CITY OF YORK COUNCIL

Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee   **4 September 2017**

Report of the Director of Customer and Corporate Services

Attendance & Wellbeing Project

Summary

1. This report provides information on work being undertaken to address the management of sickness absence in the council and to brief Members on the current and planned work being undertaken by Human Resources with a focus on attendance management and employee wellbeing.

Background

2. In 2013, following a task group scrutiny review, the former Corporate and Scrutiny Management Committee made changes to the Council's Sickness Absence process to improve the attendance at work policy. In December 2016, a report on Sickness Absence Management was considered by the Audit & Governance Committee in relation to the council's recording of sickness absence on iTrent (the council's payroll/HR MI system). The report also outlined the wider actions and plans in place to manage sickness absence in the council and address inconsistencies in the reporting of sickness absence.

3. Across the Council there are many areas with good attendance and good practice, however there are some areas that require focused interventions due to having high levels of absence

4. The People Plan for 2016-2020 was agreed at Executive on 14 July 2016. The development of the People Plan was led by Human Resources, with engagement from a wide range of stakeholders, including Departmental Management Teams, staff focus groups, senior managers and Trade Unions.

5. The Council's People Plan priorities and summary of each of the five key areas can be referred to in Annex A. Wellbeing is an agreed area of

focus and the Executive and Corporate Management Team have an ongoing commitment to continue to support staff wellbeing.

6. Significant progress has been made against the action plan in the first year. The key activities in relation to attendance and staff wellbeing included:

    - The build of the iTrent absence module.

    - Gathering data for the Wellbeing Charter accreditation and to inform and support the creation a wellbeing strategy for the Council.

    - To complement existing services, the council we have launched a Workplace Wellness scheme to replace the Employee Assistance Programme. It offers around the clock access to confidential, independent, professional information and emotional support.

      Employees can self refer to specialists and counsellors through telephone conversations and receive up to six sessions of face to face counselling. It is available 24/7 every day of the year and is a confidential service, independent of the council (see Annex B).

    - Review of arrangements for the support we provide to staff experiencing organisational change.

7. The priority for the second year is a focus on attendance management. The original Absence Management Project scope will now extend beyond the implementation of self service absence reporting to ensure the wellbeing priority is addressed.

8. At the end of June 2017/18, the 12 month rolling average of sickness days per FTE(full time equivalent), excluding schools, has remained constant at 10.2 days but still remains higher than the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) public sector average of 8.5 days[1].

9. 12 month rolling stress related absence increased slightly to 2.4 days per FTE in June from 2.2 in March and overall, stress, depression and mental health related absences account for a quarter of all sickness.

10. The focus on attendance management aims to reduce the CYC sickness absence rates to be more reflective of national benchmarks.

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[1] Annual report undertaken by CIPD to provide organisations with benchmarking data. This figure includes all public sector organisations not just Local Government

11. The organisation is continuing to effectively monitor and manage sickness through appropriate absence management techniques and by ensuring impacts and costs are understood throughout the management structure.

12. The Business Intelligence Team provides consistent information to assist services to manage attendance. Information is now reported to all managers through a variety of mechanisms, Directorate management reports, self service through the KPI machine, reporting to Corporate Management Team and Senior managers.

13. Further development of the self service information available to managers, through the internal 'KPI machine' and integrated performance management framework, are being undertaken to continue to make sure decisions are timely and well informed, focussing on the outcomes expressed within the Council Plan and contributing to reduced overall sickness levels.

14. The management information is enabling the organisation to identify 'hot spots' and to target particular teams who require support with managing attendance. Adult Social Care (see Annex C) have used the intelligence to highlight areas requiring support and taking appropriate action.

15. Between July and October 2017, the HR team will build on the implementation of the iTrent Absence Management module to allow managers to record sickness into iTrent. To note, this element of the project has taken longer to put in place than first anticipated. There have been some delays with the software providers which has preventing us making some changes to the system. This has now been addressed and we are on track to roll out the self service element by 1 November 2017.

16. Following the restructure of the HR department, a HR Wellbeing and Occupational Health Advisor has been appointed to work with managers and staff to support improving attendance and staff wellbeing. The postholder will also review the Occupational Health contract and the associated provision of services the Council procures.

17. The project will draw together much of the existing support and resources available to staff and managers, along with specific activity as follows:

   - The implementation of self service absence reporting into iTrent which will reduce the reporting burden for managers and assist with

more accurate reporting and improved management information, including email workflow prompts when absence triggers are hit.

- Based on feedback received the further development of learning and development for managers including attendance management training, disability awareness, support with difficult conversations.

- Specific communication to ensure all employees having a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities regarding application of policy and why this is important.

- A review of the role of Occupational Health and counselling service.

- An engagement campaign to promote an understanding of the benefits of proactive management of absence and help support managers and staff to deal with sensitive issues e.g mental health, support with cancer and terminal illness) and promotion of flexible working and work life balance, to ensure staff have an understanding of wellbeing initiatives and how they access them.

- Detailed work with areas across the Council where there are high absence rates. This may be something the Committee wish to consider for further specific Scrutiny.

- Review of the current attendance management toolkit to consider improvements and determine if there are any recommendations to revise policy. To achieve fundamental change in absence rates may well require policy changes to be considered, and the Committee may wish to consider this as a specific piece of further Scrutiny.

Consultation

18. Trade Union colleagues will be part of the project team. Staff will be involved in focus groups throughout the project. Any proposed changes to policy will be consulted upon as required.

Council Plan

19. The information outlined in this report is in line with the Council Plan and the People Plan which has health and wellbeing as a priority.

Implications

20. **Financial**

There are direct costs associated with absenteeism in some areas due to the use of agency. Indirect costs are associated in relation to potential loss of productivity.

21. **Human Resources (HR)**

If sickness absence is not tracked and managed appropriately, the implications for staff members could be significant if appropriate support or responses are not put into place either through worsening absence or symptoms, or through litigation action taken against the council. If absence reasons and volumes recorded in iTrent are not accurate, they cannot be relied upon to inform decision making and subsequent actions.

22. **Equalities**

The poor recording of sickness absence reasons and related management action could result in reasonable adjustments or occupational health advice not being provided where staff are covered by the Equalities Act in relation to disability.

23. **Legal**

See HR implications

24. **Crime and Disorder**

None

25. **Information Technology (IT)**

Matters relating to the HR system are covered in the report

26. **Property**

None

27. **Risk Management**

The main risks relate to failure to record, track, monitor and put in place actions to monitor sickness, and that sickness levels are not accurate and the response to intentions are not proportionate or in line with policy. Mitigations will be put in place as detailed in the main body of the report.

Recommendations

28. Members are asked to note and comment on the contents of the report.

    Reason: To understand the key issues and response to the recommendations to secure improvements in control arrangements around sickness absence.

29. Members are asked to consider receiving future updates and a specific report in 6-9 months

    Reason: To review the progress and impact of the project and the impact on attendance and wellbeing across the Council.

30. Members are asked to consider any further areas to review or explore in more details.

Contact Details

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Report Approved ✓ **Date** *23/08/17*

Wards Affected: **All** ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes

Annex A – People Plan
Annex B – Information, Advice and Support
Annex C – Case Study of Work Being Undertaken in Adult Services to Manage Sickness Absence

Abbreviations

CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development
CYC – City of York Council
FTE – Full Time Equivalent
HR – Human Resources
IT – Information Technology
KPI – Key Performance Indicator