

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

12^h April 2018

Report of the Director of Education – Aled Evans

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All Wards

LONG TERM SICKNESS TASKFORCE SCHOOLS UPDATE

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update in relation to the work of the Long Term Sickness Taskforce in Schools and the early intervention methodology pilot.

2. Background to the Long Term Sickness Taskforce Project

2.1 In April 2016, the School Sickness Taskforce was established to undertake an examination of long term sickness absence [over 28 days absent] and to understand what actions would be needed to reduce the incidences of absence and / or the length of absences with the aim of reducing the costs of absence to Schools. The School Sickness Taskforce is jointly funded by Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and the Education Directorate.

In March 2016 CYPE approved a long term sickness absence management project to be implemented in schools. This was with a view to effectively improving the management of long term sickness absence and reducing it over time. A dedicated HR Officer focussing on long term sickness absence case management has been in place since

March 2016 and started to brief schools on the long term sickness absence project in April 2016 as follows:

- Secondary and special schools: April – June 2016
- Primary Schools: Mid-October – end of November 2016, with final session held in January 2017

93% attendance of Head Teachers/Bursars was achieved. 30 Chair of Governors also attended.

It is understood that most schools have now briefed staff on the long term absence project, (see briefing note in Appendix 1). Case management support has been available to secondary and special schools since the briefings in April and to primaries since mid-October 2016, although the dedicated HR Officer has tried to capture all known long term absence cases since September 2016 (which is difficult as absence data is not immediately available to centrally based staff).

2.2 The Early Intervention and Effective Communication Strategy within the Sickness Taskforce Project combines the following:

- **Early intervention**
- **Effective communication**
- Informal **Return to Work Plan Meetings** with a clear focus on the return to work
- Additional HR resources utilised for **rigorous case management** and **manager/Headteacher prompting** at each key stage
- **Clear roles and responsibilities** – managers/Headteachers retain responsibility and accountability for managing absence
- School Briefings and Training for Schools
- **Stress risk assessments** to be carried out for every instance of identified work related stress (even where employee is not absent)
- **How to Guides** on managing long term absence
- **Occupational Health Referral Hotline** to ensure referrals are necessary and add value

2.4 The Taskforce was phased in over a period of time, from April 2016 – June 2016 the secondary schools began the procedure and from October 2016 – January 2017 the primary schools phased in the process.

3. Summary of Findings

3.1 Taskforce Activity

3.1.2 During the 2016/17 school year, the dedicated HR Officer advised on 160 long term absence cases (some repeat), as well as 11 where long term absence (over 28 days) was avoided through early intervention. A total of 133 formal long term sickness absence meetings were held (all attended by HR), as indicated below.

- Informal Return to Work Planning Meetings: Not known (Schools' are inconsistent in terms of informing HR if/when completed)
- Formal Stage 1 meetings: 72
- Formal Stage 2 meetings: 36
- Formal Stage 2 review meetings: 11
- Formal Stage 3 meetings: 14
 - Of which:
 - Ill Health Capability dismissals: 9
 - Ill Health Retirements: 5
- Voluntary Redundancies: 3 (effective end of Aug 2017)
- Early Retirements: 2 (effective end of Aug 2017)

The dedicated HR Officer also attended a number of informal Return to Work Planning meetings and OHU case conferences where necessary/on request.

3.1.3 Table 1 attached in Appendix 1 shows that the average working days lost per employee total for primary schools has decreased by 0.51 days (6.22%), whereas in comprehensives, special and all-through schools the decrease is 0.17 days (2.38%) with an overall decrease in schools of 0.29 days (3.86%) in average working days lost per employee.

3.1.4 There has been a decrease in long term sickness absence across the board for the 12 month period 1st August to 31st July in 2016/17 compared to the same period in 2015/16. A drop in the number of

working days lost by 628 (3.43%) and in the number of FTE working days lost by 72 (0.63%) is shown in Table 2, within Appendix 1.

3.1.5 Table 3 details that long term sickness has decreased in primary schools by 828 working days (7.24%). The FTE working days lost has decreased by 818.87 (11.73%).

3.1.6 Table 4 shows that long term sickness has decreased in secondary schools by 104 working days (1.51%). The FTE working days lost has increased by 510.29 (11.47%).

3.1.7 Table 5 below details the 8 most common absence reasons for the last 2 years. The most common reason each year has been for absences due to stress related illnesses – This increased by 542.14 FTE working days in 2016/17 compared to the same period a year earlier. The other absence reason includes all absences (such as bowel related, stomach pain related and neck pain related) with a lower total FTE working days lost figure than the 7th most common absence reason in each year.

