
Select Committee on Health and Adult Social Care – 17th September 2009

Report of the Director of Law, Property and Human Resources

Encouraging a Healthy Workforce

Purpose of Report

1. The Chair and the Vice Chair have requested a report on this subject.
2. A healthy workforce is a happier, more productive workforce. Keeping people well and in work has obvious benefits: protection against financial hardship, promoting a better quality of life and allowing people to make the most of their potential. Conversely, being out of work can exacerbate physical and mental health problems and increase the chance of social exclusion.

(Improving Health and Work: Changing Lives. The Government Response to Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population – November 2008)

3. The purpose of this report is to identify to the Select Committee on Health and Adult Social Care what facilities are currently in place to support Council employees' health and wellbeing. The report identifies the benefits to both the Council and employees of the individual schemes.

Background

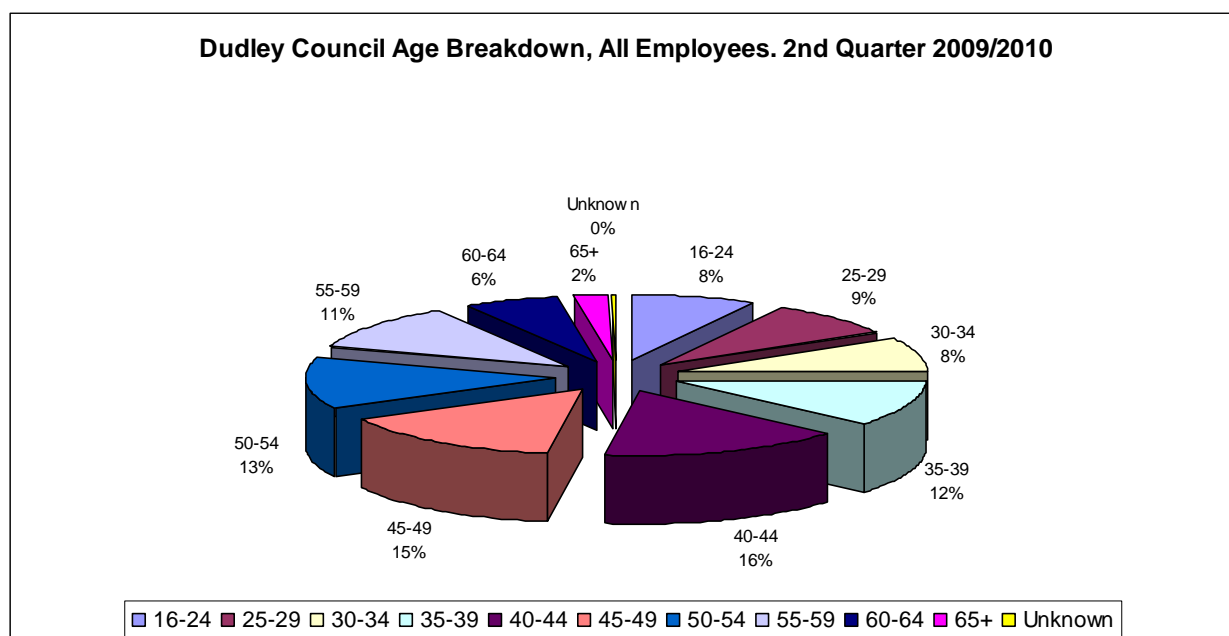
4. There are a number of schemes in place that not only encourage a healthy workforce, but that also enhance the wellbeing of our workforce. As an employer, we have schemes and procedures in place that:
 - Help both managers and employees facilitate a healthy return to work through the use of Occupational Health and phased returns,
 - Keep people at work by encouraging a healthy workforce and by having a culture that not only allows but also accepts flexible working,
 - Supports the wellbeing of the workforce through manager and employee training and flexible benefits.
 - Support employees when too sick to attend work through the occupational sick pay scheme and welfare visits,

Workforce Statistics

5. Number of employees end of 2nd Quarter 2009/10

Directorate	Staffing	Male	%	Female	%
ADULT COMM & HSG	3121	901	28.9%	2220	71.1%
CHIEF EXECUTIVE	307	76	24.8%	231	75.2%
CHILDREN'S SERVICES HEAD OFF	2044	373	18.2%	1671	81.8%
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCHOOLS	7637	1198	15.7%	6439	84.3%
FINANCE ICT	664	232	34.9%	432	65.1%
LAW & PROPERTY	226	103	45.6%	123	54.4%
URBAN	1651	1021	61.8%	630	38.2%
TOTAL	15650	3904	24.9%	11746	75.1%

6. Age Profile of the Workforce



32% of the Council's workforce are aged 50 plus. This is below the average for Local Authorities in England and Wales (34%) but higher than national average (25%).

