

Sickness Absence - update

Purpose of the Scrutiny

1. To monitor the Council's progress in tackling sickness absence, including interventions that have been put in place and future developments.
2. To focus on sickness absence challenges within the Waste Management Service.

Structure of the Papers

3. There are no briefing papers for this item, however a presentation covering both scrutiny purposes will be circulated to Members prior to the Committee to assist their preparation for the meeting.

Background

4. Central to this Committee's Terms of Reference is the scrutiny and review of the effectiveness of the Council's use of human resources policies and procedures.
5. The Committee previously scrutinised sickness absence in June 2019. There followed emergency scrutiny arrangements to address the pandemic of 2020-21. In September 2020 a full scrutiny service resumed on the basis of a restricted remit to focus only on pre-decision priority matters with reputational or time-critical implications.
6. As the organisational recovery progresses the Committee is seeking to monitor more closely issues that have been a continued interest and are listed as ongoing challenges for the Council in performance assessments.

Issues

- 7. The Delivering Capital Ambition policy programme for the city was refreshed in January 2020. The Council’s Corporate Plan is the high-level strategic document that sets out detailed delivery milestones, key performance measures and targets. It is supported by Delivery Plans developed by each Directorate, which set out in greater detail how the Administration’s priorities will be delivered, as well as how Directorate business will be taken forward.

- 8. The four Capital Ambition high level priorities that form the basis for the Corporate Plan 2021-24 are Working for Cardiff; Working for Wales; Working for the Future; and Working for Public Services.

- 9. These four priorities are supported by eight Well-being Objectives that form the framework of the Corporate Plan and the Council’s performance assessment arrangements. *Cardiff is a great place to grow up; Cardiff is a great place to grow older; Supporting people out of poverty; Safe, confident and empowered communities; A capital city that works for Wales; Cardiff’s population growth is managed in a resilient way; Modernising and integrating our public services; and Managing the Pandemic.*

- 10. Well-being Objective 7, *Modernising and integrating our public services*, lists the following *Steps* that will be taken by the Lead Cabinet Member and Directorate to address the sickness absence challenge.

Ref	We will:	Lead Member	Lead Directorate
S7.6	<p>Reduce sickness absence rates by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to support staff well-being, particularly through providing additional support for staff suffering with poor mental health • Strengthening management practice across all directorates, with a focus on reducing long-term sickness absence rates 	<p>Cllr Chris Weaver</p>	<p>*Resources</p>

11. The *Steps* above are assigned a *Key Performance Indicator* and a *Target* that will enable the Council, and its scrutiny committees, to monitor how effectively the objectives are being delivered going forward.

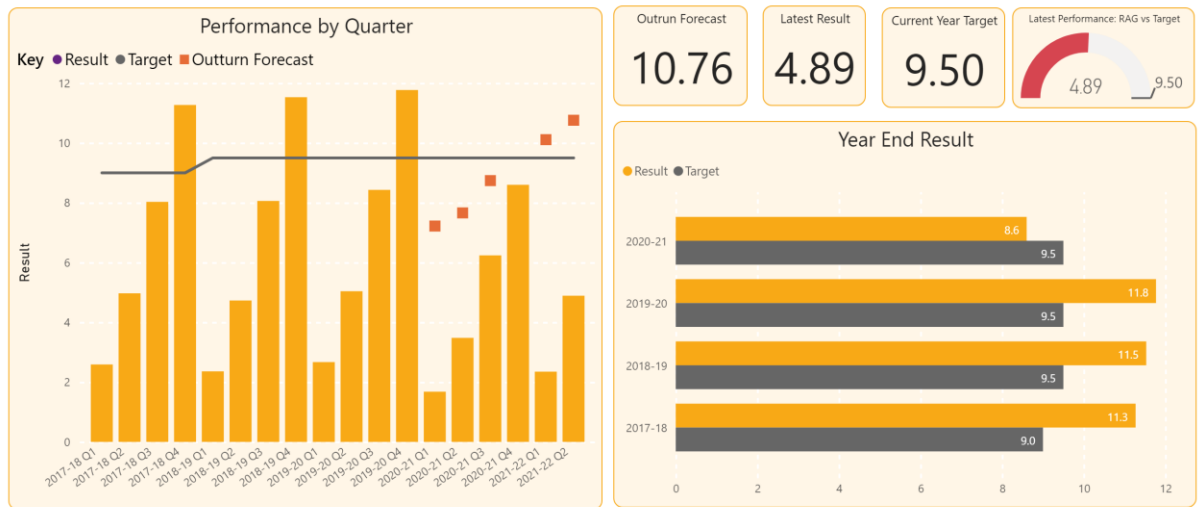
Ref	Key Performance Indicator	Target
K7.12	The number of working days/shifts per full-time equivalent (FTE) Local Authority employee lost due to sickness absence	9.5