3.1.8 Long term sickness absences attributed to ‘Stress Related’ illnesses accounted for 4881.35 FTE working days in the period shown during 2015/16 – 42.7% of the total FTE working days lost in that year due to long term sickness. In 2016/17, the FTE working days lost figure rose to 5423.49 – 47.75% of the years overall FTE working days lost due to long term sickness. Table 6 below shows the different types of ‘Stress Related’ illnesses as well as the number of instances case managed by HR in each year. In 2016/17, 14 fewer ‘Stress related’ cases were managed compared to 2015/16, however, it can be argued that it is as a direct result of adding the reason ‘Stress – Other Work’ to the Vision system – 13 cases were managed under this reason.

4.2 Cost benefits

4.2.1 In terms of financial savings, primary schools have spent around £200,000 less on long term sickness absence in 2017/18 than in 2015/16 prior to the schools sickness taskforce. In 2017/18 the primary schools have underspent the SLA set aside to cover the cost of long term sickness absence by £84,834.

4.2.2

	15/16	16/17	17/18
Expenditure	£ 606,786	£ 530,868	£ 426,010
LLAN contribution	- £ 471,712	-£ 476,880	-£ 487,373
Over Spend Reapportionment	- £ 135,039	-£ 53,810	

4.2.3 We are not able to split the total sickness spend in the Secondary Sector between long term and short term absence, but the total sickness absence costs in secondary schools is listed below:

2015/16 £532,721.96

2016/17 £717,512.01

2017/18 £641,898.54

5. Next steps

5.1 Funding is currently available until August 31st 2018 and beyond this point negotiations with schools are ongoing to sustain the additional resources based in the HR team.

6. Risk Management

Sickness absence must continue to be managed effectively or there is the risk that sickness rates will increase with associated loss of productivity and budgetary impact.

7. Financial Impact

The costs of the HR Officer is a full time Grade 8 post, £27,668 plus on costs, which is shared between the Primary Schools, Secondary

Schools and the Education Directorate. This cost can be offset against the savings listed above in this report.

8. Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

9. Equality Impact Assessment

There is no requirement for an Equality Impact Assessment in relation to this item.

10. Workforce Impacts

This report will be shared with recognised trade unions in respective consultative forums for discussion and consideration.

11. Legal Impacts

The management of absence must be fair and reasonable, and managers should ensure compliance with the School's Maximising Attendance of Staff in Schools Procedure and related policies.

12. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Members NOTE the update report.

13. Background Papers

The Maximising Attendance of Staff in Schools Policy and Procedure.

14. Officer Contact

For further information on this report item, please contact Aled Evans, Director of Education.

Table 1

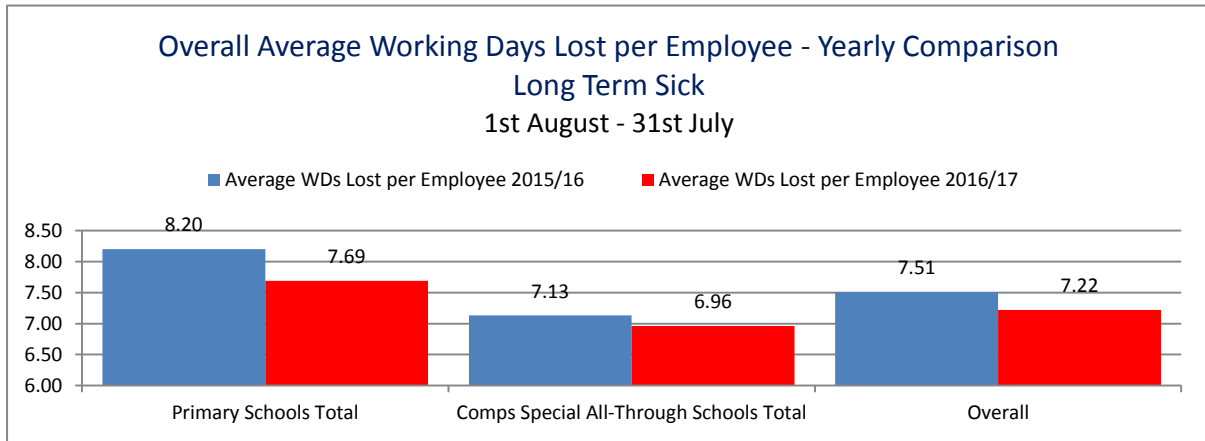


Table 2

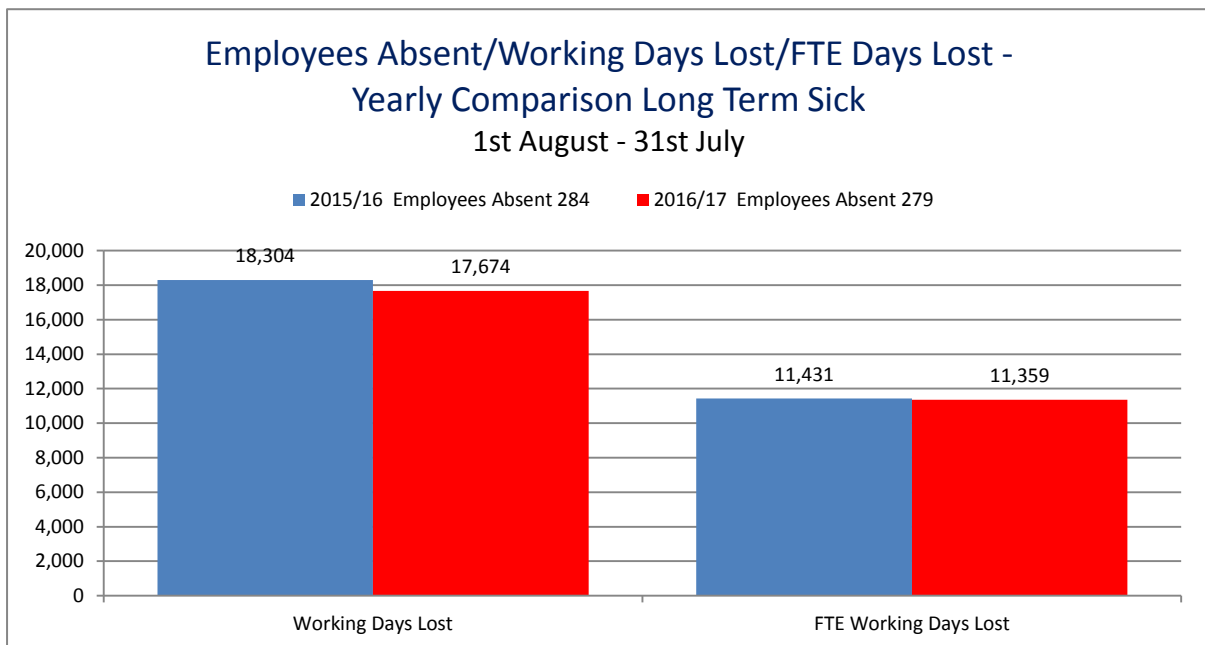


Table 3

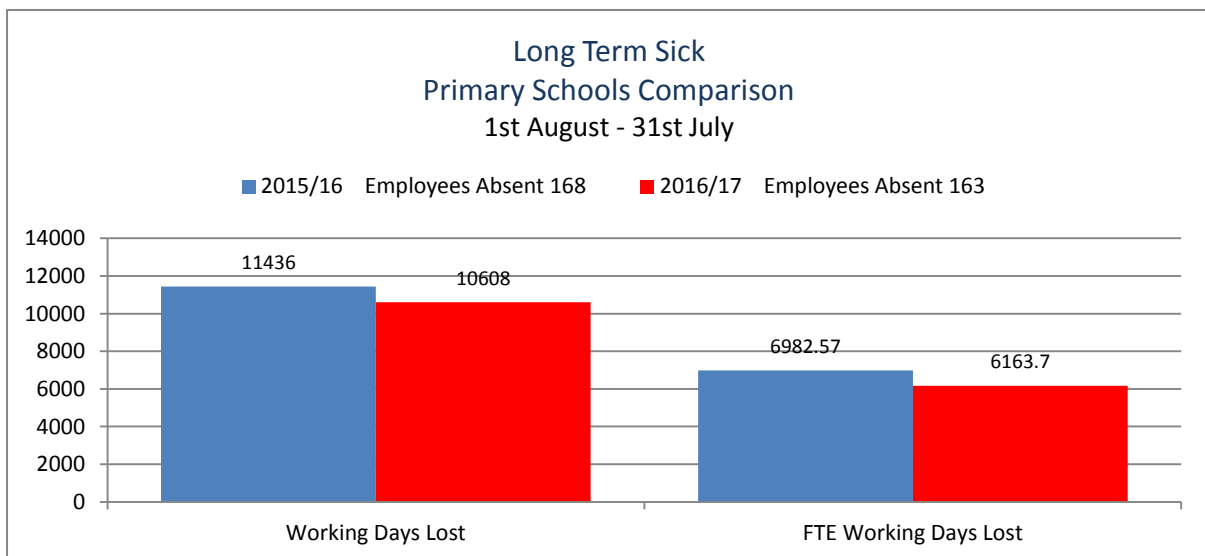


Table 4

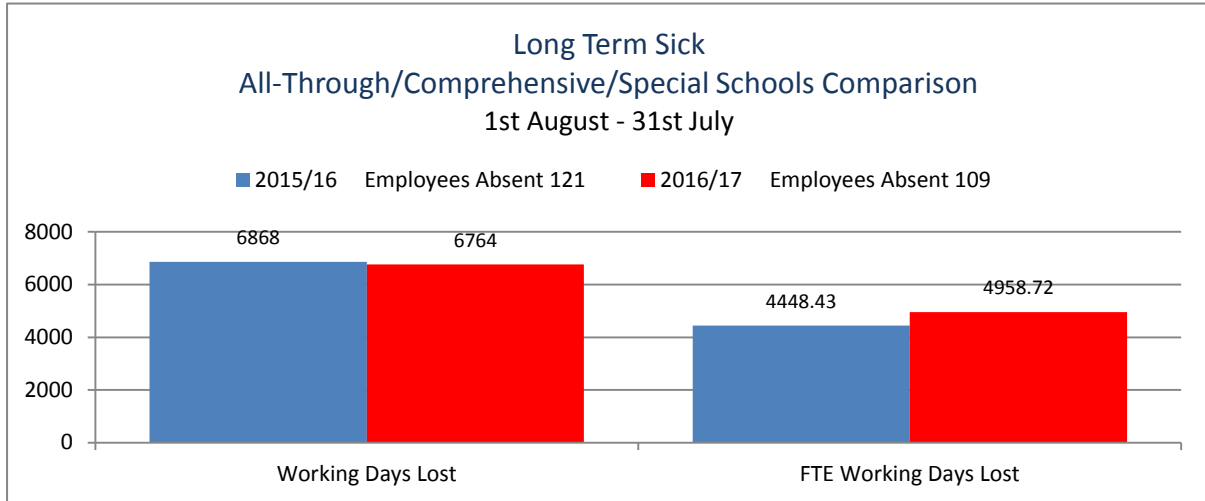


Table 5

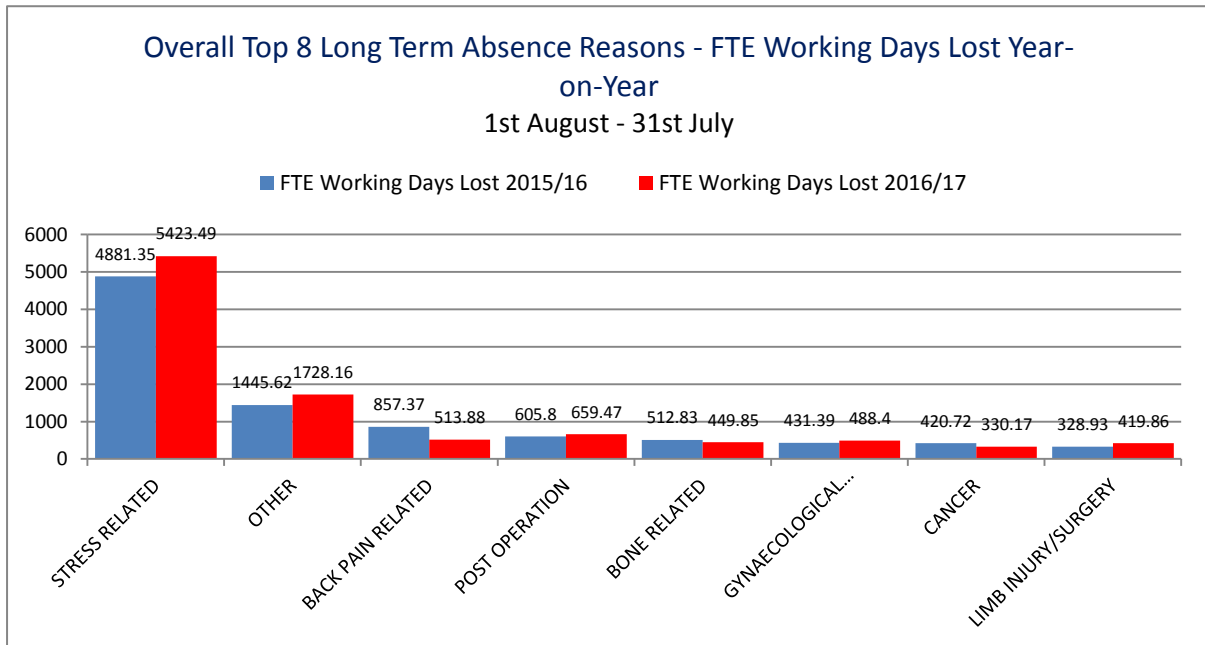
