

**Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny
Management Committee**

9 November 2020

Report of the Head of Human Resources &
Organisational Development

Human Resources (HR) Update

Summary

1. To provide members with an update on key HR activity to support the health and wellbeing of staff.
2. To provide an update on the day one absence provision and key dates for information.
3. The report also suggests areas where the committee may wish to scrutinise further.

Background

Health & Well Being

4. This committee has always shown an interest in the health and wellbeing of the council's staff and in having the assurances that the council is doing what it can to maintain and support staff. This has shown to be even more important during a global pandemic.
5. An update was provided to the committee in July 2020 on staff well being, reflecting how positively staff had responded to the need to work very differently and provide essential services to our residents.
6. To ensure that staff health & well being is maintained, a number of key activities were initiated during the initial lockdown period and are continuing. These are listed in the table below.

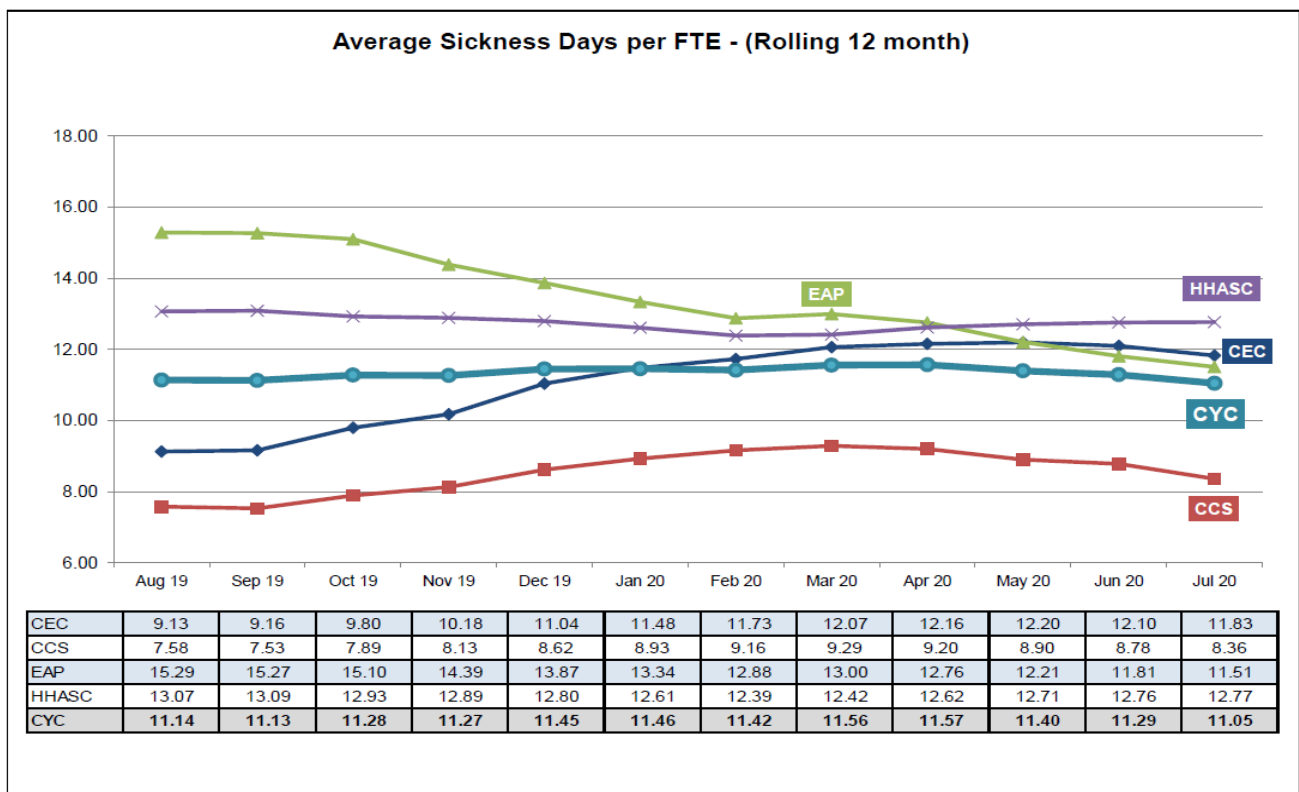
HR & Resource Meeting	Meets regularly with representation from across the council, to monitor progress against action plans, make recommendations to CMT in relation to all HR and resourcing matters, this covers key covid related issues such as temporary redeploying staff to essential areas, track and trace, advice on absence etc
Workplace Readiness Group	Meets regularly with representation from across the council to ensure employees can safely return to the workplace (where possible) and considers HR and H&S issues, including a refreshed risk assessment
Staff Health & Well Being Survey	Survey was carried out earlier in lockdown and is to be repeated in November / December. The survey results showed that the majority of staff feel they are coping at least well or very well. (58%) Key themes of the last survey were around working from home, work life balance and health & safety. All areas that we have covered with staff in communications and staff engagement sessions.
Elected Member Health & Well Being Survey	Survey was carried out earlier in lockdown and is to be repeated in November / December. Additional support has been offered to members where required.
Regular Communication	Regular communication via Head of Paid service updates, public health messaging, covering a huge range of topics; silver linings, buzz manager briefings
Facebook Live	Any employee can access Q&A sessions and these will take place quarterly, the next taking place on 2 November.
Staff Information Sessions	These are currently in progress and themes and issues will be reported to CMT and take place quarterly. The next round commences on 5 November.
Signposting	Signposting employees to support via manager briefings, the intranet and the internet (information also available on the CYC website). We continue to promote the use of the workplace anxiety booklet.

