
**Children, Education and Communities Policy
and Scrutiny Committee**

21 July 2022

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services

Permanent Employee Absence in Children's Services

Summary

1. This paper provides members of the committee with an overview of permanent employee absence within children's services and the actions taken to support and address staff absence.

Background

2. Recruitment, retention, and absence within social work services is a national challenge. The challenge is most acutely felt within statutory services, such as those provided by Local Authorities.
3. Historically absence rates for children's and adults' services have been higher than for other parts of the Council. The context of the national pandemic, vacant posts and increased demand, has resulted in further stressors and this trend continues.
4. Consistently responding to employee absence in line with the absence management policy continues to be an area of focus for children's services.

Analysis

Current Position

5. At 8th July 22 there were 28 current absences for employees within children's services:
6. Duration
 - 12 absent for less than a week (to date)
 - 5 absent for between a week and a month (to date)

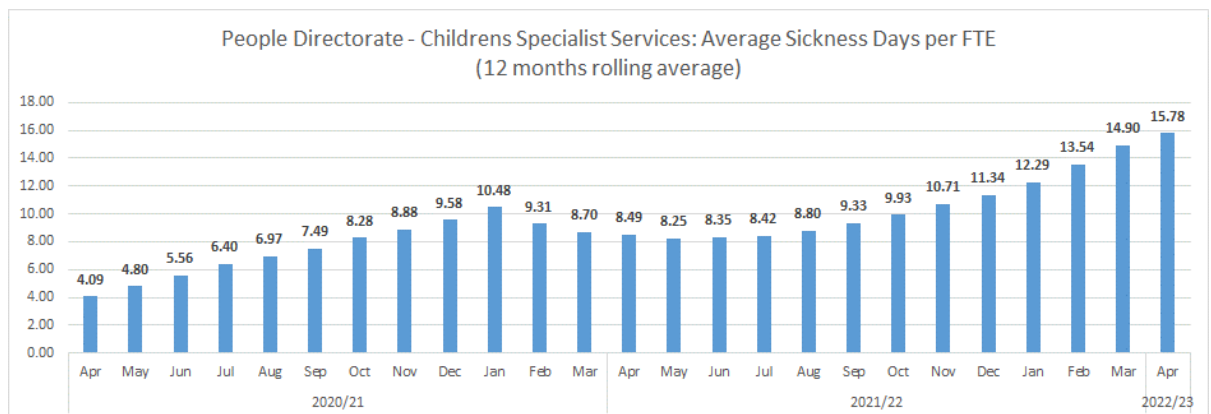
- 10 absent been for more than a month
- 1 absent for 3 months or more

7. Reason

- 3 absent with Covid
- 12 absent with Stress
- 13 a mix of pre-planned surgery, colds/flu, genitourinary & gynaecological disorders

8. Absence is across children’s services teams and not consolidated in a single area.

9. The below graph illustrates average sickness days year to date to April 22, and shows similar patterns to the wider organisation in that overall sickness has increased in the winter/spring period, after a reduction/settled period in summer 2021. With an increase in Covid cases in the last couple of months, it is likely that the number of sickness days will continue to rise.



Context

10. There has been considerable instability in children’s services over recent months with change and vacancies at a senior leadership level, at head of service and within team management.
11. Taken alongside social work vacancies this has created an environment where some employees have felt unsettled, and this is likely to have impacted on employee absence levels.
12. Some workers have felt unsettled by recent changes and turnover of staff. However, overall, most were positive about working for York and the support they receive. Source: Ofsted May 22

13. However, recruitment is now live at a head of service level and the key vacancies of Corporate Director of Children's Services and Director of Safeguarding have now been recruited too. These appointments and the head of service recruitment will enable stable leadership for children's service for the first time since early autumn 2021.
14. Progress has also been made with recent permanent appointments to service manager posts within Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting further strengthening this management level in terms of consistency and permanence.
15. Use of agency workers is still evident but permanent social work vacancies are being recruited too. A considered advertising campaign and a multi-faceted approach to recruitment including use of newly qualified social worker, Grown Your Own through Frontline and the change to Grade 10 for experienced social workers ensuring more competitive pay have all impacted.
16. A bespoke business support offer to the children's social work teams is enabling social workers to begin to focus more of their time on social work rather than administrative tasks and caseloads are considered to be at a reasonable level. Although absence can create pressures on performance, these are being managed.

Areas of focus

17. Absence is recorded and measured through a procured system - Medigold. An employee contacts Medigold to register their absence, the reason and expected return date. Upon return to work the employee contacts Medigold to close down the absence. The system advises Managers when an employee has hit an absence trigger, keep track of expected return dates, and prompts the manager to complete the return to work interview.
18. The return to work process is clearly outlined in the absence policy, including capturing the reason for absences, any patterns/triggers and any actions taken by the employee or by City of York to support improved attendance.
19. Following the return to work processes consistently and in line with the policy is an area which the children's management team are continuing to strengthen with focus on return to work interviews being carried out in a reasonable timeframe, so that employees feel supported in all aspects of wellbeing, and reduce further occurrences of absence.

20. Alongside individual management responsibilities, the internal monthly Workforce Development Board within children's services will now have strategic oversight of employee absence trends alongside recruitment, retention, and employee development. Membership of the Board includes the Director of Children Services, Heads of Service and colleagues from HR, Training and Development and Finance.

Implications

- 21.
- **Financial** None
 - **Human Resources (HR)** None
 - **Equalities** None
 - **Legal** None
 - **Crime and Disorder** None
 - **Information Technology (IT)** None
 - **Property** None
 - **Other** None

Recommendations

22. Members are asked to note this report.

Reason: To keep the Committee updated in relation to staff absence matters within children's services.

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Report Approved



Date: 11/07/22

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Claire Waind – HR Manager (Performance and Change)

David Mountain - Accountant

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the authors of the report