7. Employees on Fortnightly Pay end of 2nd Quarter 2009/10

Directorate	Staffing
ADULT COMM & HSG	332
CHIEF EXECUTIVE	0
CHILDREN'S SERVICES HEAD OFF	549
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCHOOLS	1283
FINANCE ICT	0
LAW & PROPERTY	0
URBAN	807
TOTAL	2971

Generally employees on fortnightly pay are casual workers or manual workers. However, the above figures do include leisure centre staff.

8. For manual workers we have a variety of health screening schemes so that any deterioration as the employees get older can be monitored. Training on all aspects of manual handling is available with the aim of preventing long term problems. Details of these schemes are contained in this report.
9. Investigations took place in 2004 as to whether to go in to partnership with Sandwell MBC to provide an Occupational Health Service. This was pursued but it soon became apparent that Sandwell MBC didn't have the resources to manage the needs of the two workforces. At that time Sandwell MBC employed a consultant on an "as and when" basis, which was not cost effective.
10. After reviewing the situation, it was determined that it would be more cost effective to have in-house Occupational Health Nurses who were dedicated to Dudley MBC employees.

Occupational Health

11. The in-house Occupational Health Service currently available is based at No. 7 Ednam Road, there are 2 part-time nurses available to give advice to both managers and employees about the health and wellbeing of employees, including illnesses, recovery periods. The Council also has a contract for services with Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Trust for the services of a Consultant Occupational Physician (COP). This contract will be subject to re-tender in December 2011.
12. The Service Objectives and Key Elements of the Occupational Health Service are:
 - Provide an Occupational Health Service across the authority,
 - Advise managers and HR colleagues on employees health in relation to the job they are contracted to undertake,
 - Advise employees about their health and healthier life styles ,
 - Advise managers and HR colleagues on areas of reasonable adjustments within the workplace,

- Advise managers and HR colleagues on rehabilitation of employees in order to facilitate an earlier return to work following absence,
- Advise managers on the provision of safe and healthy conditions by means of workplace assessments where necessary.
- Health surveillance – see paragraphs 23-25 below.

13. Referral Process

Employees are referred to occupational health if there is an ongoing medical problem, or if the employee is on long-term sick leave. Depending on the circumstances of the case, the manager will either refer to the in-house nurses, or direct to the COP.

The reasons for referral generally cover one of the following reasons:

- To gain an opinion regarding the employee's future employment prospects,
- To determine whether there is a genuine reason for the absence,
- To determine whether someone is fit to return to work,
- To determine the likely length of any absence,
- To determine what support can be given to aid their return to work e.g. reasonable adjustments, phased return, etc.

14. The nurse or COP will then provide a medical opinion that will assist the management of the absence.

Other sources of support for employees to return to work are:

- Counselling – To help with any non-physical issues preventing a return to work,
- Redeployment – If an employee, due to ill-health is unable to return to their substantive post. In the last financial year, the Council redeployed 7 employees who were unable to carry out their substantive post due to ill-health out of a possible 19 employees.
- Reasonable adjustments – to working hours, location or facilities if the employee has a disability to enable a return to their substantive post.

