

Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources

18th July 2019

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources – Councillor J Mutton

**Director Approving Submission of the report:
Deputy Chief Executive People**

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

Sickness Absence to year Ending 31st March 2019

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

To enable Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources to monitor:

- Levels of sickness absence for the year ending 31st March 2019.
- The actions being taken to manage absence and promote health at work across the City Council.

Reporting methodology for 2018/19

The report;

- Is based upon a rolling 12 month period
- Excludes schools' workforce data (schools' data is inconsistent with the data of the workforce as a whole)
- Measures Sickness Absence as days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

Recommendations:

Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources is asked to:

- 1) Receive this report providing sickness absence data for the year ending 31st March 2019 and endorse the actions taken to monitor and manage sickness absence.
- 2) Note the need to keep under review our sickness and absence policies and procedures and invest in sickness absence management training in order to deliver a sustained reduction of absence levels.

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: Sickness Absence to year Ending 31st March 2019

1. Background

Performance

- 1.1 This report provides the sickness absence figures for the Council as days lost per employee (FTE) for the year ending 31st March 2019 and for the previous year

Coventry City Council (excluding Schools)		
	Up to March 2019	Up to March 2018
People	11.62	12.17
Place	9.62	11.11
CCC	10.94	11.44

- 1.2 A report on Sickness Absence is produced every 6 months based on the previous year's performance. The method of calculating absence is the same as that widely used by other employers including Local Authorities and thus enables us to compare our performance
- 1.2.1 Absence figures for schools are excluded because there are fewer working days in the year and therefore the number of days lost does not produce a sensible comparison.
- 1.2.2. The current target figure for the number of days lost per FTE is 8 days. However, this was arrived at when school's figures were included in the total and thus the overall figures were significantly lower.

The target of 8 days was approximately 15% lower than actual performance (9.4 days). To set a similarly demanding target now that the school's figures have been excluded, it is suggested that a target of 9.3 days be set (i.e. 15% below our current performance)

This will produce a more realistic target going forward.

1.3. Comparative Data with Other Local Authorities

West Midlands Employers have provided comparative information for unitary authorities within the region as follows:

West Midlands Authorities	Days lost per FTE (Excluding Schools)
Coventry City Council	10.94
Birmingham City Council	10.44
Dudley Met Borough Council	12.17
Herefordshire	8.24
Staffordshire County Council	10.75
Stoke	10.96
Solihull Met Borough Council	10.54
Warwickshire County Council	9.51
Wolverhampton Met Borough Council	9.5
Worcestershire County Council	7.68

At the time of writing this report not all Unitary authorities had reported figures for 2018/19

- 1.3.1 Employees working with social care typically have higher levels of absence. Therefore, the overall absence rates for authorities who have outsourced large areas of social care are likely to be lower.
- 1.3.2 CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) data for 2019 suggests that average absence in the public sector is 8.4 days per year

1.4 Reasons for Absence

- 1.4.1 The top 3 reasons for absence (shown as a percentage of the days lost) for 2019 and 2018 are as follows:

Coventry City Council (excluding Schools)	March 2019	March 2018
Stress, Depression, Anxiety	33.18%	23.93%
Other Musculoskeletal Problems	18.80%	17.68%
Stomach, Liver, Gastroenteritis	8.52%	9.86%

People Directorate	March 2018	March 2018
Stress, Depression, Anxiety	36.70%	27.36%
Other Musculoskeletal Problems	16.34%	16.99%
Stomach, Liver, Gastroenteritis	8.47%	7.21%

Place Directorate	March 2019	March 2018
Stress, Depression, Anxiety	24.87%	23.43%
Other Musculoskeletal Problems	24.61%	25.75%
Stomach, Liver, Gastroenteritis	8.63%	7.80%

- The main reason for absence is Stress, Depression, and Anxiety. Based upon employees who are referred to Occupational Health we have some information on the extent to which they attribute these problems to work or external pressures (see 2.2 under Mental Wellbeing)

1.5 Short Term and Long Term Absence

1.5.1 The following table shows the breakdown between long term and short term absence for the year ending 31st March 2019, expressed as a percentage of total days lost.

Coventry City Council (excluding Schools)			
Directorate	Long Term (30 Calendar Days+) <i>(Number of employees)</i>	Short Term (below 30 Days) <i>(Number of employees)</i>	
People	70.99% <i>(379)</i>	29.01% <i>(1547)</i>	
Place	67.16% <i>(160)</i>	32.84% <i>(706)</i>	
CCC	69.85% <i>(539)</i>	30.15% <i>(2246)</i>	

Each column also includes the number of employees who have had a period of sickness in each category.

1.6 Sickness Absence Costs (excluding Agency costs)

Coventry City Council (excluding Schools)		
Directorate Totals	Employee Cost (£000 thousands)	<i>Days lost in thousands (FTE)</i>
People	3,562	<i>29037</i>
Place	1,433	<i>12278</i>
CCC Totals:	4,995	<i>41314</i>

1.7 Outcomes of the Promoting Health at Work Corporate Procedure

1.7.1 During 2018/2019 there have been a total of **24** employees who left the council in accordance with the 'Promoting Health at Work' Corporate Procedure. **14** have been due to ill health retirement and **10** are due to the required standards of attendance not being met.

2. Activities during the current year

2.1 HR Support Team

HR staff aim to ensure a consistent approach to sickness absence management and to provide information on sickness absence to Management Teams/Senior Managers monthly. HR colleagues also support managers in the application of the Council's 'Promoting Health at Work' procedure.

2.1.2 Management teams review summary sickness absence reports monthly to monitor the progress and determine actions needed to address any hotspots.

