

Report to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel



SCRUTINY



Date of meeting: 20 September 2011

Subject: Sickness Absence

Officer contact for further information: Paula Maginnis (01992564536)

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Panel notes the report on sickness absence.

Executive Summary

1. This report provides information on the Council's absence figures for 2010/2011 and Q1 in 2011/2012; it includes absence figures by Directorate, the number of employees who have met the trigger level, those who have more than 4 weeks absence and reasons for absence.
2. In addition, at the Panel's June meeting members requested further analysis of the sickness figures for Housing Services, as at Quarter 4 2010/2011, they were the highest figures of all the Directorates.
3. The Council's target for sickness absence under KPI10 for 2011/2012 is an average of 7.75 days per employee. The Council's overall figure is 1.78 days for Quarter 1 and figures for each Directorate are set out in paragraph 10 of the report.
4. During Q1, 5.1% of staff met the trigger levels or above, 23.7% had sickness absence but did not meet the triggers and 71.2% had no absence.
5. Quarterly figures for Housing have shown an improvement over the last 3 quarters and details are set out in paragraphs 17 to 22.
6. Currently, under the Council's Managing Absence Policy there are trigger levels for initiating management action in cases of excessive sickness absence. These are:
 - (i) during any 'rolling' twelve-month period an employee has had 5 or more separate occasions of absence; or
 - (ii) during any 'rolling' twelve-month period an employee has had at least 8 working days of any combination of un/self certificated, or medically certificated absences.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To enable members make decisions regarding actions to continue to improve the Council's absence figures

Other Options for Action

For future reports the Panel may wish to include other information or receive no report.

Report:

Introduction

7. The latest figures published by the Industrial Relations Service (for 2010) show that the average number of days taken as sickness absence in Local Government was 8 days compared to 6.5 days across all sectors. In manufacturing and production the average number of days was 6.2 and in private sector services the average was 6.2 days.
8. Currently, under the Council's Managing Absence Policy there are trigger levels for initiating management action in cases of excessive sickness absence. These are:
 - (i) during any 'rolling' twelve-month period an employee has had 5 or more separate occasions of absence; or
 - (ii) during any 'rolling' twelve-month period an employee has had at least 8 working days of any combination of un/self certificated, or medically certificated absences.
9. In addition to the above a manager should consider referring an employee to Occupational Health when an employee has been absent from work for at least one month if there is no estimate when they will be fit to return, or if this is unlikely to be within a reasonable period.

Quarterly Figures 2010/2011 – 2011/2012

10. The Council's outturn figure for 2010/2011 was 7.85 days set against a target of 8 days. The target has been revised to 7.75 days for 2011/12 and the Q1 figure is below target at 1.78 days.

Table 1 below shows the absence figures for each quarter since 2010/2011.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Outturn	Target
2010/2011	1.88	1.81	2.15	2.01	7.85	8
2011/2012	1.78					7.75

Table 1

Directorate Figures 2010/2011 – 2011/2012

11. Table 2 shows the average number of days lost per employee in each Directorate. In the main there have been improvements by all Directorates compared to Q4 figures. The increases in the Office of the Chief Executive and Finance & ICT are minimal.

Directorate	Average FTE	Average Number of Days Absence 2010/2011				Total Average Number of Days 2010/11	Average Number of Days Absence 2011/2012			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Office of CE	20.87	0.25	0.51	2.12	1.42	4.3	1.47			
Office of DCE	46.91	0.92	2.09	2.35	1.99	7.35	1.95			
Corporate Support Services	69.69	2.06	1.81	2.29	2.26	8.42	2.18			
Environment & Street Scene	112.97	1.70	2.10	1.79	2.78	8.37	1.23			

Directorate	Average FTE	Average Number of Days Absence 2010/2011				Total Average Number of Days	Average Number of Days Absence 2011/2012			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Finance & ICT	115.62	1.15	0.87	1.73	1.29	5.04	1.74			
Housing	183.8	3.11	2.42	2.72	2.01	10.26	1.72			
Planning	68.20	1.07	1.48	1.64	1.96	6.15	2.59			

Table 2

12. This table is represented by a graph which can be found at appendix 1.

Long Term Absence 2011/2012

13. For this purpose long term absence has been defined as 4 weeks or over. During Q1 a total of 13 staff had 4 weeks or more absence. Nine employees had one continuous period of absence and 4 employees had two periods of absence

Table 3 provides further detail on these employees.

