

**SWYDDFA CYMORTH Y CABINET
CABINET SUPPORT OFFICE**

Fy Nghyf / My Ref: CM41816
Eich Cyf / My Ref:
Dyddiad / Date: 5th September 2019

Councillor David Walker
Chair - Policy Review & Scrutiny Committee
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Annwyl/Dear David

**Policy Review And Performance Scrutiny Committee 12 June 2019
Sickness Absence**

Thank you for your letter dated 25th June 2019.

Outturn 2018/19 – current position

I am also disappointed at the 2018/19 outturn position on sickness absence, however I can assure you that we are taking action and that our actions are the correct ones. I note that you reference the decrease in short term sickness absence, which has decreased by 5% in the last 12 months. I would also point out that 42% of Council staff had no sickness absence in 2018/19. The presentation to Scrutiny on 12th June 2019 included two examples of preventative approaches we are taking that are aimed at preventing muscular skeletal absence. There is appropriate training to look to prevent injury and illness, and wellbeing resources to guide staff to appropriate support for many issues relating to stress and mental health. We will continue to work on preventative and supportive measures, and look for best practice that we can adopt.

In the January 2018 PRAP meeting, APSE stated that there was “no magic solution” and that data should be used more proactively to target supportive interventions. This led to a number of actions being taken as previously highlighted to this committee in September 2018 where the committee scrutinised the action plans.

ATEBWCH I / PLEASE REPLY TO :

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GWEITHIO DROS GAERDYDD, GWEITHIO DROSOCH CHI

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg, Saesneg neu'n ddwyieithog. Byddwn yn cyfathrebu â chi yn ôl eich dewis, dim ond i chi roi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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Action Taken in 2018/19

Q1 and Q2 indicated that we were on track to achieve an outturn of 10.41 FTE days lost which was an improvement on the outturn for 2017/18. As a result of the Q3 2018/19 forecast the Council did take action in Q4 to introduce some adjustments to the policy which were as a result of discussion with Merthyr Tydfil Council and translated these into two specific adjustments which were implemented from 1st April 2019.

I note your comment regarding the new employee leaflet though we do not necessarily agree that it could concern some staff. The leaflet needs to summarise in clear language the key aspects of the Attendance & Wellbeing policy and it reflects the policy and employee/manager guidance. The leaflet does reference involvement of Occupational Health but also states "if appropriate". There has been no adverse reaction from employees to the leaflet which was consulted on with Trade Unions prior to sending.

Individual Service Areas

In your response, there is reference to "We note that you consider there has been an improvement in sickness absence at Lamby Way".

I did not make this statement nor did officers at the meeting. However if the committee wants to look at inviting some service areas to talk about what actions they are taking, that would be welcomed.

Analysis of Data

We will provide further analysis of Q3 and Q4 data as agreed at the meeting.

We welcome the committee's recognition of the work we have done on the Carers Policy and in particular the development of the Carers Passport, becoming a member of Employer for Carers and would like to highlight how this is seen as a helpful preventative action we have taken.

In your response, you reference that "it may be difficult to separate stress into work-related and non-work related stress". This is a differentiation which is made in the data and as such an analysis was provided at the meeting under the reasons for absence slide in the presentation (slide no.7 and 10).

Preventative Action

We both agreed that there needs to be more preventative approaches to tackling the increasing trend in Long Term Sickness, particularly in relation to stress non-work related absence.

There has been an increasing focus on Health and Wellbeing Initiatives over the last 12 – 18 months which are aimed at prevention. For example, Awareness Sessions covering prostate cancer, ovarian cancer, diabetes, Dementia Friends etc. We provide access to Physio via the Councils in-house Occupational Health Service which effectively fast tracks staff to treatment in 2 weeks. We also have a highly rated Employee Counselling Service, which is experiencing high demand, and we are responding with additional resource to reduce waiting times.

For information I attach the **June 2019 Health & Wellbeing Newsletter** and **Directory** which highlight a number of preventative agencies and services available to staff. This includes "Community Wellbeing Services" previously raised by this Committee. We will continue to work on preventative actions to help address sickness absence, and I welcome the committee's interest and involvement in this area.

Further Data

I am happy to provide the committee with data from across Wales and Core Cities, but also strongly believe that we need to ensure that when we reference other authorities we are accurately reflecting the actual policy or data. There was the suggestion made at the Scrutiny meeting that an Authority was reducing pay after 3 months. We have checked with the authority in question and confirmed that they pay 6 months full pay and 6 months half pay in line with National T&Cs and the same as Cardiff Council.

We are open to best practice and search for it, however it is also important that we do not lose focus on the challenge at hand.

APSE did say that our Policy was "largely ok" and that it was more about managers using management judgement when needed, hence changes which have been made to the policy to allow managers to exercise their judgement.

Private Healthcare Benefits

There was reference to a former council policy "to offer private healthcare to certain key staff as it enabled faster diagnosis". The current policy allows for referrals to consultants for example, to avoid unnecessary delays, and that seems an appropriate approach.

Conclusions

You state in your conclusion that 'Whatever actions were taken clearly did not work'. I agree with the Committee that this is a serious challenge and am disappointed in the outturn. However, I would point out that we cannot know what the sickness absence outturn would have been if the measures we have taken had not been put in place – without appropriate response the rates could have been higher. There is a significant proactive and preventative approach to tackling sickness and the overall wellbeing of staff, and it will remain a focus of our work.

Yn gywir/
Yours sincerely



Cynghorydd / Councillor Chris Weaver
Aelod Cabinet Dros Gyllid, Moderneiddio a Pherfformiad
Cabinet Member Finance, Modernisation & Performance

Enc: June 2019 Health & Wellbeing Newsletter and Directory

