

**Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny
Management Committee**

8 July 2019

Report of the Director of Customer & Corporate Services

Attendance and Wellbeing

Summary

1. This report provides an update on the sickness absence figures in City of York Council (CYC) and the continued work ongoing across the Council in improving the well being of employees and supporting managers in attendance management.
2. The report also provides an update on the staff survey that has now concluded.

Background

3. Supporting staff in their well being continues to be a key focus at CYC. We have seen sickness absence figures increase over time and Scrutiny Committee, Executive and Corporate Directors are keen to ensure we manage attendance fairly and consistently across the authority.
4. There is no one root cause leading to absence of staff and individual cases are complex. Absence from work is often a result of many factors. These can include changes to the workplace, performance management, ill health and life events outside of the workplace that impact on people being unable to attend work.
5. Line managers continue to work with HR to ensure the correct support is provided to staff in a timelier manner. In addition, HR are supporting managers to consistently apply the attendance management policy so that staff continue to be supported and managed in a fair and transparent way.
6. Since reporting in January we have awarded both the contract for Occupational Health provision and a provider to provide industry expertise in managing short term absence from day one. This is to

ensure consistent and fair practice along with more timely support to individuals through occupational health professionals.

7. The authority is just in the process of implementing these services and within the next few months communications and support to managers will increase. Collaborative work with the providers, unions and managers will be key to ensure effective implementation.

Continued activity around attendance management

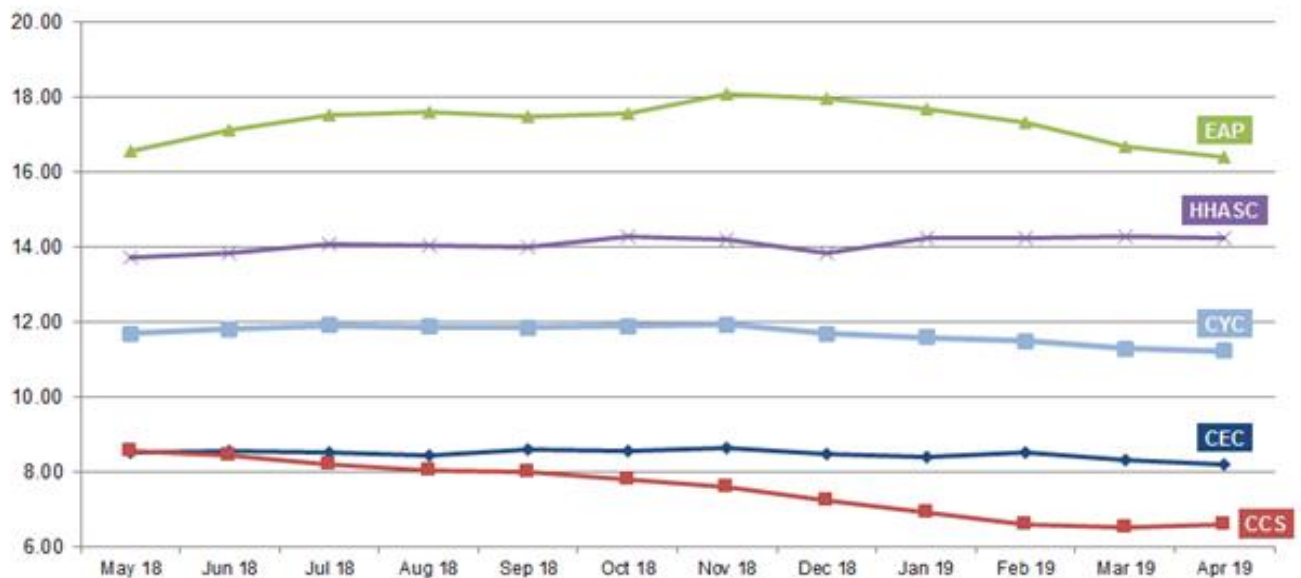
8. There has been a continued focus on attendance management as a result of increases in absence figures over the last few years. Improved reporting through the online HR system may account for some of the increase over time and this should be seen as a positive.
9. Having the absence recorded allows the manager to actively manage any absence and can pick up on any trends over time, allowing the appropriate support to be given to staff.
10. The well being of staff is very important to the council, and a multiple faceted approach to attendance management has been adopted, as there is no one cause of absence and therefore no one solution that will result in reduce absence figures.
11. Consistent application of policy is a key aspect, one which the Unions have raised. It is important that the policies are applied consistently and fairly across the organisation and in a supportive manner. As a scrutiny committee you are aware there is a direct cost of absence, on lost productivity, impact on colleagues left in the workplace and ultimately on delivery of services to the residents of York. The council has to balance up it's responsibilities across its staff, managers and ultimately ensure the service delivered to residents is not affected.
12. The Director of Public Health continues to lead the Workplace Health and Well Being Strategy Board, with a focus on delivering a Workplace Health and Well Being Strategy. Key members of staff are involved in this group including the trade unions.
13. The Council have signed up to the Time to Change Employers pledge. Time to Change is a social movement focussed on changing how we think and act about mental health and aims to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental health. Reducing stigma and discrimination has a positive impact on how we experience ourselves and our mental health problems, or how we might ask for help and support.

