

Research briefing paper: *A comparative review of GLL and Cardiff Council's policies for Managing Attendance.*

Introduction and background

The Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting in January 2018 conducted a short scrutiny of the sickness absence review undertaken by APSE for Cardiff Council. During this meeting and in the letter to Cabinet that followed, the Chair of the Committee, Cllr David Walker and Committee Members noted GLL's success in managing sickness absence as cited during GLL's presentation to the Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee in December 2017. In this presentation, a GLL Director stated that that during its operation of the eight Leisure centres in Cardiff, GLL had *"reduced sickness hours by 50%; and significantly reduced long term sickness cases"*.

As follow-up work on the sickness absence scrutiny, the Committee's Chair, Cllr David Walker, on behalf of its Members commissioned a short briefing paper that would provide a better understanding of the reasons for GLL's success in managing sickness absence at these 8 leisure centres. The purpose of the research was to inform future consideration of sickness absence in summer 2018. The points highlighted in this briefing paper are a result of a comparative review of GLL's and Cardiff Council's Sickness Absence policies and arrangements and was supported by data gathered in face to face interviews with selected officers and managers from both Cardiff Council and GLL. Additionally, sickness absence figures were also requested from Cardiff HR People Services and from the GLL HR team so that a comparative analysis of these figures and indicative trends could be established.

A fully robust comparative analysis of the sickness absence figures could not be undertaken due to the limited data that was available. GLL has so far shared some of the sickness absence figures requested, but due to constraints in existing

workload and commitments, they asked to provide outstanding requested data on a later date.

The findings of the review undertaken will highlight the key differences and similarities between the sickness absence policies of Cardiff Council and GLL.

Cardiff Council's Attendance and Well-being Policy vs GLL Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure

Introduction, purpose and language of policy document

Cardiff Council's Attendance and Well-being policy puts emphasis on a holistic and positive approach to managing employee sickness and absence, whereas the tone and language used in the GLL policy suggest a more commercially focused approach. The importance of employee wellbeing and work-life balance and health promotion are regarded as key in supporting attendance of Cardiff Council employees. In comparison the GLL document stresses that due regard is given to the needs of the business and its customers and the negative impact of sickness absence to service delivery.

The approach taken by Cardiff Council on attendance is to "encourage employees to achieve and maintain acceptable standards" while in contrast, the GLL's approach is to "encourage employees to maximise attendance at work"

Expectations of employees.

Cardiff's policy states that it expects employees to attend work on a regular basis as required by their contract. Although the GLL policy has a similar provision, it further specifies that employees should not allow ... "minor ailments to negatively affect their attendance"

HR responsibilities

The GLL policy illustrates that the HR team in GLL has a broader scope in monitoring and supporting the management of sickness absence. To support the

management of short-term absence, the HR team undertakes regular analysis of sickness absence data and identifies patterns of absence and employees who have high sickness absence and have exceeded absence thresholds. In Cardiff, the policy is reliant on the managers and the Digigov facility to identify absence patterns and cases where an employee hits absence triggers. Although HR can provide support to managers, their role is much more focused in leading and providing support during the management of long-term sickness cases and absence due to stress.

Sickness notification and certification requirements

The Cardiff Council and GLL policy have similar provisions in requiring employees to contact their manager on the first day of absence before 10am or before their scheduled start time, and to maintain this contact on each day of subsequent absence. Cardiff's policy allows employees to self-certify for absences lasting 1-7 days but does not require employees to submit a written self-certification as in the Employee Statement of Sickness form. However, the Council's return to work interview form, which must be completed after every absence, including half a day, includes an employee's declaration that the information recorded is correct and they have not engaged in any work whatsoever during the period of absence. The GLL policy does not require a written self-certification for absences of up to three calendar days, but requires employees to submit an Employee Statement of Sickness form for absences lasting 4-7 days. Employees of Cardiff Council and GLL are required to submit a medical certificate or Statement of Fitness for Work absences of more than 7 days.

For Cardiff Council employees, sickness absence of less than a day will be counted as a full day. In comparison, the absence of GLL employees who become ill (as part of the day) but have been at work for more than 4 hours, will not be classified as sickness absence but will still be recorded by managers for future reference.

Sickness absence triggers and thresholds

Both Cardiff Council and GLL have well defined and structured processes for managing long-term and short-term sickness absence. Cardiff's policy follows a four key stage process that also specifies the sickness absence threshold for each stage, and the duration for the monitoring of improvements in employee attendance. Within this management procedure or trigger stages, it can take from 20 months to as long as 38 months to end the case management of an employee's sickness absence.

