

Report of the Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee

Sickness Absence Management Scrutiny Review Final Report – Cover Report

Summary

1. This cover report presents the final report arising from the Sickness Absence Management scrutiny review – see Appendix 1.
2. At the same time that the work on this review was being carried out, HR was reviewing the Council's Attendance Management policy and procedures. As part of that work, the findings from this review were taken account of and informed the revisions being made by HR. As a result a number of the recommendations arising from the review have already been implemented. A table of the recommendations indicating their implementation by HR to date is shown in paragraph 7 below.
3. This report asks Cabinet to note the work on the scrutiny review, endorse the implementation of the recommendations by HR and where appropriate, approve the remaining recommendations arising from the review.

Background & Review Objectives

4. At a Scrutiny Event for Members in July 2011, the Committee agreed to carry out a scrutiny review on staff sickness, specifically to identify ways of reducing sickness absence levels across the organisation.
5. In January 2012, the Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee received a scoping report for the review detailing the Task Group's initial findings and as a result, agreed the following objectives for the review:

Objectives:

- i. To revise the Council's Absence Management Policy & procedures to ensure they take account of iTrent, are in line with best practice, and written in a more formal assertive language;
- ii. To identify improvements in:
 - a. the provision of Management training
 - b. the induction programme for all new staff
- iii. To explore ways of introducing a change in culture within the workforce moving away from a policy of 'managing absence', towards one of 'encouraging attendance'.

Review Conclusions

6. In response to the objectives of this review, the Task Group concluded that:
 - a) The current policy document covering everything for all was not suitable and that a short, clear and succinct policy for employees, together with a separate guide for managers would be more appropriate
 - b) The organisation would benefit from all new starters receiving information on the council's sickness absence procedure and all managers receiving the relevant training.
 - c) Overall, the Task Group concluded that improvements in training and induction, an updating of the policy and a rise in staff morale (there needs to be mutual respect and support to enable all staff to perform to the best of their ability), would over time assist in changing the culture of the organisation. They recognised that this would be difficult and take time, and that there was no 'quick fix'. They therefore agreed it would be necessary to revisit the question of how best to create a change in culture once the revised policy and change to working practices had been embedded throughout the organisation.
 - d) The current processes lacked positive reward and recognition for good attendance.
 - e) The authority did not make adequate use of online training for staff.

Recommendations

7.

Recommendation	HR Response /Implementation	Status
i) The Council's policy be rewritten as two separate documents – one to be a short, clear and succinct policy for employees, and one to be a separate guide for managers	A revised draft Attendance Management policy and procedure has been written - currently in consultation with unions (including school unions) on these documents. Deadline for feedback is 27 th March 2013. A draft manager's guidance is being finalised and will be distributed for feedback with virtual user group and unions beginning of April. The completed policy and procedure aim to be launched end April	Implementation ongoing
ii) Both documents be written in a clear, assertive and more formal language	The policy and procedure has been made shorter. The process for notifying of absence and the procedure for dealing with absence is easier to read and more formal in language.	Fully implemented
iii) Both new documents incorporate the amendments identified in Annexes A & B of final report, as appropriate	The amendments identified in annex A & B have been incorporated into either the policy, procedure or manager's guidance the only exception is the following: <i>Referral to Occupational Health must be done after 1 month.</i> There maybe occasions where it is inappropriate to refer an employee to occupational health after 1 month e.g. if the employee is in hospital or terminally ill. We have included guidance on when an OH referral may be delayed. The procedure states the following: <i>Where absence lasts for four weeks the employee will normally be referred to occupational health'.</i>	Implementation ongoing
iv) Mandatory training on absence management to	The attendance management training is currently been scoped to be available along side the roll out of the policy.	Implementation ongoing

<p>be introduced for managers e.g. through the introduction of an eLearning package and use of Team Talk.</p>	<p>Manager training will initially target areas of the council which have high sickness absence levels or long term cases that require progression through the procedure. This training will be managed and recorded via the Workforce Development Unit as part of the core training offer.</p>	
<p>v) HR should consider the one off purchase of an online training package for managers in an effort to reduce Health Nurse training costs</p>	<p>The initial delivery model for training is expected to be face to face, this is due to the development time, and cost of developing an eLearning package. However the potential to move to an e-learning package will be explored.</p>	<p>Implementation ongoing</p>
<p>vi) Mandatory induction for new staff should be introduced.</p>	<p>The corporate induction training is currently under review. Plans are to conduct bi-annual induction events for all new employees. Managed and recorded via the Workforce development unit. The induction checklist now includes a summary of Attendance Management information to be covered in an employee's first week of employment these include: reporting absence, certification, trigger points, return to work interviews & Occupational Health service.</p>	<p>Implementation ongoing</p>
<p>vii) Manager's should be held accountable for employees in their team failing to attend Occupational Health appointments without an appropriate</p>	<p>OH notifies managers of OH appointments made for their employees and informs them if they do not attend. Detailed in the manager's guidance are their responsibilities to ensure their employees attend OH scheduled appointments. The policy also states that sick pay is conditional upon the employee attending an Occupational Health</p>	<p>Implementation ongoing</p>

