

Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Absence Management Sub-Group

Wednesday, 3 October 2007

Present: Councillor Mike Devaney (Chair) and Councillors Terry Brown, Hasina Khan, Geoffrey Russell and Mrs Stella Walsh

Also in attendance: Lorraine Charlesworth (Corporate Director of Human Resources) and Ruth Hawes (Assistant Democratic Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Doreen Dickinson, Danny Gee, Pat Haughton, June Molyneaux and Mrs Joyce Snape.

2. DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by Members relating to the items on the agenda.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No members of the public requested to speak at the meeting.

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY INQUIRY - A BACKGROUND TO ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

The Sub-Group received a presentation from the Corporate Director of Human Resources giving a background to Absence Management.

Best Value Indicator 12 measured the working days lost due to sickness absence. The electronic system used to report sickness was demonstrated, the information was sent to Human Resources at Chorley and payroll at Blackpool. A copy of the form was sent to the employee and the manger.

The details on the form included the Directorate the person worked in, the first day of sickness, reason for illness, whether the person intended to go to the doctor, the person notifying of the absence and the time and date the notification was received.

Once the notification of sickness is received the form is used to record details on the sickness absence database, used for monitoring purposes and collating sickness absence statistics.

The database enables HR to monitor absence levels throughout the authority and ensure that the Attendance Policy was being followed through identified trigger points.

The procedure for the return to work interview is the same way as the notification. The completion of return to work interviews was monitored and chased up as these interviews had been identified as reducing sickness absence. It was also important to ensure that staff were well enough to come back to work, in particular if there had been an injury.

The number of days lost is calculated to produce the Days Lost Per Employee (BV12). This is rather a complex calculation with the results displayed within a spreadsheet, including figures for long and short-term absence.

Members considered the figures for the last few years by month and noted the improvements in recent years. For 2006/07 Chorley was average in performance on BV 12 across Lancashire. It was anticipated that this would improve this year. Members reviewed the reasons for sickness for one Directorate and noted this level of detailed information assisted in identifying any trends.

Members noted that there were policies for special leave and bereavement leave and that special circumstances were taken into account. These policies were reviewed regularly. The contract for Occupation Health was currently under negotiation and would include stress management and physiotherapy.

It was **AGREED** that potential recommendations be made:

- To increase the target for completed return to work interviews to 100%,
- Employees should speak to their manager specifically when phoning in sick rather than a colleague
- A solution be found to enable managers to put on the "out of office" message on emails when staff have called in sick
- The current Absence Management policy was sufficient.

5. **INQUIRY DOCUMENTATION**

The Sub-Group received the Inquiry documentation and noted the updated Information Checklist.

6. **THE WAY FORWARD**

The Chair reported that he had made contact with South Ribble Borough Council and advised that their Absence Management policy was similar to the one at Chorley. A copy of the Policy had been requested.

Chorley have a break down of employee's age ranges: Between 16 – 30: 17%, 31 – 50: 55%, 51 – 60: 20%, 61 – 65: 8%. This is something that South Ribble are going to start collecting. They have 70 employees who work outside and the same performance indicator is used throughout the Council.

The Chair had contacted a local company with 360 staff with 100 in a contact centre. The average age of employees in the contact centre is 31. At the company employees were not paid for their first day of sickness and whilst the Sub-Group recognised this was a positive way of dealing with sickness it was noted that at the Council payment for the first day of sickness was part of nationally agreed terms and conditions. At the company a bonus was paid for attending every day, this scheme worked well for the company but would not be appropriate for the Council.

Members highlighted the importance of Human Resources Advisors supporting the managers through the whole process as difficult situations could arise with severe illnesses.

It was suggested that a scheme involving workplace listeners could be helpful. This was a scheme where employees could talk to people, other than managers, about any issues. Councillor Terry Brown undertook to find out some information on this and report back to the next meeting.

The Sub-Group agreed that the information received so far went a considerable way to meeting the three objectives set out in the scoping document and that it would be worthwhile waiting a few months, so that the results of the winter weather could be reviewed and the statistics reassessed.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was AGREED that the next meeting be held in late January 2008 on a Wednesday evening if possible.

Chair