Chorley Council

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Policy and Governance	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	30 March 2017

OVERVIEW AND SCRUNTINY MONITORING REPORT - STAFF SICKNESS ABSENCE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To respond to the report of the Overview and Scrutiny task group that examined staff sickness absence for 2015/16 and provide an update on progress in delivering against the recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That the responses be noted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. An Overview and Scrutiny task group looked at staff sickness absence as the figures for 2015/16 where significantly higher than the target set for the year. Their final report was presented to Executive Cabinet 30 June 2016. This report provides an update of the progress made in responding to the 4 recommendations contained within the report.

4. The table below details the recommendations arising out of the review and the progress made against each:

O&S Task Group Recommendation	Progress
1. Employees to complete a survey, a minimum of three weeks following their return to work after a period of absence to provide feedback to HR on their experience of the application of the Sickness Absence Policy.	Questionnaires were issued between April 2016 – February 2017 with a 42% return rate. Detailed breakdown is contained in appendix A. It is felt no further analysis needs to take place.
2. Managers should receive refresher training on applying the Sickness Absence Policy to ensure a consistent approach across the Council.	The eLearning portal "Emerge" has now launched and includes an eLearning module on the importance of managing absence. All new managers will be asked to complete the eLearning and with an intention to roll out to all managers.
3. Review the wording in the letter that employees receive when the Sickness Absence Policy is triggered.	The letter has been reviewed. Although no changes were made to the letter, the email that goes with the letter to managers has been reviewed to include more specific details about how letters should be given to the employee. This is to ensure that the letter is in line with the council's policy, but that managers are better able and prepared to provide context and explanation to employees.

O&S Task Group Recommendation	Progress
4. To review the current performance measure for sickness absence monitoring and establish a range of measures using figures prior to the policy being introduced when compared with current information.	A new target set at 7 days per employee. Last year's target was 6 days per employee. The figure was set using data for Chorley for last 5 years and looking at district data across the North West.

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	**No**

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all		A strong local economy	
Clean, safe and healthy communities		An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	X

CURRENT DATA

6. Quarter 3 figures for 2016/17 are 5.73 days lost per employee, broken down to 2.53 short term and 3.20 long term. This is up on the yearly target which is 5.25 for Q3, but a reduction for the same period in 2015/16 which was 6.23 days lost.

7. Breaking down the data for 2016/17 up to December 2016 shows that the highest category for days lost is Stress & Depression losing a total of 701 days, with the next highest being operation. Roughly half of those absent with stress and depression are due to work related stress; however the actual number of employees absent was 5. We have support in place for people with stress and depression such as paid for counselling, CBT via Lancashire Mind, occupational health and various physical activities to help maintain good wellbeing.

8. The biggest proportion of sickness absence is within Customer & Digital Directorate this is to be expected as they have the greatest number of staff and also contain the majority of the manual workforce.

	Back & Neck	Other Muscular Skeletal	Stress/Depression	Infection	Neurological	Operation	Stomach, Liver, Kidney & Digestion	Total
Policy & Governance	5	35.38	20.47	19.41	16.3	3	26.63	**152.68**
Early Intervention	0	21	244	26.35	46.16	118.73	46.7	**516.94**
Customer & Digital	61	154.11	396	108.8	11	168	197.8	**1163.21**
Business Development & Growth	4.51	20	41	11	85.78	45.05	2	**213.84**
	70.51	**230.49**	**701.47**	**165.56**	**159.24**	**334.78**	**273.13**	

9. Council policies are being adhered to and all cases are being closely managed.

10. The current breakdown of attendance data is detailed.

11.	For 2017/18 we are going to do further trend analysis considering regional and national figures local government figures. Taking account of recent Council data and any trends that are happening more widely.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

12.	This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources	X	Equality and Diversity	
Legal		Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

CHRIS SINNOTT
DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Jane McDonnell	5371	20th March 2017	***

SICKNESS ABSENCE SURVEY RESULTS

Surveys were distributed to employees who were absent from work due to illness between April 2016 and February 2017. Different questions were asked dependent upon whether the employee had been absent long term or short term. The response rate was 42%.

Findings

Long Term

18 surveys were received from employees who were absent long term (21 working days or more pro rata). The directorate split was:

Customer and Digital – 10

Policy and Governance –1

Early Intervention and Support – 5

Business Development and Growth - 2

The following responses were received.

My manager and human resources visited me during my absence.

67% Strongly Agreed

28% Agreed

6% (1 respondent) Disagreed

I felt supported by my manager during my absence.

