

Report of the Head of HR Services

Attendance Management Update

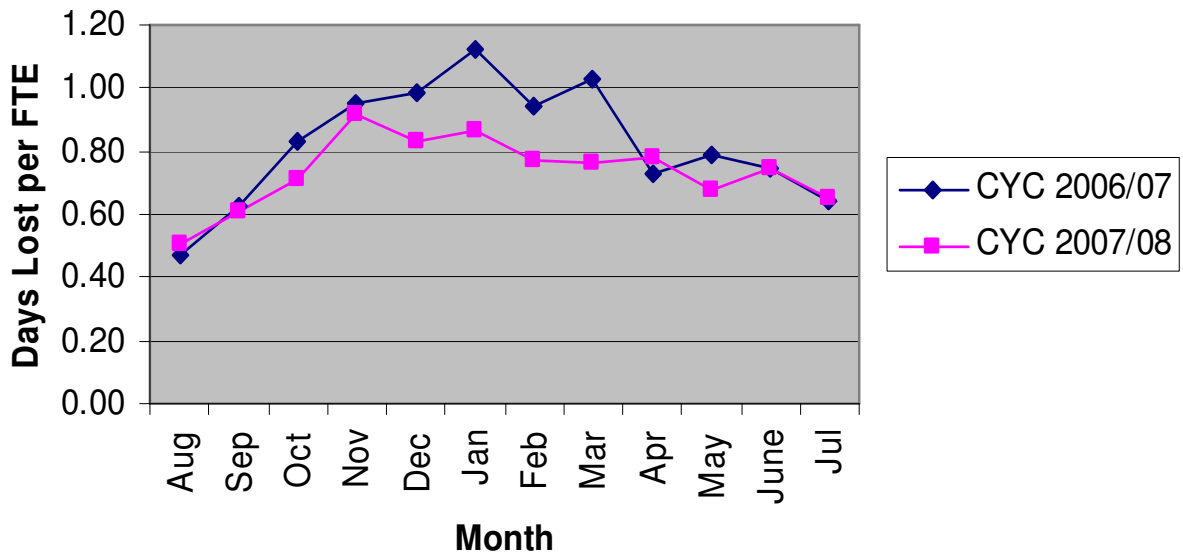
Summary

1. This report provides:
 - i. an update on the implementation of the new Attendance at Work policy, procedures and guidelines;
 - ii. indicates progress on a number of strategic approaches to maximise attendance and further the reductions in sick absence levels throughout the Council.

Background

2. On the 1st October 2007 the new Attendance at Work Policy came into effect which provided staff and managers with detailed guidance and support on sick absence management.
3. Since 1st October 2007 there have been significant improvements in sickness absence across the Council with an overall reduction from 12.9 days per FTE in 2006/07 to 9.54 days per full time equivalent (FTE) in 2007/08. This reduction is equivalent to a savings of over £1million for the Council on last year's sickness absence costs, not taking into account savings in overtime and temporary staff to cover for absent employees.
4. A comparison of days lost to sickness absence using the most recently available figures (see graph below) shows significant improvements to sickness levels were made upon the introduction of the new policy, procedure and guidance. However the improvement is showing early signs of levelling off and there is a risk that sickness levels will 'bounce'. As such it is critical that momentum and the focus on attendance is maintained. Equally it is critical that the Council moves on to taking a holistic approach to attendance and enabling attendance as well as managing sickness absence when it occurs.

Sickness Absence comparison 2006/07 & 2007/08



5. Following an Internal Audit report in early 2006 which found the Council's controls of sickness absence to be weak, a significant amount of work has been undertaken and the follow up audit has found that recommendations made under the headings of:
- policies and procedures – were fully implemented as was clarity on roles and responsibilities and staff training;
 - reporting and management information and analysis of causes and reasons for absence – not yet fully implemented, although relevant Delphi updates and a corporate management information reporting tool is being tested and will be implemented as a matter of priority. The HR Corporate Development Team is taking the lead in producing this suite of information according to the correct schedule, and disseminating management information down to the appropriate managers.
 - compliance monitoring – implemented through the provision of information to Directorate Management Teams.

External Auditor's Letter

6. The external auditor's recommendation to seek out and adopt best practice arrangements for managing and minimising sickness absence is being carried out. Another recommendation, to raise the profile of data quality across the council and improve arrangements to produce accurate reliable data to ensure that council decisions are based on up to date and accurate data, is in the process of being implemented in relation to sickness absence. The external auditor recognised the council's introduction of the Attendance at Work policy as one of a range of robust actions to enhance our capacity for further improvement, writing:

“You have responded well to the issues we raised in the original review, and you are taking steps to develop a more proactive approach to sickness absence through your Attendance at Work policy.”

Implementation of the new Policy, Procedure and Guidelines

7. Since November 2007, 16 half day Attendance Management Workshops were held, co-ordinated and resourced centrally by corporate HR and were attended by 227 managers. They provided ‘soft’ skills training for managers on attendance management interventions have taken place.
8. Two half day training sessions with 20 HR Administrators within directorates have also taken place to provide them with greater clarification on their roles and responsibilities, training on ways to improve sick absence data collection, inputting and processing etc in order to ensure they are fully conversant with the attendance management policy. This training aimed to support consistency in approach across the council to ensure the quality of data collection and, therefore, of reporting.
9. Whilst the new policy is completely functional, the implementation of the front-end collection and entry of sickness absence data, ‘reports and go live’ of the amended Delphi system to capture new data required, and reporting has, however, taken longer than expected, and as yet is not yet fully operational.
10. The way in which Delphi holds sickness absence data has meant that a significant amount of system development has been required in order to extract the information and present it in a meaningful and useful manner. This has recently been completed and it is expected that the first batch of reports will be dispatched in October.