<p>reason, and the number of missed appointments should be reported to the Corporate Joint Consultative Committee.</p>	<p>appointment where required. Therefore occupational sick pay can be stopped where an OH appointment is missed and the employee is notified of this deduction in pay. HR business partners will start to provide data to DMT's on the volume of employees who fail to shows for OH appointment in their directorates and reasons provided. There is a proposal to recharge the cost of 'No Shows' to manager's own budgets.</p>	
<p>viii) Managers should report quarterly to DMT on absence figures.</p>	<p>iTrent sickness absence reports are currently under development; however the reports are dependant upon development work around management structures and sickness absence reasons. Sickness absence reports will be gradually rolled out across directorates in line with People Manager implementation, Midland HR is required to support this work. It is anticipated that no MI reports will go out to directorates until the structure work is completed, which is not likely to be until the end of June 2013.</p>	<p>Implementation ongoing</p>
<p>ix) HR should look at positive ways of promoting good attendance, e.g. recognition for those employees who have no or low rates of absence e.g. letter from Chief Executive, Xtra Factor Award.</p>	<p>Promotion of good attendance is most successful at a local manager level. Guidance will be included for managers to recognise good attendance in PDR's and 1:1 meetings, to make recognition more personal. A council wide recognition scheme would incur administration costs. Such schemes can also have equalities implications and negative effects on employees where absences are unavoidable e.g. to</p>	<p>Implementation ongoing</p>

	<p>attend an operations or linked to a disability.</p> <p>The staff survey will ask a number of questions to highlight trends and reasons why staff may have poor attendance or are not engaged e.g. pressure of work, stress, bullying. Addressing these issues in subsequent action plans will assist in improving attendance.</p> <p>The following question will also be included in the next survey to help further inform the work to promote good attendance - <i>'I feel good attendance should be recognised'</i></p> <p>In addition HR will continue to a promote ways to maximise attendance e.g. flexible working opportunities.</p>	
<p>x) Two HR officers should be designated as 'GO TO' officers (see 4th bullet point in paragraph 49 of final report).</p>	<p>The First Contact Network is a staff volunteer group available to offer support to employees who are being bullying or harassed at the work. Within HR the Employee Relations (ER) team is the key contact for employees who have queries in relation to the Attendance Management Procedure or who need general guidance on other policy related issues.</p> <p>However, there is currently no provision in place for staff to access completely impartial advice as per the recommendation. This will be reviewed following the completion of the HR restructure.</p>	<p>Implementation ongoing</p>
<p>xi) CYC's Counselling Services should be re-publicised.</p>	<p>The counselling services will be re-published during the launch of the policy, during Attendance management training and on colin, buzz etc. There have been some recent changes to the counselling services available for staff. Due to a</p>	<p>Implementation ongoing</p>

	<p>significant increase in demand for counselling services year on year and the fixed price nature of the previous NHS contract, when the negotiations to extend the NHS contract took place the current level of service across the OH contract could not be maintained for the previous price. Employees will continue to self refer for counselling services; OH will then triage the referral. Where counselling is not the best source of assistance the employee will be signposted to either a specialist charity organisations or mainstream NHS services.</p>	
<p>xii) CSMC should re-visit the question of how best to create a change in culture once the revised policy and change to working practices had been embedded throughout the organisation.</p>		

Update on Cost to Council of Missed Occupational Health Appointments

8. Since the final report was signed off by the Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee, HR have provided updated figures on the cost of CYCs occupational health provision in relation to 'Do Not Attend and missed appointments' - see the last bullet point in paragraph 60 of the final report attached.
9. The table below shows the number of missed appointments (including late cancelations) for the past three years. In 2010/11 due to the contract negotiations it resulted in a cheaper cost to CYC than in 2009/10. In

2011/12 and 2012/13 the figure below is an opportunity cost of what the charge would have been if CYC had been charged for these missed appointments, for comparison purposes. During 2011/12 and 12/13 CYC negotiated an all inclusive fixed price service for Occupational Health services which in effect resulted in any costs of missed appointments been absorbed by the occupational health provider. This is because during this period the individual cost of the services CYC received from the NHS was in excess of the fixed price paid.

Year	No. of Missed Appointments	Total cost charged to CYC for missed appointments
2010/11	218	£7,254.40
2011/12	155	£4,697.50
2012/13	222	£6,994.00
Total	595	£18,945.90

Council Plan 2011-15

10. The Council Plan recognises that staff are the most important resource of the Council and without them it could not deliver its services and priorities. Ensuring staff receive the proper levels of support in times of illness etc is one way in which staff can be made to feel valued and engaged.

Risk Management

11. There are no known risks associated with the recommendations arising from the review.

Implications Associated with Above Recommendations

12. **HR** – The HR implications are largely financial. The HR policy on promoting attendance at work has already been redrafted in line with the recommendations in this report; it will be consulted on with the trades unions in March at a meeting of CJCC. There are also plans in place to run a bi annual induction (led by the CE), where we can accommodate messages about the importance of attending work when you are well. There is however costs involved in running mandatory training for managers which HR have no budget for, nor is there a current budget to purchase an e-learning option. The other recommendations in this report can be easily adopted and accommodated within current workload and budgets.

13. **Financial** – As outlined in the HR implications above, the recommendations of this report have a financial impact that is not included within the current approved budget. Therefore, should the recommendations be approved, it would not be possible to implement those with a financial cost immediately, but as and when resources allow.
14. **Other Implications** – There are no legal or other known implications associated with the recommendations arising from this review.

Options

15. Having considered the scrutiny final report attached, the Cabinet may choose:
- i. To endorse the recommendations already implemented by HR and approve any remaining Recommendations
 - ii. Not to approve some or all of the recommendations listed above.

Recommendation

16. Taking into consideration all of the information contained within the final report attached and its annexes, the Cabinet are recommended to:
- i. Endorse the recommendations already implemented by HR and approve any remaining Recommendations arising from the review, as shown in paragraph 7 above.

Reason: To conclude the Scrutiny Review in line with CYC Scrutiny procedures and protocols

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Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

All

Background Papers:

See information contained within the final report attached

Appendices:

Appendix 1 –Final Report