Employee Survey

15. By learning about our employee's perceptions of the Council as a workplace we can get an insight into areas of underperformance or excellence within the Authority. Priority areas for action can be identified such as flexible working needs.
16. Areas where issues relating to meaningful and satisfying work relationships can be identified with the resulting improvement actions leading to an increase in employee retention.
17. Learning about employee's job satisfaction, motivation and overall wellbeing can identify areas where there are problems, and areas of really good practice that we can adopt across the Council.
18. A Corporate employee survey takes place bi-annually the most recent of which was conducted in 2007. Some key, relevant results were:

- Over 80% of respondents think that the survey is a good way to feedback how they feel about working for the Council,
- Job satisfaction had increased from 76.2% to 78.7%
- 81% were aware of the range of flexible working policies with 61.4% already or intending to make use of them to better manage their work life balance.
- An increase in staff receiving constructive feedback from their line manager about their work performance from 79.4% to 83.2%
- 69.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt valued by their division.
- There was a decrease in instances of respondents that said they were discriminated against by their line manager (age/disability/gender) from 122 in the 2005 survey to 49 in 2007.

Facilitation of a Return to Work

19. The CBI estimates that 175 million working days were lost last year (calendar year). Dudley Council lost 101,239.67 working days between April 2008 and March 2009. That is 9.59 days per full-time equivalent worker. Getting employees back to work after illness reduces the loss of experienced staff and the cost of recruiting new staff.
20. A return to work after a lengthy absence can be very daunting for the employee, the manager and work colleagues. If the return to work is not managed properly, there is a higher chance that the return will fail and the employee will go off sick again.
21. Dudley Council has the facilities and policies in place to reduce the stress surrounding the return to work and trying to ensure that there isn't a recurrence of the absence. These are:
 - Return to work process which is a two-way discussion between the manager and the employee that covers such things as changes, things that have happened at work during their absence and what needs putting in place to help the employee at work.
 - Advice from Occupational Health about temporary changes to such things as duties, hours or facilities required,
 - Phased returns and/or temporary change in duties during a settling back in period.

Encouraging a Healthy Workforce

Smoking Cessation

22. In July 2007, it became unlawful to allow smoking in all enclosed and substantially enclosed work places. To coincide with the legislation, the Council banned smoke breaks during working time. To help employees who wished to give up smoking, Corporate Health and Safety worked with Dudley PCT to provide on site smoking cessation sessions to Council employees during work time.

50 employees across the Council attended the sessions.

Health Surveillance & Screening

23. Health surveillance is carried out by Occupational Health if the risk assessment indicates one or more of the following:
 - Noise risk – e.g. machinery such as sit & ride mowers
 - Hand arm vibration risk – e.g. road workers
 - Lung function risk – e.g. disposal of asbestos
 - Risk of skin conditions – e.g. any functions that involve handling chemicals like the print unit
 - Night workers
24. Advice is then offered to the employee and the employer to help reduce the risks associated with carrying out these functions. For example, work rotation, personal protective equipment, etc. Approximately 10 employees each month undergo Health Surveillance with our Occupational Health Nurses.
25. Work place assessments are also carried out by Occupational Health. This is to facilitate a return to work, or in some cases, to resolve an issue and prevent an absence. Approximately 9 workplace assessments are carried out each month.

The Council's Travel Plan

26. A Travel Plan is a long term strategy for an occupier or site that seeks to deliver sustainable transport objectives through positive action. It helps organisations manage transport to and from their sites through a package of measures and actions aimed at reducing car use and increasing travel choice. It's a dynamic process which develops over time according to the changing circumstances of the specific site.
27. In Dudley walking, cycling, car sharing, public transport, working from home, video conferencing, car park management schemes etc, form part of the travel plan process.
28. In order to get employees to make the change it needs to be fun, hence holding promotional events throughout the year. Walk to work days and cycle to work days are some of the events that have been held in the past to try to encourage staff to think about how they travel to work. These events are supported by the PCT (where possible) by providing blood pressure checks, BMI checks and smoking cessation.
29. The events are gaining momentum, with roughly 80 – 100 staff taking part in each event.
30. A number of Council offices have bicycle storage facilities and showers.

Salary Sacrifice

31. To promote healthier journeys to work and to reduce environmental pollution, the 1999 Finance Act introduced an annual tax exemption, which allows employers to loan cycles and cyclists safety equipment to employees as a tax free benefit.

The exemption was one of a series of measures introduced under the Government's Green Transport Plan. A Salary Sacrifice Scheme for Council employees to enable them to purchase bicycles and equipment is currently being pursued by the Council's Travel Plan Co-ordinator.

