Staff and Pensions Committee

13 September 2021

**Sustainable and Resilient Workforce
Annual Review 2020/2021
(Previously known as Employee Sickness Absence Management
Report)**

Recommendations

1. That the Committee notes the performance information in relation to the management of employee sickness absence during 2020/21 and endorses an overall target of 8 days per FTE (with a +/- 1 day tolerance).

2. That the Committee notes the work in our approach to developing a sustainable and resilient workforce and supports the priority actions for 2021/2022.

3. That the Committee considers for future years whether the use of the charts in section 3 are a complementary addition to the Annual Review, or whether the annual review information would be sufficient.

1.0   Introduction

1.1   Following the introduction of the Our People Strategy and the increase in absence figures in 2019/2020, the council identified a key priority area of developing a sustainable and resilient workforce. With the aim to support the wellbeing of our workforce and reduce the level of sickness absence across the council, by providing an infrastructure for managers to proactively support wellbeing and manage absence.

1.2   An annual review attached as Appendix 1 details the work that has taken place with regards to developing a sustainable and resilient workforce and outlines:

a) The achievements in 2020/21.
b) The priorities and action plan for 2021/2022 to take forward further development of a sustainable and resilient workforce.
c) Workforce performance data for 2020/21, with trend and benchmarking information.

1.3   This report pulls out the main themes from the annual review for consideration by the Committee.

2.0 Sustainable and Resilient Workforce; at a glance:

2.1 Absence has reduced significantly from 10.9 to 7.45 days per FTE over the last year, whilst we have been working through the pandemic with many of our people working from home. With a 3.45 days reduction, the rate is the lowest level for a decade and is below the public sector and the Shire's Counties LA comparators for the first time in 5 years. A 25% overachievement of the target of 7% reduction (from 10.9 to 10.1 days per FTE) and an actual reduction of 32%.

2.2 Regular 'Check- ins' with our staff has allowed us to track how people are feeling and tailor our supporting staff offer and we know that at least 80% of our staff have been doing ok or better and 86% of our people feel that wellbeing is promoted at work.

2.3 The sustainable and resilient workforce group, which is a collaboration of managers and professionals, has been created and are driving actions to maximise wellness at work. Priority has been focused on data and insight for managers and working towards achieving Bronze Thrive at Work accreditation.

2.4 Stress and mental health absence makes up over a third of time lost due to absences, and remains a focus for 2021/2022 along with long term absence, which makes up over 70% of our absence. Whilst this is an increase in terms of percentage, the days per FTE for stress have reduced from 3.17 to 2.47.

2.5 Two thirds of our people have taken no sickness absence at all, an increase from 50% last year. Absence relating to cancer, is now one of our top reasons, and we have seen a reduction in absences relating to chest and respiratory. Covid-19 related absences has not had a significant impact on the absence reasons, however, what is not yet fully known is the longer term effects, in relation to long-covid and the mental health impacts of the pandemic.

2.6 2020/2021 has been an extraordinary year in terms of reducing sickness absence, likely to have been impacted considerably by home working, social distancing and increased hand hygiene. Therefore, this attendance performance should not be regarded as a benchmark year, instead the aim should be to maintain this improvement, and as such a target range of 8 absence days per FTE (+/- 1 day) is proposed.

2.7 Priorities for 2021/2022 will focus on Stress and Mental Health related absence and workload management, managing long term absence, understanding the longer-term impact of the pandemic and the use of data to target our actions.

3.0 Performance Data and Benchmarking

3.1 Traditionally the committee has received performance data and benchmarking information, whilst these are included in the annual review in graphical format, these have also been included here for ease of comparison purposes:

3.2 Days per FTE
Absence has significantly reduced to the lowest level for a decade and is lower than both the public sector average and the Shire's Network Average. A target reduction of 7% was set, a 32% reduction was achieved.

Year Ending	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Days Lost per Employee FTE	8.81	9.61	9.60	10.08	10.26	9.90	9.87	9.51	10.90	7.45
Public Sector Average	9.3	9.1	7.9	8.7	7.9	8.7	8.5	8.5	8.4	8.0
Shire County Average				9.92	9.78	9.36	9.62	9.48	9.19	7.60

