

Report



meeting

SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING SELECT
COMMITTEE

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7

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT: SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 A report outlining progress in attendance management was presented to the Social Services Standing Select Committee on 8th June 2004, and is attached as Appendix A to this report.

1.1.2 Further information was requested in respect of the following:

- ratios of short-term to long-term sickness
- comparison with corporate figures
- comparison with social services departments of other authorities
- comparison within social services department of areas of service.

2. Information and Advice

2.1 Short-Term vs Long Term Sickness

2.1.1 The department has had the technical means to separate long-term sickness (defined by the authority as episodes longer than 4 weeks in duration), from short-term sickness only since September 2003.

2.1.2 Distinction between the two categories, in monitoring, is viewed by the department to be important as they generally require different management strategies.

2.1.3 It is viewed that, in general, managers are more able to influence short-term sickness levels than long-term; the latter tending to be linked to health/capability, the resolution of which tends to follow a more protracted course involving Personnel and Occupational Health, in order to be managed appropriately and in accordance with legislation.

2.1.4 At the time of drafting this report, the dates available for 2003/04 is as at February 2004. In terms of the recorded average sickness absence level of 7.46% that comprises 2.88% short-term absence (less than 4 weeks duration) and 4.58% long-term absence.

2.1.5 The department's long-term sickness protocol, referred to in the previous report to Social Services Standing Select Committee, will, therefore, remain as an important feature of the department's on-going attendance management strategy.

2.2 Comparison with Corporate Figures

2.2.1 In comparison with other departments of the authority, social services' absence rates are higher: however, this tends to be reflective of the national picture, i.e. the work of large numbers of staff within social services departments is physically demanding, resulting in high levels of back/musculoskeletal complaints. The work in many areas is emotionally demanding, resulting also in high levels of stress and depression. See Appendix B for a more detailed breakdown of reasons for sickness absences.

2.2.2 The department has, for its own internal purposes, preferred to report absence levels in percentage terms, because of the high proportion of part-time staff. However, the Audit Commission have determined that comparative data be expressed in lost working days per FTE (full time equivalent) employee per year.

2.2.3 For the 2003/04 financial year, the social services rates compare with other departments as follows:

Department	(Projected)
Resources	10.3 days
Culture & Community.	9.9 days
Environment	15.5 days
Education: School	14 days
Non-school	11.2 days
Social Services	17 days (7.6%)
NCC Overall:	12 days per FTE/year
(Corporate Target:	10.12 days)

2.2.4 The best performing authorities (upper quartile of performance) are recording levels of sickness absence of between 8 and 9 days per annum. However, the county council is currently operating within the lower quartile of performance which is 11-12 days.

2.2.5 Despite the improvement in absence rates reported to Social Services Standing Select Committee on 8th June, it will be noted that due to the large

numbers of staff employed by the department, larger shifts in performance by social services have the potential to affect the corporate outcome significantly. See Appendix C for a break down of sickness absence by social services service area.

- 2.2.6 The overall trend in absence levels for the department is downwards as indicated in the graph (Appendix C) which shows the position both for the department overall and the major areas of service individually. The position for Resources functions as the 'lowest' in terms of level would compare with other 'office' based services and the position of Adults Direct Services, as the area with the highest absence levels, is not unexpected in the light of the very demanding nature of the work and services provided by that sector. The Adults Direct Service area is also very large incorporating for example, Home Care, with some 800 staff and therefore improvements in this area are very significant in terms of impact upon the department's overall performance. There have been notable improvements in Home Care in particular, which are illustrated by the outcomes in the graph.

2.3 Comparison with other Social Services Departments

- 2.3.1 The national Employers Organisation have confirmed that the last survey of sickness absence within social services departments was conducted for the year 2001/02.
- 2.3.2 The 2001/02 report expresses absence rates in percentage terms.
- 2.3.3 At that time, the mean average of a sample of social services departments in 102 authorities was **7.3%** and those in the **lower quartile of performance averaged 8.6%**. The mean average for the Midlands was 7.4%, but for county authorities specifically, it was just 6.4%.
- 2.3.4 The most recent report undertaken by the Employers Organisation is for local authorities as a whole and pertains to 2002/03. This indicates that nationally, sickness absence in local authorities had not improved on 2001/02 figures: however, analysis of the average figure shows that in the case of county authorities, there was an improvement.
- 2.3.5 The Employers Organisation will be deciding over the next two weeks whether they will undertake a new survey of absence in social services departments.
- 2.3.6 Although available information nationally requires updating, it seems possible to deduce at this stage that Nottinghamshire Social Services stands up reasonably well to scrutiny against national average performance in social services departments. In contrast to the corporate outcome, the department now seems to be achieving significantly better than the lowest performing quartile of departments. However, our performance compared specifically to other county authorities appears less favourable.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Members note and comment on the report.

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