

28 November 2018**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – CUSTOMERS, GOVERNANCE AND
EMPLOYEES****SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE TRENDS AND ONGOING ACTION
FOR IMPROVEMENT****Purpose of the Report**

1. a) To update Members on quarterly performance information, **as at 30th September 2018**, in relation to levels of sickness absence across the directly employed Nottinghamshire County Council workforce.
- b) To seek approval for ongoing actions to further reduce absence levels.

Information**Background**

2. This report sets out the latest available sickness absence figures and the actions being taken by the Council to continue to improve the health and wellbeing of its employees with an aim to further reduce these to make sustainable progress towards the achievement of the target of 7.00 days average per employee per annum.
3. The range of strategic HR, Workforce and Organisational Development and wellbeing interventions and guidance has been extended as detailed in previous reports to this Committee. The County Council continues to give priority to providing a safe and healthy working environment which maximises workforce productivity and performance, motivates and engages all employees and actively promotes a culture of positive mental and physical wellbeing at work.
4. Absence levels and related trend data provide an indicator of how well the Council is performing in this respect and continue to be used to highlight areas of focus for both service specific and strategic actions to promote employee wellbeing and further develop the employee support package. They should be viewed within a context of overarching seasonal trends which is the reason for providing information on a 12 month rolling basis.
5. This approach has resulted in an overall trend of incremental improvement over recent years although there have been slight increases in the overall recorded level of absence in the last

two reported quarters. However the overall figure has reduced very slightly from 8.43 to 8.42 days for this latest period to 30th September 2018.

Performance Monitoring and Trend Analysis

6. The table below shows the quarterly breakdown, by department since January 2017 as a 12 month rolling figure.

	(A) January 2017 to December 2017	(B) April 2017 to March 2018	(C) July 2017 to June 2018	(D) October 2017 to September 2018
Adult Social Care, Health	12.99	12.79	12.60	11.76
Children and Families	10.32	10.89	10.61	10.49
Place	9.49	9.47	9.03	8.98
Chief Executive's (prev. Resources)	8.75	9.21	9.21	8.59
NCC Schools*	6.13	6.34	6.34	6.72
Authority	8.25	8.54	8.43	8.42

* Maintained schools only

7. The revised Infographic in **Appendix D** to this report illustrates in executive summary of the situation as at 30th September 2018, when the headcount of direct NCC employees was 7,508 in relation to:
- The level of performance against the current Council target and CIPFA national benchmarking data
 - The most significant causes of reported absence across the Council and by department during the quarter
 - The relative distribution of short and long term absence.
8. **The average level of sickness per employee per annum at the end of quarter 2 was 8.42 days overall.** This is a decrease of 0.01 percentage points compared to the previous quarter when it stood at 8.43 days. This reflects the fact that absence has reduced slightly in all departments although there has been an increase in the absence reported in schools included in this data.
9. **Appendix B** to this report illustrates that stress and related conditions remain the most prevalent overall reason for absence across the Council. However there has been a significant decrease this quarter from **20.2% to 18.12%** of all reported absence.
10. Due to the particular pressure on the social care services, stress is routinely the most prevalent reported reason for absence in both the Adult Social Care and Health and Children and Families services. This currently stands at **22.21%** and **26.23%** respectively showing a proportionate increase in reason for reported absence during this period.

11. The Council has engaged with Healthy Working Futures and had contributed to a bid for national funding from the Work and Health Unit Challenge Fund. Unfortunately we have recently been advised by Healthy Working Futures that their bid was unsuccessful however now we are in contact with them, we are continuing to explore other ways we may work with them to improve our overall performance in this challenging area.
12. Stress continues to be the most significant reported reason for absence in the Chief Executive's department, currently standing at **23.76%**, a slight increase over the previous quarter. It has previously been reported that this may be due to uncertainty for employees around the Corporate Services Review and the arrangements to populate the new Chief Executive's department.
13. The Place department has consistently reported muscular / skeletal injury as the most frequently recorded reason for absence at 18.38%. However this has been overtaken this quarter by post-operative recovery at 19.28%.
14. Stress, depression, anxiety, mental health and fatigue also remain the most common overall cause of all absence across the local government sector, the most recent LGA data which has not been refreshed from the previous report stands at **22.30%** of all absence across the sector nationally and **22.40%** for comparable Councils. The Council's figure as mentioned previously stands at **18.12%**.
15. The Council's overall performance reflects its commitment to taking action to prevent and manage stress and related conditions to achieve continuing improvement and continues to compare favourably with other Council's and public sector employers nationally.
16. The next most significant attributed reasons for absence across the Council are operations and post-operative recovery which has increased by 1.52% to 17.63% from the previously reported figure of **16.01%** in the previous quarter.
17. Absence due to Flu, colds and sore throats shows a decrease this quarter having moved from 9.85% to 9.27% since the previous reported period. The Council has again provided a voucher scheme for frontline workers to encourage them to have the flu vaccination. The figure for employees requesting a voucher was 751 as at the end of October 2018.

