

Effective Organisation Overview & Scrutiny 22 November 2011 Committee

Sickness Absence Management Scrutiny Review – Scoping Report

Summary

1. This report provides information on the work of the Absence Management Task Group to date, and based on their findings asks the Committee to agree a formal remit for the Sickness Absence Management Scrutiny Review.

Background to Review

2. At a recent Scrutiny Event for Members in July 2011, members of this Committee agreed they wished to carry out a scrutiny review on staff sickness, specifically to identify ways of reducing sickness absence across the organisation.
3. At the committee's last formal meeting in September 2011, Members received a briefing on City of York Council's (CYC) current sickness absence procedures and policies together with recent statistics and information on actions previously taken. The Committee agreed to set up a Task Group to gather information on the potential areas of focus for the review for the full committee's consideration at this meeting.
4. The Task Group met twice and received detailed information on the following:
 - National survey of annual absence & labour turnover
 - Recent scrutiny reviews carried out by other Local Authorities
 - Comparative figures from other Local Authorities
 - Comparisons with other organisation types
 - CYC Attendance at Work Policy
 - HR Management Information Digests
 - Headlines from CYC Quarter 1 2011

- Statistics on long and short term sickness & ill health retirements
- iTrent – new CYC HR management system
- Occupational Health – NHS Contract & Costs
- CYC sickness absence management training for managers
- Induction programme for new staff
- CYCs current procedures for recording and monitoring sickness absence

Task Group Findings

5. Having considered all of the information provided, the Task Group recognised there are issues around the provision of absence management training for Managers which is currently optional, and the varying quality of induction for new council staff which does not always include reference to the council's Attendance at Work Policy.
6. The Task Group recognised a number of the issues around the recording of sickness absence and the monitoring of that absence, but noted that those will be addressed through the introduction of the absence management function of iTrent which is included in Phase 2 of its introduction, expected to take place in early 2012. The Task Group therefore agreed that the review should not focus on the problems with the current system (Delphi).
7. Having considered the absence management policies from other Local Authorities, the Task Group recognised the need for more assertive, clear and formal language within CYCs policy. HR officers confirmed that the policy will need to be revised in light of the introduction of iTrent, as its introduction will require changes to the council's current working practices. This will provide the opportunity for the introduction of the change in style suggested by the Task Group. The Task Group agreed the review should include overseeing the revising of the policy and facilitating consultation on draft revisions to the policy with officers across directorates.
8. The Task Group also agreed it would be beneficial to explore how the council might introduce a change in culture within its workforce, moving away from managing absence towards encouraging attendance. They agreed it would be useful to meet with representatives from other large organisations within the city e.g. the Hospital Trust, CPP & Aviva, to discuss with them their approach to encouraging attendance at work etc.

Suggested Objectives for the Review

9. As a result of their findings to date, the Task Group have suggested the review be focussed on:
- Revising 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;
 - identifying improvements in:
 - i) the provision of Management training
 - ii) the induction programme for all new staff
 - Exploring ways of introducing a change in culture within the workforce moving away from a policy of 'managing absence', towards one of 'encouraging attendance'.

Options

10. Members may choose to:
- Identify any additional information required in support of this review, outside of that which has already been considered by the Task Group.
 - Identify additional and/or alternative objectives for the review.

Implications

11. Members will need to consider the implications associated with any recommendations arising from the review and the views of the relevant implications officers will need be sought as part of that process.
12. At this stage, there are no known implications to carrying out the review in line with the suggested objectives identified by the Task Group. However there are implications to the Council of not having a robust Attendance at Work Policy, which is why the timing of this review in line with the coming introduction of iTrent would be beneficial to the Council.

Council Plan

13. 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

8. There are no known risks associated with the recommendations below.

Recommendations

10. Having considered the information contained within this report and provided at the meeting, Members are recommended to agree:
- i) Who will carry out the review? i.e. the Task Group or the full Committee
 - ii) A robust remit for the review based on the Task Group's suggested objectives shown in paragraph 9 above
 - iii) A timeframe for completing the review in line with Phase 2 of the introduction of iTrent, and a number of additional meeting dates as appropriate.

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Report Approved



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Wards Affected:

All

