

**POLICY & RESOURCES
CABINET BOARD**

16TH JUNE 2011

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

JOINT REPORT OF THE

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

&

**DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT
J.FLOWER**

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MAXIMISING ATTENDANCE AT WORK – PROGRESS UPDATE

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with a summary of progress made during the financial year 2010-11 in reducing sickness absence levels and to outline plans to make further improvement during 2011-12.

Background

In 2010-11 the Council established a comprehensive Workforce Strategy to underpin its change programme. One of the elements of that Strategy was the reduction of sickness absence.

Whilst consideration had been given to reducing the cost of sickness absence by removing entitlement to sickness pay on the first three days of any period of absence, following negotiations with trade unions, the Council decided to take forward a review of the way in which sickness absence was being managed. That review was led by the Director of Environment and the Head of Change Management and Innovation. The approach was based on systems thinking principles with trade union representatives (full time officers and shop stewards) working alongside human resources professionals, service managers and employees to examine the underlying causes of sickness absence and then designing a new policy approach to addressing those underlying causes.

A new policy, supported by a new recording system and training programme was tested in the summer of 2010 across a range of service areas that were reporting relatively high levels of sickness absence. Following this trial period, the new approach was formally adopted and the roll-in of the new arrangements commenced December 2010. The roll in is complete in four directorates and work to complete roll-in for the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate is in progress. Two schools have been identified to support work to reduce absence in those settings.

Main Achievements 2010-11

The achievements to date can be summarised as follows:

- The overall number of days lost due to sickness absence fell by 19.1% over the 12 month period ended 31st March 2011, compared with the previous year. (The number of days lost due to sickness absence in 2009-10 is recorded as full time equivalent 72,871.5 days, with days lost in 2010-11 recorded as 58,980.5 days.). A more detailed analysis of the underlying trends and patterns will be available at committee for review;
- The corporate priority attached to the reduction of sickness absence across the whole council has been acknowledged and acted upon across all services;
- Improvement work has been jointly owned by trade unions, managers and human resources professionals;
- Reports have been introduced to scrutiny committees, enabling Members to track the progress being made for the council as a whole, and for individual services;
- There is, amongst managers, increased awareness and understanding of the causes of absence;
- Managers have been empowered to take the appropriate action to address persistent problems of absenteeism;
- Employees and managers awareness of the wider range of employment policies in place to enable employees to balance work and home life has been improved;
- There has been a significant reduction in short term, persistent absenteeism – especially in areas that participated in the early trials;
- Enhanced reporting arrangements are enabling a whole organisation, up to date view of employees absent from work;
- For participating services, improved management information is available from the desk top on absence trends and patterns of absence for individual employees;
- Paybill costs have reduced as a consequence of absenteeism dropping, helping to improve the competitiveness of some services; and
- The Council has been able to retain payment for the first three days of sickness absence.

Improvement Priorities 2011-12

During 2011-12 it will be important to ensure the new approach is embedded in management practice across the Council. Additionally, focused work needs to continue in those service areas where absence levels remain relatively high. An implementation board has been established to oversee the full roll-in programme. Particular areas of focus will include:

- Full roll-in of the new approach to all five directorates;
- Enhanced management reports to be designed and available from the new recording system;
- Continued scrutiny of sickness absence patterns by elected Members through the scrutiny process and through directorate management teams;
- Further examination of the referral processes into and out of Occupational Health;
- Further streamlining of reporting procedures to eradicate, as far as possible, unnecessary paper processing;
- Identification of service areas with continued, relatively high sickness absence levels and concentrated support to be provided to the managers of those services to examine the scope for reducing absences further;
- Piloting of a revised approach in the two schools that have been selected and, following the pilot phase, the development of a plan to roll in a new approach to all schools; and
- Review of the Council's existing technologies to determine the long term system solution to support absence management.

Recommended

1. That Members note the revised arrangements that have been put in to maximise attendance at work and the consequential reduction in absence levels across the Council.
2. That Members note and endorse the proposed improvement priorities for 2011-12.

List of Background Papers

Workforce Strategy
Maximising Attendance at Work Policy

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Wards Affected

All