2.1.3 HR teams undertake proactive strategies to support the managers in the reduction of sickness absence levels. This includes:

- Robust approach in 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 senior managers when employees trigger a sickness absence point and have not been 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 is taking place across Coventry City Council as a whole. This includes: receiving the absence phone call, conducting effective 'Return to Work' interviews, supporting employees with a disability, and understanding the rationale for making reasonable adjustments in the workplace to facilitate an employee's return to work.
- Training has enabled managers the opportunity to refresh their knowledge and understanding of the 'Promoting Health at Work' procedure.

2.1.4 A number of service areas across Coventry City Council hold regular 'performance summits / clinics' on a monthly, quarterly or as needed basis. These incorporate both the management of sickness cases as well as areas of performance concerns, which in some cases have a direct link.

- 2.1.5 The purpose of 'performance clinics', is to provide an opportunity for Management with the relevant Head of Service/Directors to review sickness and performance patterns and 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 procedure and other relevant processes.
- 2.1.6 The clinics 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 from HR on changes to procedure and the full support that's available to its employees and managers.
- 2.1.7 One of the key benefits of performance clinics 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.
- 2.1.8 In addition to the above a process mapping exercise is currently being undertaken with a view to making management processes in this area efficient and effective.

2.2 Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service

Activities from the Occupational Health Team

RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) Health & Safety Awards

Coventry City Council's Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service has been successful in achieving a second consecutive Gold in the internationally-renowned RoSPA Health and Safety Awards, the longest-running industry awards scheme in the UK.

The RoSPA Awards scheme which runs annually, recognises and celebrates excellence in safety performance and organisation's commitment to raising the standards of health and safety management.

Incident and accident reporting system

The new incident and accident reporting system, Alcamus Info Exchange, commenced on 1st April 2019, with accompanying communication and training

Accident Prevention Programme

Over the last 12 months only 24 near miss incidents have been reported which is a small decrease when compared with last year. All near miss incidents reported have been followed up by the Health and Safety Team. A summary report will be available in Q1 – 2019.

Corporate Health & Safety Audit, Inspection & Monitoring Programme

- The Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service will be co-ordinating the Managers Health and Safety Annual Self-Assessment Audit in July 2019, which reviews health and safety performance throughout the Council. The findings will inform Directorate Health and Safety Plans. The Audit outcomes will be reported in Q2.
- The Service is also undertaking a topic audit of mandatory health and safety training. The outcome of the audit with associated action plan will be available in Q3 2019.

Current Wellbeing Activities

- Yoga and massage sessions have continued at lunch times at Friargate in the Wellbeing room.
- A Wellbeing Week took place on the week commencing 20th May 2019 for Adult and Children's Services. The events which focus on wellbeing and resilience took place at three venues across the City.
- Further wellbeing events are being planned in August 2019 to support Children's Services, with additional workshops and therapies.

Musculoskeletal

The Fast Care Clinics at 3 City Arcade and Whitley Depot will continue to support high risk areas for musculoskeletal problems.

- 183 cases were closed, having been provided with appropriate advice and support.
- 34% of referrals for musculoskeletal problems assessed were caused or made worse by work. These were distributed across directorates and schools. No single area was represented as a hot spot. No single condition was significantly represented.
- All 183 cases were addressed, and work practices reviewed.

Mental Wellbeing (Annual Summary)

- 470 referrals were made to counselling and 256 cases were closed. Of the 256 closed cases, 100 employees attributed their difficulties to a combination of personal and work related pressures and 36 reported that their difficulties were solely work related stress.

3. Public Health

- 3.1 The Director of Public Health and Wellbeing has been chairing a cross council sickness absence working group as part of the Our Future Workforce programme. The purpose of the group is to better understand our sickness absence patterns and identify opportunities to reduce sickness absence and improve health and wellbeing across the organisation.
- 3.2 The group are developing an organisational Health and Wellbeing Strategy based around the Thrive at Work standards. In November 2018 the Health and Wellbeing Board including the Council signed up to a commitment to develop a standalone wellbeing induction for all new staff and to register and work towards meeting the THRIVE bronze standards in 2019 (Thrive at Work builds on our previous Workplace Wellbeing Charter status and the framework we are promoting to a range of local employers as part of the Year of Wellbeing and our Business Development function)
- 3.3 Public Health have been supporting the iBCF (Improved Better Care Fund) funded adult social care Making Every Contact Count (MECC) programme. Social workers across the council have been trained in MECC and motivational interviewing to support them around health behaviour change with clients. The programme has also supported awareness of staff wellbeing and creation of health and wellbeing champions within social care.

4. Results of consultation undertaken

Trade union colleagues are kept up to date on the latest absence figures and are actively involved in casework regarding sickness absence management.

Absence from work is also as part of the reported Health & Safety Governance arrangements.

5. Timetable for implementing this decision

None

6. Comments from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources

6.1 Financial Implications

The cost of sickness shown in section 1.6 is a calculation of the pay cost of individuals who have been absent from work due to sickness. The actual impact on the Council is the financial cost of replacement cover where this is required in specific service areas plus the notional cost of the effect of the absence on the Council's ability to deliver its services.

6.2 Legal implications

Employees are able to make a claim against the Council if they can demonstrate that the Council has failed in its duties as an employer when dealing with sickness absence.

7. Other implications

There are no other specific implications.

7.1 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) twice a year at the end of Q2 and the end of Q4.

7.2 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 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

7.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Human Resources

The HR/OD teams 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

Data warehouse: Throughout 2018/19 HR data including sickness absence will be stored on the Data warehouse enabling us to use the latest corporate reporting tools improving consistency, timeliness, analyses and presentation of statistics.

7.4 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.

7.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None.

7.6 Implications for partner organisation

None.

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