Quarter	Left	Returned to work	Dismissed	Proposed Return date	Still Absent	Other Arrangements
Q1	7.7% (1)	53.8% (7)	(0)	7.7% (1)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1) (Ill health retirement 7.7% (1) retirement)

Table 3

14. At appendix 2 there is a graph which sets out a breakdown of days lost to long term absence, those who met the trigger level and those below the trigger level. The graph at appendix 3 shows the percentage breakdown of the duration of absence (of the average 1.78 days). This graphs shows that 51% of lost time for Q1 was due to long term absence, 20% met the trigger level (and above to 19 days) and 29% was due to short term absence.

Reasons for Absence

15. Table 4 shows the reasons for absence.

Reason	Total Number of Days 2010/11	Number of Days Q1 2011/2012
Stomach, liver, kidney, digestion; include diarrhoea, vomiting and other gastro-intestinal illnesses.	716.5	282
Other musculo-skeletal problems; includes neck, legs or feet and arms or hands. Also include joint problems such as arthritis.	968.7	150.5
Infections, including viral infections such as influenza, cold, cough and throat infections	1298.8	132.9
Depression, anxiety, mental health and fatigue. Includes mental illnesses such as anxiety and nervous debility/disorder (does not include stress)	468.2	60.6
Stress – Old description	357	91

Reason	Total Number of Days 2010/11	Number of Days Q1 2011/2012
Work related stress		58
Non Work related stress		29.1
Chest, respiratory; including asthma, bronchitis, hay fever and chest infections	212.7	89
Back problems	166.5	55.1
Neurological; headaches and migraines	158.1	41.1
Genito-urinary; menstrual problems	126.7	34.5
Cancer, including all types of cancer and related treatments	97.7	30.4
Eye, ear, nose and mouth, dental; sinusitis	142.9	20.9
Pregnancy	11.1	17.5
Heart, blood pressure, circulation	134.7	10
RTA	6	0

Table 4

Numbers of Staff Absent

16. Table 5 shows that there were fairly consistent numbers of staff who had no absence and those that had absence over the course of last year which has continued into Q1. Approximately two-thirds of staff had no absence.

Quarter	Staff with no absence	Staff with 7 days or less	Staff with 8 days or more
1 2011/2012	71.2% (475)	23.7% (158)	5.1% (34)
1 2010/2011	71.4% (523)	24% (176)	4.6% (34)
2 2010/2011	73.7% (539)	22% (162)	4.3% (32)
3 2010/2011	65.2% (478)	29.9% (219)	4.9% (36)
4 2010/2011	66.8% (490)	28.9% (212)	4.3% (31)