- 14. An action plan describing how CYC will achieve it's pledge will be led through the Workplace Health Strategy Group
- 15. This is an important step for CYC. We want to create a workplace environment which acknowledges that we're all human, we all have mental health, and that talking about it in a supportive environment makes a difference. Managers and leaders can help shape the workplace environment to be supportive of staff facing mental health problems.

Data Analysis and Comparator Data

- 16. At the end of March 2019 the rolling 12 month sickness days per full time equivalent (fte) figure has decreased to 11.3 days, from 11.7 at the end of Q3, and compared to 11.5 at the same point last year. These figures should be seen in comparison to the public sector benchmark of 8.5 days (CIPD public sector benchmark). Personnel Today reported that in the public sector in 2017, 9.8 days were lost to sickness per employee compared to 5 days in the private sector.

Average Sickness Days per FTE - (Rolling 12 month)



- 17. There has been no significant change in the overall figure since we last reported to scrutiny on absence figures across directorates. The graph above shows the rolling 12 months to end of March 2019. At a glance you can see that CCS have reduced their absence by around 25% in the

past 12 months and is below the average for public sector. CEC is also low.

- Economy and Place directorate averaging 16.7 days lost per FTE compared to 15.8 days at the same point last year. Sickness in this department rose during the Summer but has reduced for each of the last 4 months;
- Health Housing and Adult Social Care directorate are averaging 14.3 days lost per FTE compared to 13.4 days at the same point last year;
- Children's, Education and Communities directorate are averaging 8.3 days lost per FTE compared to 8.5 days at the same point last year;
- and Customer and Corporate Services directorate are averaging 6.5 days lost per FTE compared to 8.7 at the same point last year.

18. The majority of time lost to sickness absence is caused by long term sickness. The ratio for long term sick across the authority is around 66% of total absence compared to 70% last year. This reduction is possibly indicative of the increased work HR has completed with departments to support long-term sickness cases. Whilst most departments are at similar levels, the percentage of long-term sickness increases to 76% in Economy and Place directorate compared to almost 80% at the same point last year.

19. The main reasons being recorded by CYC for long term sickness include mental health and stress related absence. Mental Health, stress and depression were the most prevalent reasons for absence across all participating councils in the recent benchmarking exercise. Stress and Mental Health related absence accounts for 30% of the total absence figure which is a similar level to last year. Most directorates are at this level except Children's, Education and Communities where stress and mental health accounts for 37% of absences.

External provision

20. As agreed by Executive on 18th October 2018 and 17th January 2019 contracts have been awarded for the provision of an occupational health

service and additional support (through a specialist provider) to assist managers proactively manage employees absences from work.

21. Work is currently on going with the provider to implement changes and review the operating model to ensure that the service provided, is more responsive, to meet the council's current needs and thus facilitate the escalation of quick referrals where these may be needed. The provision (including an osteopath service), will continue to provide professional advice where an employee is off sick.
22. The second provider, an industry expert in Day One Absence management will see the provision of;
 - a. a standard process for all employees to report their absence from work;
 - b. the provision of appropriate medical advice to the employee based on the initial telephone contact including self care advice;
 - c. the provision of real time data and information (including pro active alerts) to managers to help inform and support them in taking appropriate action. This may include recommendations to refer to the OH provider, tailored questions to inform return to work interviews, as well as pro active push reports to ensure policy compliance; and
 - d. trend analysis and bench marking of data, to include manager compliance around holding return to work interviews and stage management to ensure appropriate support can be given where needed.
23. In summary this provision, agreed by the Executive for two years, will see us working proactively with employees who are absent due to sickness, providing them occupational health support for self care, identify where an early referral to OH may be needed; provide support for managers in their management of sickness absence; provide true reasons for absence and real time data, (including compliance data with council policy) to enable targeted support to be provided where needed.
24. With both suppliers working jointly with the council to share and review trend and benchmarking data, will help the council develop and inform solutions to keep employees with health issues at work. This more proactive approach to health management should in turn reduce the cost of absenteeism, increase productivity and staff retention.

25. The coming weeks will see collaborative work with the providers, HR, managers and the trade unions to ensure the implementation of this provision is smooth and transparent.

Staff Survey

26. Throughout 2018/19, we have been engaging with staff to understand their views across a range of topics, so we can identify any concerns and challenges staff face on a day to day basis. This allows CYC to improve staff engagement, to identify minor changes to reduce sickness and improve employee wellbeing. We have completed the staff survey for 2018/2019, covering 6 themes as shown below.

- My Role (informed and equipped) & Teamwork
- Values and Behaviours
- Inclusion, Wellbeing and Behaviour at Work
- Reward and Recognition
- Performance and Development
- Leadership and Management

27. Response rates to the survey averaged around 35% over the course of six surveys, and whilst no benchmarking on response rates for this type of survey is available nationally, feedback from other Councils whom have completed internal staff surveys suggest that responses rates >20% can be seen to be positive.