56% Strongly Agreed

44% Agreed.

I felt supported by human resources during my absence

33% Strongly Agreed

67% Agreed.

I was offered appropriate support e.g. counselling, physiotherapy

22% Strongly Agreed

78% Agreed.

I understand the Council's attendance policy.

56% Strongly Agreed

44% Agreed.

I feel that the attendance policy was applied to me fairly.

50% Strongly Agreed

50% Agreed.

I felt supported by my manager upon my return to work

89% Strongly Agreed

11% Agreed.

I felt supported by human resources upon my return to work

33% Strongly Agreed

61% Agreed

6% (1 respondent) disagreed

I feel that the workplace adjustments (such as a phased return) helped my return to work.

94% Strongly Agreed

6% Agreed.

Additional comments

6 additional comments were received:

4 employees described the process as "good" or "fair".

 1 employee felt that welfare visits were not a good use of officer time.

1 advised that they would have chosen a "not applicable" option for the question related to HR support.

Short Term

48 surveys were received from employees who were absent short term (20 working days or less pro rata). The directorate split was:

Customer and Digital – 30

Policy and Governance – 4

Early Intervention and Support – 12

Business Development and Growth - 2

I felt supported by my manager during my absence and upon my return to work.

96% Strongly Agreed or Agreed.

4% Disagreed.

I felt supported by human resources during my absence and upon my return to work.

46% Strongly Agreed

31% Agreed

23% Disagreed

I was offered appropriate support (e.g. counselling, physiotherapy, workplace adaptations)

48% Strongly Agreed

29% Agreed

23% Disagreed

I understand the Council's attendance policy.

34% Strongly Agreed

63% Agreed

4% Disagreed

I feel that the attendance policy was applied to me fairly.

25% Strongly Agreed

71% Agreed

4% Disagreed.

Between April 2016 and February 2017 25 employees triggered an absence meeting. 3 were issued with warnings. None appealed.

6 respondents had triggered an attendance meeting due to their absence(s). 1 respondent was issued with a warning at this meeting.

My manager explained the reason for the absence meeting to me.

33% Strongly Agreed

67% Agreed

I felt supported during the meeting.

33% Strongly Agreed

50% Agreed

17% Disagreed

I thought that the outcome of the meeting was fair.

67% Strongly Agreed

17% Agreed

17% Disagreed

Additional comments

14 additional comments were received:

8 employees describe a positive experience with managers described as "supportive", "understanding", and "caring".

2 employees expressed dissatisfaction at being invited to an absence meeting.

1 employee felt that the absence policy was implemented in her service but not in other (none specified) services.

1 employee thought that planned post-operative recovery should not require the same level of manager contact.

2 employees stated that HR were not directly involved in their short term absence.

Analysis

In considering the negative responses:

2 employees did not feel supported in their return to work following a short term absence. 1 employee works in Customer and Digital and 1 in Early Intervention and Support.

11 employees did not feel supported by HR during their short term absence. 9 are from Customer and Digital, 1 from Early intervention and support, 1 from Policy and Governance.

11 employees were not offered appropriate support during a short term absence. 7 from Customer and Digital, 2 from Early Intervention and Support, 1 from Business Development and Growth, 1 from Policy and Governance.

2 employees did not understand the Council's attendance policy. Both employees were from Customer and Digital.

2 employees did not feel that the policy was applied to them fairly. 1 employee from Customer and Digital and 1 from Early Intervention and Support.

1 employee did not feel supported during their absence meeting, they are from Customer and Digital. This employee also did not think that the outcome of the meeting was fair. This employee was issued with a warning.

Conclusion

Employees across the Council understand the attendance policy and feel that the long term absence policy is applied fairly and consistently. They feel supported by management and HR both during and after their absence.

Employees who are absent short term are less likely to feel supported by HR, although this may be due to limited HR involvement as the process is manager led.

Not all employees are being offered interventions to support them through a short term absence. There may be more work to be done to ensure managers are aware of what can be offered. Conversely, it may be that the support the Council offers is not appropriate to some types of illness, for example viral illness.

The employee who was issued with a verbal warning was unhappy with the process and felt unsupported.

More employees in Customer and Digital responded negatively to questions around the short term absence policy; however this may be due to a higher number of absences and therefore greater number of returns for this directorate. There is no trend which proportionately identifies greater levels of dissatisfaction to any specific directorate. It is possible that should the survey be repeated, service level could be incorporated, however this may impact on response rate and the accuracy of responses.