Mindfulness	CYC Chaplain continues to offer mindfulness sessions to staff directly and also to incorporate into team meetings.
Access to the Chaplain	As was available pre covid staff can contact the chaplain direct.
Covid HR email address & Support with Track & Trace for Employees	The HR team supports the Public Health team and managers with the testing for Covid for CYC employees, referring staff if they are unable to access tests. Where staff are reporting symptoms then referral to public health for local support to ensure contacts are identified and self isolation advised.
Staff Wellbeing Line	Since the introduction of the dedicated telephone line and email address at the beginning of May we have had around 30 calls and a handful of emails, covering a variety of topics. Whilst this is a lower level of contact that was anticipated the communication channels remain open and are advertised to staff.
Identification of staff who fall within the vulnerable categories	HR have worked with managers to ensure staff have the right support and risk assessments in place to ensure they feel safe and well within the workplace.
Seasonal Flu	Flu vouchers are being issued to staff who would like them, however due to national shortages the vouchers are being prioritised to staff who fall within those high risk front line services in the first instance.
Employee Assistance programme	Available for staff to contact through a dedicated number and also access via the internet. Access is available for all elected members also.
Refreshed OD Plan	The OD plan features Health & Wellbeing as a priority and will be a key part of the responsibility of the Leading Together group to ensure it is implemented and embedded across all teams. This work is ongoing.

7. In addition to the above we have regularly asked staff to identify any further areas they wish us to consider, to date we have not had anything raised and staff are appreciative of the information and support that has been provided.
8. Areas therefore where you may wish to consider further is the results of the next staff survey and what that is telling the council 10 months into a pandemic.

