since 2013 with the Council retaining 50 per cent of the growth.

Corporate Income

- 2.6 The Service is responsible for the collection of corporate income - the billing and collection of invoices raised for goods and services provided by all Council Directorates ranging from commercial rent income, to care charges and one off services.
- 2.7 With the introduction of the new Agresso system and its reporting methods a new operational target has been introduced to benchmark collection. The target is to reduce corporate debt in excess of 6 months old (where there is no arrangement to repay in place) to less than £0.4 million. The level of debt outstanding at the end of September is £0.46 million, just above target. New processes improvements in the workflow are being implemented and the Service is confident of meeting the target by the end of the year.

Housing Benefit Overpayment

- 2.8 Housing benefit overpayment debt has increased from £9.8 million in April to £10.5 million at the end of September. During this period all processes have been fully automated and all outstanding debt not in recovery has been identified and is currently being reviewed. With these changes now in place, the Service is in a much better position to tackle the outstanding debt and focus on the problem areas.

Revenues

- 2.9 The value of debt written off within the service area totalled £0.79 million at the end of September and is not expected to exceed the £5 million threshold (for reporting to councillors) by the end of March.

Direct Debit

- 2.10 Direct debit is the most efficient way of collecting council tax. The number of people opting to pay council tax by direct debit remains steady, and positive steps are being taken to revise guidelines and procedures to increase take up. It is further planned to associate a 'push' for direct debit take up as the councils plans for the new customer services office go forward.

	April 2014	September 2014
Accounts for which payments are required (excludes maximum council tax support accounts)	105,085	105,034
No. of accounts paid by direct debit	64,676 (61.5%)	65,157(62.03%)

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 No consultation has been undertaken.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1 Not applicable.

5. Comments from Executive Director of Resources

5.1 Council tax is an important source of income for the city Council. Each Extra 1% of council tax collected amounts to approximately £1 million in revenue to the Authority.

5.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / LAA (or Coventry SCS)?

The effective collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and other corporate revenue is crucial to maximising the use of Council resources.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

The service reports monthly to Resources Management Team, the Cabinet Member and the Shadow Cabinet Member. Performance against target is reported on a traffic light basis in order to identify quickly any potential variations in the performance of the revenues service.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None

6.4 Equalities / EIA

No equality impact assessment has been carried out as the recommendations do not constitute a change in service or policy

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

Report author(s):

Tim Savill

Name and job title:

Head of Revenues and Benefits

Directorate:

Resources

Tel and email contact:

024 7683 2607

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Susan Freelove	Revenues and Benefits Policy & Projects Manager	Resources	10/11/2014	11/11/2014
Tim Savill	Head of Revenues and Benefits	Resources		
Other members				
Names of approvers: (officers and members)				
Finance: Rachael Sugars	Finance Manager	Resources	12/11/14	
Legal: Carol Bradford	Solicitor, Place and Regulatory Team	Resources	12/11/14	18/11/14
Human Resources: Neelesh Sutaria	HR Business Partner	Resources	12/11/14	

This report is published on the council's website:
www.coventry.gov.uk/moderngov

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources)

1 December 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) – Councillor Gannon

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director Resources

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Performance within the Benefits Service for the period 1 April 2014 – 30 September 2014

Is this a key decision?

No. Although the matter within the Report can affect all wards in the City, it is not anticipated that the impact will be significant and it is therefore not deemed to be a key decision.

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance and Resources) on performance and developments within the benefits service during the financial year 2014/15. The benefits service in Coventry administers more than £160 million (paying Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support) to more than 38,700 households. The service processed the average new claim for benefit in 23.5 days and processed the average notification of a change in circumstances in 13.9 days.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is requested to:

- 1) Endorse the performance of the benefits service for the period 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2014.
- 2) Agree to receive a further report at the first meeting of the 2015/16 municipal calendar to provide an update for the financial year 2014 -15.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it, or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:

Performance within the Benefits Service for the period April 2014 – September 2014.

1 Context (or background)

1.1 Coventry benefits service administers more than £131 million in housing benefit (HB) and £30 million for council tax support (CTS) payments each year to more than 38,000 Coventry households. The Service also administers discretionary funds – discretionary housing payments (DHPs) and Community Support Grants (CSGs). These funds provide additional support to particularly vulnerable people.

