

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

21 NOVEMBER 2017

REPORT TITLE:	ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT
REPORT OF:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: HR OD

REPORT SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the work undertaken to respond to the audit review of Attendance Management (Sickness Absence). There are four items to note concerning the development of Council Attendance Management action plan, activity to date and planned approach.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to:

- Note the report
- Note the Attendance Management Action Plan

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 To provide Members with assurance that the Council is taking appropriate measures to address issues identified in the Attendance Management (Sickness Absence) Internal Audit report.
- 1.2 To update Members on the proposed approach to manage attendance in the Council via the Attendance Management action plan.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options considered

3.0 BACKGROUND AND AUDIT OUTPUT

- 3.1 In June 2017 the Chief Internal Auditor brought a report to Committee which highlighted that, following an audit review of Attendance Management (sickness absence) evaluating compliance with corporate policy and procedure, there was a significant governance issue and major organisational risk. The report identified that managers were not complying with policy requirements, this included under and non-reporting of sickness and not taking action in line with policy and procedure.
- 3.2 The internal audit report identified a number of recommendations to address issues of non-compliance including further training and HR support, resetting expectations for managers and proactive monitoring and management of absence by senior management.
- 3.3 In addition to the issues identified in the audit report the Council had a number of wider concerns over the management of attendance, as a result, the recommendations of the audit report were fed into a wider approach to Attendance Management. An Attendance Management action plan (Appendix 1) was developed to:
 - Respond to the recommendations within the audit report
 - Reset expectations for managers to manage attendance
 - Embed a new performance management approach to managing attendance
- 3.4 This report will:
 - Provide an overview of the Attendance Management action plan
 - Outline the approach and key actions so far
 - Outline future activity for 2017 – 18 (Quarter 3 and 4)

- Update Members on current sickness absence position

3.5 Items of Note

3.5.a Attendance Management action plan

The attendance management action plan (Appendix 1) has been developed to:

- Develop a culture where wellbeing is valued and supported
- Improve the management of attendance in line with the policy
- Target and respond to key issues in order to improve wellbeing and attendance

The key themes of the action plan include:

Leadership and communication

The Council's Accountability Statement explicitly states that managers are responsible for managing attendance and during the Performance Appraisal Managers and Team Leaders are asked to confirm they understand their responsibilities in line with the policy.

A Senior Manager Briefing has been arranged to outline the new approach to management of attendance, the performance management framework and reset expectations for Managers.

Further training and support

The audit report identified there was a need for some refresher training for managers.

We will be putting in place both desktop based' and skills based training to ensure managers understand how to use the tools available to them to manage absence and have the skills and confidence to have difficult conversations with employees when their attendance gives cause for concern.

Performance Management and compliance

We have developed a detailed performance management report framework which focuses on the management of absence including compliance with the policy rather than the absence itself. The management information will identify issues of none or under reporting of absence. This will enable senior managers to actively monitor management action in line with the policy and hold managers to account who are not effectively managing the attendance of their staff.

Targeted Action addressing the causes of absence

HR/OD have previously delivered stress management training, we are now widening this training to focus on managing wellbeing at work, including stress and mental health related absence.

Workplace wellbeing

Workplace wellbeing is a key theme of the People Strategy as the Council recognises that employees play a vital role in our ability to deliver our 2020 pledges and the improvement and development of the Council. An action plan has been developed to be supportive and proactive in our approach to workplace wellbeing so they are healthy, happy and engaged to deliver.

The action plan has been shared and agreed with Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

3.5b Approach so far

Identifying targeted areas for action

SLT requested that target areas were identified for monitoring and additional support. The purpose of identifying the hotspots is to concentrate resources on specific areas of concern. That means that we will work with the managers to identify the causes of absence and provide dedicated targeted action.

The overall attendance figure and progress on the hotspots will be monitored at SLT. The targeted areas will be reviewed as progress is made

Meetings have taken place with all Directors and relevant DMTs to discuss the area for targeted action based on these reports.

Performance management

HR has produced a new suite of reports which cover a range of different performance indicators. Discussions have taken place at DMTs outlining the new performance management framework. Feedback has been positive; managers have welcomed the approach and found the reports insightful. The new reports will cover the following areas:

- Individuals currently off sick for 60 days or more,
- Areas with highest number of occasions of sickness
- Areas with highest number of lost days per FTE.
- Absence history per employee for use by managers.
- Detailed and summary data on number of absences and action taken by service.

Long term absence

We are systematically working through list of long term cases. Starting with the longest the aim is to ensure the number of individuals off sick over 60 days is reduced. Whilst there may always be a number of long-term absence cases in an organisation of our size, they should be relatively few and exceptional.

This is being progressed via case conferences involving legal & OH advice with the Director and line manager attending

Dedicated HR resources

We have redirected HR support to form a dedicated team to implement the new attendance management performance framework and provide training and support to managers. This will initially be in hot spot areas but all managers will be expected to undertake the training over the next 6 months.

Desktop training

The first phase of training for managers will be a one hour desk based session. Around 347 managers will be trained from targeted areas. These are not necessarily just areas with high absence levels but also where there are wider concerns about compliance and under-reporting.

Improved monitoring and recording of key decisions

Development of e forms to record key actions such as Return to Work interviews in line with the policy.

3.5.c Future activity – 2017-18 (Quarter 3 & 4)

Leadership and Communication

- Launch the new Workplace Wellbeing plan and approach to attendance management.

Further training and support

- Commence desk based training for managers in 'hot spot' areas.
- Run workshops for managers on 'having the absence' conversation to improve the skills of managers when having difficult conversations/ challenging absence / addressing concerns over an employee's health and wellbeing.

Performance management and compliance

- Continue to embed the new performance management culture via management meetings.

Targeted Action addressing the causes of absence

- Commission workplace wellbeing training to be delivered to all managers.

Workplace wellbeing

- Launch the Workplace wellbeing plan.

3.5d Level of sickness absence – current position

In 2016 – 17 the average overall days lost to sickness absence per full time equivalent (FTE) was 10.72 days. When comparing ourselves to both Merseyside and North West Authorities, the Council is in the middle range. The highest number of days lost in Merseyside Authorities is 13.31 days and the lowest number of days is 8.17. Across the North West the highest number of days is 13.31 and the lowest is 4.4 days.

The published target for the overall days lost per full time equivalent (FTE) for 2017-18 is 10.75 days. The projected outturn is estimated at 10.23 days lost per FTE. This shows there has been slight improvement within the year.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Attendance Management Action Plan