12. The Mid-year Performance Assessment Report 2021/22 will be considered by Cabinet on 16 December 2021. Within the report the narrative for Sickness Absence states ‘Significant improvements were seen in sickness absence levels throughout 2020/21, with the increase in sickness absences correlating with the easing of pandemic restrictions. The Quarter 2 sickness absence result shows that the Council is currently above target, at 10.76 working days/shifts lost, per full-time equivalent (FTE) Local Authority employee, against a target of 9.5. Much of this increase relates to a large number of staff absent due to Covid-19, with the forecasted result dropping to 9.77 FTE days if Covid sicknesses are removed, only slightly above target.’

13. It continues ‘Sickness absence is not uniform across the Council, with sickness particularly high in Street Scene, Adult Services and Housing and Communities. A targeted approach will continue to be applied to improve performance. Furthermore, a continued focus is being placed on reducing long term sickness absence, with additional corporate support being provided for complex cases. Emphasis is being placed on active ongoing management action to improve performance in this area.’

14. The following slide taken from Appendix 1 to the Mid-year Performance Assessment for 2021/22 illustrates the trajectory of sickness absence since 2017/18 by quarter.

The number of working days/shifts per full-time equivalent (FTE) Local Authority employee lost due to sickness absence



15. The report includes a technical Appendix 2 that updates on progress with addressing the Steps.

Reduce sickness absence rates by:

- Continuing to support staff well-being, particularly through providing additional support for staff suffering with poor mental health;
- Strengthening management practice across all directorates, with a focus on reducing long-term sickness absence rates.
- Work to support staff wellbeing is ongoing;
- Continued mental health promotion on a variety of themes, and wellbeing information provided on a weekly basis;
- Promotion of national awareness days via Staff Information such as World Suicide Awareness Day, Sepsis Awareness Day etc.;
- Updated Health and Wellbeing Intranet site to be more user- friendly;
- Virtual Awareness sessions including sepsis and screening talks;
- Creation of Neurodiversity guide;
- Continued promotion of Carefirst support along with promotion of webinars. Information from Carefirst has also featured in a number of health and wellbeing newsletters;
- I-act training is being provided for both managers and employees;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing sessions on topics such as improving your sleep, anxiety about returning to work etc.; • Building self-confidence and self-esteem sessions provided; • One-to-one support provided for some employees suffering with anxiety, bereavement reaction, anxiety and depression. • Support has been provided to managers to help reduce long term sickness cases. Data has also been provided to Directorates, the Senior Management Team, and Trade Unions to monitor sickness levels.
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Way Forward

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

- Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation & Performance, with portfolio responsibility for human resources.
- Councillor Michael Michael, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment
- Paul Orders, Chief Executive
- Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources
- Neil Hanratty, Director of Economic Development
- Tracey Thomas, Chief Human Resources Officer
- Graham Harries, Head of Recycling & Neighbourhood Services
- Donna Jones, Assistant Director County Estates

17. Members will receive a presentation followed by an opportunity for questions to the witness Panel.

Legal Implications

18. 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

19. 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.

Recommendation

20. The Committee is recommended to consider the evidence presented; and agree whether it wishes to report its comments and observations in a letter to the Cabinet.

DAVINA FIORE

Director, Governance & Legal Services
8 December 2021