2 Summary of Performance

2.1 During the period 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2014 the benefits service has processed new HB/CTS claims in an average of 23.5 calendar days. This is just above the operational target of 23 days – and an improvement of 1.3 days when compared to the same period last year (when the year-end figure met the target of 23 days).

2.2 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has published the latest comparative data on benefit processing performance as National Statistics for the first quarter of 2014/15. This shows the national average for new claims to be 24 days. Comparison with other West Midland unitary councils is not available for 2014/15. The position for the whole of 2013/14 for Housing Benefit only, showed:

Council	Number of days to process new claims
Dudley	16
Wolverhampton	19
Coventry	22
Birmingham	23
Sandwell	24
Solihull	27
Walsall	32

Fig 1: New claims comparison 2013/14 – source DWP

2.3 This performance has been achieved through maintaining focus on new claims and staff taking ‘ownership’ of the outcomes for customers (eg by encouraging interviews and following up with phone calls). On line claiming has continued to assist the improvement in processing times. Processing times are continuing to improve and the year-end figure is expected to be well within the 23 day target. Comparisons with previous year’s performance in Coventry for the same period shows consistent progress year on year:

Year	Days to process
2011/12	30.2
2012/13	27.2
2013/14	24.8
2014/15	23.5

Coventry City Council April – September performance for new claims – 2011/12 to 2014/15

- 2.4 The average time to process a change in circumstance (for HB and CTS claims) in the first six months of 2014/15 was 13.9 days. Whilst this is above the operational target for the year of 12.5 days it is nearly six days better than the same period last year. The year-end total in 2013/14 was 14.8 days (for Housing Benefit 12.2 days – the DWP reported indicator). Performance continues to improve and the Service expects the year-end performance to be within the operational target of 12.5 days.
- 2.5 Our performance at this stage of the year compared to previous years shows an encouraging trend:

Year	Days to process
2011/12	19.4
2012/13	23.4
2013/14	19.7
2014/15	13.9

Days to process changes in circumstances – April to September 2011/12 to 2014/15.
Source, Coventry CC

- 2.6 Comparative performance for the first six months of 2014/15 is not yet available. For some contextual information our performance when compared with other West Midland councils for the whole of 2013/14 was:

Birmingham	6
Sandwell	7
Walsall	8
Solihull	9
Wolverhampton	12
Coventry	13
Dudley	14

Fig 2 – Average days to process change in circumstances (Housing Benefit only) 2013/14 – source DWP

- 2.7 Recent changes in management have led to changes in processes and our overall work position has made an excellent improvement. The oldest work has moved forward from around two months old to less than seven days. This will continue to ensure the change in circumstance performance indicator improves. This position is also meaning less overpayments were caused by delays – classified as ‘Local Authority Error’. This can lead to a significant loss of subsidy paid to the Council from DWP. The Service is currently on track to receive maximum subsidy with LA error overpayments £215,000 compared with £273,000 at the same stage last year (we achieved full subsidy, subject to audit). This area is closely monitored by the Service.

3 Customer Service

- 3.1 The Service has been heavily involved in the way it interacts with customers as part of the ‘Kickstart’ programme. Following a successful trial it has now rolled out an ‘appointment only’ service for people who claim housing benefit and council tax support. This will mean an improved service for those customers who require help

with their claims. Staff will prepare for the appointment and understand the nature of the enquiry in advance. It will mean that the longer waiting times previously experienced will be removed and customers only need to visit for as long as is necessary to resolve their enquiry.

- 3.2 As part of the council's strategy to be 'digital by default' wherever possible Benefits staff are also asking customers if they can send in information via email to save them time and money. Customers who have a smart phone are also being encouraged to take a picture of the evidence that they have been asked for to support their claim. This means that we can speed up the process of dealing with claims and also saves the Council money.

4 Discretionary Housing Payments

- 4.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are used to help people in difficult circumstances with their housing costs. The DHP policy was approved by Cabinet in March 2013. The Welfare Reforms introduced from April 2013 continue to impact on this area of work.
- 4.2 In the first six months of 2014/15 the Service received 1,475 applications. The number of applications in 2013/14 for the same period was 1,541. At the end of September 2014 £320,776 had been allocated out of the total budget available for this year of £811,865. This compares with £159,620 being spent at the same time last year. The Service has engaged with stakeholders and has taken a targeted approach to the allocation of awards. The number of applications for a 'bond' to enable customers to move to affordable accommodation has increased from 94 at the end of September 2013 to 248 at the end of September 2014.

