

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 4 December, 2017

Report of the Leader

Sickness Absence Report - April 2017 to September 2017

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Members of the Cabinet on the sickness absence statistics for the 6 month period 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017.

Recommendations

1. That the report and the half yearly sickness absence figures provided in [Appendix A](#) be noted.
2. That Members note progress in relation to the action plan as attached in [Appendix B](#).
3. That the report be referred to Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Performance & Resources) for consideration.

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. To bring matters to the attention of Members of the Cabinet in line with corporate objectives.
2. To inform Members of the Cabinet of the progress in relation to the agreed management of attendance action plan.
3. To enable the Scrutiny Committee to maintain a continued focus on the management of sickness absence throughout all services of the Council.

Background

4. The levels of sickness absence within the Council are reported to Cabinet every six months. The report is part of a wider performance monitoring framework and improvement plan as originally approved by Cabinet in July 2015.
5. This report sets out the sickness absence information for the period 1st April 2017 to 30th September 2017, including corporate and schools employees. It also includes details of sickness absence figures for the period 1st April 2016 to 30th September 2016 and external data for comparative purposes.

6. This report acknowledges the work and commitment of all managers, employees and trade union colleagues in relation to the continual management of sickness absence.

Relevant Issues and Options

7. The overall sickness absence rates [i.e. working time lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE)] over the period April 2017 to September 2017 are set out in the table below with comparative data for the same period in 2015.

	April 2016 - Sep 2016	April 2017 - Sep 2017
Total days/shifts lost (per FTE)	3.76	4.45

8. The total days/shifts lost per FTE for the period April 2017 to September 2017 indicate an increase in absence levels in comparison with 2016 (from 3.76 to 4.45 days) which represents an overall increase of 0.69 of a day lost per FTE.
9. A summary of absence levels within each Directorate is set out below. A breakdown of absence in each Service area is included within Appendix A.

Directorate	April 2016 to Sep 2016	April 2017 to Sep 2017	Annual Target
	Total days / shifts lost per FTE	Total days / shifts lost per FTE	
Social Services	5.51	6.50	5.80
Environment & Housing	4.48	5.09	5.85
MD and Resources	2.19	4.26	2.90
Learning and Skills	3.51	4.18	4.15
Totals - excluding Schools	4.10	5.16	4.45
Schools	3.40	3.69	3.95
Totals - including Schools	3.76	4.45	4.45

10. Members will note that there has been an increase in absence levels across all corporate directorates in the first half of 2017/18 compared with the performance in the same period in 2016/17.
11. In relation to the annual target, all directorates except for Environment and Housing have seen an increase in sickness absence.
12. Sickness absence recorded in schools has remained relatively static during this period compared to the same period in 2016.
13. The overall increase in absence levels is disappointing given the range of positive measures that have been put in place and particularly the increased scrutiny of absence across all directorates and by the Council's Corporate Management Team.
14. The increase is, to a degree, an understandable reflection of the volume of change and transformation that is being managed across all service areas and something which has been reflected across the majority of other Welsh local authorities.
15. The performance management approach to this issue will continue (and be intensified) throughout the remainder of 2017/18, alongside the range of measures as set out in paragraphs 25 to 40 and the action plan as attached at Appendix B.

16. A full end of year review will be presented to Cabinet in June 2018

Reasons for absence

17. The most common reasons for sickness absence in the Council (including in Schools) over the period April 2017 to September 2017 are listed below, along with a comparison of the previous period (April 2016 to September 2016). A full breakdown of sickness reasons can be found in [Appendix C](#).

	Absence reason	April 2016 to September 2016	April 2017 to September 2017
1	Stress	24.1%	28.8%
2	Operations and Recovery	21.4%	20.1%
3	Musculoskeletal Disorders	11.3%	11.9%
4	Viral Infection	12.8%	11.1%

18. Members will note that 74% of all absence in April 2017 to September 2017 was categorised as long term (i.e. over 4 weeks in duration) compared with 26% short term/intermittent absence. This shows an increase in comparison to last year where 69% of all absence was categorised as long term compared with 31% short term.

19. Stress continues to be the most common reason for sickness absence in the Council and it can be seen that the ratio of sickness absence relating to stress has increased from 24.1% to 28.8%.

