

People, Performance and Development Committee  
27 November 2014

## Managing Sickness Absence

### **Purpose of the report:**

This report is to provide an update on how absence management is being supported through a proactive and preventative approach.

This report is being brought to People, Performance and Development Committee for information.

### **1. Recommendations:**

The People Performance and Development Committee are asked to consider and support the proposals outlined in this document.

### **2. Introduction:**

1. Absence Management is supported by a proactive and preventative approach involving interventions which support and promote wellbeing and a healthy workplace.
2. Managing absence relies on a proactive and focussed approach by senior management, a partnership between service managers and supporting functions such as Human Resources.
3. Where do we sit now? Looking at comparator groups of public body organisations below is a table of Average days lost per FTE found through benchmarking sources.

	Average days lost per FTE
Surrey CC	6.7
CIPFA (public bodies comparator)	9.3
CIPD (P)	8.7
SE Regional benchmarking group SE	7.59

### 3. Direction of Travel

4. There has been a significant reduction in sickness absence across the organisation since 2008 (see Appendix A), this has been achieved through the following interventions:

#### **Resource and Supplier arrangements:**

- An HR absence project group to support the management of absence
- Occupational Health and Employee assistance programmes – The providers now work closer together to assist our staff with advice and support. We are currently re tendering these provisions and looking at options around physiotherapy and day one absence management using nurse led support.
- Focussed “step change” absence management support in ASC due to significant absence levels within this directorate.
- Introduction of a dedicated Wellbeing post, integrating Equality and Inclusion.
- Fairness Champions – a wide network of over 70 staff, in 34 locations.

#### **Training:**

- Design and Delivery of absence management training by HR advisors through the People Management pathways and also focussed training through management workshops.
- Supporting Emotional and Mental Wellbeing – management master classes (currently being delivered).
- Identifying and Resolving Stress in Teams – one day management workshops.
- A series of regular training sessions for Time Administrators and super users on recording absence.
- High Performance Development Programme – being rolled out to over 1,500 managers over the next 3.5 years

#### **Improved tools and process:**

- The revision of the Absence Policy
- Updated and simplified Return to Work forms which can be directly accessed and completed through the staff portal and SNet'
- The introduction of the absence dashboard to provide better and real time data to managers on sickness absence within their teams to enable direct management of sickness.
- The improvement of the SAP portal to enable staff to record absence directly to encourage absence recording.
- Appraisals – now have a wellbeing focus, as part of the conversation.
- “I Resilience” an interactive 40 minute web based tool which helps staff assess their level of resilience.
- Mindfulness – on-site employee sessions with online resources

## Campaigns:

- “Stay Healthy – Stay Well” Campaign - SCC workplace wellbeing campaign including: NHS Health Checks (currently live), Smoking Cessation, Walk To Work, Swimming promotion, Yoga, Yogarobics.
  - Time To Change National Employer Health Check – research, survey, interviews and report.
  - Team Workplace Health checks – jointly delivered with the trade unions, over 100 facilitated one day workshops, with Children`s Services and ASC Personal Care and Support Teams.
  - Better Place To Work – workshops leading from Health Checks, currently live.
  - National Wellbeing Charter – during 2014-15, SCC will self-assess and identify an improvement plan.
5. Achieving consistent reductions in sickness absence continues to be a challenge, but the newer and greater focus on wellbeing and workplace health plus continual training of managers should support the continuing trend. This will support productivity, business continuity and excellent customer service.
6. To help us continue to support the organisation in reducing absence we have commissioned an audit to be undertaken to support us refresh our strategy, details are as follows.

## 4. Absence Audit

7. An audit is to be undertaken to provide assurance to senior management and the Audit and Governance Committee. Its objectives are:
- a. To check if data recording, management and reporting are accurate, timely and provide a sound basis for decision making.
  - b. To provide assurance on the adequacy of risk management relating to absence management.
  - c. To establish the accuracy of data gathered via the SAP HR.
8. The auditor will also provide data on the effective operation of a range of issues of concern with the current management of absence, including:
- a. Speed of OH referrals being made.
  - b. Absence dashboard usage by managers.
  - c. Under reporting of absence.
  - d. How disability related absence is supported and managed.
  - e. Reasonable Adjustments, how well are they being done.
  - f. What difference are the Managers Supporting Mental Wellbeing Master classes making

9. The findings of this review will form a report to Surrey County Council leadership. This report will set out recommendations for improvement and provide an overall audit opinion on:
  - a. The effectiveness of systems in place.
  - b. The impact of absence management training and wellbeing initiatives.
  - c. The general approach and ownership of senior and service managers in developing a healthy workplace.

## 5. Next steps

- An audit to be conducted as outlined above and any recommendations to be taken into consideration.
- Absence to be continued to be monitored by the HR leadership by directorate.
- Continued promotion and positive engagement with the Council's Wellbeing programme, as part of the People Strategy..
- A revision of the current Reasonable Adjustments Policy, with a clear focus on mental health and supported with a series of practical tools for managers.
- HR advisors to continue to meet with senior managers to review their service absence and to continue to monitor absence cases and pro actively meet with managers to set action plans.
- Reward Strategy Review – This is an opportunity to reconsider our current arrangements with regards to absence payments

## Conclusions:

Progress will be measured by a continuing positive downward trend and an increased reduction in under reporting.

### **Financial and value for money implications**

The cost of supporting absence cases will be the cost of HR and managers' time. A reduction in overall absence costs will be a benefit to the Council, with improved efficiency of service delivery.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

Best practice absence management will continue to support employees who have protected characteristics, in particular disabled staff and ensure absence is managed in a fair and supportive manner.

### **Risk Management Implications**

If absence is currently not being recorded accurately or is under reported, there is a risk that the true scale and cost of absence is still unknown and the current level may not be fully reflected.

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### Appendix A - Sickness Days Lost Per FTE Jan '09 - Sep 14

Dashboard Go Live

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