5 Community Support Grants

- 5.1 The Community Support Grant (CSG) scheme is in its second year. The CSG fund is currently used to give emergency help to the most vulnerable people in the city – many of which have already faced benefit cuts etc, including those under the threat of homelessness or domestic abuse. Through liaison at a local level with other areas of the Council – including Housing and Children's Services, and organisations such as Coventry Law Centre and CAB the Service targets support where it is most needed.
- 5.2 The Council is responsible for administering the £1,195,847 annual grant for these awards. In the first six months of 2014/15, the Service received 1,986 applications, of which 1,078 were successful. The number of applications in 2013/14 for the same period was 1,962, of which 940 were successful. The Service received 5187 telephone calls in respect of CSG applications compared with 4144 by the end of September 2013.
- 5.3 At the end of September 2014, £351,120 had been allocated out of the total budget available for this year. This compares with £169,173 being allocated out of the budget at the same time last year. The Service has put in place a responsive process and has worked hard with partners to ensure money is targeted on individual needs. Improved engagement with support agencies has meant that the Service has seen an increase in the number of support grants for this half year.

5.4 The Government is currently conducting a consultation exercise on the future funding arrangements for 'Local Welfare Schemes' (CSGs in Coventry). Depending on the outcome of the consultation, a decision is likely to be needed from councillors regarding the future of the scheme in Coventry.

6 Partnership working

6.1 The Service has continued to be a key contributor to effective partnership working. A strategic partnership 'working together' group has continued to develop and has been meeting monthly for well over a year to coordinate our efforts. Partners include: Coventry City Council, Whitefriars, Midland Heart, Job Centre Plus, Coventry Law Centre, and Citizens Advice Bureau. Close working in the partnership has helped to limit the impact of welfare reforms and benefit reductions.

7 Results of consultation undertaken

7.1 No consultation has been undertaken.

8 Timetable for implementing this decision

8.1 Not applicable.

9 Comments Executive Director, Resources

9.1 The Administration of HB/CTB is being delivered within the current budgetary provision. The achievement of 100% subsidy on LA error overpayments will continue to be monitored closely in 2014/15.

9.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

10 Other implications

None

10.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / LAA (or Coventry SCS)?

The effective administration of HB/CTB impacts on a range of agendas and supports the Council's vision and objectives for jobs and growth, supporting young people and protecting vulnerable residents.

10.2 How is risk being managed?

Risks relating to fraud/corruption and the HB subsidy threshold's impact on the general fund revenue account are managed through the corporate risk register. The challenges of the significant welfare reforms are also included on the register.

10.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Welfare reform is having a significant impact on the organisation (as outlined in the report) as staff deal with the increasing volume and complexity of enquiries to the service.

10.4 Equalities / EIA

No equality impact assessment has been carried out as the recommendations do not constitute a change in service or policy

10.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

10.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The effective administration of HB/CTB is in the interests of a number of partner organisations, including local social landlords, and the benefits service works closely with those organisations.

Report author(s):

Tim Savill

Name and job title:

Head of Revenues and Benefits

Directorate:

Finance and Legal Services

Tel and email contact:

024 7683 2607

Tim.savill@coventry.gov.uk

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Barry Hastie	Assistant Director	Resources	12/11/14	
Hugh Peacocke	Governance Services Officer	Resources	12/11/14	

Names of approvers: (officers and members)				
Finance: Rachael Sugars	Finance Manager	Resources	12/11/14	
Legal: Carol Bradford	Solicitor, Place and Regulatory Team	Resources	12/11/14	18/11/14
Human Resources: Neelesh Sutaria	HR Manager	Resources	12/11/14	
Director: Chris West		Resources	12/11/14	
Members: Councillor Gannon	Cabinet Member		13/11/14	

This report is published on the council's website:
www.coventry.gov.uk/moderngov



1st December 2014

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance & Resources) – Councillor Gannon

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director, Resources

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Proposed voluntary ban on the release of sky lanterns from Coventry City Council owned land hired for events, or events organised and/or funded by Coventry City Council

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

The growing popularity of sky lanterns over recent years has increased concerns about the impact they have on the environment, wildlife and farm animals. The possible safety risks involved were highlighted a year ago when West Midlands Fire Service identified a sky lantern as the likely cause of a devastating fire in Smethwick which caused £6million worth of damage.