32. A salary sacrifice happens when an employee gives up the right to receive part of their pay due under their contract of employment. A salary sacrifice is neither a deduction from salary nor is it a charge on salary, it is where the employee agrees to accept a lower amount of salary - usually in return for the employer's agreement to provide some form of non cash benefit (in this case the loan of cycle or cyclists' safety equipment). From the tax benefits from this scheme the employee can save up to 40% on the original cost of a bicycle.
33. Corporate Board gave consent in principle for this scheme to be implemented. It is hoped to launch the scheme shortly. By providing this incentive to staff it is hoped to increase the amount of employees cycling to work. The scheme will be available to all staff including teaching staff and Members of the Council.

Pay care

34. Paycare is a not for profit company that offers a healthcare cash benefit plan. Anyone can join Paycare either as an individual or to obtain cover for their family. However, if you pay for membership via salary deduction through payroll, there are substantial discounts of 26 ½ % on the monthly fee.
35. There are different levels of membership with the higher the premium equating to more generous benefits, as follows:

Monthly Premium if deducted by Payroll	£8.45	£16.90	£23.35
Normal Monthly Premium	£11.50	£23.00	£34.50
Optical charges 100% of cost up to a yearly total of	£70	£140	£210
Dental Charges 100% of cost up to a yearly total of	£80	£160	£240
Hospital For each night spent as an in-patient (up to 21 nights per year and 42 nights in any 3 consecutive years)	£30	£60	£90
Specialist Consultation and Tests 100% of cost up to a yearly total of	£150	£300	£450
Professional Therapy Physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, chiropody, homeopathy, hypnotherapy and reflexology 100% of cost up to a yearly total of	£100	£200	£300
Inoculation/Vaccination 100% of cost up to a yearly total of	£30	£30	£30
Health Screening 100% of cost up to a yearly total of	£100	£200	£300
Personal Accidents Cover (adults under 70 only) Disablement and major fractures	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000
Paycare Employee Assistance Programme	Unlimited access 24 hours a day, 365 days a year		

36. 325 Council employees are in the scheme. There is an option to pay for a partner's cover via the employee's salary.
37. Children of the policy holder are covered by the scheme provided that they are a minor living at the same address.

Gym Membership

38. Leisure centre membership is available to all members of the public. The benefits of membership are unlimited access to:
- Lifestyles gyms with regular programme reviews
 - Public swimming
 - Aerobics, fitness and yoga classes
 - Seven-day advanced telephone and internet booking for various court sports
39. For members of the public this costs £27.50 per month, but for Corporate Membership is available to six public sector organisations including Dudley Council employees. For members of those public sector organisations the charge is reduced to £22 per month, a discount of 20%.
40. The number of employees who have taken this up is approximately 540.
41. The scheme is immediately accessible with employees taking a recent payslip or ID card to our Leisure Centres.

Healthy Towns

42. Dudley has successfully bid for £4.5 million to focus on a programme called 'Let's Go Outside'. This aims to encourage families to make the most of outdoor areas by transforming parks and play areas in to 'family health hubs'. These hubs will be connected to people's homes via safe 'active travel corridors' and will be complimented by a programme of activities and events.
43. The aim is to increase activity over the next two and a half years. The funding will allow us to make better use of some of our parks and play areas.
44. As the healthy hubs materialise over the next 24 months, it is anticipated that borough parks will benefit from the enhanced marketing campaign. There are plans to promote borough parks as 'free, fun and fabulous' which also joins up with the current issues regarding the challenging economic climate.
45. 73.9% of Dudley Council employees live within the Borough with the majority of the remaining employees living in authorities which border Dudley Borough. This means that the facilities will be available to benefit the health of many of our employees.

Work Station Assessments

46. Dudley MBC recognises that while the risks to individual users of display screen equipment (DSE) are low, but good practice still needs to be followed. The principal risks that may arise when working with DSE relate to physical (musculoskeletal) problems, visual fatigue and mental stress and, while these are not unique to DSE work and are not an inevitable consequence of it, they can have potential to cause ill health if appropriate controls and precautions are not taken.
47. Each employee who is new to the Council or whose workstation is moved and they use display screen equipment should carry out a Workstation Self

Assessment. Subsequent self assessment need to take place annually by fixed workstation DSE users. The assessments have two benefits, firstly that the employee is given advice on how to safely set up the workstation; secondly that any issues are highlighted to Corporate Health & Safety to handle in a timely manner.

