

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2015

15 ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Acting Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced a report which set out proposed changes to the Council's Attendance Management Policy and Procedure following a review.

The Council's absence performance had 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 showed that Wirral Council's performance in comparison to that of other North West authorities had 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 demonstrated that absence was an issue for other Councils and the work Wirral were doing was achieving some success in containing absence levels in the context of significant change affecting Local Authorities. Quarter 1 in 2015/16 had seen an increase in absence levels although this had adjusted slightly in July. The average absence level in the public sector was around 8 days per year and Wirral was committed to improving performance.

The report gave details of a number of measures undertaken during the past couple of years and went on to recommend a number of changes to the Council's Attendance Management policy, including:

- 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 separate periods of absence of up to 3 working days within any 6 calendar month period OR
 - 2 separate periods of absence of over 3 working days within any 6 calendar month period OR
 - 20 days continuous absence OR
 - Concerns over patterns of absence

The recommended changes to first stage of absence to specify a number of days rather than just occasions of absence would strengthen the operation of the policy and add clarity. It remained a fundamental principle of managing absence that an employee was made aware informally that their absence was a concern before formal action was taken and the policy retained this.

Responding to comments from Members, the Acting Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that Directors did receive a monthly report by directorate and the reporting system was sufficiently advanced to highlight any trends. He acknowledged more work was needed around working with people to identify potential areas of stress and to be able to take preventative measures. Although some changes were proposed to the triggers in relation to short-term absence, the proposed policy did retain an informal stage to the process. It was not felt appropriate to reward those with good attendance but he would look into possible initiatives that could be implemented such as a 'thank you' letter for those with exemplary attendance. Some training had taken place with line managers particularly within social work teams. Training would be across the board to the top of the Council structure although he couldn't answer as to who monitored the Chief Executive's sickness record. A Member suggested that the Committee should have sight of the training programme.

Members further commented that with regard to triggers, there should be some exemptions such as for bereavements. There was a need to look at the proposed policy in comparison with other authorities' policies. The proposals were not vastly different to what existed in the private sector but that officers did need to look at all the available tools to improve sickness absence without being too draconian. As funding cuts continued to hit Local Authorities there were less staff to run services and this did then put pressure on staff to make up for the shortfall in staff resources. The option of staff being able to work from home rather than have to take sick leave should be explored for instances such as staff suffering from colds, whereby they didn't want to spread it on to other colleagues.

Resolved - That this Committee recommends to Council, approval of the revised Attendance Management Policy and Procedure.