Benchmarking:

18. Overall the level of the Council's current performance continues to compare well against the most recently available benchmarking data for the local government sector. The Council is awaiting updated information from our identified benchmarking sources but the current figures are produced below for ease of reference:
 - The Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy (CIPFA) published data for March 2017 shows that the average for comparable County Councils in the national benchmark cohort is now **8.60 days** (having increased from **8.50 days** at the previous year) and **9.30 days** for all Councils.

- The most recent annual Local Government Association (LGA), Workforce Survey (March 2018), continues to report an average of **8.70 days** across all local authority respondents.
- The most recent (May 2018) annual benchmarking report on absence management from the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD), reports the average days absence reported by respondents across the wider public sector, including Health and Central Government, as **8.50 days** and across respondent private sector services as **6.60 days**.

Actions for improvement:

19. Members of Personnel Committee have previously agreed a range of actions to address the ongoing challenge of preventing and significantly reducing stress and stress related absence and enabling employees to improve their resilience and mental wellbeing. These include:

- A commitment to proactively manage absence and to support employees to maintain their attendance at work.
- To continue to focus on mental health at work and to work closely with the recognised trades unions to identify and test the effectiveness of the various initiatives in place.
- To develop new approaches and activities to further improve employee health and wellbeing and reduce absence.
- To continually review the action plan to assess what is working and what more could be added.
- To use the feedback from the Chief Executive led employee workshops to further inform the action plan.
- To review the effectiveness of the new workplace Buddies and the Chaplaincy service and to provide an update report regarding these initiatives at the January 2019 meeting of this Committee.
- The introduction of Mental Health First-Aiders. We are currently reviewing several training packages to identify which is the best fit for the Council before seeking volunteers from the workforce.
- In response to a number of employee requests, some further management guidance is being produced to advise on supporting employees through the menopause.

Other Options Considered

20. In addition to its overall strategic approach, the Council continues to benefit from the ongoing commitment of the recognised trade unions in considering options to improve employee health and wellbeing. Their active engagement and involvement, and that of the employee support groups, in task focussed, time limited, joint working groups which operate as sub groups of the Central Joint Consultative and Negotiating Panel, are helpful in developing proposals for further

consideration by Members. It is also intended to work more closely with colleagues in Public Health to engage their expertise in finite pieces of work which will add to our overarching strategy.

Reasons for Recommendations

21. The recommendations in this report will enable Elected Members to regularly review the current levels of performance and consider potential actions to further reduce the level of absence in order to meet the Council's identified target.

Statutory and Policy Implications

22. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

23. The data in this report and the associated appendices cannot be attributed to individual employees and therefore protects their privacy.

Financial Implications

24. There is no specific budget allocation to fund the development and delivery of employee wellbeing interventions and initiatives. This is met from within the HR, Workforce and Organisational Development budgets.

Human Resources Implications

25. These are set out in the body of this report. The trades unions continue to be engaged in joint working with managers and HR colleagues to further develop employee health and wellbeing initiatives. Trades union colleagues welcome the opportunity to continue to work with managers with a focus on mental health issues and are keen to ensure that mental health issues have parity with physical health issues and particularly welcome the introduction of mental health first aiders and training for managers in supporting employees with mental health issues and supporting employees through the menopause.
26. Trades union colleagues welcome the range of services available to help support employees in their roles and prevent ill health developing and have indicated that they would support a Council-wide staff health survey in addition to the more detailed surveys already undertaken across Children's and Adult's services.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

27. The Council's Attendance Management policy and procedure applies equally to all directly employed staff. There is a separate policy which is applicable to all maintained schools and is recommended to all schools with different governance arrangements. These procedures contain guidance which ensures that appropriate management of the sickness absence of employees with a disability complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 1) Continue to receive updates regarding the revised Employee Health and Wellbeing Action Plan 2018/19 and agree any new additions to the plan.
- 2) Receive a further report on progress at the end of the third quarter of 2018/19 at March 2019 Committee.

Marjorie Toward

Service Director – Customers, Governance and Employees
Chief Executive's Department

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Gill Elder, Group Manager HR, on 0115 9773867 or gill.elder@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (KK 05/11/18)

28. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Personnel Committee.

Financial Comments (SES 06/11/18)

29. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 24 of the report.

HR Comments (AW 20/11/18)

30. The HR implications are contained within the body of the report. We continue to work in partnership with the recognised Trade Unions to identify and understand the impact of the range of actions taken to improve employee wellbeing across the Council.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All