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## **Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021**

### **Report of the Chief Executive**

#### **Attendance Management**

##### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the current sickness absence levels and the application of the Attendance Management Policy within Directorates.

##### **Recommendation**

2. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee note and comment upon this report.

##### **Background**

3. The council's priority is to support employee's health and wellbeing. However, the number of day's sickness in previous years has been high and there has been a move to support a reduction. This has included joint work with health and well-being colleagues and the provision of well-being services and the review of policies.
4. As at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 the Councils employees 4800 (4035 FTE) people within Directorates.
5. The sickness absence rate for Directorates for the complete year 2019/2020 was 12.19 days lost per person against a target of 10.50 days.

##### **See Appendix 1**

6. The sickness absence rate for 2020/2021 Q2 (April 2020 –September 2020) shows 4.35 days lost per FTE against a target of 5.25 days lost; based on trend analysis if the rate of absence continues this may result in a year end figure of 8.7 days lost per FTE for the full year of 2020/2021 (unless days lost significantly increases during the October 2020 – March 2021)



## **See appendix 2**

7. Nationally the average days lost per person to absence is 6.4 days across all sectors. Within the Public sector the average days lost per employee nationally is 7.5 days.
8. Regionally a limited absence survey was undertaken by West Midland Employers Organisation who reported 8.8 days lost per employee.

### **Attendance Management Policy**

9. The Attendance Management Policy was revised from 1st June 2018 with the introduction of revised triggers. Absence triggers highlight those staff whose absence is more concerning and for whom the line manager should focus attention in discussing the employees' health, the support they may provide and taking appropriate action.

From 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018 the triggers are:

- Bradford Factor Score
- 4 weeks continuous absence (regardless of working pattern)
- Any pattern or trend identified by manager monitoring

### **See appendix 6 for explanation of triggers**

10. Attendance triggers are there to “trigger” a manager to review an employee’s absence record. The trigger may require different interventions from supporting an employee through to absence that requires attention, or to a maybe a pattern of absence that is becoming problematic and more detrimental to their service. The trigger, whether a Bradford Score, 4 weeks absence or pattern or trend alerts a manager that they must address this with the employee using the Attendance Management Policy and accompanying toolkits.
11. The Bradford Factor or Bradford Formula is used as a means of measuring worker absenteeism. The theory is that short, frequent, and unplanned absences are more disruptive than longer absences. Bradford factor scores are based on the frequency and length of an employee’s absence during a rolling 12 months and indicates to a manager when they should intervene and at what stage. The Bradford Factor must not be used in isolation as it is meant to target short term frequent absence, hence the other triggers of 4 weeks continuous absence and any pattern or trend emerging.

### **See appendix 7 for further Bradford Factor information**

12. Using the Bradford Factor focusses the manager's attention on the more problematic absenteeism. For example the previous triggers resulted in more employees meeting a stage 1 trigger for being absent for 10 days (2 weeks) with post-operative recovery or chicken pox without having any other absence within the year. Using the Bradford Factor formula for the same situation would not result in a trigger being met. This would give the manager more time to focus and resolve situations of more frequent and long term absences that gives the greater concern and more impact on service delivery.

13. The People Management Information System (PIMS) holds all absence information and line managers are responsible to record the following in the system:

- Start and end date of absence
- Reason for absence
- Return to work completion and information
- Warnings issued
- Absences discounted

All absences information must be recorded in PIMS by the employee's line manager including the completion of return to work interviews. Once the line manager records an absence PIMS generates tasks for the manager to complete and provides ongoing absence information i.e. return to work required, Bradford Factor Score, absences still open.

14. The records held in PIMS show that during October 2019 to September 2020 a total of 331 employees met a trigger as defined in the Attendance Management Policy. 162 employees who have met a trigger have no recorded actions by the line manager. You should note that some of the triggers were met in August and September 2020 and therefore may be pending action and some completed by the time of the report.

**See appendix 5 for more information**

15. Across Directorates, 91 employees have met the stage 3 trigger indicating their absence is problematic and detrimental to the service areas. Of those 91 employees 3 have been dismissed, 47 employees have received a warning that their employment is at risk or are currently having further reviews/ discussions with HR or Occupational Health. 41 employees meeting the stage 3 trigger have no action recorded in PIMS and have not been referred for review with HR as advised in the Policy. You should note that some of the triggers were met in August/September 2020 and therefore may be pending action at the time of this report.

**See appendix 5 for more information**

16. Within the Attendance Management Policy long term absence is described as any absence that reaches 4 continuous weeks (regardless of working pattern). The manager is required to undertake a 4 week review with the employee and decide on the appropriate action i.e. referral to Occupational health, consider adjustments to allow an earlier return to work, recovery is going as planned and a return to work date is identified. The manager is not required to record this action within PIMS. Intervention by the line manager at an early stage of long term absence is crucial in trying to ensure that an early return to work is achieved.
17. Where an employee is unable to return to their job, they cannot be redeployed, or are not eligible for ill health retirement their case is referred to a capability panel for their continuing employment to be considered. The Chair of the Panel is either a Head of Service or Chief Officer supported by an HR Specialist. During the period April 2019 – March 2020 there were 10 employees dismissed for health capability. During the period April 2020 to September 2020 4 employees dismissed for health capability.

**See appendix 8 for dismissals in relation to absence**

18. The main reason for sickness for the council Directorates are in the period 2019 to 2020 was Mental health/Anxiety/Depression (9.1% of absence), followed closely by work related stress (9%) and post-operative recovery (8.3%).

**See appendix 3 for further information**

19. For the period April 2020 to September 2020 the main reason for sickness absence was work related stress (12.9%) and mental health/anxiety/depression (12.6%).

**See Appendix 4 for further information**

20. Return to work interviews are mandatory regardless of time absent. Our records show that 90% of return to work interviews have been complete. Return to work interviews are crucial in the early identification of underlying health issues and for the manager to sign post appropriate help and support initiatives; make temporary adjustments to prevent absence or to discuss the absences may putting the employee's employment at risk. You should note that there may be non-completion of return to work where the employee is currently still absent or they may have left the Councils employment.

**See appendix 9 for further information**

21. Dudley Counselling Service provides various support to employees across the Directorates. The total number of staff requesting support through the Counselling Service during April 2019 to March 2020 was 235.

22. The Counselling Service also provides a number of wellbeing workshops, accessible to all employees to support their mental health and wellbeing. Courses are accessed by employees independently and during 2019/2020 there were 797 employees attending various workshops

**See Appendix 11 for further information**

23. It should be noted that since March there have also been absences from work due Covid. This could either be as a result of a Covid positive test or isolation in line with Government guidance.

**See Appendix 10 for further information**

### **Finance**

24. The cost of absence is not available through data information. According to a National Survey in 2018 of sickness absence the average cost per person is £573. This is unlikely to be a true cost as it does not include any additional costs of covering absence or loss through reduced service where applicable.

### **Law**

25. There is legislation that impacts on this policy - Equality Act 2010 that is reflected in the Attendance Management Policy and Toolkits.

### **Equality Impact**

26. The Attendance Management Policy complies with the Council's Equality Policy Statement.

### **Human Resources and Organisational Development**

27. The council's policies and procedures apply to all staff. Line managers manage through support and resources absences in the workplace with support from the OD team by the provision of training, bespoke team briefings, advice to managers, attendance at meetings involving more complex workplace health issues, review of absence progressing to dismissal, support to prepare capability dismissal documentation, supporting Chair of Capability Panels and through the review of Policy and Toolkits.





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