Eyesight Tests for Display Screen Equipment Users

48. There are no indications from extensive research that working with display screen equipment causes any permanent damage to eyes or eyesight, but it may make users with pre-existing vision defects more aware of them. This may give some users temporary visual fatigue or headaches. Uncorrected visual defects can make work at display screens more tiring or stressful than it should be, and correcting defects can improve comfort, job satisfaction and performance.
49. Dudley MBC ensures that specified users are provided when requested with an appropriate eye and eyesight test by a competent person;
- before the commencement of employment as a VDU user
 - at regular intervals thereafter, and
 - if a user experiences visual difficulties which may reasonably be considered to be caused by working on display screen equipment.
50. Employees who fall in to the above categories are able to attend initial screening during work time.
51. Where an eye test shows that an employee, who is an identified DSE user, requires special corrective appliances, the employees' directorate, via the approved corporate scheme, will meet the costs of providing basic single vision spectacles for use at work or, if preferred by the user, will provide a fixed contribution towards alternative spectacles for use at work that will correct the identified defect.
52. The table below shows the numbers of employees who attended eye screening in financial year 2008/09, and those referred on for an eye test. Those referred on for an eye test receive a £17 voucher to cover the cost.

Directorate	Attendance	Referrals
DACHS	41	12
Chief Exec's	25	4
Children's Services	14	2
Finance	31	3
Law & Property	13	1
DUE	120	27
TOTAL	244	49

Substance Misuse

53. Dudley Council recognises that alcohol, drug or substance dependence is a condition for which sufferers may need assistance and treatment to aid recovery. It is intended that managers will be fair and understanding to the employee, but will balance that with the need to maintain a safe working environment for all employees and service users.

54. Where employees admit that they have a substance misuse problem, the Council can offer support via Occupational Health and the Counselling Service.
55. Where a period of time off from work is required to undergo treatment, normal sick pay arrangements apply.

Counselling Service

56. The service is a work based Counselling service, addressing issues either in the staff member's work setting or in their personal lives which has an impact on how they are able to do their job or manage issues surrounding their job.
57. The aim of counselling is to work with clients in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life or loss of direction and purpose. Counselling is a way of facilitating choice or change or reducing confusion.
58. There is not an equitable access to this service currently. In DACHS, where the counsellors are based there is a facility for self referral; however employees in other directorates need to be referred by their manager. Employees that are referred by their line manager are allowed to attend the sessions during work time. There is a similar counselling service available in Children's Services.
59. Staff may be referred for counselling in order to prevent sickness absence, while they are sick to facilitate a return to work, or while suspended. When an employee is referred for counselling, there is a commitment to finance six sessions.
60. Some of the themes that have been identified are:
 - Disability
 - Sickness absence/capability/ transitions back to work
 - Redeployment
 - Medication/alcohol
 - Retirement/leaving the organisation
 - Conflict in the workplace –relationships/support /bullying/issues/supervision/complaints/workplace/communication demands/transitions/consultation issues/changes /culture/changes
 - Family issues-children/parents/carers issues life stages/separation/divorce/domestic abuse
 - Bereavement/Loss/death /terminal illness
 - Depression/anxiety /self harm /suicide
 - Self esteem /confidence/performance anxiety/Body image/weight
 - Trauma Support e.g. road traffic accident/aggression

Manual Handling Risk Assessments and Training

- 61. Dudley recognises that hazardous manual handling operations pose a significant risk of musculoskeletal injury to employees who are invaluable assets.
- 62. We recognise our responsibility to ensure all reasonably practicable precautions are taken to provide and maintain working conditions and systems of work that are safe and healthy.
- 63. To meet the requirements of The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) and other specific legislation the Council:
 - o Avoid hazardous manual handling operations so far as is reasonably practicable
 - o Make a suitable and sufficient assessment of any hazardous manual handling operation that cannot be avoided
 - o Reduce the risk of injury from those operations so far as is reasonably practicable
- 64. In the last financial year (2009/09) 751 Council employees attended the Corporate Manual Handling training course. The course gives training and guidance on carrying out risk assessments and good practice when bending, lifting and twisting, etc.