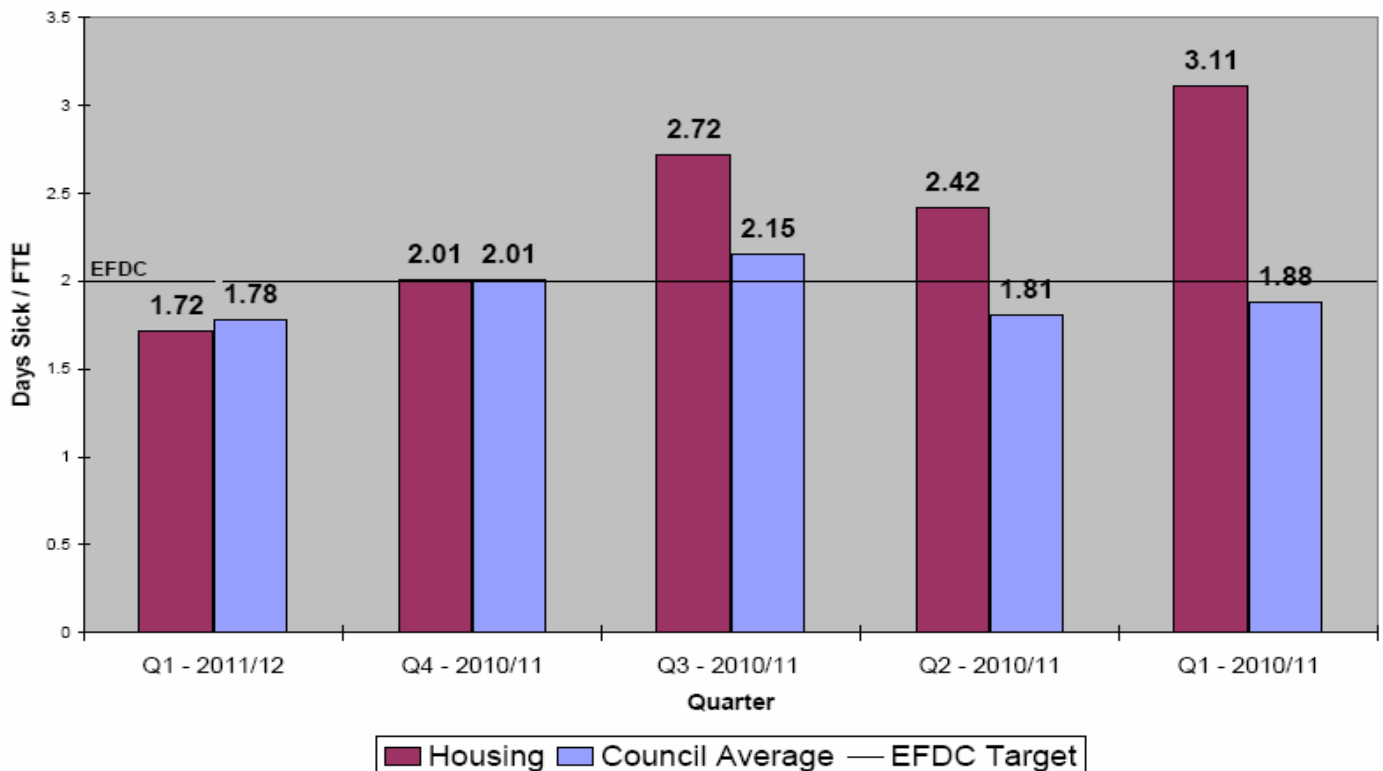
Table 5

Sickness Levels within the Housing Directorate

17. At its last meeting, the Scrutiny Panel requested a report on the sickness levels within the Housing Directorate, since at that time (Quarter 4 of 2010/11) they were the highest of all the directorates.

18. However, sickness levels within the Housing Directorate have been consistently reducing over the last 3 Quarters, as can be seen in the graph below. In fact, as at the end of the latest Quarter for which figures are available (Quarter 1 of 2011/12), the level of sickness within the Housing Directorate has reduced to the 3rd lowest of all the 7 Council Directorates – as can be seen from table 2 above.

Sickness Levels - Housing Directorate



19. The above graph shows the following in respect of Housing:

- Sickness levels in the Housing Directorate have reduced consistently over the last three quarters, from an average of 2.72 days in Quarter 3 of 2010/11 to an average of 1.72 days in Quarter 1 of 2011/12
- Sickness levels in Housing have reduced by 45% (an average of 1.4 days) since the same Quarter last year
- Although sickness levels in Housing were significantly above the Council average in Quarter 1 last year, (3.11 days compared to 1.88 days) they are now lower than the Council average in the latest Quarter (1.72 days compared to 1.78 days)
- Although sickness levels in Housing were significantly above the Council's target of 2.00 days in Quarter 1 last year, they were at the target level in the last Quarter (Quarter 4) and are lower (14%) than the Council's target in the latest Quarter (Quarter 1).

20. It is emphasised that this reduction has not been due to any particular change in approach by managers within the Housing Directorate. Housing has always ensured that it follows the Council's Managing Absence Procedure and senior management has always taken a pro-active approach in monitoring the sickness levels of individual members of staff who have reached the "trigger levels", and ensuring that appropriate action is taken by managers.

21. The reduction has mainly been due to the fact that, last year, there were a number of staff on long-term sick leave within Housing for various reasons, which skewed the average figures. However, over time, these staff have either returned to work – in most cases following a successful Return to Work Strategy - or have left the Council's employment.

22. However, in order to ensure that managers within the Housing Directorate continue to remain up to date with the Managing Absence Procedure and techniques for dealing with sickness, representatives from Human Resources attended a recent monthly meeting of Housing Managers to discuss good practice. HR representatives will similarly be attending meetings of managers within other Directorates over the next couple months.

Resource implications:

N/A

Legal and Governance Implications

N/A

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications

N/A

Consultation Undertaken

None

Background Papers

Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel - Sickness Absence Reports of 9 September 2010, 10 March 2011 and 21 June 2011.

Risk Management

Failure to manage sickness absence results in loss productivity and if it is significantly high could adversely affect the reputation of the authority.

Equality and Diversity

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?

No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?

N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

N/A