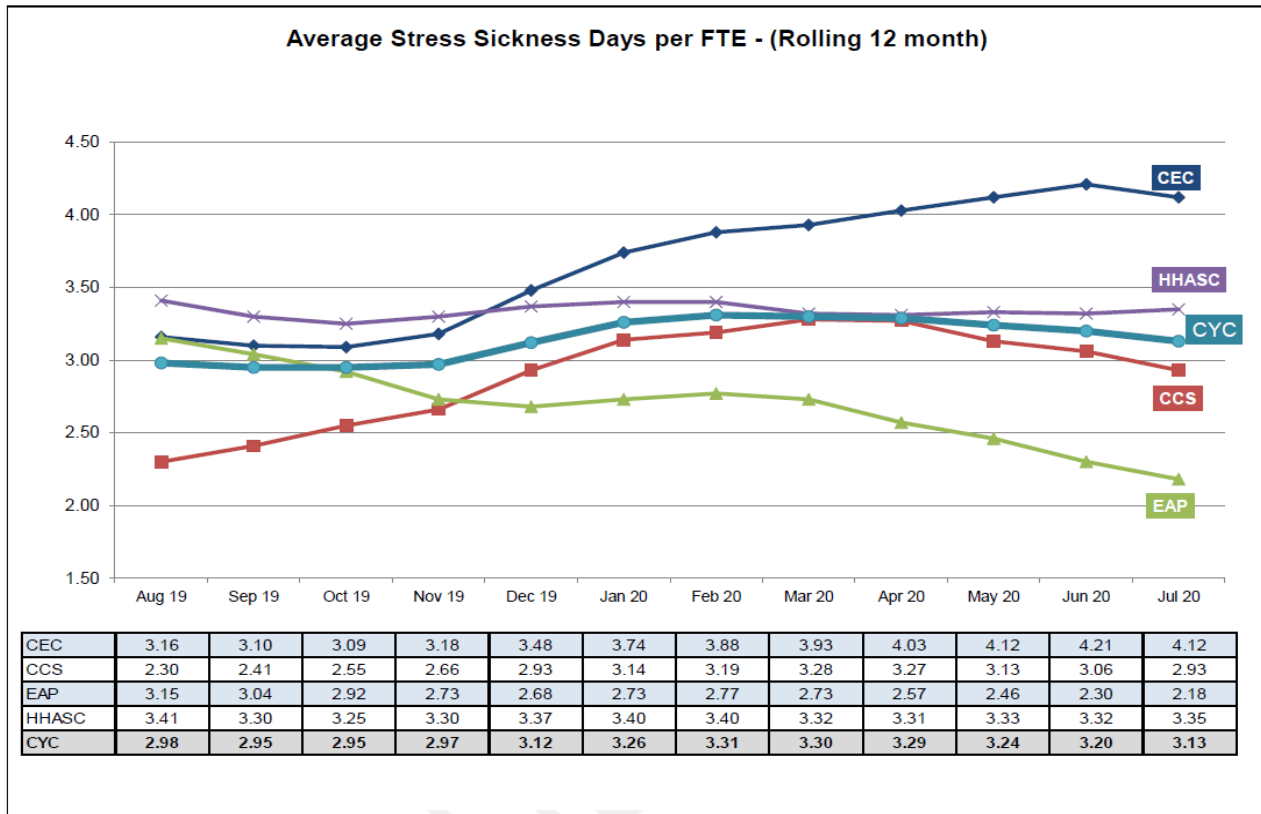
Absence Management

9. The management of staff absence is still a key issues and important to ensure that staff are fully supported when they are unable to work. The two graphs below show a high level overview of the sickness absence rates over the past 12 months.
10. Absence rates have reduced slightly overall, however with a global pandemic ongoing this can be seen as a positive outcome.



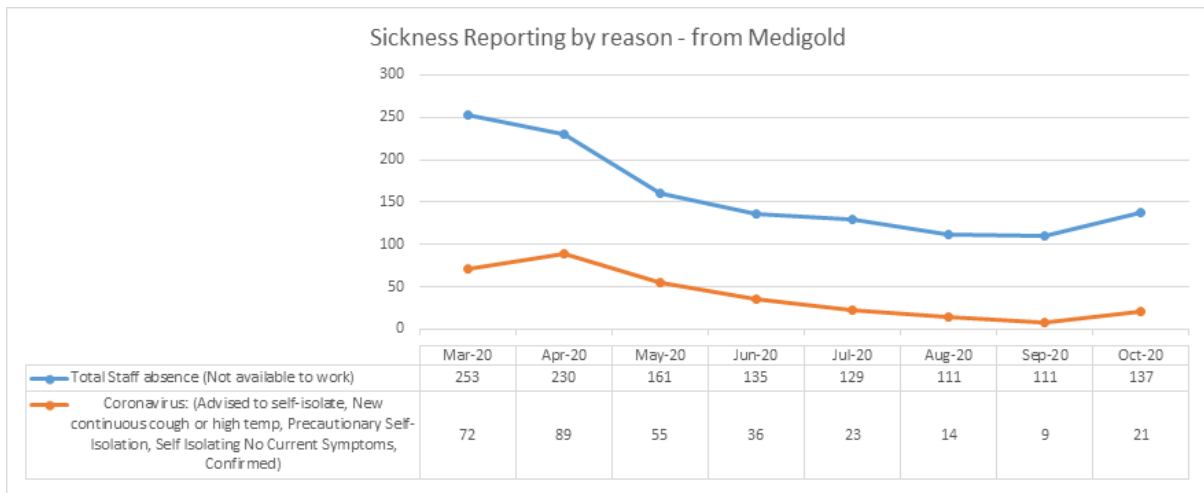
11. Stress has always been a key area when managing sickness absence and ensuring that staff are supported when feeling stressed and anxious. During the pandemic we have done a lot of work supporting staff and sign posting staff to the anxiety workbook and other sources of information. HR and Public Health have worked very closely during this period, and a key focus for the corporate management team.

