

Title of Report:	Absenteeism Report – Quarter 1 2021/2022
Committee Report Submitted To:	Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	16 September 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Innovation and Innovation
Outcome	Improve Service Delivery and Performance
Lead Officer	Director of Corporate Services

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals. N/A		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with Quarter 1 (1 March 2021 to 30 June 2021) information regarding Absenteeism throughout the Council.

2.0 Background

Absenteeism within the Council is closely monitored and reviewed in accordance with Policies and Procedures, and in line with NJC Terms and Conditions.

ODHR Business Partners work closely with each of the Directorates, Managers and Supervisors to assist and support through a range of preventative proactive measures alongside the reactive including referrals to Occupational Health, absence review meetings, referrals for Ill Health Retirement.

3.0 Performance Improvement Plan 2021/2022

3.1 Progress to date – Quarter 1 (1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021) Objective 4, Performance Improvement Plan

Outputs

- OD/HR continue to co-ordinate a programme of training for employees and line managers on the Council's newly revised Sickness Absence Policy which came into effect on 1st July 2020.
- To date 116 line managers and 254 employees have been trained on the new policy (total 370 employees).
- Face to Face training is required in the Operations Department and dates have been scheduled to provide this training now that restrictions have been relaxed.
- Work is ongoing with stakeholders to identify and agree further measures to support employees such as access to private Health Care, access to specific treatments, health insurance etc.
- In light of COVID-19 Occupational Health appointments are mostly by telephone, however face to face appointments can be arranged if required.
- Councils' highest reason for sickness absence is the Sickness Category including conditions such as Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue syndrome. However, it is noted there is a reduction of 607.05 days from the 2019/20 figures (See Table 4 for further analysis).
- Employees who are absent due to a stress or a stress related absence are referred immediately to Occupational Health so that interventions can be put in place at an early stage. Employees are also reminded of the counselling services provided by Inspire.
- In Quarter 1, 21 employees availed of these services, 5 of which are new referrals.
- The Health & Well Being Group activities included a successful walking challenge.
- Regional health and well-being initiatives also included the 'One Billion Steps' Challenge, with individual staff members and teams participating.
- ODHR continue to issue emails to staff covering a variety of topics in relation to general health and wellbeing including Mental Health.

- ODHR work closely with the PR department in providing wellbeing content for the weekly Staff News.
- Council are mindful of the unique and difficult time we are working in and have been providing practical advice and solutions for staff who continue to work from home. Further details provided in Section 6.

3.2 Outcomes

Please Note: As 2020/21 has not been a usual year due to the COVID 19 Pandemic, the sickness figures from the previous year (2019/20 actuals) will be used as a baseline to report against)

- A 2.75% reduction in the number of days lost to Council through long term sickness (2,237.37 in Q1 2019/20, target 2,175.84 days in 2020/21, actual 1,362.68 days)
- A 2.5% reduction in the average number of days lost per employee through sickness absenteeism (4.03 days per employee in Q1 2019/20, target 3.93 in 2020/21, actual 2.68 days per employee)
- We will maintain the average time for an Occupational Health Review from 4 weeks to 2 weeks

3.3 Quarter 4 Performance Against Targets

Table 1 Quarter 1 Performance Against Targets and in-Year Comparisons

	12 months ending 30/06/19	Reduction target against same period last year	12 months ending 30/06/21	On Target/ Not On Target
Average number of days lost per employee through sickness absenteeism	4.03	3.93 (2.75% target)	2.68 (33.42% reduction)	On Target
Number of Days lost to Council through long term sickness	2,237.37	2,175.84 (2.5% target)	1,362.68 (39.09% reduction)	On Target
Average time for an Occupational Health Review (We will maintain the average time for an Occupational health Review from 4 weeks to 2)	4 weeks	2 weeks (from 4 weeks to 2 weeks)	2 weeks	On Target
Staff members engaging in Council's wellbeing activities			327*	

