

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Human Resources	Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel	15/02/07

## ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT

### PURPOSE OF REPORT`

1. The purpose of the report is to update Members on progress against BVPI 12 sickness absence for 2006/07 and to advise them on how sickness absence is managed within the Authority since the implementation of a revised Absence Policy in March 2006.

### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2. This report relates to the corporate priority of ensuring that Chorley Council is a performing organisation.

### RISK ISSUES

3. The report contains no risk issues for consideration by Members.

### BACKGROUND

4. The Council's Absence Policy was revised in March 2006 to reflect the ongoing commitment to reducing sickness absence within the Authority. The policy states: 'Whilst recognising that employees may be prevented from attending work through ill health, the council has a duty to maintain service delivery and minimise disruption, we are therefore committed to managing attendance and sickness absence'.
5. The BVPI 12 sickness absence indicators for the first 6 months of the year had increased in comparison to the same period last year.

### ABSENCE POLICY

6. The Absence Policy was revised to include proven best practice initiatives that assist in reducing absence at work. In line with ACAS guidelines all employees must now:
  - Contact their Line Manager themselves on the 1st, 3rd and 5th day of absence
  - Attend a return to work interview with their Line Manager on their return
  - Attend a formal meeting if trigger points are reached ie 3 occasions within a rolling 6 month period
  - Receive appropriate disciplinary warnings if trigger points are reached
  - Attend the Occupational Health Unit if absence is longer than 4 weeks (earlier in certain circumstances)
  - Receive weekly telephone contact from their Line Manager during absence
  - Attend a welfare visit from their Line Manager and HR Adviser after 4 weeks absence

The policy was communicated to all employees via 'News and Views' and placed on the loop. 50 Line Managers have received absence management training on the policy.

7. To date 20 employees have received disciplinary warnings after reaching trigger points and evidence now shows that their attendance has improved significantly since these were issued. The warnings issued to 10 employees have expired as their attendance is now deemed to be satisfactory.
8. The Occupational Health Unit is being utilised on a far more pro-active basis and employees are attending physiotherapy and counselling sessions as necessary prior to any absence being taken.
9. Although the policy shows an improvement in attendance in certain areas it can take some time for it to embed throughout the Council and the benefits reflected in a reduction to the overall level of absence.

## FINDINGS

10. The BVPI 12 at the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter reporting period shows a slight reduction on last years figure, December 05 = 7.60 days absence per person December 06 = 7.53 days per person.

A comparison with other Lancashire districts is shown

West Lancs	6.13
Pendle	6.24
Preston	6.99
Rossendale	6.07
Burnley	8.5

11. It is difficult to compare absence with private sector organisations as terms and conditions of employment are more favourable within the public sector, however recent statistics published by the CBI show that absence in the private sector continues to be lower than the public sector.
12. Absence is monitored closely on a monthly basis and each Director receives the information relevant to their directorate. This highlights month by month how the directorate is performing against targets set, the data identifies short term and long term absence. Long term absence is deemed to be anyone who has been absent for longer than 4 weeks or 20 working days. Currently the first 20 days of any absence is recorded as short term absence with the remainder shown as long term, this does not give a clear indication of long term absence. The current years figure shows sickness levels at 4.1% with 2.46% of absence as short term and only 1.64% as long term absence, this does not reflect the norm within organisations. With effect from the 1 April the way sickness is recorded will be amended to reflect all absence over 20 days as long term.
13. The December figure shows that 5 directorates are currently above the target set. However, further scrutiny shows that although absence is being managed in accordance with the policy each of the 5 directorates has a number of long term absence cases. There are currently 10 employees on long term absence, which has a detrimental affect on figures particularly within smaller directorates. 2 of the employees absent on long term absence are expected to return to work within the next month and 3 employees are expected to leave the Councils employment shortly. Long term absence is normally acquainted with serious illness or broken bones, reasons for the employees absent at present includes cancer, post op recovery, broken humorous and depression. A review of each individual case has been undertaken and confirms that they are all being managed

in line with the policy. The appropriate Director and HR Advisor with advice and support from the Occupational Health Unit are managing cases. Trade Unions are also involved in cases of both short term and long term absence.

14. Since the introduction of the policy and the issuing of disciplinary warning for continuous short term absence as stated previously, 20 employees have been issued with warnings of which 10 have expired as their attendance is now satisfactory. In particular 1 employee in 2005/06 had 27 days absence over 6 occasions, which has reduced to 8 days over 4 occasions in 2006/07 as a direct result of warnings issued, it is envisaged this trend will continue.
15. In 2004/05 143 employees had no sickness absence in 2005/06 this figure had increased to 173 employees. In the current year to date 195 employees have no sickness absence recorded.
16. The Chief Executive has introduced 'The Chief Executives Award for Attendance' to reward teams with the lowest sickness absence. The first presentation event to reward teams with the lowest sickness absence between July and December 2006 is to be held on the 7 February.

## **FUTURE ACTIONS**

17. Although there has been a slight improvement in the BVPI 12 upto the end of December it is higher than the target set of 6.75 days. Stringent management of the Absence policy will continue, however further action is needed to achieve a significant reduction in absence.

Actions for the current year include:

- Re title the policy from Absence Policy to Attendance Policy
- Review the OHU contract and investigate the opportunity for joint procurement
- Explore opportunities for a more pro active approach i.e. blood pressure monitoring,
- Introduce stress awareness briefings for managers/employees
- Review the physiotherapy service and explore other alternative methods
- Review the monitoring of attendance to identify trends long term/short term
- Review the monitoring of attendance to identify main reasons for absence and target them by proactive health initiatives
- Amend how we record long term and short term absence
- Improve monitoring of statistics by the commissioning of a Management Information System
- Benchmark against other Local Authorities and adopt best practice from high performing authorities
- Embed the Attendance Policy
- Ensure Managers are responsible for managing attendance within their own teams

## **CONCLUSIONS**

18. The management of absence has improved since the introduction of the Absence policy. Directors are proactively dealing with instances of poor attendance in accordance with the policy and continue to demonstrate good practice to all line managers.

The number of employees having any period of sickness absence has reduced continually over the last 3 years.

Long term absence is the main cause of sickness absence.

The policy is continuing to embed throughout the Council, however it can take some time before the benefits are shown by a reduction in overall absence figures.

Further action is needed as outlined above to ensure a further reduction in absence.

#### **COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES**

19. Contained within the report

#### **COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

20. There are no direct financial implications from the report

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

21. To adopt the future actions as outlined above.

LORRAINE CHARLESWORTH  
DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

<b>Background Papers</b>			
<b>Document</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>File</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>
Attendance Policy	March 2006		HR Directorate Team Office

  

<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Ext</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Doc ID</b>
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