20. Members will be aware that in all cases of stress or anxiety, employees are automatically referred to occupational health for advice, offered counselling support and managers are offered training and support in completing stress risk assessments.

21. The Council's new Employee Assistance Programme (Care First) continues to be promoted throughout the Council. Further information on this initiative is set out in paragraphs 27 to 29 of this report.

22. A Directorate breakdown of the most common absence reasons as identified in paragraph 17 is set out below:

	Social Services		Environment and Housing Services		Resources		Learning and Skills		Schools	
Stress	1	33.2%	3	17.3%	1	47.9%	2	20.5%	1	28.7%
Operations and Recovery	2	14.1%	1	27.8%	2	14.8%	1	25.5%	2	19.8%
Viral Infection	3	12.0%	5	9.7%	3	10.3%	5	10.0%	3	11.6%
Musculoskeletal Disorders	4	10.2%	2	21.1%	5	4.9%	3	13.7%	4	9.7%

23. The top three reasons for long-term absence mirror that for overall sickness absence. Stress remains the main reason for long-term absences, followed by Operations and Recovery and Musculoskeletal Disorders. Details are set out in the table below:-

	Absence reason	April 2016 to September 2016	April 2017 to September 2017
1	Stress	39.7%	34.2%
2	Operations and Recovery	20.5%	23.8%
3	Musculoskeletal Disorders	15.7%	11.8%

24. Viral infections remain the main reason recorded for short-term/intermittent absences, followed by Stress and Stomach Ailments, as outlined below:

	Absence reason	April 2016 to September 2016	April 2017 to September 2017
1	Viral Infection	32.2%	28.6%
2	Stomach Ailments	13.0%	13.3%
3	Stress	11.9%	13.3%

Performance Management

25. As indicated above, an action plan for improving the management of attendance was approved by Cabinet in 2015. The momentum behind this action plan has been maintained over the first six months of this financial year and an update on actions within the plan are set out in Appendix B.
26. The main elements of the action plan focus on a range of performance management measures as set out below:
- A full report containing the breakdown of sickness absence levels per FTE across all Directorates and services continues to be reviewed by CMT each month and any required action is taken.
 - All Directorates continue to review absence levels within Directorate Management Teams on a monthly basis and in accordance with a service based action plan.
 - The focus on absence has, over the last year been based on the scrutiny of priority absence reports within each directorate and service area. This has been helpful in focusing attention and support on particular absence cases.
 - Managers and Supervisors continue to receive sickness flagging reports on a monthly basis from HR Employee Services.
 - Long-term sickness absence cases continue to be dealt with on an individual case management basis. Human Resource Business Partners work closely with managers to maintain communication with employees, along with Occupational Health, to support employees' wellbeing and their return to work.

- The Head of Human Resources continues to hold a dedicated review of the top 50 on-going long term absence management cases from across the Council on a monthly basis.

Employee Assistance Programme

27. The Care First Employee Assistance Programme is now fully operational having been launched on 1st June 2016. Quarterly reports have been received and an update of the service is set out below:
- Care First EAP continues to be promoted throughout the Council.
 - Quarter 2 (June 2017 to August 2017) of this year shows an increase in the number of face to face counselling sessions taking place and shows that the service continues to be used at a consistent level.
 - Following promotion of other services provided by Care First, the Lifestyle service for home and work had 44 users in Quarter 2 of this year which is a significant increase on previous quarters.
28. Further promotion of the facility will be on-going particularly in respect of management support, lifestyle and on-line counselling provision.
29. The service has been promoted through staff circulars on Staffnet and as part of the promotion of the Staff Charter. This service continues to be promoted as part of the new 'Welcome to the Vale' induction programme and as a key feature of corporate health fairs and manager briefing sessions.

Positive Health Promotion

30. Work is continuing to develop positive health support mechanisms in line with the action plan (Appendix B). A summary of developments is as follows:
- Flu vaccinations have been offered to all employees during October/November 2017. At the time of this report, approximately 1,300 vaccinations have been administered to employees. A full report on the uptake of this programme will be included in the 2017/18 sickness absence report at the end of the financial year.
 - Positive health events have been planned for 2017/18. A health fair took place in October 2017 for employees based at the Civic Offices and was extremely well attended with excellent feedback. A similar event is planned at the Alps Depot in the New Year.