28. There was a significant amount of positive feedback within the surveys from employees covering areas such as fairness within the workplace, structures for feedback and team meetings, wellbeing, and peer and managerial support.

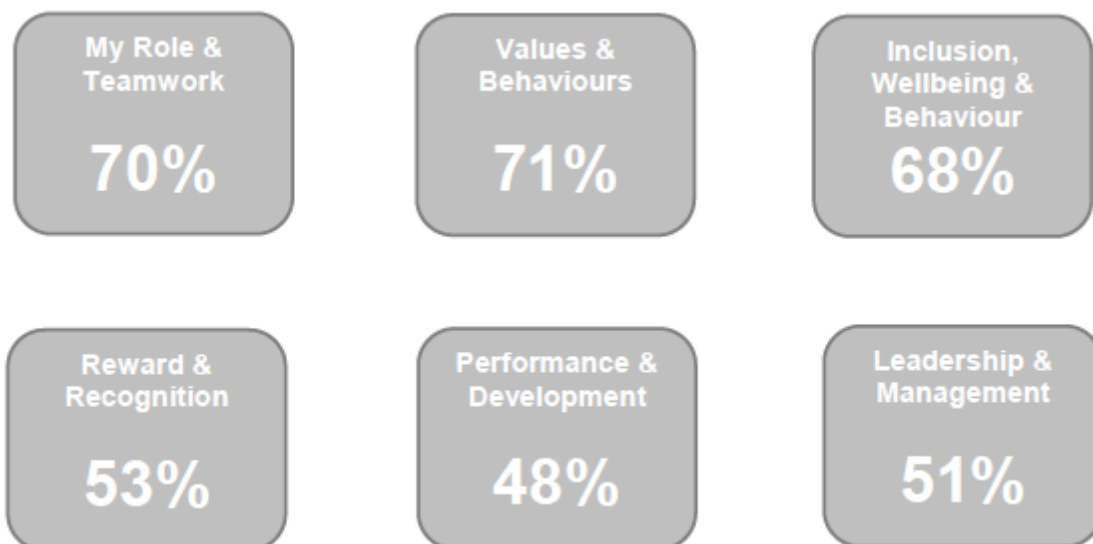
29. A number of themes were brought up by employees through the survey which we are going to consider in more detail. These include managing talented individuals, managing poor performance, visibility of senior officers and managing change.

30. Action has been taken on some areas that were raised around recognition and usefulness of team meetings has already been addressed.

31. A new monthly managers briefing is being piloted to help support managers delivering standard messages across the council and to help structure team meetings.
32. The four staff recognition and engagement events that were run throughout May and June was a new approach to recognition. These were positively received with around 200 employees attending.
33. Whilst there are significant details within the staff survey, two core questions were asked. One whether staff “would recommend the council as a good place to work” and two, whether post the survey staff “felt that action would be taken forward”.
34. Across the six surveys, on average around 71% of employees would “recommend the Council as a good place to work” and this compares to a civil service benchmark for a similar question of 58%.
35. Around 33% of employees felt “action would be taken forward” post the staff survey and this compares to a civil service benchmark for a similar question of 49%. Results were relatively similar across the four directorates. Whilst the results are low, in previous years when surveys have been run we accept that communication with staff regarding around action taken as a result may not have been sufficient.
36. In May and June four staff recognition and engagement events across the council were held, led by the Chief Executive and members of CMT. The events, as well as recognising achievements in the past 12 months, sought staff views on a couple of areas, including ‘one thing they liked about the council’ and ‘one thing they would change’. We are still analysing this information as we had around 200 employees attending. We are progressing with further focus groups over coming months on specific themed areas coming out of the staff survey so we can gather qualitative data.
37. To try and understand the topic areas which the Council needs to focus upon, all questions were analysed within the topic in order to show the percentage of respondents who indicated that they agreed with the statements across all questions within the theme. Results are below and suggest that focus is required on performance and development, reward and recognition, and leadership and management.

38. Additional focus groups were initiated and run within Economy and Place following the results during the survey. This enabled them to drill down into responses further and gather qualitative data to allow DMTs to understand what staff were thinking.

39. **Staff Survey Positive Results by Theme**



Consultation

40. We continue to engage with the trade unions on absence management, and they will be involved in the implementation of Occupational Health Provision and the new dedicated well-being team through the external provider.
41. Further focus groups are being arranged for staff to attend to discuss further the results of the staff survey.

Council Plan

42. 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

43. **Financial:** No specific implications at this stage, though the costs of a wellbeing team will need to be considered by the Executive.

- 44. **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.
- 45. **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.

Risk Management

- 46. The main risks continue to relate to failure to record, track, monitor and put into place actions to monitor sickness, which may cause sickness levels to not be accurate, and in turn cause actions to be put in place that are not proportionate or in line with policy. Mitigations will be put in place as detailed in the main body of the report.

Recommendations

- 47. To consider the information provided in the report.

Reason: To inform the Committee of the latest sickness absence figures

Contact Details

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Report Approved **Date** 26/6/19

Specialist Implications Officer(s) None

Wards Affected: All

For further information please contact the author of the report