Note the Public sector average has a lag in reporting and is a year in arrears

3.3 By Service Area
The majority of the service area's exceeded the 7% target reduction, with the one exception, this is likely to be due to the transfer of staff through the Service Redesign process to other areas, and as a result not all comparisons are like for like.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	20/2021	% +/_	FTE
WCC (excluding schools)	**10.08**	**10.26**	**9.9**	**9.87**	**9.51**	**10.9**	**7.45**	-34%	**3890.4**
Communities Directorate	**9.99**	**9.28**	**9.21**	**9.05**	**8.44**	**9.65**	**5.64**	-40%	**1243.73**
Communities	9.26	10.19	11.12	8.31	7.12	7.93	9.27	14%	152.72
Education Services	11.72	8.54	9.62	9.09	7.07	7.83	5.18	-23%	341.13
Environmental Services*						7.02	4.45	-37%	336.46
Fire & Rescue **	6.5	8.42	7.91	10.22	10.09	14.34	4.73	-67%	**410.15**
People Directorate	**12.28**	**13.16**	**13.12**	**12.12**	**12.12**	**14.11**	**10.51**	-26%	**1282.71**
Adult Social Care	11.9	16	15.37	13.35	13.38	16.22	11.54	-29%	495.61
Children & Families	11.8	12.86	11.45	12.4	11.66	13.12	10.8	-18%	697.72
People Commissioning	15.89	13	11.24	4.03	7.98	7.98	2.28	-71%	67.01
Public Health	3.16	6.56	7.49	7.95	15.15	6.22	1.9	-69%	17.47
Resources Directorate	**8.2**	**8.87**	**8.36**	**7.05**	**8.25**	**9.94**	**6.52**	-34%	**1298.4**
Business and Customer	11.21	11.55	10.15	9.95	9.43	13.5	8.51	-37%	522.75
Commissioning Support Unit	9	4.98	4.82	3.7	2.66	5.73	2.8	-51%	132.66
Enabling (was HR and OD)	7.84	9.46	7.77	5.03	8.04				
Enabling (was ICT)	4.64	6.89	5.27	5.55	7.71	7.98	6.35	-20%	320.43
Enabling (was Property Services)	8.7	9.07	10.07	6.37	12.26				
Finance	6.83	7.35	7.18	8.81	7.3	7.18	5.83	-19%	163.71
Governance and Policy	7.29	7.95	5.92	6.77	5.49	6.08	4.03	-34%	153.84

* Environmental Services is a new area which did not exist prior to 2019/2020.
**Fire and Rescue service, from 2020/21 onwards a different method of calculating days per FTE, based on the shift patterns has been adopted.

3.4 Percentage No Absence

Over two thirds of our people have not had a day off absent in the last 12 months, an increase from 50% the previous year,

No Absence	2011/12	12/13	13/14	14/2015	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
WCC	40.50%	36.30%	39.30%	38.70%	40.70%	39.60%	48.10%	39.95%	50.45%	67.58%

3.5 Benchmarking information

Benchmark data on average days absence has been obtained from the Shire Counties network to provide comparative data. Datasets should be considered as illustrative as the precise method for calculation, together with absence strategies, may differ.

The public service sector average for 2020 was 8.0 days per employee per year, compared to 8.4 days reported in 2019

Warwickshire absence rates are tracking below the average for the first time in 5 years.

Local Authority	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Warwickshire	9.9	9.87	9.51	10.90	7.45
LA a	8.4	9.1	9.4	9.80	6.47
LA b				9.00	7.70
LA c	13.2	11.9	12.4	13.63	12.90
LA d				10.18	8.30
LA e				11.03	8.23
LA f	7.8	9.1	8.1	8.59	5.64
LA g	6.9	7.3	7.5	8.02	5.99
LA h				10.08	7.51
LA i					5.91
LA j				8.39	6.46
LA k				11.2	10.53
LA l				7.42	6.42
LA m	7.5	8.3	6.7	7.42	6.42
LA n	12.9	13.6	13	11.91	8.79
LA o		10.6	10.7	6.65	9.48
LA p				6.39	4.81
LA q				6.74	9.48
LA r				8.1	6.00
Mean Average	9.36	9.62	9.48	9.19	7.60
Public Sector	8.7	8.5	8.5	8.4	8.0

Public Sector Source: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2020

3.6 Percentage of time lost due to short-term / long-term sickness

During the last 12 months there has been a significant increase in the percentage of long-term v short term, although overall long term absence has reduced from

7.19 to 5.31 days per FTE.