Managing Attendance at Work Policy Update

31. The new Managing Attendance at Work Policy was implemented on 1st October 2016 following a period of consultation and negotiation with the Council's trade union representatives.
32. Members of Cabinet will be aware of the importance of the new policy in reinforcing the responsibilities of all managers in the management of attendance, in emphasising the need to support employees who are unable to attend work but also to underline the need for both early intervention and performance management.
33. A significant feature of the new policy is the setting out of a differential approach for the management of long term/chronic absence and short term intermittent absence.

This approach responds to the recent increase in long term absence and the specific management approaches for dealing with such absence.

- 34. Training and support on the new policy has been provided to all managers and that support will continue through the remainder of the financial year.
- 35. A review of the new Policy (and compliance with it) is scheduled to take place with the recognised trade unions in December 2017. The half yearly increase in absence levels will be a consideration as part of that review and any necessary action taken.

Wider Engagement Strategy

- 36. Members will be aware of the continuing engagement activity that is taking place as part of the Council's new Staff Charter. The Charter sets out the mutual expectations of staff and managers in a "reshaped" working environment.
- 37. Progress continues to be made in implementing the 15 supporting actions and commitments within the Staff Charter. To date some 8 out of the 15 commitments have been delivered with a further 7 making good progress.
- 38. Over the last six months a particular focus has been placed on development work in five workstream areas all of which are sponsored by individual Chief Officers. Details are as set out below:-

	Workstream	Sponsor
1	Skills Development	Head of Finance
2	Recognition	Managing Director
3	Communication	Head of Performance
4	Innovation	Director of Environment & Housing
5	Management Development	Head of Human Resources

- 39. The effectiveness of the staff engagement strategy will be measured as part of the current Staff Survey which was launched on the 16 October 2017 and which will end on the 24 November 2017. The results will be presented to Cabinet in January 2018.
- 40. Members will clearly appreciate the importance of the Staff Charter (and related staff engagement initiatives) in relation to the impact on attendance and contribution levels of employees across all services.

Absence in wider comparison

- 41. Information from the Welsh Local Government Association has been compiled for the financial year 2016/17 to be able to compare with other authorities within Wales.
- 42. [Appendix D](#) shows a breakdown of the total days lost per FTE for all Welsh authorities. For 2016/17, the Vale of Glamorgan Council had the third lowest absence rate (8.8 days per FTE) across Wales. The average absence rate across all reporting welsh local authorities was 10.3 days for 2016/17.
- 43. Research from the latest XpertHR survey 2017 on absence indicated the average number of days lost in local government in the public sector was 9.3 sickness days per employee. The trends in the report show that absence is increasing slightly within the public sector and other sectors.

44. The latest CIPD survey on absence management suggests that the average number of days lost in local government is 10.5 sickness days per employee. The Vale of Glamorgan Council's performance in the previous year of 8.8 days per FTE was lower than the comparative data.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

45. The incidence of high levels of absence has significant resource implications and places constraints on the continued delivery of high quality service provision. The need to continue to maintain reasonable levels of absence will be important as the Council responds to ongoing financial pressures and the implementation of the Reshaping Services Programme.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

46. There are no sustainability or climate change implications directly arising from the content of this report.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

47. All legal implications including the Human Rights Act and Data Protection Act will have been considered within the implementation of policy provisions.

Crime and Disorder Implications

48. There are no crime and disorder implications directly arising from the content of this report.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

49. In progressing the Attendance Policy the Council will remain compliant with its obligations under the Equality Act.

Corporate/Service Objectives

50. The Council will be unable to deliver corporate objectives without keeping absence levels to a minimum.

Policy Framework and Budget

51. This is a matter for Executive decision by the Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

52. The overall sickness absence figures are reported quarterly through the Corporate Performance Indicators.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

53. Corporate Performance & Resources

Background Papers

- Appendix A - Breakdown of absence by Services (April 2017- September 2017)
Appendix B - Management of attendance action plan (Updated June 2017)
Appendix C – Breakdown of Absence Reasons (April 2017 to September 2017)

Appendix D - Welsh Local Authority Sickness Absence 2016-17

Contact Officer

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Officers Consulted

Corporate Management Team

Responsible Officer

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