12. The table below shows stress related absence across the council over the past 12 months.



13. The stress related absence overall is reducing since its highest point in February, however CEC has seen an increase. This is an area where you may suggest further analysis is carried out and was the focus of scrutiny prior to the pandemic.

14. With regards to Covid related absences, whether staff are unable to work because of self isolation, or covid positive / covid symptoms, we have had a number of absences as can be seen from the below table. Please note that this table shows headcount.



15. Numbers of absences were highest in March and April, with this dropping over the summer. As with the national increases in positive cases we are also now seeing an increase.
16. As soon as a member of staff reports to the day one absence line relating to covid, HR speak direct to the member of staff or individual to ensure they have been able to book a test. Where they have symptoms they are referred through to the Public Health team who make contact to establish any further CYC employees who are classified as contacts. The individuals and managers are contacted and appropriate action taken.
17. A lot of effort has gone into the advice around the use of PPE and other mitigation to reduce any potential exposure to covid. Risk assessments are in place and are regularly reviewed and updated.
18. The numbers are relatively low and no one area is being affected more than any other.
19. As staff continue to work from home where possible, through the provision of technology and other equipment, this is reducing the potential spread within the workplace. Had we returned staff to the office, for example the covid capacity of around 450 people to West Offices, we could be seeing a greater increase in absence rates and impact on service delivery.
20. The committee should note though that where staff are unable to work from home due to health & well being or other personal circumstances then space has been made available in a covid secure building for them.

Day One Absence

21. As a committee you are aware of the day one absence contract and the delivery of the service. The day one absence line has been key in our daily response to staff as stated above. The data is real time and enables HR to be involved much sooner than our previous arrangements.
22. The process continues to be developed with the roll out of stage management at the beginning of November. This will give more real time information to managers to be able to support staff and manage absence.
23. The contract for the system comes to an end in September 2021 and a decision will need to be made as to whether we look to extend or not. This will be considered through the necessary decision making process early in the new year.

Further Support

24. To maintain and ensure further support to staff health and wellbeing there are a number of initiatives being progressed (shown below in the table), as well as the continuation of the elements listed above in paragraph 6.

Staff Buddy Scheme	To help employees who are missing the face to face contact and are feeling lonely or isolated, introduce a buddy scheme for staff to be matched with a colleague to share a virtual cuppa. This is due to go live early November.
Peer Network (Mental Wellbeing Network)	The Time to Change Employers Pledge will come to an end at the end of this financial year. It is important to ensure there is a sustainable peer network in place and time now should be taken to create a network
Virtual Drop In Sessions for Managers	To provide an opportunity for managers to 'drop in' to chat to HR about any issues that they might wish to get further information on – these could be themed and will be advertised in advance. This is to supplement the support they are receiving from directorate support, but will encourage managers to 'get together' from across different working areas

Virtual Drop in Session for those in vulnerable groups	For staff in vulnerable groups to have the opportunity to chat to HR
Home working support	Ensuring support for managers and staff are readily available for the longer term impact of home working

Consultation

25. There was no consultation involved in the production of this report.

Council Plan

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

Implications

27. There are direct financial cost associated with health and wellbeing, mainly through the cost of absence. Managing Health & Well Being effectively will reduce this strain on resource.

28. HR implications are throughout health & wellbeing and ensuring that practice and policy is being consistently applied is essential.

29. There are no known Legal, ICT or other implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

Risk Management

30. The main risks continue to relate to failure to record, track, monitor and put into place actions to monitor and manage well being, which may cause sickness levels to rise.

Recommendations

31. To consider the information provided in the report.

32. To consider the areas for further investigation

- To consider the results of the next staff survey.
- To consider stress and mental health of staff within the workplace and to identify if this is an issue and what can be done about it, specifically within CEC.
- To consider what other authorities do to support well being in particular around Stress and Mental Health and to see what best practice can be shared.

Reason: To inform the Committee of the activity ongoing to ensure the Health & Well Being of staff.

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Report Approved Date 29/10/2020

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Abbreviations

HR Human Resources

OD Organisational Development

CEC Childrens, Education and Communities Directorate