As a result of these concerns a number of councils throughout the country have introduced voluntary bans on their release on Council owned land hired for events.

This report proposes a voluntary ban prohibiting the release of sky lanterns at Council run events, events that are undertaken on City Council owned land or funded by the Council.

Recommendations:

For the Cabinet Member (Strategic Finance & Resources):

- a) To approve the application of a voluntary ban on the use of sky lanterns at all City Council organised events or events that are undertaken on City Council owned land or funded by the Council.
- b) To clearly stipulate at procurement and tendering stage of event contracts that the use of sky lanterns are not permitted, communicated through Assistant Director for Communities and Health and the Events Safety Advisory Group and enforced through the procurement process.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background Papers

Industry Code of Practice – Sky Lanterns

List of Authorities who have applied a voluntary ban on the use of sky lanterns on Local Authority land

West Midlands Fire Service, Smethwick statement

Department of Communities and Local Government, Fire and Rescue Monthly bulletin 49, September 2014

Tesco's to ban sky lanterns, following FG campaign January 2014

Sky lanterns: the difference between high and low quality

Doc 5a Sky Lantern Briefing note October 2013

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

Health and Safety Strategy Group 15th October 2013

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Proposed voluntary ban on the release of sky lanterns from City Council land hired for events, or events organised and/or funded by Coventry City

1. Context

- 1.1 Sky lanterns (known by a variety of names including Chinese lanterns) are small hot air balloons made of paper, with an opening at the bottom where a small fire is suspended on a base framework containing an ignition source. They are intended to be launched into free flight, rising by the enclosed hot air. Sky lanterns float up into the air and remain airborne for as long as they are filled with hot air. Evidence suggests lanterns sometimes drift back to land whilst still alight.
- 1.2 Internationally many countries have banned the use of sky lanterns due to their unregulated manufacture and potentially hazardous nature. The UK has not, to date, banned sky lanterns. However 33 councils so far have taken the decision to apply a voluntary ban.
- 1.3 The Chief Fire Officers Association, Farmers Guardian, National Farmers Union, Women's Farmers Union, Marine Conservation Society, Country Land Owners Association, Newmarket Stud Farmers Association and RSPCA are amongst those urging individuals to use alternatives to sky lanterns and to ask event planners and retailers to use alternatives as well. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Group, Master Thatchers and Suffolk Wildlife Trust have also noted their concerns. A plea for councils to use alternatives in their events and to ban releases of sky lanterns on their own land has also been issued by many of these organisations. Two professional bodies for events professionals – the Local Authority Events Organisers Group and the National Outdoor Events Association also support the ban on lanterns.
- 1.4 In 2013, a major fire which estimated six million pounds worth of damage was caused by a sky lantern in Smethwick, Birmingham; this was one of many but by far the largest. Some lanterns (dependent on the quality of their manufacture) can be hazardous to humans, the environment, livestock/animals, property and aviation. Materials used in some lanterns have been found to be harmful, not biodegradable and contain asbestos. In addition some lanterns have been found to have non-drip fuel cells, increasing the risk of burning debris when lit. The use of sky lanterns is prohibited at both Knebworth House and at the Glastonbury Festival.

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Internationally Spain, Malta and Austria and some states within the USA have banned the use of sky lanterns. Tesco's stopped the sale of Sky lanterns in 2012. Various charities (such as Marillac Care in Brentwood, the, Isle of Man Children's Centre CAFOD and the RAF Association) and land owners (The Hall, Sudbury) have also banned releases of balloons and sky lanterns.
- 2.2 Currently there are no national or international product standards for the design and manufacture of the lanterns, resulting in them being presented in varying degrees of quality, shapes and sizes. Poorer quality lanterns present a wide

range of potential hazards that increase the risk to both user and environment. The substandard lanterns often look the same as a good quality lanterns, the principal issues are that they are made using poorer quality materials that are prone to damage, which can affect their performance which increases the associated risk. An example of this is the use of poorer quality paper which tears easily. Some cheaper lanterns on the market have been found to contain asbestos in the eco-string element. Asbestos cannot be detected in the lanterns with the use of a standard EN71 tests and a specific test must be carried out to establish if the product has asbestos in it. The type of asbestos found in many types of lanterns is chrysotile (white asbestos). It is difficult to establish if the lanterns contain asbestos without undertaking the specialist tests. Research indicates that the fuel cells on cheaper lanterns can be prone to leak, both prior to lighting and during the lanterns flight. Many cheaper lanterns are also packaged and distributed without full instructions about user safety.

