

**POLICY & RESOURCES  
CABINET BOARD**

**1<sup>ST</sup> April 2010**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE**

**DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT  
J.S.FLOWER**

**&**

**HEAD OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT & INNOVATION  
K.JONES**

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**PART 1. Doc Code: PRB-010410-REP-CE-KJ-J(1)**

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## **SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT – CORPORATE REVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To provide Members with details of the review of sickness absence management that is being taken forward as part of the Council's Workforce Strategy.

### **Background**

The Council is facing a period of unprecedented change. To support the changes, Cabinet has approved a Workforce Strategy which, amongst other things, seeks to reduce the levels of absence (and associated costs) due to sickness.

Trade unions have endorsed the priority given to this review and have agreed to work jointly with management to examine the underlying causes of absences and to ensure the Council's arrangements for managing those absences are effective. Additionally, a number of managers and employees have expressed an interest in being actively involved in the review.

Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee has already asked for additional information to be provided on the levels of absence across the Council and the measures being taken to reduce those absence levels. Given that a formal review of arrangements has been initiated to implement the Workforce Strategy, Members of the Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider becoming actively involved in the review as it develops.

### **Outline Plan**

An outline plan for taking the review forward has been developed:

#### **a) Baseline analysis**

This stage will involve a detailed analysis of sickness absence across the Council. It will provide a basis upon which any improvement work can be evaluated and it will also identify sickness absence patterns that should be prioritised for detailed review.

As well as capturing details of the sickness absences, this phase of work will also examine the capacity that has been established to manage sickness

absence. This will include an analysis of the activities of the health and safety and occupational health teams, the activities of the personnel and payroll teams. It will also involve getting information from managers and employees about the current approaches.

A short presentation will be made at the Committee meeting on the issues emerging from the analysis conducted so far.

**b) Occupational Health – Role and Processes**

One of the areas already identified by occupational health professionals, managers and employees as requiring review is that of the role of the Occupational Health Unit and associated processes. The support and advice provided by the OHU is appreciated by managers and employees. However, there is a need to clarify respective roles and to ensure that referrals into Occupational Health and the way in which OHU advice is provided back to managers is working effectively. The aim will be to ensure that the Council's investment in occupational health specialist support is optimised.

**c) Services with high levels of absence**

The trade unions have proposed that a joint approach should be taken as a matter of some urgency to reviewing areas of service where sickness absence is high. Streetcare services have volunteered to be the first area that is examined. The review will examine underlying reasons for absence and support the service to address those reasons. If necessary, the Council's policy and procedures will be amended to ensure that managers have the right range of tools and support. As well as helping to reduce absence levels in these particular services, a key output of this work will be to provide and agreed method for reviewing all other areas of high absence levels on a rolling basis.

**d) Recording and Management Information Systems**

Timely, accurate and relevant management information is important to ensure that sickness absence is monitored regularly and that continuous improvement work is being undertaken to address the causes of absence. This element of the review will involve a critical examination of the recording processes and the sufficiency of existing management information systems.

## **Timing**

The review is underway and will be led by the Director of Environment (designate) and the Head of Change Management and Innovation.

It is anticipated that the detailed baseline will be completed by the end of April with the reviews of the other three elements substantially completed by the end of June 2010. Following the completion of this phase of work plans for further phases of work will be outlined.

## **Recommendation**

That Members of the Scrutiny Committee note the details set out in this report and indicate how they would wish to be involved in the corporate review of sickness absence management as it progresses.

## **List of Background Papers**

None

## **Wards Affected**

All

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