
Sickness Absence

Purpose of the Report

1. To monitor corporate sickness absence levels at quarter 2 2019/20, and undertake in depth scrutiny of the management of sickness within the Council's Street Scene service area.

Structure of the Papers

2. To assist Members' preparation for the scrutiny as described above the papers attached to this cover report are as follows:

Appendix 1: Sickness Data

Slide 1: Q1 & Q2 Outturn FTE days lost per employee 2019/20

Slide 2: Cumulative sickness FTE days lost per employee
2013/14 – Q2 2019/20

Slide 3: Q1 & Q2 Proportion of total sickness recorded by
reason for absence 2019/20

Appendix 2: Correspondence following the previous scrutiny.

- a. The Committee's letter capturing its concerns, comments and recommendations following its previous update in June 2019.
- b. The Cabinet response to Committee addressing all issues raised.

Appendix 3: Case Study Presentation

Sickness Management & Performance in the Street Scene
Service

Background

3. The Committee's remit within its Terms of Reference includes the scrutiny and review of the effectiveness of the Council's use of human resources policies and procedures. The Council's Attendance and Wellbeing Policy is the framework on which it manages sickness absence, and reports to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The Committee continues to monitor corporate sickness levels on a six monthly basis. It has previously considered sickness and the Council's approach to reducing levels of FTE days lost per employee in June 2019.

Issues

4. The Corporate Plan 2019-22 states within the *Working for Public Services* priority that the Council is committed to investing in its workforce. It also make clear that *"more needs to be done to reduce the number of sickness absences which remain too high across the Council."* The Plan contains an objective to **improve the health and well-being of our employees** by reducing sickness absence through continued monitoring, compliance and support for employees and managers. This objective is supported by a Key Performance Measure "The number of working days/shifts per full-time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence". The **target for 2019/20 is 9.5 days**.
5. The Cabinet, in both the Annual Wellbeing Report 2018/19 (published July 2019) and the mid-year (Q2) performance report 2019/20 (published November 2019), has identified levels of sickness absence within the Council as a key corporate challenge.
6. At **Appendix 1** are 3 key slides central to the presentation of the corporate position. **Slide 1** illustrates that all Council Directorates are set an annual target for sickness absence, bespoke to their circumstances and previous year's sickness levels. It indicates that the forecast for year end 2019/20, based on Q2 data, is 11.09days.

Slide 2 enables a comparison of quarterly patterns of sickness over the past six years. It indicates that at Q2 2019/20 FTE days lost are 5.03, representing a comparative increase on all previous years at this point in the year. **Slide 3** analyses the percentage of total sickness by reason for absence. It indicates that the highest percentage of sickness is attributable to non-work related stress (22.95%).

7. Despite the implementation of a number of measures to improve the health and well-being of the workforce, the number of days lost as a result of sickness absence remains above target. Long term sickness continues to account for 72% of all sickness absence, having risen significantly over the past 5 years, while the number of short term sickness absences has reduced by c.10% over the past 5 years. Musculoskeletal problems remain a major cause of long term absences, and new support has been put in place in quarter 2. Additional support is also being put in place to support staff absent as a result of stress and mental health issues, responding to the significant increase in long-term absence due to non-work related stress¹.
8. Following its June 2019 update the Committee offered several suggestions for improvement in its letter to the Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation and Improvement, to which a prompt reply indicated work is underway on many of the Committees concerns. The correspondence exchange can be found at **Appendix 2**.
9. The Committee's letter expressed a view that *there remain widely differing levels of sickness across service areas*, acknowledging that bespoke action plans have been put in place for each. Both Committee and Cabinet agreed that *the option of inviting some service areas to Committee to enable a deeper dive into the effectiveness of their action plans and the challenges they are facing* would be worthwhile.

¹ Source: 2019-20 Quarter 2 Performance Report

10. In November 2019 the Committee, jointly with the Environmental Scrutiny Committee, received an informal briefing on Waste Management performance, challenges and opportunities. Members heard that an important challenge is workforce culture and the management of sickness. Following the briefing the Chair, on behalf of Members, proposed that the Waste Management service be invited to Committee for closer consideration of their bespoke Sickness Absence Improvement Plan.
11. Attached at **Appendix 3** is a presentation covering the Sickness Absence Improvement Plan for the service, the initiatives and preventative measures underway, welfare officer arrangements in place, details of the MRF (Materials Reclamation Facility) targeted improvement plan, an overview of sickness 2019/20, an overview of cases 2018/19, an overview of actions taken in 2018/19 and an analysis of types of sickness 2019/20.
12. For clarity, the Waste Management Service now sits within the Council's Street Scene Service. Members will note from **slide 7 of Appendix 3** that the Street Scene service is comprised of two distinct services, Enforcement and Cleansing, and Waste. Their combined FTE sickness absence target is 14.8 for 2019/20. The actual FTE level as at November 2019 is 17.36.

Way Forward

13. To facilitate this scrutiny of sickness absence attendance will comprise:

Corporate Overview

- a. Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation & Performance, with portfolio responsibility for human resources.
- b. Tracey Thomas, Acting Senior HR People Partner, HR People Services.
- c. Anita Batten, HR People Partner, HR People Services.

Sickness within the Street Scene Service

- a. Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment
- b. Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities
- c. Matt Wakelam, Assistant Director Street Scene

14. Members will receive a short presentation on the corporate position at Q2 2019/20 followed by an opportunity for questions. The Assistant Director Street Scene will then deliver the presentation at Appendix 3, followed by a further opportunity for questions.

Legal Implications

15. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

16. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial

implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

Recommendations

17. The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Consider mid-year corporate sickness absence data, the evidence presented, and agree whether it wishes to report any comments and observations to the Cabinet Member Finance Modernisation & Performance.
- b) Consider the Street Scene Sickness Absence Improvement Plan, and agree whether it wishes to report any comments or observations to the Cabinet Member Clean Streets, Recycling & Performance.

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9 January 2020