

WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION & RESOURCES POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2015

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| SUBJECT: | ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT POLICY |
| WARD/S AFFECTED | ALL |
| REPORT OF: | ACTING HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT |
| RESPONSIBLE PORFOLIO HOLDER | CLLR A JONES |
| KEY DECISION | NO |

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out proposed changes to the Council's Attendance Management Policy and Procedure following a review.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

The Council's Human Resources policies are subject to an ongoing review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, legally compliant and provide a valuable and workable resource for employees and managers on employment related issues in the workplace.

The Council's absence performance has been regularly reported to Policy and Performance Committee. In 2014/15, the average number of days lost per employee was 10.37 days against a target of 9.75 days.

Absence data provided by North West Employers shows that Wirral Council's performance in comparison to that of other North West authorities has improved. The average level of absence amongst 20 Authorities was 11.05 (up from 10.61 in 2013/14) with Wirral ranked seventh highest.

This demonstrates that absence is an issue for other Councils and the work we are doing is achieving some success in containing absence levels in context of significant change affecting Local Authorities. Quarter 1 in 2015/16 has seen an increase in absence levels although this has adjusted slightly in July. The average absence level in the public sector is around 8 days per year and we are committed to improving performance.

There has to be a holistic approach to managing absence. We must ensure that there are a range of support initiatives to assist employees to stay in work but also ensure our attendance management policy is fit for purpose and allows for management action to address concerning levels of absence both informally and formally when appropriate.

We have implemented a range of measures over past couple of years to manage absence in the workplace.

Training

| Training | Employees who have undertaken this training |
|--|---|
| Attendance management e-learning | 976 |
| Stress awareness E-learning for staff and managers | 3,574 |
| Attendance Management Course | 309 |
| 30 days to Fantastic management | 26 |
| Stress awareness and personal resilience | 120 |
| Resilient leadership (Managing Stress and Staying Resilient) | 97 |
| Working through change | 281 |
| Leading people through change | 258 |
| Coaching | 153 |
| WRAP training | 187 |
| Mental Health Awareness | 105 |
| Demystifying Mental Health | 140 |

The Council has introduced a range of other interventions around stress to assist employees in returning to work as soon as possible.

Occupational Health contract/Employee Assistance Programme

The Council has a contract in place with an external provider and the Employee Assistance Programme also offers 6 'free' sessions of counselling for any employee without charge. We have the facility to refer employee to Occupational Health for medical advice.

Enhanced Management Information

We have also significantly increased the information available to managers via their desktop which can be broken down by Directorate, service area, team and individual level. This allows identification of employees who have met triggers or have concerning patterns of absence.

Case Management

HR Business Partners attend Departmental Management Teams on a monthly basis to discuss sickness absence cases, highlight trends and concerns and ensure there is a plan in place next to each long term case.

Chief Officer Briefings

In July 2015 Strategic Directors and Chief Officers, supported by HR, met line managers to discuss the Council's performance and make clear the line manager's role and responsibilities in managing absence. Feedback from those sessions has also helped inform proposed policy and procedure changes.

3.0 FURTHER ACTION

We have a number of initiatives in progress to continue to manage absence;

Refresh of training

We will be refreshing mandatory training (including e-learning) for line managers and developing the tools and guidance available to managers.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

We are developing a Health and Wellbeing strategy which will bring together all the actions we intend to take to address issues of health, wellbeing and absence in the workplace. We are working with colleagues in public health to access national and local health initiatives and events and ensure there is proactive support in place for employees. We are exploring bespoke mental health and stress interventions which can be targeted to employees in specific areas.

Proposed Policy and Procedure changes

Most large organisations have a policy and procedure in place to manage absence in the workplace. Under the policy and procedure managers are required to:

- record absence
- maintain contact with employee during absence
- make referrals to Occupational Health for long term sickness
- hold a back to work meeting with employees
- advise employees informally if attendance is a concern
- take formal action (issue warnings) where appropriate

Within the Council's policy, as is common in most policies, there are a series of 'triggers' which may result in formal action being taken.

Following a review, we are recommending a number of changes to the Council Attendance Management policy. The key changes are:

- A policy requirement that employees are referred to Occupational Health immediately (day 1) for stress related absence (this is currently practice but not a policy requirement).
- Adoption of the following triggers in relation to short-term absence.
 - Any period of unauthorised absence **OR**
 - 3 periods of absence up to 3 days within a 6 calendar month period **OR**
 - 2 periods of absence over 4 days within a 6 calendar month period **OR**
 - 2 periods of absence over 7 days within a 12 calendar month period **OR**
 - Unacceptable patterns of absence

Appendix One (a) and (b) sets out current and proposed triggers. The recommended changes to first stage of absence to specify a number of days rather than just occasions of absence will strengthen the operation of the policy and add clarity. It remains a fundamental principle of managing absence that an employee is made aware informally that their absence is a concern before formal action is taken and the policy retains this.

These 'triggers' are already in the policy in place for schools based employees. The policy changes would ensure consistency of application between the Council and schools in application of the attendance management policy.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

4.1 There are no specific risks arising out of this report.

5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 There are no other specific options to consider arising out of this report. There are a wide range of absence triggers that could be considered but adopting those already agreed for schools based staff is consistent.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 In developing the Attendance Management Policy feedback has been received from managers across the Council to identify how policy and practice may be improved.

6.2 Trade Unions were formally consulted on the revised Policy and Procedure. Unison has not agreed to proposed changes. Unite and GMB did not respond to consultation.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

7.1 There are no specific implications arising out of this report.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising out of this report. All expenditure involved has been contained within existing budgets or funded from other specific budgets or has been funded by external organisations. There are no specific staffing implications arising out of this report.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required? Yes

11.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no specific implications arising out of this report.

12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no specific implications arising out of this report.

13.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

That Policy and Performance Committee recommends to Council;

- a) Approval of the revised Absence Policy and Procedure

14.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

14.1 To ensure that Council's HR policies are up to date, legally complaint and relevant to the organisations requirements.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 (a) Stages of Managing Absence - current
Appendix 1 (b) Stages of Managing Absence - proposed
Appendix 2 Attendance Policy
Appendix 3 Attendance Procedure

REFERENCE MATERIAL

None

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

| Council Meeting | Date |
|------------------------|-------------|
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