2.3 In a nationwide survey in 2011, a third of Britain's fire brigades said they had received emergency callouts to extinguish lanterns. Damage included scorched gardens and roofs. Fire fighters said they had experienced a number of false alarms as the lanterns had burnt themselves out before they had arrived. The lanterns are at their most dangerous in the summer months because of the drier conditions.

2.4 West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) is calling for an urgent review of legislation regarding the use of airborne fire lanterns. This request comes as the brigade tackled one of the largest fires in the West Midlands of England, involving 100,000 tonnes of recycling material and causing an estimated six million pounds worth of damage. The fire was started by a sky lantern which landed at a plastics recycling plant in Smethwick. In response to the fire, Poundland decided to stop selling sky lanterns and recalled their entire stock on 6 July 2013.

2.5 Research evidences that a sky lantern may land when the flame is still alight, making it a fire hazard. In typical designs, as long as the lantern stays upright the paper will not get hot enough to ignite, but if the balloon is tilted (say, by the wind or by hitting some object); it may catch fire while still in the air. All the paper will usually burn in a few seconds, but the flame source may remain lit until it hits the ground.

2.6 The Government has warned people not to use sky lanterns due to their effects on livestock and the countryside. The warning issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government is published on the department's website and says "We recommend you do not use sky lanterns as you have no control over them once they have been set off. They can kill animals, litter the countryside and start fires. If you do choose to set them off, always follow the manufacturers' guidance/instructions carefully. Campaigners including the Women's Food and Farming Union (WFU) and the Country, Land and Business Association (CLA) have welcomed this guidance as a step forward, but have urged the Government to press ahead with a full ban.

3 Results of consultation undertaken

The Health & Safety Strategy group requested that further research was undertaken prior to any consultation taking place.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

With immediate effect

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

Resources required to deliver this ban are low level in terms of officer time to state the negative impact of balloon and sky lantern releases, in addition to the creation of guidance documentation and procurement and tendering process.

If terms of hire are found to have been breached – i.e. if someone reports a release on council land then the enforcement could be delivered through refusal to allow that person/organisation to hire in the future or some other appropriate action. This could have financial implication however this outcome is considered a low risk as there are many alternatives to sky lanterns.

If the proposal to apply a voluntary ban on the use of Sky Lanterns was declined and injury or property damage was sustained, the financial impact to the organisation could be significant.

5.2 Legal implications

The Council, as landowner or the promoter of an event, can impose reasonable conditions on the use of its land or on how events are run. Given the risks associated with the use of sky lanterns, it is reasonable for the Council to prohibit their use where it can.

6. Other implications

None.

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

This supports the Council's objective to improve the environment and tackling climate change.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Based upon information available both nationally and internationally it is foreseeable that levels of risk are attached to the use of Sky Lanterns due to the unregulated design and manufacture. Without the application of a voluntary ban on the use of Sky Lanterns on City Council land or events where the City Council has a financial interest it would prove very difficult to mitigate responsibility within both civil litigation and criminal prosecution.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

None.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None.

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None.

Report author(s): Andrea Burrows

Name and job title: Health and Safety Manager

Directorate: Resources Directorate

**Tel and email contact: andrea.burrows@coventry.gov.uk
76 83 3101**

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Hugh Peacocke	Governance Services Officer			12 November
Fran Collingham	Assistant Director, Communications	Chief Executive		12 November
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Finance: Carolyn Prince	Lead Accountant	Resources		12 November 2014
Legal: Carol Bradford	Legal Services	Resources		18 November 2014
Director: Chris West	Executive Director	Resources		19 November 2014
Members: Councillor Damian Gannon	Cabinet Member	Strategic Finance and Resources		18 November 2014

This report is published on the council's website:
www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings