



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 12TH NOVEMBER 2019

SUBJECT: SICKNESS ABSENCE WITHIN THE COUNCIL

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND
CORPORATE SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee with an update of the position with regard to sickness absence within the Council.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report provides Members with an update on the steps that have been taken and the progress made in reducing the Council's levels of sickness absence over the last financial year and the actions being taken to support a continued improvement.
- 2.2 To support this, the report provides an overview of levels of absence within the Council for the previous 2 years. For Members information, the tables and graphs reflect the structural changes in Directorates.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Policy and Resources Scrutiny Members are asked to note the sickness absence information contained within this report and the improvements made in 2018/19.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The recommendations are designed to inform Scrutiny Members of levels of sickness absence within the Authority during the previous 2 years and what is being done in an attempt to reduce these.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The Council's Managing Sickness Absence Procedure provides a structured framework to allow Managers to effectively manage sickness absence. The

Procedure has also been adopted by all Schools. The purpose of the Procedure is to:

- Maximise employee attendance at work.
- Support employees in returning to work in a timely manner.
- Have a clear and agreed process for managing the sickness absence of all the Council's employees, which is applicable to all.

5.2 In 2018/19 the Council ranked 16th in Wales for the number of days lost per full-time equivalent (FTE) Local Authority employee due to sickness absence including schools. Performance was 11.3 days per FTE, a move up of 4 positions from 2017/18, when CCBC was 20th in Wales with 12.3 days.

5.3 Both short-term and long-term sickness in the Council has improved over the last year. Sickness has decreased from 23,975 days lost in 2017/18 to 21,609 in 2018/19, a difference of 2,366 days. Long-term sickness also saw a decrease from 54,142 to 49,237 days lost between 2017/18 and 2018/19, a difference of 4,905 days.

5.4 The tables below provides Members with the % absence levels for 2017 / 18 and 2018 / 19 for the Council and each Directorate. For Members information, the table reflects the changes in the organisation's structure.

2017 / 18			
Directorate	% short term absence	% long term absence	Total % absence
Communities	1.40	3.84	5.24
Corporate Services	1.37	3.00	4.37
Education & Lifelong Learning	1.37	2.50	3.86
Social Services	1.80	4.65	6.45
Total	1.47	3.31	4.78

2018 / 19			
Directorate	% short term absence	% long term absence	Total % absence
Communities	1.33	3.53	4.86
Education & Corporate Services	1.28	2.34	3.62
Social Services & Housing	1.47	4.42	5.89
Total	1.34	3.04	4.38

The tables below provides the percentage number of employees per Directorate that have reported sick for the number of days stated for 2017 / 18 and 2018 / 19.

2017 / 18					
Directorate	0 days sickness	1-5 days sickness	6 - 11 days sickness	12-19 days sickness	20+ days sickness
Communities	49.43%	19.78%	8.38%	6.15%	16.26%
Corporate Services	45.97%	28.14%	8.44%	4.50%	12.95%
Education & Lifelong Learning	46.70%	28.86%	9.01%	4.23%	11.20%
Social Services	39.18%	25.72%	11.13%	7.18%	16.79%
Total	44.38%	26.35%	9.40%	5.61%	14.26%

2018 / 19					
Directorate	0 days sickness	1-5 days sickness	6 - 11 days sickness	12-19 days sickness	20+ days sickness
Communities	54.11%	18.04%	7.65%	4.66%	15.54%
Education & Corporate Services	46.37%	27.88%	9.04%	4.42%	12.29%
Social Services & Housing	41.90%	26.19%	9.39%	5.67%	16.85%
Total	46.17%	26.25%	8.93%	4.81%	13.84%

5.4.1 Members will note that during both financial years that almost 50% of employees did not report absent due to sickness and over 70% of employees reported absent between 0 and 5 days

5.5 The table below provides the top ten reasons for absence across the Authority, as generalised categories, for the periods April 2017 – March 2018 and April 2018 to March 2019.

Top 10 Reasons of Absence for the Authority	Ranking	
	April 17 - March 18	April 18 - March 19
Stress; depression; anxiety; neurasthenia; mental health; fatigue	1	1
Other musculo-skeletal problems	2	2
Stomach; liver; kidney and digestion inc. gastroenteritis	3	3
Infections inc. colds & flu	4	4
Injury	5	6
Back and neck problems	6	5
Chest and respiratory inc. chest infections	7	7
Neurological including headaches & migraines	8	9
Work related stress	9	8
Eye; ear; nose & mouth/dental to inc. sinusitis	10	N/A
Heart, blood pressure and circulation	N/A	10

5.5.1 Members will note that the rank order of reasons remains fairly consistent across the 2 years.

5.6 Within People Services, the HR team support Managers with all aspects of people management, but there is also a dedicated Managing Attendance Team to support Managers to manage absence effectively and consistently across the Authority.

5.7 To support the management of sickness absence, the Council has its own Occupational Health Unit, with Occupational Health Physician, Physiotherapist and Nurse expertise provided.

5.8 The Council also provides a confidential counselling service via Care First that can be accessed by all employees.

5.9 As a result of concerns regarding increasing sickness absence levels during 2017 / 18, the following activity has taken place:

- i) The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services:
 - discusses sickness absence as a regular agenda item in his meetings with the Head of People Services.
 - has regular meetings with the Managing Attendance team to discuss progress and areas of concern.
 - has met with all Heads of Service to discuss sickness within their services and is following up on any actions agreed.
 - discusses sickness absence as a regular agenda item in his meetings with the Trade Unions.
- ii) Sickness absence is a regular agenda item on Leadership and Management Network meetings.
- iii) Sickness absence is a regular agenda item on SMTs and HR attend to support the discussions.
- iv) Sickness information is included in the Directorate Performance Assessments
- v) Additional training continues to be provided by HR and is tailored to suit service area needs.
- vi) Daily advice, guidance and support continues to be provided by HR to Managers.
- vii) Additional appointments are arranged if required for the Occupational Health Physician, the Physiotherapist and the Nurse.
- viii) People Services have developed a digital 'Health Wall' featuring some of the links to organisations that provide expert information and advice for a number of health related issues.

5.10 In addition, the following are being actioned to support the continued improvement in sickness absence levels:

- i) The Council's Managing Sickness Absence Procedure is being reviewed.
- ii) The Council's Wellbeing group is now chaired by the Head of People Services and has refocused to bring together all the support the Council can provide to employees to be fit and well and attend work, including what they can do to support themselves.
- iii) The Head of People Services is developing a Wellbeing Strategy with a view to supporting employees to be well and at work. This will include what employees can do to support their own health and attendance at work.
- iv) HR have produced and will continue to produce guidance notes in relation to specific health areas.
- v) HR and Health and Safety are looking at proactive and preventative measures to address the top reported reasons for absence.
- vi) People Services are developing an employee reward and recognition scheme that will acknowledge employees who do not report absent due to sickness.

5.11 Sickness absence will continue to be monitored by Corporate Management Team, HR and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services with the aim of reducing sickness absence levels.

5.12 Some of the work described in 5.10 is just a small part of a wider transition from an Authority that focuses on sickness absence to one that supports attendance and it is hoped that staff will find this of benefit in supporting their own health and attendance at work.

5.13 Conclusion

The improved focus on managing sickness absence appears to have been beneficial as sickness absence within the Council led to a ranking of 16th in Wales in 2018/19 for the number of days lost per full-time equivalent (FTE) Local Authority employee due to sickness absence including schools. This reflected a performance of 11.3 days per FTE, a move up of 4 positions from 2017/18, when CCBC was 20th in Wales with 12.3 days. However, this position has to continue to improve and cannot remain at this level and the Council must continue to assess the impact of the move away from managing sickness to promoting wellness at work with the introduction of the new procedure and strategy.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 There are no assumptions made within this report.

7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

7.1 The Council's Managing Sickness Absence Procedure acknowledges that employees are our most valuable resource and as a result high attendance at work plays a key role in providing efficient and effective services. The reduction in sickness absence levels will improve service delivery, increase employee morale, ensure that the Council is more competitive and increase job security.

7.2 Corporate Plan 2018-2023.

The contents of this report contribute towards 'Objective 2 - Enabling employment' of the Corporate Well-being Objectives, by supporting employees to be well and at work.

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

8.1 The information set out in this report contributes to the following Well-being goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 in that supporting employees to be well and at work, including the effective management of sickness absence, should reduce the levels of sickness in line with the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Procedure:

- *A healthier Wales*
- *A more equal Wales*

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Managing Sickness Absence Procedure was assessed in 2012 and takes Equalities related issues into account when dealing with sickness issues. This was done in order to ensure that any individual falling under one or more of the protected characteristics or wider issues covered by the Council's Strategic Equality Plan, is not adversely affected by that procedure.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are direct financial implications for sickness absence where replacement labour is required to cover lost time by the absent employee. This clearly does not happen with all periods of absence.
- 10.2 Where no replacement cover is being provided there may be no direct financial costs, however there may be hidden costs in terms of the delivery of the service or the impact on other members of staff.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The regular monitoring and review of the long term and short term absences will continue to be a core responsibility of HR with managers to reduce absence levels in their service areas.
- 11.2 Managers have been and will continue to be provided with support from HR to manage attendance within their service areas, and also any employee relations issues that may arise.

12. CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

13. STATUTORY POWER

- 13.1 The Equality Act 2010
Employment Relations Act 2004

Author: Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services

Consultees: Corporate Management Team
Cllr Colin Gordon, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Stephen Harris, Interim Head of Business Improvement & Acting S151 Officer
Geraldine Burns, HR Manager