Risk Assessments – Expectant Mothers

- 65. If an employee informs their line manager that they are pregnant, it is the responsibility of the line manager to ensure that a pregnancy risk assessment is carried out (or reviewed).
- 66. Risks include shocks, vibration/movement, hazardous substances/chemicals and all manual handling. Other, less obvious risks include mental and physical fatigue, stress and prolonged standing.
- 67. Upon returning to work, a further risk assessment will be carried out if the new mother returns to work within six months, or she is breastfeeding.

Supporting the Wellbeing of Employees

Childcare Vouchers

- 68. Dudley MBC works in partnership with Busy Bees to provide child care vouchers to our employees. Childcare vouchers are an employee benefit available to working parents. Childcare Vouchers are purchased via a salary sacrifice scheme and are therefore non-taxable and exempt from National Insurance contributions for employees, whilst offering National Insurance savings for employers. Childcare Vouchers are the recognised payment method for registered carers.
- 69. Working parents with children up to 16 years old can benefit from Childcare Vouchers. The working parent can exchange a part (up to £243 per month) of their gross salary for childcare vouchers. The scheme benefits both basic and higher rate tax-payers and offers savings of up to **£1,196** per parent, per year.

70. Childcare Vouchers are not just for under 5s - they can be used to pay for all types of registered childcare for children up to 16 years old, including day nurseries, nannies, au pairs, crèches, childminders, out of school clubs, holiday schemes, activity clubs and qualifying childcare offered by schools.
71. Employers can save up to £373 per employee per year via reduced national insurance contributions. The Council currently has 210 employees taking up childcare vouchers.
72. Childcare vouchers are a government work-life balance scheme, supported by HM Revenues & Customs.

Flexible Working

73. *Today's evidence shows that flexible and enlightened working practices are good for business. Achieving a balance between the needs of home and work is a win-win situation for the family and the employer.*
74. *Helping staff to balance their work and home lives aids retention, can increase productivity and can be an important aid to recruitment.*
75. *Organisations need motivated staff, not the costs of absenteeism. To stand out, they need people who see their work as more than 'just a job'. They need the loyalty and dedication given by employees who enjoy a healthy work-life balance.*

(workingfamilies.org, accessed 24th July 2009)

76. Dudley Council has the following types of flexible working available:
- part time: working less than 37 hours per week. This can be fewer hours per day and/or fewer days per week.
 - flexi time policy: flexible start, finish and lunch times within the constraints of core working hours and service needs.
 - compressed hours: working agreed hours over fewer days
 - job sharing: sharing a job designed for one person with someone else
77. All council employees have the right to request an alteration in hours to their contract for a temporary period of time, or permanently. In order for the policies to be successful, there is a culture accepting the need for a good work-life balance and that doesn't place any pressure or guilt on employees who are trying to balance their work with the needs of their family or other outside commitments.
78. Work-life balance is not something that is exclusive to parents or, specifically to mothers. At Dudley Council, the right to request an alteration in hours is available to all employees.
79. This goes further than the current statutory legislation that allows employees who is (or is the spouse, civil partner or live in partner of the parent of) the parent, adoptive parent, guardian, special guardian or foster parent of a child aged 16 and under (18 if the child is disabled) to request a flexible pattern of working. The same legal rights are applied to employees who have a caring responsibility for

an adult who is the employee's spouse, civil partner, live in partner, a relative or someone who lives at the same address.

- 80. Every directorate within the Council has a proportion of employees who have had a request for part-time working granted. 52% (8101) employees and workers have a part-time contract.
- 81. The number of male employees who are part time workers is 858, 22% of the male employees. For female employees, the numbers are unsurprisingly, considerably higher. 7,243, 62% of the female employees are part-time workers.

