

22 May 2019**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 31st March 2019**, in relation to levels of sickness absence across the directly employed Nottinghamshire County Council workforce.
- b) To seek approval for ongoing actions to further understand reasons for sickness and therefore reduce absence levels.
- c) To report back to Members on the use of “Other” as an absence reason.

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. It is encouraging that we received over 30 applications from employees wishing to train as volunteer mental health first aiders. It is our intention to publicise this new addition to our wellbeing support package along with other important measures including the buddying scheme and the workplace chaplaincy over the course of Mental Health Awareness week which runs from 13th to 19th May this year. We are seeking to align our programme with Learning at Work Week which runs concurrently to maximise this awareness raising opportunity.
4. 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.

5. 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.
6. At Committee in March 2019, Members requested some further information regarding the use of "Other" as an absence type. Internal Audit colleagues are preparing an overarching audit on the application of the sickness absence procedures. As part of the preparation for the audit, they have been asked to explore this matter further. However, an initial analysis has indicated that the percentage of absence declared as "Other" is showing increased usage for each quarter of the last 12 months. In quarter 4 2017/18 this stood at 14.21% and for the same quarter in 2018/19 it was 16.83%. In the first two quarters of 2018/19 it was the third placed absence type but this rose to second place for the last two quarters. An intranet news item and Team Talk reminder will be published to ensure managers understand the importance of accurately recording the reason for absence to ensure we are properly targeting our energies to reduce absence in the correct areas. We will report back to Members on the audit findings and suggested actions to address the issue.

Performance Monitoring and Trend Analysis

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

	(A) July 2017 to June 2018	(B) October 2017 to September 2018	(C) January 2018 to December 2018	(D) April 2018 to March 2019
Adult Social Care, Health	12.60	11.76	11.96	11.70
Children and Families	10.61	10.49	10.51	10.28
Place	9.03	8.98	9.20	9.33
Chief Executive's	9.21	8.59	8.17	8.30
NCC Schools*	6.34	6.72	6.79	6.86
Authority	8.43	8.42	8.50	8.52

8. The Infographic in the **Appendix D** to this report illustrates in executive summary the situation as at 31st March 2019, when the headcount of direct NCC employees was 7,457 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.
9. **The average level of sickness per employee per annum at the end of quarter 4 was 8.52 days overall.** This is an increase of 0.02 percentage points compared to the previous quarter when it stood at 8.50 days.

10. **Appendix B** to this report illustrates that stress and related conditions remain the most prevalent overall reason for absence across the Council and has increased slightly since the previous quarter currently standing at **23.41%** of all reported absence. This is followed by Other at **16.83%** and Operations/Post-Operative recovery at **13.4%**.
11. There has been an increase from **29.03%** to **34.97%** attributed to stress and related conditions in Children and Families which requires further examination. The primary reason for absence in Adult Social Care for this period is also **Stress and Depression** rather than Other standing at **19.48%**.
12. Stress has also been the most significant reported reason for absence in the Chief Executive's department over recent quarters, having slightly increased to **24.51%** from **21.93%** for this period.
13. The Place department continues to be the exception where the most prevalent reported reason continues to be muscular / skeletal injury which decreased slightly to **21.98%** from **22.82%** compared to stress at **21.15%**.
14. Absence due to flu shows a further slight decrease this quarter having moved from **9.45%** to **9.30%**. It was reported in March that the expectation was that this figure would increase this quarter but that has not been the case. A possible conclusion from this may be the increased take up of flu vaccination vouchers from **710** in 2017/18 to **900** in 2018/19. Further work is being undertaken with Public Health colleagues to determine how we can further increase the take-up.

Benchmarking:

15. The updated information from CIPFA for 2018 was not received in time to be included in this report. This information will be updated in the report to Committee in July 2019. Generally the Council's position in relation to absence attributed to sickness has been lower than other Councils in the benchmarked data.

Actions for Improvement:

16. The ongoing challenge of preventing and significantly reducing stress and stress related absence and enabling employees to improve their resilience and mental wellbeing therefore continues to be a priority of the Council's employee health and wellbeing action planning and delivery, supported by a range of existing initiatives. Members of Personnel Committee have received detailed information on a number of occasions describing our extensive provision to promote good mental health in the workplace.
17. The focus on mental health at work will continue to be a key area on which to focus activity and we continue to work closely with the recognised trades unions to identify and test the effectiveness of the various initiatives in place and develop new approaches and activities to further improve employee health and wellbeing and reduce absence. This includes reviewing the current action plan.

18. Work has begun with Public Health colleague to examine our wellbeing offer to understand what interventions and approaches are most effective and we will bring further information and related actions back to this Committee as the work progresses.

19. We will also continue to explore any suggested additional provision to determine whether there is a benefit to adding to our existing package of support.

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. As mentioned above, the work with Public Health colleagues has begun and their insight and expertise will prove invaluable to understanding and addressing the root causes for absence and what else we can do to improve the Council's performance in this area.

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. The development and delivery of employee wellbeing interventions and initiatives 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. Reducing absence remains a priority area for the Council and work continues with individual service areas to deliver targeted interventions as previously demonstrated in the Case Study of the BSC reported to Committee in March.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

26. 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 sickness absence performance and ongoing actions for improvement on a quarterly basis and identify any further necessary actions.
- 2) Receive a further report on progress at quarter 1 of 2019/20 at July's Committee.

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Constitutional Comments (KK 02/05/19)

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

Financial Comments (RWK 08/05/19)

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

HR Comments (JP 08/05/19)

29. The HR implications are set out in the body of the report.

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