	WCC		Communities		People		Resources	
	Short Term	Long Term	Short Term	Long Term	Short Term	Long Term	Short Term	Long Term
2015/16	37.3%	62.7%	41.1%	58.9%	33.8%	66.2%	40.0%	60.0%
2016/17	39.7%	60.3%	38.9%	61.1%	37.3%	62.7%	45.6%	54.4%
2017/18	36.6%	63.4%	39.8%	60.2%	33.6%	64.4%	44.7%	55.3%
2018/19	37.4%	62.6%	39.0%	61.0%	32.4%	67.6%	44.2%	55.8%
2019/20	33.5%	66.5%	33.1%	66.9%	30.2%	69.8%	39.0%	61.0%
2020/21	28.6%	71.5%	27.0%	73.0%	27.4%	72.6%	31.8%	68.2%

Short-term absence = below 20 working days. Long term absence four weeks plus

3.7 Sickness Absence Management With the support of the HR Service, managers across all Directorates are working to proactively manage sickness absence in accordance with the Council's Sickness Management of Absence Procedure. Please note due to the sensitive nature of the details, some of these figures are not recorded in the annual report.

Year	Indicators (e-episodes, d-days)				Ill Health Retirements	Dismissals	Re-deployees
	3e / 6mths	5e / 12mths	10d/12mnth	LTS at 31/			
2015/16	No Record				9	7	No record
2016/17					16	7	No record
2017/18					9	5	No record
2018/19					6	7	1
2019/20	160	117	783	153	9	1	3
2020/21	78	55	568	59	1	2	3

3.8 Reasons for Sickness Absence
The top reasons for sickness absence by percentage has changed this year, stress and mental health is still the highest, now making up over a third of all absence (although it is worth noting that overall stress absence has also reduced in 2021/2022 from 3.17 days per FTE to 2.47). Musculo Skeletal remains the second highest, and chest and respiratory is no longer the third reason, being replaced by cancer. Covid-19 related absence has not had a significant impact on the absence reasons.

Reason	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Mental Health	19.90%	25.40%	25.30%	24.60%	25.70%	29.10%	33.10%
Musculoskeletal	17.70%	18.60%	16.00%	18.10%	19.60%	17.00%	15.70%
Chest or Respiratory	5.90%	4.60%	5.10%	9.90%	9.60%	7.90%	3.80%
Cancer	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	na	n/a	6.50%

Digestive System	6.90%	6.70%	7.00%	4.50%	6.40%	6.80%	4.00%
Reason Withheld	6.60%	3.90%	5.50%	0.90%	5.90%	6.10%	5.90%
Neurological	4.00%	4.20%	3.40%	3.70%	4.10%	5.00%	4.30%
Viral (inc Covid-19)	13.90%	13.20%	12.30%	4.80%	3.50%	3.50%	5.30%

3.9 Financial Implications

The estimated opportunity cost of days lost due to sickness absence has reduced by £700,000 in the last 12 months. Please note that this figure does not include any cover costs where cover arrangements may have been put into place

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Estimated Cost	£3.13 million	£3.5 million	£2.8 million

3.10 Occupational Health Referrals and Reasons

Management referrals have reduced slightly this year and the percentage of referrals relating to stress has increased.

Referrals	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Communities Group	77	73	99	103	78	111	73
People Group	256	211	168	181	181	222	210
Resources Group	127	128	110	97	79	78	94
Total	460	412	377	381	338	411	377

Referral Reasons	18/19	19/20	20/21
Mental Health	40%	47%	50%
Musculo-Skeletal	21%	20%	15%
Other Reasons	39%	33%	35%

3.11 Employee Assist Programme

The Employee Assistance Programme provision is available to all WCC employees (excluding WFRS who have their own in-house provision) and has continued to be extensively communicated and promoted to employees. It is worth noting that during throughout 2020, this has also made available to WCC's foster carers, WCC commissioned social care providers as well as a number of our schools.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Emotional Support	25	37	35	31	128
Legal and Information	10	10	5	10	35
Management Support			1	1	2
Total	35	47	41	42	165

WCC only contacts.

4.0   Conclusions

4.1   2020/2021 has been an exceptionally successful year in terms of developing a sustainable and resilient workforce, especially considering the global pandemic.

4.2   Absence rate have reduced significantly over the last 12 month and is at the lowest level for a decade, which can be attributed to the majority of our workforce working from home, our focus on wellbeing along with more accurate recording of absence in our Fire and Rescue Service. Our Absence is now tracking below our benchmark comparators.

4.3   The wellbeing of our workforce continues to be our number one priority, with a commitment to keeping our people well and at work and with our agile working offer encouraging our people to work in the way that enables them to be their best.

4.4   Stress and Mental health continues to be a priority area along with reducing our long-term absences, understanding the effects of long covid and the mental health impact of the pandemic.

4.5   A full programme of activity is planned for 2021/2022 to ensure that absence levels are sustained.

4.6   A target of 8 days per FTE (with a +/- 1 days tolerance) is proposed for 2021/2022.

Background Papers

Our People focus on Sustainable and Resilient Workforce Annual Review 2021/2022

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Not applicable.