Next Steps – Maximising Attendance

11. In order to further improve levels of sickness absence in the Council, the HR Corporate Development Team is facilitating shared learning and coordinating cross directorate initiatives as well as leading on the following strategic actions.

Management Training

12. Research into managing sickness absence indicates that the key to sustainable reduction is through well trained, informed, and confident managers. Corporate training is therefore going to be provided to expand and develop managers’ skills in dealing with sickness absence casework.

Health and Well-being Promotion Activities

13. Health promotion, policies and benefits, such as healthy eating, back care, smoking cessation and fitness, maximise the physical, psychological and social health of all employees, promote ownership of the cause and solution of ill-health issues by staff, and positively impact on both the culture and reduction of sickness absence levels. A multi-disciplinary, cross-directorate team has

been created to scope and plan a phased implementation of new health and well-being initiatives.

Occupational Health Service (OHS)

14. A major part of the maximising attendance provision will be through the Council's contracted occupational health service, York Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. The new contract replaces both those services previously provided by National Britannia, and those supplied by the Tuke Centre for counseling services.
15. The new contract offers the Council annual savings of approx 15% on the core services of management referrals, pre employment screening, health surveillance and stress counseling, in addition to savings on additional services such as flu vaccinations and physiotherapy, staff training and health and well-being promotion.
16. These savings will be reinvested into more proactive health and wellbeing measures. These services include physiotherapy/ osteopathy, influenza and Hepatitis B jabs, specialist DSE and Workplace Assessments, ergonomics, post incident debriefing, one to one "Passport to Health" health promotion, "Healthy Lifestyles" workshops for groups amongst others.
17. The OHS service is working with the Council on introducing health and well-being initiatives in the directorate/ teams with high sickness absence levels: for example in Neighbourhood Services work is being undertaken to fast track osteopathic assessments, health promotion, no smoking packages and a health fair open day

Rehabilitation Programmes

18. Research shows only 50% of staff who are absent for 6 months or more are ever likely to return to work, and only 25% of those absent for 12 months or more. These absences are best dealt with by stronger management interventions such as targeted rehabilitation programmes.
19. Rehabilitation and treatment is an important component in absence management. These programmes involve intensive and fast tracked access to physiotherapy, counselling, medical intervention with a dedicated occupational health specialist and caseworker. The aim is to restore function, with the ability and confidence to return to work as soon as possible, reducing the amount of time on sick leave and reducing the risk of further periods of absence.
20. While primary prevention is better than cure, rehabilitation programmes and proactive and targeted sickness absence management in combination with health enhancement to promote resilience; engagement and Work-Life balance at the same time as sorting out any institutional barriers can significantly improve sickness absence levels, increase ongoing attendance and improve the culture of attendance.

21. A working group has been established to conduct a scoping exercise to consider which staff should be targeted for this approach based on the most 'costly' long-term sickness absence cases.

Work/life balance

22. Work/life balance policies improve employee engagement and motivation in an organisation, as well as supporting the psychological contract we have with our employees. It has also been proven to have positive impacts on lowering absenteeism, improving morale and job satisfaction as creating an adaptable workforce. The Council's current work/life balance provisions are currently being reviewed with a view to extending and re-marketing them thereby making it easier for staff to attend work and to use the correct provisions for unavoidable absence instead of sickness absence as a default.
23. The Council already has in existence various work-life balance schemes, which help employees to meet certain personal or family commitments. It is HR's intention to review these provisions and seek to extend them where possible, encouraging staff to use these instead of sickness absence as a default, and make them available to all employees to prevent divisiveness and promote fairness.

Consultation

24. The attendance at work project is being developed collaboratively with HR Management Team and discussions have recently been held at the HR Joint Consultative Committee concerning the establishment of a joint working group to ensure trade union involvement in the initiatives.

Options

25. This paper is an update for information only.

Analysis

26. Whilst the significant improvement in the Council's sickness absence levels is encouraging, further work is required in order to achieve further reductions and ensure that absence levels do not 'bounce'. It is anticipated that by taking an approach which seeks to manage sickness absence and also maximise attendance, the Council will be able to achieve significant and sustained improvements in attendance levels whilst also modernising working practices and enabling a more flexible and responsive workforce.
27. Attendance management has been included as an item for addressing within the Single Improvement Plan (SIP), which was approved by Members in June 2008. For 2008/09, progress against the SIP will be monitored via the corporate monitoring cycle, which provides reports to Members on a quarterly basis. In addition, sickness will continue to appear as an item for monitoring within the monthly performance 'Dashboard' which is monitored by CMT.

Corporate Priorities

28. The City of York's own strategies promote this approach through our:
- Corporate value – supporting and developing people and encouraging improvement in everything we do.
 - Direction statement – working across boundaries to benefit the people of York.
 - Corporate priority - Improve the health and life styles of the people who live in York; seeking to promote healthy lifestyles and physical activity
 - Key action – to develop the council's role as an employer in improving the health and well-being of employees

Implications

29. **Financial** - contained within the body of the report.

Human Resources (HR) - contained within the body of the report.

Equalities - contained within the body of the report

Legal - no implications.

Crime and Disorder - no implications.

Information Technology (IT) - no implications.

Property - no implications.

Other - no implications.

Risk Management

30. The risk score for this issue is 20, placing the issue in the high category. Implementation of initiatives in this report will reduce the risk to medium in the short term and low in the long term.

Recommendations

31. Executive is asked to:

- 1) Note the work being undertaken in this area.

Reason: In order to achieve significant and sustained improvements in attendance levels.

Contact Details

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Heather Rice
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Report Approved

Date *September 2008*

Specialist Implications Officer(s):

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

Attendance Management Policy, Procedure and Guidelines – available in the Council's HR Manual

Annexes: None