

Meeting of the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services Advisory Panel

15 October 2008

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services

Neighbourhood Services Staff Wellbeing Initiatives

Summary

1. This report outlines a number of health and wellbeing initiatives being introduced in Neighbourhood Services (NS) to tackle absence proactively. The initiatives have been developed with colleagues in Occupational Health and Human Resources.
2. The initiatives focus on the directorate's Civil Engineering department, although a number of the initiatives will potentially benefit all staff across the directorate.

Background

3. The NS HR Advisor took a report to NS Management Team on 17th July 2008, initially as a discussion document, outlining proposals on how to address the high levels of sickness absence in the Civil Engineering department.
4. All of the options were relevant across Neighbourhood Services, so from the initial proposals document a number of ideas were developed that would have benefit across the whole directorate. This report highlights the outcomes and agreements of that meeting and sets out a timetable of ongoing and immediate actions.

Rationale behind the proposals

5. The number of fte (full-time equivalent) days lost through sickness absence for the whole of the City of York Council was 9.5 days in 2007/08. The number of fte days lost through sickness absence for the whole of Neighbourhood Services was 15.5 days in 2007/08. While the directorate has been successful in reducing absence levels over the last few years (from 19.2 days per fte in 2005/06) our absence level remains higher than other directorates.
6. NS currently manage all absences (both short and long term) under the council's absence and attendance management procedure. This policy, introduced in October 2007, has been key to maintaining a reduction in absence, as the new 10 day trigger point pushes more employees through the formal short-term procedure. Using the policy we are likely to achieve a figure of around 14 days lost per fte in 2008/09 – a further 1.5 day reduction on 07/08. However managing employees through the procedure in isolation will not reduce sickness absence levels significantly and will not obviously lead to further reductions beyond 2008/9. A more proactive and preventative approach will be required in addition.

7. The number of days lost through sickness absence for Civil Engineering was 24 days per fte in 2007/08. Examples of the type of work done in the department include planned and reactive carriageway and footpath repairs, winter maintenance, drain clearing, pest control work and restoration of the city walls. Absence levels in this department have been consistently high for a number of years, and so this appeared to be a good service area in which to pilot different approaches to absence management.

Findings, considerations and actions

8. Analysis of 2007/08 sickness absence statistics for Civil Engineering show that there were 116 different incidences of absence in the year, losing 1,429 fte days. 41 of these absences were Musculo-Skeletal Disorder (MSD) related absences, accounting for 823 fte days - 57% of all absence.
9. 224 fte days absence was due to one long-standing individual absence (which has now been resolved). If we remove this absence from the overall figures, MSD then accounts for 68% of all absences in 2007/08. The department has had a member of staff to coordinate training on safe lifting issues since mid-2007.
10. A series of options was discussed by NS DMT – mostly around Civil Engineering – but all of some relevance across NS. The following measures were agreed:

A. Immediate Referrals to Osteopath / Physiotherapist

- The aim is to immediately refer employees who call in with an MSD absence to either the osteopath service or the physiotherapy service. These services are sub-contracted to private companies. We estimate that approximately fifty cases will be referred over the trial period.
- Referrals will be made either directly to the relevant service, or recommended through Occupational Health (OH). Assessments can be conducted either at the relevant service centre or at the Eco-Depot.
- **Status:** This initiative has commenced and is being applied to all Civil Engineering employees/ absences.

B. Occupational Health 'Gold' Wellbeing Package

- Seventy individual assessments have been booked for all relevant Civil Engineering employees. These assessments will provide a comprehensive health check for employees that should pick up any significant health issues they may face.
- All employees will receive a copy of the outcome of these tests.
- Neighbourhood Services will only receive reports, where the outcome of the test has a material impact on the individual's ability to carry out their role.
- **Status:** Implemented week commencing 6th October 2008.

C. Pilot Absence Questionnaire

- OH will initially issue an absence questionnaire to Civil Engineering employees who have been off at any point (either self certified or certified) in the previous 12 months, during their well-being assessments. The surveys will be anonymous. The results will be co-ordinated by OH and a final report presented to Neighbourhood Services. It is hoped that the questionnaire will provide an insight into the root causes of absence in the department, and that the results may help to focus future policy and practice to proactively prevent a proportion of the absences that we might otherwise see.

Status: Implemented week commencing 6th October 2008

D. Stop Smoking Campaign

- This will initially be a one-off drop-in session at the Eco-Depot, open to all Neighbourhood Services employees. The drop-in session will be run by a specialist from the 'No Smoking Unit' and an Occupational Health Nurse.

- Employees can then pursue individual stop smoking campaigns via the NHS.

- OH will record how many people attended and showed interest for audit purposes.

Status: On hold pending a directorate-wide review of cultural change issues.

E. Health Fair / Open Day

- The fair will initially be a one-off promotional day at the Eco-Depot, available to all Neighbourhood Services employees.

- Occupational Health will provide an OH stand covered by an OH nurse, and a counselling stand covered by a qualified counsellor.

- Other exhibitions will include issues such as osteopathy, physiotherapy, smoking cessation and healthy eating. OH will consider other relevant providers and confirm the attendees.

Status: To be implemented week commencing 3rd November 2008

Consultation

11. Consultation around the programme has taken place with Occupational Health and Human Resources. When we come to evaluate the initiatives here, which we will be able to do alongside the result of the October 2008 staff survey, we will be keen to talk with staff and unions over the next steps.

Corporate Priorities

12. The proposals will contribute to delivering the corporate priority of 'improving the health and lifestyles of the people who live in York, in particular among those groups whose levels of health are the poorest'. They also contribute to our directorate priorities of dealing with sickness absence and improving our health and safety culture.

Implications

13. **Financial:** It is envisaged that costs will be met from existing budgets.
14. **Human Resources:** The aim is to improve staff welfare, and to reduce staff absence levels.
15. **Equalities:** None
16. **Legal:** None
17. **Crime and Disorder:** None
18. **Information Technology (IT):** None
19. **Property:** None
20. **Other:** None

Risk Management:

21. The report is primarily to provide members with information and as such there are no significant risks associated with this report.

Recommendations

22. Members are asked to welcome the proposed improvements to staff care and wellbeing, and to support the varying projects.

Reason: To inform members of initiatives being taken in Neighbourhood Services to further reduce staff absence levels.

Contact Details

Author:

Nick Carter
HR Advisor – Neighbourhood
Services
Tel: 553291

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Terry Collins
Director of Neighbourhood Services

Report Approved Date 23/09/2008

Penny Hepworth
Performance and Projects
Officer Tel: 553104

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

None

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: Report to Neighbourhoods DMT, 17th July 2008