The GLL policy outlines three key sickness absence thresholds for monitoring employee sickness levels and specifies the two key stages for monitoring and managing sickness absence. Unlike the Cardiff Council process, the management of each sickness stage in GLL does not specify the time scales involved for management of sickness of those who have exceeded the thresholds and in monitoring improvements in employee attendance which suggests that that the time scale for the management of each case could be shorter.

Occupational health referral and review

As part of managing sickness absence, Cardiff Council and GLL could refer employees for an Occupational Health assessment. The findings of the assessment would inform any reasonable adjustments or further action that the authority or organisation would implement in managing individual sickness cases. Cardiff Council employees may be referred to the Council's Occupational Health Service at any stage during the process, regardless of the duration of sickness absence. If a referral has not already taken place when the employee hits a Stage 2, a medical opinion must be sought. Referrals may also be made where the employee expresses concern before actually reaching the point of reporting sick. In contrast, GLL employees could be referred for Occupational Health assessment, from as early as the Informal Absence Review stage.

For Cardiff Council employees, failure or refusal to attend an occupational health appointment can lead to stoppage of pay and disciplinary action. In cases where a GLL employee fails to keep an occupational health appointment, they will be required to pay the full cost of referral.

The in-house Occupational Health service of Cardiff Council aims to review the employee within 10 working days of referral and submit a medical report within 5 working days of examination. GLL's occupational health assessment is externally provided, and has a quick turnaround time. According to GLL managers, the scheduling of appointments is generally dependent on the availability of employees. The occupational health assessment report provided for GLL is often ready on the day or within 24-48 hours of the assessment.

Payment during Sickness absence

Cardiff Council and GLL calculate sickness pay entitlement depending on the employee's duration of service. The sickness pay entitlement for both GLL and Cardiff Council is the same for employees after 4 months service. Cardiff Council's entitlement appears to be more generous for employees with less than 4 months service than the provision made by GLL for its employees. For example, the sickness payment for employees who have worked less than 4 months for Cardiff Council is 1 month (26 days) full pay. In contrast, the sick pay for employees who have worked less than 4 months for GLL is only Statutory Sick Pay (SSP). There is no provision for full pay for less than 4-months tenure.

Return to Work Interviews (RTW)

Cardiff Council and GLL use the RTW interviews to manage and monitor sickness absence, to discuss and determine underlying causes of absence and to provide advice on support that is available to enable the employee's safe return to work.

Cardiff Council and GLL also uses the RTW as an opportunity to identify and validate reasons for sickness absence, and where a manager is not satisfied with the

reasons provided, or has reason to conclude that sickness absence is not genuine; the employee can be subject to disciplinary procedures. Cardiff Council managers certify that they have discussed the absence with the employee in accordance with the Attendance and Wellbeing Policy, which states any form of abuse of this procedure, will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Policy.

Phased return

Cardiff Council and GLL offer a phased return to work which will be agreed with employee, manager and HR. GLL allows for a phased return of no more than 4 weeks whilst Cardiff Council allows for a phased return of up to a month, which can be extended by a month (maximum total period of two months.)

Flexible working provision

The Cardiff policy allows the use flexible working arrangements to support the work-life balance of its employees. In contrast, GLL has no provision for flexible working due to the nature of its service, which requires employees to undertake shift work. GLL management however, allows employees to swap schedules/rotas to a limited extent by special arrangement between employees and managers

Special Leave provisions

Cardiff Council has an extensive variety of special leave provisions that can be requested/applied for via Digigov and are subject to approval of the employee's line manager. Although GLL has a number special leave provisions, these are limited compared to those Cardiff Council provides.

The provision for special leave for part-time employees of GLL is calculated on a pro-rata basis. GLL employees applying for certain types of special leave e.g. domestic or personal emergencies, medical appointments, undertake public duties, jury service may be required by their manager to provide documentation to evidence

their application. In contrast, Cardiff Council policy does not require employees to submit supporting documentation for such special leave applications.

Where time off is taken as unpaid special leave, GLL employees are required submit a request form and provide as much notice as possible to attend funerals, medical appointments or take carer's leave. GLL also requires at least two weeks' notice for unpaid leave for religious and cultural observance and to undertake public duties e.g. as local councillor, school governor etc.

The provision for paid special leave for Cardiff Council employees are generous compared with the allowances provided by GLL. For example, Cardiff provides for bereavement leave of up to 10 days, which can be extended in exceptional circumstances while GLL provides a maximum of 5 days. For personal medical appointments, Cardiff Council employees are allowed up to 2 hours paid leave, which can be extended up to a max of 1 day. In contrast, GLL will allow for time off to be taken where medical appointments cannot be made outside of working hours; however, employees are required to make up the work hours taken at another time.