

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**14 DECEMBER 2017**

**REPORT OF PEOPLE  
SELECT COMMITTEE**

**CABINET DECISION**

**Lead Cabinet Member – Leader of Stockton Council – Councillor Bob Cook**

**SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SICKNESS ABSENCE**

1. Summary

The attached report presents the outcomes of the People Select Committee's review of Sickness Absence.

2. Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1) all steps should be taken to ensure staff are clearly aware of the wide range of support that the Council makes available for them to access.
- 2) given that it already meets the criteria, the Council signs up to the TUCs *Dying to Work* campaign which proposes that Employers sign a voluntary charter to provide additional protection from dismissal for any person with a terminal diagnosis because of their condition.
- 3) a targeted approach to the top locations for each sickness type, including premises assessments for staff health and wellbeing (linked to SWIS review into working environments), is adopted.
- 4) the Committee endorses the Council's bid for the Better Health at Work Award Continuing Excellence accreditation.
- 5) developments are pursued around Display Screen Equipment (DSE) use to reduce workstation discomfort, including pop-up warnings reminding staff to take a break from their computer and workplace workouts.
- 6) management training in mental health awareness to aid early intervention is made available.
- 7) smarter ways of working are fully explored to enable greater flexibility for staff and create appropriate work/life balances.
- 8) the Council encourages staff to take up the new in-house flu vaccination offered through Occupational Health.

- 9) regular team meetings and individual 1:1s (incorporating employee health and wellbeing considerations) are scheduled for staff across the Council so that any pressure points can be identified early and addressed.
- 10) Cabinet endorses the new draft SBC *Work/Life Balance and Attendance* policy proposals, and the emphasis on promoting the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

### 3. Reasons for the Recommendation(s)/Decision(s)

The report presents the findings of the scrutiny review of sickness absence which was included as part of the agreed 2017-2018 work programme for the People Select Committee.

### 4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code).

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

#### Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code).

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**SUMMARY**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee recommend that:

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## DETAIL

1. According to the Office for National Statistics, an estimated 137.3 million working days were lost due to sickness or injury in the UK in 2016. This is equivalent to 4.3 days per worker (the lowest recorded since the series began in 1993, when it was at 7.2 days per worker, the highest level over the reference period). Minor illnesses (such as coughs and colds) were the most common reason for sickness absence in 2016, accounting for approximately 24.8% of the total days lost - this was followed by musculoskeletal problems (including back pain, neck and upper limb problems) at 22.4%. Mental health issues (including stress, depression, anxiety and serious conditions) resulted in 11.5% of the total days lost.
2. Sickness absence is an issue that can affect all sections of the workforce, and continues to be a challenge for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council - the target for 2016-2017 (7.6 days average per FTE) was not met, with the confirmed absence level being 8.8 days per FTE. The increase in sickness absence, areas and reasons for sickness absence reflect similar trends in the other Tees Valley Local Authorities.
3. The aim of this review was to contribute towards a reduction in sickness absence by:
  - analysing current performance
  - understanding the underlying reasons for such absence
  - reviewing the measures taken to reduce sickness absence and their effectiveness
  - considering suggestions for improvement

In addition, a new SBC Attendance Management Policy was being drafted in 2016-2017 – the review had an opportunity to shape this policy.

4. The Committee considered evidence from a number of stakeholders, principally the Council's HR, Legal and Communications department. Other key contributors included the Council's Health and Safety Unit, employee support services Insight Healthcare, Body 2 Fit and the in-house Occupational Health Team, and Tees Active Ltd. Trade Union representatives also provided a staff perspective on the issue of sickness absence, including the Council's current policies.

In addition, Committee Members also considered feedback from Better Health at Work Award Focus Groups that took place in June 2017, as well as responses to a question that was put to staff in July 2017 via the Council's HIVE micro-survey platform which asked '*are there any factors within your workplace environment that may be increasing the risk of staff becoming absent due to sickness?*'

## COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

5. This report is not subject to an Impact Assessment.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6. The identification of any potential reasonable adjustments to workplaces and the provision of additional management training will require financial consideration, as will any further commissioning and promotion of support services for staff.

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7. None.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

8. This review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

## COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

9. The review supports the following Council policy principles:

- Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention (in relation to tackling health inequalities, meeting the skills gap and improving access to job opportunities).
- Creating economic prosperity across the Borough (in relation to the number of people able to work).

The review will also contribute to the following Council Plan 2017-2020 key objectives:

### *Our Council*

- Continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services.
- Continue to attract, develop and support diverse, capable and resilient employees.

## CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

10. There are no direct implications in the report.

## CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

11. The Committee received evidence as set out in the final report of the People Select Committee.

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Education related?: No

Background Papers: None

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: n/a

Property: Council workplaces