Stress Awareness Training for Managers and Employees

- 82. The Corporate Learning and Development Team and the Corporate Health and Safety Team have jointly designed and deliver stress awareness training to managers and other employees of the Council in line with recommendations by the Health and Safety Executive.
- 83. Both courses cover; Signs and symptoms and sources/ causes of Stress, although the Manager course focuses more on work based stress.
- 84. The employee course looks at work factors to begin with but then moves on to take a more holistic approach by looking at personal factors in depth, including personality, challenging beliefs and coping strategies.
- 85. The management course, on the other hand, starts to look at the legislation and stress management tools, such as risk assessments, based on the HSE Management Standards. Finally, support available from HR/ Counselling Service/ Occupational Health etc. is explored.
- 86. In total, 5 manager courses ran throughout 2008/09 with a total of 45 attendants. 2 Stress Awareness for Staff courses were advertised, due to demand, this was increased to 4 courses, with a total of 43 attendants.

Domestic Violence

- 87. Dudley MBC undertakes to raise awareness on the implications of domestic violence as a workplace issue by displaying relevant information and publicising the impact of domestic violence. The Council makes available information, leaflets and contact numbers for external support agencies.
- 88. Where an employee discloses that they are in a domestic violence situation, it will be treated sympathetically and confidentially by their manager.
- 89. Where an employee asks for help and support to enable them to deal with their situation the council allows reasonable time off work to obtain help and support, which may be of a legal, housing or counselling nature. The manager will also treat sympathetically the effect of abuse on an employee, which may result in distraction, poor timekeeping, absence, depression, and other health related problems.

Special Leave Policy

90. The Council recognises that employees have commitments outside of work, and on occasions, in order to meet those commitments, a short period away from work might be required to deal with a situation.
91. Examples of leave that is allowed above the minimum statutory requirements are:
- Compassionate Leave
 - Cancer Screening
 - Hospital/Consultant Appointments
 - Emergency Medical Appointments
 - Fertility Treatment
 - Blood Donations (at Dudley or Stourbridge Concert Hall)
 - Exam/Study Leave

Flexible Retirement

92. When the Pension Regulations changed in April 2008, a provision was added called flexible retirement. This allows members of the Local Government Pension Scheme, where they are eligible, to reduce their working hours and receive their pension.
93. At Dudley MBC, we only operate this provision where the release of the pension doesn't have a cost to the authority.
94. The benefits of flexible retirement are:
- Employees, who no-longer wish to work full time, can gradually reduce their hours while receiving their pension.
 - This keeps people at work for longer so helps to retain skills.
 - While people are at work, they are paying tax and national insurance for longer.
95. Since 1st April 2008, 29 employees have taken flexible retirement.

Home-based Workers Pilot - Benefits

96. In April 2008, eight Assessors from Benefit Services began a home-based working pilot. This was based on case studies from other local authorities. There are costs to the authority of purchasing and maintaining office equipment. This equates to a £1,245 initial cost with ongoing costs of £747 per year for each home-based worker.
97. Home-based workers work from home on a permanent basis and for contractual reasons the home address is the employee's work place. This is different to the Occasional Working at Home Policy in operation. This is where the employee's permanent place of work is a Council building and there is no contractual right to work from home.

98. Prior to commencing on a home based working arrangement, the individual and a Health and Safety Representative complete an assessment to help identify if the employee and/or their home is suited to home-working.

99. However, reviews of the home-working pilot have found that an average productivity increase of 15% has been achieved and sickness absence has reduced to 0%.

100. Home-based workers operate an enhanced flexible working policy with the following amendments:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| ○ Flexi-time bandwidth | 07:00 – 19:30 |
| ○ Core hours | None |
| ○ Min sessions per contract day | 1 |
| ○ Max sessions per contract day | 3 |
| ○ Min session length | 1.5 hours |
| ○ Max session length | 6 hours |
| ○ Min hours per contracted day | 5 (unless using leave) |
| ○ Max hours per contracted day | 10 |
| ○ Min length of break | 15 min* |
| ○ Max length of break | No limit |

*(at least one 30 min break if working greater than a 6-hour day)

101. The advantages that have been identified for the authority are:

- Increased productivity,
- Improvement in accuracy,
- Reduced sickness absence,
- Impact on staff retention,
- Increase in morale for home-based workers,
- Contribution to the Green Agenda,
- Increased scope for meeting requests for flexible working.

