
Audit and Governance Committee

24th September 2008

Report of the Director of People and Improvement

Sickness Absence

Summary

1. This report provides an update on the Council's controls relating to sickness absence.

Background

2. An audit of sickness management was completed in early 2006, with reports being considered by the Corporate Management Team in mid 2006. The audit identified a number of significant weaknesses with the sickness management processes throughout the Council. In total eight recommendations were made, relating to:
 - policies and procedures,
 - reporting and management information,
 - compliance monitoring.

Action Taken

3. Following the Internal Audit report a significant amount of work has been undertaken and a 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.
4. The implementation of the new Absence Management Policy and Procedures in October 2007 is part of the first phase of a long-term project aimed at improving sickness absence levels and management across the Council.

Progress has been made and the first phase of work, aimed at managing sickness absence, is now largely completed. It is acknowledged that a significant amount of work remains to be completed, starting with the commencement of phase 2 of the project. The project will therefore need to progress further, combined with a period of embedding the new policy and procedures, before the system can be deemed to operate effectively.

5. The Council's corporate sickness statistic, since the last audit, has shown an improvement in the reported figures. The 2006/07 outturn for number of days lost to sickness per full time equivalent (FTE) was 12.9 days and the equivalent 2007/08 outturn was 9.54 days per FTE.
6. Further to the new policy, sickness absence 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.

External Auditor's Letter

7. 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."

Next Steps

8. 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 a range of initiatives and actions, the details of which will be reported to Executive in October.

Consultation

9. 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

10. This paper is an update for information only.

Analysis

11. 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.

Corporate Priorities

12. 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

13. **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) - contained within the body of the report.

Property - no implications.

Other - no implications.

Risk Management

14. 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

15. Audit and Governance Committee is asked to:

1) Note the work which has been undertaken in this area.

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

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Report Approved



Date *10 September
2008*

Specialist Implications Officer(s): n/a

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