*93 participants involved in the Councils Walking Challenges / a further 6 employees have joined the Councils Gyms / 228 staff completed Online Personal Well being courses

4.0 Analysis of Quarter 1 Data

Table 2 – Analysis of Absenteeism Data

April – June	2021/22	2019/20
No. of employees absent	77	135
Long Term as % of total absence <i>(absence greater than 20 days)</i>	86.9%	88.9%
Short Term as % of total absence <i>(absence less than 20 days)</i>	13.1%	11.1%
Average days lost per employee <i>(combined short and long term)</i>	2.68	4.03

Table 3 – Top 5 reasons for Absence*

April – June	2021/22	2019/20
Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue	35.73%	46.36%
Musculo-skeletal problems	19.14%	9.40%
Infections	10.13%	2.51%
Back and neck problems	9.63%	7.96%
Heart, blood pressure and circulation	7.91%	6.15%

Table 4 – Analysis of Stress and Stress Related Absences

	12 months ending 30/06/19	12 months ending 31/06/21	Difference
Total days absent under the Sickness Category for Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue	1,167.22	560.17	Reduction of 607.05 days
Stress listed as sickness reason – Total Days absent	644.86	189.07	Reduction of 455.79 days
Work related Stress listed as sickness reason – Total days absent	458.59	34.02	Reduction of 424.57 days

Table 5 - Analysis of the Cost of Absence

	12 months ending 30/06/19	12 months ending 31/06/21	Difference
Total Days Lost	2,517.72 days	1,567.70 days	Reduction of 950.02 days
Average hourly rate	£19.81	£19.77	
Total estimated costs*	£369,083	£229,351	Reduction of £139,732

*Estimated cost of sickness, not including Agency backfill, acting-up, overtime, retraining, lost productivity etc

5.0 Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan

The Council have been involved in the development of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan. This Strategy has been developed to guide the work of the Local Government in the longer term, and to focus on the action plan for 2020 - 2023. The Vision for the Strategy is based on the acronym **ASK**:

Accept

One of the key messages to come out of the consultation was the need to accept that anyone at any level in Councils and the NIHE can have poor mental health, and to work towards a culture where mental health can be discussed openly. As organisations, we need to demonstrate a visible commitment to mental health in the workplace by providing an environment where individuals feel accepted and safe to speak openly about mental health including their personal experiences.

Support

The Group seeks to ensure that individuals in Councils and the NIHE feel supported in relation to their health and wellbeing and that, if they are experiencing poor mental health, they know how and where to access support.

Knowledge

Mental health is about wellness rather than illness and is not merely the absence of a mental health condition. Mental health exists on a continuum, or range: from positive, healthy functioning at one end through to severe symptoms of mental health conditions at the other. The Group seeks to support individuals at all levels in Councils and the NIHE to have access to the knowledge and tools to support anyone experiencing poor mental health and create healthy workplaces.

Activities are being considered for 2021/22 based on the Strategy and Action Plan.

6.0 Support provided to Staff during year – COVID arrangements

- Flexible working arrangements available such as parental leave, special leave, annual leave, toil and flexi
- Encouraging staff to have breaks during the day and to take annual leave
- Importance of regular staff contact/communication using methods such as whatsapp, MS Teams, Phone calls, Staff Newsletter
- Initiatives from Inspire
- Health and Well Being Groups Walking Challenge
- Regional Well Being initiatives such as 'One Billion Steps'
- Stress Control Classes through Health Trusts delivered by professionals offering suggestions/advice/support, and providing staff time to attend same
- Supervisors and Managers applying practical and sensible solutions, managing workloads and priorities, whilst delivering services, mindful of public and expectations
- Draft Agile Working Policy has been presented to Trade Unions and is currently under consideration

This quarterly report will continue to be provided to Audit Committee, and the information will also be feed through Council's Performance Improvement Plan.

7.0 Recommendation:

It is recommended that Council notes the report presented.