102. Advantages that have been identified for the home-based workers are:

- Reduced cost of travel, parking and lunchtime spending,
- Flexible working and no travelling time contributes to an improved work-life balance,
- Less stress,
- Improved health,
- More confidence (work & use of technology)
- Increased job satisfaction.

103. There are some disadvantages that have been identified that require close management. These include:

- A division in the Benefits Team between home and office-based workers,
- Some home-based workers may feel isolated and not part of the team,
- Communication with home-based workers needs to be managed so that information is shared with them.

104. In order to tackle these potential problems, the following have been implemented:

- Home based workers have a face-to-face feedback meeting, in the office at least every 4-weeks,
 - An online discussion board has been implemented for the home-based workers to communicate between themselves,
 - Minutes of meetings are available to home-based workers within 3-working days, where working practices are discussed.
105. Home-working within the Benefits Team is a viable working arrangement, which benefits both the Council and the employees as a result the pilot has been extended and more employees moved to Home based working. All Directorates are now looking at the potential of Home-working for some of their services.

Occasional Working at Home Policy

106. The purpose of the Council's Occasional Working at Home Policy is to encourage working at home where it is appropriate and the needs of the service allow it. This supports the concept of work/life balance.
107. The Employment Act 2002 supports the move towards more flexible ways of working enabling a better work/life balance.
108. The Occasional Working at Home Policy also supports the Corporate HR Strategy and Accommodation Strategy and the Council's Green Travel Plan.
109. There is no contractual right to work at home, but where it is appropriate to allow this provision, employees may, with management agreement work from home for up to 4-days in a month.
110. In doing so there should be:
- Greater flexibility in the span of working hours to increase productivity and promote work/life balance
 - A higher quality of work due to fewer interruptions
 - An improved service delivery as tasks are completed quickly and hence increased production.
111. Home working is not appropriate for every post and whilst every reasonable request will be considered, there is no contractual entitlement to such an arrangement. Working at home will be subject to agreement following a consideration of the appropriateness of the type of work for home working and the availability of suitable space and equipment at home. It should also be based on the balance of needs between the employee, the customer/clients and the service.

Support for Employees who are too Sick to Attend Work

112. Employers have moral and legal duties to prevent people from being made ill by the jobs they do; it makes business sense to support those who are off sick and help them return to work. Where possible we try to keep people at work by preventing the sickness absence or a repeat of the absence.
113. Sickness absence at Dudley MBC has decreased year on year since 2003/04.

Year	Ave Sick Days per FTE
2003/04	11.09
2004/05	10.69
2005/06	10.53
2006/07	10.40
2007/08	9.91
2008/09	9.59

114. For example, when people are sick, there is a return to work interview process that aims to identify if there are any underlying workplace issues contributing to the absence. We offer solutions such as mediation if there is a relationship issue, counselling if there are personal problems and stress training to help both the manager and the employee recognise the early signs of stress, whether that be work or non-work related stress.
115. The Managing Sickness Absence Policy and Guidelines informs managers that they are to maintain contact with employees who are off sick. The employee needs to be kept informed of work matters as this can make it easier for the employee to return to work after a period of illness.

Finance

116. There are no direct financial consequences as a result of this report. The Council has made revenue budget provision for all its staff and associated HR support and operational practices detailed above.

Law

117. The Council may appoint staff for the discharge of its functions upon such terms and conditions as it thinks fit under section 112 of the Local government Act 1972.

The Council have a duty of care concerning it's staff's health both under Health and Safety legislation and at common law. In the High Court Case of Walker v Northumberland County Council 1995 the Council was held to be in breach of the duty of care owed to the plaintiff as his employer in respect of a second mental breakdown which he suffered as a result of stress and anxiety occasioned by his job as an area social services officer.

Equality Impact

118. The proposals in this report are consistent with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Recommendation

119. It is recommended that:-

The Committee considers the range of facilities and policies that are currently in place to support Council employees' health and wellbeing.



.....
Phil Tart
Interim Director of Law, Property and Human Resources

Contact Officer: Teresa Reilly
Telephone: 01384 815330
Email: teresa.reilly@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers