

Agenda Item No: 7

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny (Resources)

Date of Meeting: 11 March 2010

Report Title: Scrutiny Review of Sickness Absence Management - Update

Report By: Verna Connolly
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Purpose of Report

To update Overview and Scrutiny Committee of progress made since the Scrutiny Review of Sickness Absence Management report was published on 10 March 2009.

Recommendation(s)

- 1. That progress made on reducing sickness absence to below the target figure of 8.75 working days per employee be noted.**
- 2. That further progress on reducing sickness absence levels is reported to Overview and Scrutiny through the regular quarterly performance monitoring process.**

Reasons for Recommendations

There has been significant improvement in the levels of sickness absence throughout the Council. Progress in this area is still being made and will be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny through the regular quarterly performance reviews.

Introduction

At its meeting on the 10 March 2009 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Resources received the final report of the Scrutiny Review into Sickness Absence management. At the meeting an action plan was considered and it was resolved that action 5 of the plan should be deleted as it was outside the terms of reference of the group. It was agreed that the final report and amended action plan should be forwarded to Cabinet for discussion.

Cabinet considered the management response into the scrutiny review at its meeting on 27 April 2009.

Progress to date

There has been improvement in the Council's sickness absence levels since the last report to Committee. Our sickness absence is currently 5.83 (end of QTR 3) per employee even though there has been a slight increase in absences for viral infections including Swine Flu.

We have continued to work pro-actively with managers and trade unions using the measures identified below:

Home visits

Telephone contact

Employee assistance programme

Trent HR management system – sickness absence monitoring

Self certification

Occupational health referrals

Departmental management teams sickness absence reports

HR briefings

Health checks for Environmental Health staff

Careful analysis of health questionnaire at recruitment stage; medical advice is sought when appropriate.

Each sickness absence case considered on its own merit

Dismissals due ill health or capability as a last resort.

In addition to the work identified above we have also made significant progress in taking forward the actions agreed by the scrutiny review and supported by management.

| Action | Action for | actioned by | completed |
|--|------------|-------------|-----------|
| Provide access for members to Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) | members | POD | Dec 2008 |
| Provide access for members to Benenden Health Care | members | POD | Dec 2008 |
| Change absence warnings to "sickness warning" in all relevant policies | staff | POD | May 2009 |

| | | | |
|--|----------|-----|------------|
| Change absence baseline to 8.75 days (average per employee) | staff | POD | Apr 2009 |
| Introduction of Absence Management Toolkit to assist managers | staff | POD | Apr 2009 |
| HR briefings for senior managers on absence management | managers | POD | May 2009 |
| Improved training for other managers and Unison Workplace reps on absence management | managers | POD | April 2009 |

Placing more emphasis on managers undertaking sickness absence reviews than at present – The establishment of a sickness absence management team whose main role is to monitor cases and to work with managers to ensure that sickness reviews are undertaken in timely manner. This also helps us to ensure that our approach to sickness absence is uniform across the authority.

Requesting GP and consultants reports more often and earlier, when appropriate - Previously, GP and Consultants reports were requested by the Occupational Health Practitioner only. It is now common practice for the POD team to request GP and or Consultants reports with employee's permission. This intervention has resulted in a less protracted process with more positive outcomes for both parties.

Reduction of baseline from 9 days to 8.75 – The absence level for 08/09 year end was 9.67 days per employee. Sickness absence is currently 5.83 days per employee at financial year to date. However, the total sickness absence for the 12 month period from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009 was 8.2 which is lower than the revised baseline of 8.75.

Conclusion

There has been significant improvement in the management of sickness absence across the Council. Continued monitoring and management action is necessary to build on the improvement made. Further progress to be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee through the regular performance reviews.

Wards Affected

None

Area(s) Affected

None

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Equalities and Community Cohesiveness | No |
| Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17) | No |
| Risk Management | No |
| Environmental Issues | No |
| Economic/Financial Implications | No |
| Human Rights Act | No |
| Organisational Consequences | No |

Background Information

Insert a list of appendices and/or additional documents

Officer to Contact

Officer Name
Officer Email Address
Officer Telephone Number
