

minutes



Meeting SICKNESS ABSENCE SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 21 July 2008 (commencing at 2.00 pm)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

John Knight (Chair)
Andy Stewart (Vice-Chair)

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|---|----------------|---|-------------------|
| | Reg Adair | A | Dave Shaw |
| A | John Allin | A | Parry Tsimbiridis |
| A | Vincent Dobson | | Brian Wombwell |
| | Andy Freeman | | |

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 23 June 2008, having been circulated, were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dobson and Tsimbiridis.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Freeman declared a personal interest as an employee of UNISON.

BEST PRACTICE IN ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT AT DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Nigel Hughes, Senior Human Resources Consultant at Derbyshire County Council gave a presentation on their approach to attendance management, which was part of an employee wellbeing programme started in 2001. The programme drew together attendance management, occupational health, health and safety, a helpline and counselling for employees, and HR policies (eg flexitime) intended to reduce sickness absence. There was an emphasis on managers having ownership of attendance management, with trigger levels after eight days absence, referral to occupational health after four weeks, and rigorous use of the capability procedure. He outlined the various types of support available to employees. Absence levels of 10.7 days per year per employee in 2000 had reduced to 7.54 in 2007/08.

In reply to Councillor Wombwell, Mr Hughes indicated that attendance management was felt to be good value for money. Councillor Freeman asked about Derbyshire's

flexitime scheme. Mr Hughes replied that it was quite an old scheme, with the potential for updating to be more flexible. He said it was more difficult to apply flexitime to shift working, but teams were encouraged to be as flexible as possible. In reply to Councillor Adair, Mr Hughes stated that cultural change had been achieved by consulting the trade unions and through publicity. He indicated that the lack of progress in adult social services could be explained by the nature of the work leading to stress and lifting and handling injuries, and by long term absences not being addressed.

FURTHER STATISTICAL INFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Members noted the report, which gave some seasonal information on sickness absence, and illustrated how the attendance management system would develop to provide more detailed information.

MAINSTREAMING ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Jack Markiewicz, Service Director, Human Resources, stressed the need for managers to accept their own responsibility for attendance management. He said their acceptance would be measured by their performance management. He went on to say that Nottinghamshire was taking similar action to Derbyshire, often taking the lead from them. He observed that Derbyshire spent more on attendance management, and that perhaps this should be considered in Nottinghamshire, by for example increasing the number of attendance management officers.

Councillor Adair commented that there was a need to find out why managers were not acting properly, and how their behaviour might be changed. Councillor Knight asked what measures were available beyond persuasion. Mr Markiewicz replied that attendance management officers would work alongside managers on more difficult cases, and referred to a need to train managers in their role. Fran Waldrom, Principal Personnel Officer, did not regard Nottinghamshire's trigger levels as too complex, and observed that they were more generous than other authorities. Mr Markiewicz pointed out that the trade unions had never accepted the current triggers, and would fiercely oppose any changes. Councillor Freeman commented that the trade unions might accept changes to triggers as part of a package of measures. Councillor Adair believed that the authority should look at best practice nationally, and offer zero tolerance. Councillor Freeman pointed out that people should not be forced to work when they were ill.

Mr Markiewicz stated that the flexitime scheme had been widened as part of implementing job evaluation. He wondered whether it was being applied properly, and whether managers needed encouragement to use it. It was suggested that comparisons be made with the flexitime schemes in Derbyshire and Leeds. Mr Markiewicz observed that Derbyshire had seven attendance management officers, compared with four in Nottinghamshire (of whom three were currently in post).

WORK PROGRAMME

The draft final report and recommendations would be presented at the next meeting on 15 September.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm.

CHAIR