

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Staffing Portfolio Holder
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive/ HR Officer

12 March 2009

ACTIONS TO MANAGE SICKNESS ABSENCE

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information on action to manage sickness absence across the Council.
2. This is not a key decision but forms part of the regular monitoring reports.

Executive Summary

3. The Council is a lean organisation, it must utilise all resources effectively in order to deliver excellent services and value for money to its communities. Managers need to focus on ensuring that they minimise the level of absence and maximise performance.
4. The Portfolio Holder is recommended to note the contents of the report.

Background

Benchmark figures by corporate area

5. The benchmark figure calculates the % of available working days lost due to sickness. It takes into account changes in the number of employees.

Area	% of available working days lost due to sickness			Comments
	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	01/04 – 31/12/08	
New Communities			1.9	12 employees recorded sickness against an FTE of 21.1
Finance & Support Services	2.53	2.3	3.19	56 employees recorded sickness against an FTE of 86.6
Planning & Sustainable Communities	2.22	2.4	2.5	42 employees recorded sickness against an FTE of 67
Affordable Homes	7.91	7.2	10.2 (Sheltered Housing 13.9% DLO 13.1%)	83 employees recorded sickness against an FTE of 122.7

Health & Environment	4.62	5.1	6.99 (DSO 9.48 %)	76 employees recorded sickness against an FTE of 119.8
Chief Executives	2.01	3.0	1.9 (Some staff moved into new area of Customer & Community Services)	11 employees recorded sickness against an FTE of 23.2
Customer & Community Services			2.2	13 employees recorded sickness against an FTE of 19.2

Long-term v short-term sickness

Area	01/04/2008 – 31/12/2008 sickness	
	% Long term*	% Short term
New Communities	41	59
Finance & Support Services	50	50
Planning & Sustainable Communities	33	67
Affordable Homes	63	37
Health & Environment	76	24
Chief Executives	31	69
Customer & Community Services	0	100

* Long-term sickness is any period of sickness lasting longer than 28 continuous days

- Affordable Homes and Health & Environmental Services can be expected to have higher rates of long term absence due to the physical, manual nature of many of the roles.

Considerations

7. Service areas collect their own sickness information; this is then provided to HR Payroll and entered on the HR-Payroll system. This means managers should be aware of the levels of absence occurring in their respective areas. Improved reports have been going to line managers on a monthly basis identifying individual sickness patterns for employees in their section; this is copied to corporate managers and service managers. Managers are now required to report back to HR on action taken. This is allowing corporate managers to manage their areas response to sickness in a more effective way and identify managers who are not managing absence effectively.

Summary of current cases where HR has an involvement (reported to EMT 25 February 2009)

	Sep-08	Dec-08	Jan-09
Brought forward	34	23	27
Number of cases ongoing	18	22	17
Number of cases closed	15	3	10
Number of cases opened	5	5	3
Total number of cases:	23	27	20
Breakdown			
Long term	12	13	8
Short term triggers	8	9	5
Disability	3	2	4
Monitoring HAVS			8
- of which on active case list			1
Age related referral (employee request)		2	0
Disciplinary	0	0	0
Industrial injury			2
	23	26	20
Of those:			
Absent - awaiting input/report/review by OH	10	13	8
At work - awaiting input/report/review by OH	8	11	4
Employees at work - SCDC action required*	3	0	5
Employees on phased rtw *	0	2	3
On mat leave	1	0	0
Medical suspension	1	1	0
	23	27	20
* Monitoring position with line manager			

8. Changes to the LGPS III Health Retirement process are having an impact on the length of sickness absence in some long-term situations. The ill health retirement

pension legislation changed in April 2008. There is now a 3-tier pension provision. The advice from the pensions service is that in each case where ill health dismissal is being considered, the employee should be offered the option of having an ill health pension request considered before dismissal. All referrals have to go to an independent doctor, Cambridgeshire require that only Heales Medical be used. Several cases have taken many months (in one case nearly 12 months to resolve and the issues have been raised with the pensions service

9. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development report that 16% of sickness absence is not for the reasons given. The actual reason can be the illness of someone else (dependent or child), a conflict situation at work, poor management, life events or work avoidance. However, this situation can only be identified by thorough return to work processes as described in the policy. The HR-Payroll team has returned one form where the reason for sickness absence was shown as a child being sick. Proposed revisions to the Family Issues Policy may help to reduce any instance of this at the Council.

Options

10. Attendance management is a key part of people and performance management and is the responsibility of line managers.
11. Any tolerance for absence because “the employee performs when they are at work” by any manager is misguided theory and false economy. If this is considered from a risk management perspective - an employee who is absent for one day per week is 20% less effective. Not only that but there is also a direct impact on the rest of the team/colleagues, leading to an increased workload, resulting in additional stress and resentment which will impact on the overall service provided to our customers.
12. A further outcome from managers failing to hold absence management discussions can be that some employees may struggle at work when proper medical advice to the organisation would enable effective support to be given. The organisation has obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act to make reasonable adjustments and as a good employer would want to make reasonable adjustments if necessary for all employees where practical.
13. Corporate Managers need to continue to discuss with their management teams, the issues concerning the managing of attendance and what further support and help is required. For example it may be that further management development, such as opportunity to practice having difficult conversations would be helpful for some managers.

Conclusions

14. The Council is a lean organisation, it must utilise all resources effectively in order to deliver excellent services and value for money to its communities. Managers need to focus on ensuring that they minimise the level of absence and maximise performance.
15. Attendance management needs to be seen as a performance indicator for all levels of management. HR can offer guidance about the steps needing to be taken to resolve absence issues and support managers in progressing cases.

Implications

16.	Financial	Under the Green Book the maximum amount of contractual sick pay after 5 years local government service is 6 months at full pay, 6 months half pay. There are also the financial costs involved in temporary cover in long-term sickness cases to maintain service delivery.
	Legal	The Council has an obligation to make reasonable adjustments to allow a disabled employee to continue working or to join the organisation. Sickness records are a protected category under the Data Protection Act provisions in relation to employee records.
	Staffing	Sickness absence means duties need to be covered or reallocated to ensure continuity of service delivery
	Risk Management	There are minimal levels of risk
	Equal Opportunities	There is currently minimal monitoring from an equal opportunity perspective on sickness absence

Consultations

17. There have been no consultations.

Effect on Corporate Objectives and Service Priorities

18.	Work in partnership to manage growth to benefit everyone in South Cambridgeshire now and in the future
	None
	Deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community
	Reducing the number of days lost to sickness absence will have an impact on improving service delivery and achievement of organisational corporate objectives
	Enhance quality of life and build a sustainable South Cambridgeshire where everyone is proud to live and work
	None

Recommendations

19. It is recommend that the Portfolio Holder notes the content of the report.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Performance Indicators

Contact Officer: Jill Mellors – HR Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713299