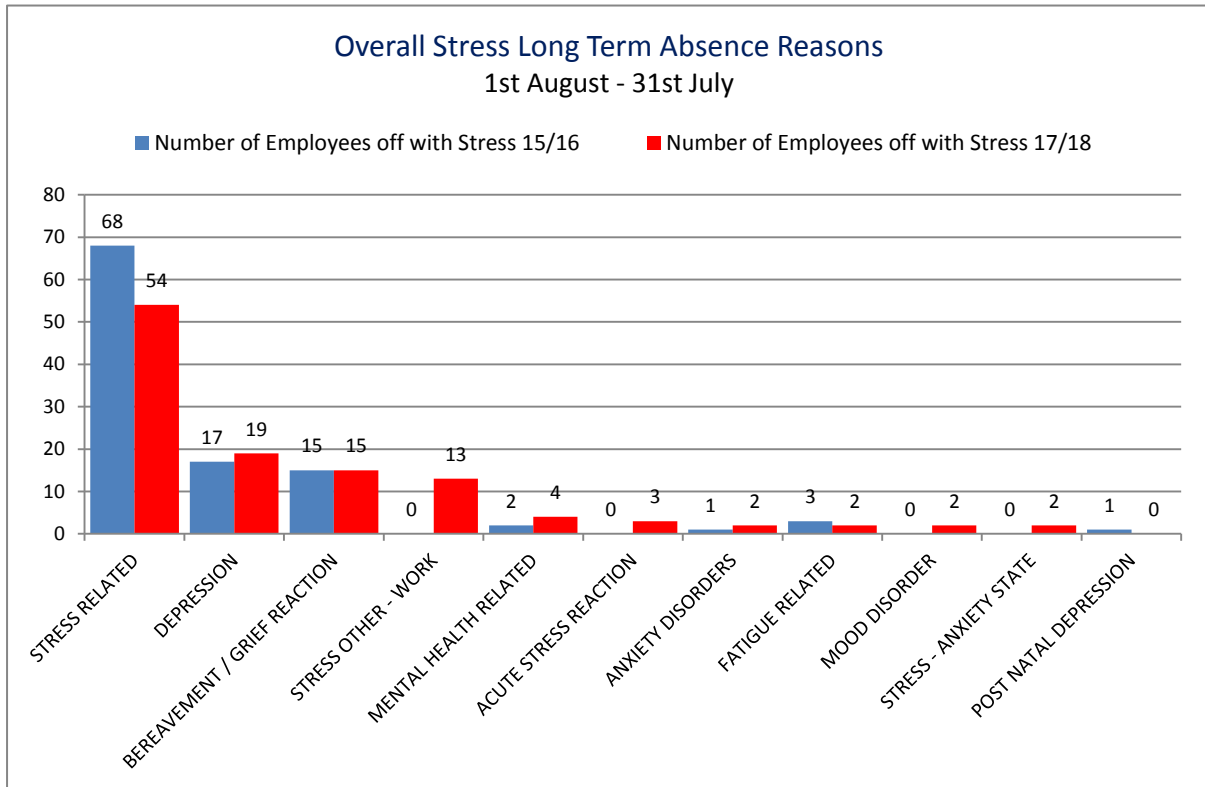


Table 6



Duration of Long term Sickness Absence

Table 1 below shows that fewer employees are now taking sick leave overall (4 fewer), and that fewer employees are off work for longer than 6 months (11 fewer). This could indicate that the policy timeframes are starting to have an impact.

Table 1

	No Employees Long Term Sick	No Employees Sick less than 3 months	No Employees Sick 3 - 6 months	No Employees Sick more than 6 months
2015/16	268	175	53	40
2016/17	264	167	68	29

