

# People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday, 22nd May, 2017.

**Present:** Cllr Eileen Johnson (Chairman) for Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Gillian Corr for Cllr Kevin Faulks

**Officers:** Beccy Brown, Jill Douglas, Liz Purdy, Joe McNaughton (HR,L&C), Derek MacDonald (F&BS), Judith Trainer, Gary Woods, Annette Sotheby (DCE)

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:** Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Di Hewitt

**PEO      Evacuation procedure**

**7/17**

The evacuation procedure was noted.

**PEO      Declarations of Interest**

**8/17**

There were no declarations of interest.

**PEO      Scrutiny Review of Sickness Absence**

**9/17**

In addition to the circulated current Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Attendance Management Policy & Procedure and Leave Policy documentation, an overview of sickness absence was presented by HR, including performance information and support offered to staff. Key areas were as follows:

- Absence management data for 2016/17
- Absence by service areas
- Attendance management reporting and procedures
- Support and benefits to keep people in work
- Engagement and communication with staff

## ABSENCE DATA

An increased level of absence was reported for year ended March 2017 with an average of 8.8 days lost per full-time employee. There were 2,706 occurrences of sickness, with 21,977 working days lost in the year.

Figures showed that the national trend was increasing, and the data for Stockton-on-Tees was below all other Tees Valley authorities except Redcar (which measures absence management in a different way).

The corporate target of 7.6 had not been achieved. The target for next year had been set at 8. Members asked if the target was set by the Council itself, and this was confirmed.

Workforce profile versus absence data, including gender, age and salary breakdown figures, was presented. Members were interested in more detailed information, for example women aged between 40 and 50 which could contribute to the increased absence in that age group. It was noted that further information could be provided in this area.

There was a slight increase in sickness absence among lower paid employees which may be due to lack of flexibility in such roles, for example care workers. Discussion took place around the disparity of flexibility between different roles.

A breakdown of long-term, medium-term and short-term absences was shown. There was no evidence to show a pattern of absence on any specific days of the week.

Stress, depression and mental health reasons caused the largest number of long-term sickness absences, and support packages were in place for this.

#### ABSENCE BY SERVICE AREA

A breakdown of absence figures was shown, with Adults & Health having the highest sickness absence. Although staff had to stay away from work with sickness/diarrhea type illnesses which could be contagious, research showed this did not appear to be the cause of the higher figures. There were a lot of mental health and stress related absences, and work was ongoing to address this.

#### ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTING AND PROCEDURES

An overview was given around how sickness absence is recorded and managed, from when an employee reports sickness to their line manager who records this on the HR online system until the employee returns to work.

Members asked if an employee would receive sick pay from the first day of sickness. This was confirmed, although the duration of full pay/half pay would depend on their length of service.

Members asked if there was a way to discourage the one or two-day sickness absence, for example the 'Monday morning feeling', and felt that people could be more inclined to stay off if they received sick pay, but may be reluctant if they were unpaid. However, it was acknowledged that not paying employees for the first/second day of sickness could encourage people to stay off longer than necessary to ensure they received sick pay, or encourage people to come into work when ill, and therefore be off again in the near future. The Council have made the decision to actively manage cases of consistent short-term absence.

Discussion took place around the issues women face in employment, for example maternity and child care, and how this was managed.

It was noted that data was shared with directors as to how their service area's sickness compared with the overall corporate picture. Guidance was ongoing to actively support managers with their sickness absence to enable consistency, as some areas manage sickness absence more actively than others.

#### ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Figures showed management/HR action taken in 2016/17 - 189 employees returned to work with support and monitoring.

Attendance management briefing sessions are held with the HR team and managers of services.

## EMPLOYEE SUPPORT AND BENEFITS

Employee support work was ongoing in the Shaping a Brighter Future Programme, one area being employee wellbeing and retention, looking at how best to support people to stay in work.

Employee Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, North East Better Health at Work Award and the Occupational Health Nurse were all making a big impact across the services.

Insight Wellbeing Services offer a 24-hour support and advice line where employees can self-refer and call the service. 117 people have accessed the service for personal, work related, legal or financial advice and support. Very positive feedback had been received about the service.

Body 2 Fit Services – an overview of services available from Body 2 Fit was given. One member shared positive feedback after accessing this service for a back problem. Members asked if an employee who used the service would be given time off, and was that included in absence data. It was reported that this was not the case. The service was preventative to try to keep people at work or help them return to work more quickly after absence. It was noted that only a small percentage of referrals to Body 2 Fit are from people absent from work, and a trigger to remind managers to ask their staff about Body 2 Fit (where necessary) has now been created.

Mindfulness – this was offered to employees to help deal with stress-related absences and had received very positive feedback from those who had completed the programme. There had been detailed analysis of stress and wellbeing levels before and after the course, and members felt it would be interesting to see the impact if monitored long term.

Leave Policy - examples and guidance were explained around employee leave, including time off for medical procedures and health screening to prevent illness, bereavement, etc.

Other Employee Benefits include Vision Express, Halfords Cycle to Work, Tees Active Cineworld and KiddiVouchers which all help employee health and wellbeing. A booklet was available to highlight and promote these benefits.

Engagement and Communication with Staff - Shaping a Brighter Future, Hive, Ask Neil, Suggestions, Employee Forum etc were now all in one place on the intranet to help promote better communication.

Employee absence data would be shared with staff quarterly on the intranet to show absence numbers and reasons for this.

Across the services, some staff had volunteered to be health advocates, setting initiatives on health and promotional campaigns, and would also be holding Focus Groups to explore mental and physical health. Members expressed interest in the outcomes from those sessions - HR would provide details at the

next Select Committee in June.

The results of feedback on employee benefits from the anonymous staff micro surveys (Hive) were discussed.

600 employees had been involved in defining Stockton Council's culture - the findings were that staff wanted to feel valued, heard, work hard and develop, try new things and belong. It was felt that if this was achieved, sickness absence figures would reduce.

Members asked if another local Joint Consultative Panel would be held as the last meeting had been over 12 months ago – it was noted that a meeting would be requested after the forthcoming election.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

A presentation was given on health and safety, the key points as follows:

- Statutory obligations – HSE publish topic-specific guidance which has special legal status and is recognised as authoritative.

The risk of ill health should be minimised as far as reasonably practicable.

- Policy – details the expected behaviour and conduct of the workforce in the workplace to comply with the health and safety ethic. This is how people are protected from harm.

- Role – to raise awareness and educate people.

- Proactive and reactive measures – sometimes people do silly things and accidents happen, therefore education is crucial to prevent recurrence.

- Managing – a simple plan that brings all elements together enabling risk profiles and assessments to be carried out.

Members asked if days lost due to accidents could be quantified. It was noted that this was the case and was recorded by department or director.

Members discussed the importance of moving about regularly instead of sitting at the computer for long periods in the workplace. Members were advised that an on-line tool was available with useful information relating to this. In addition, Body 2 Fit would be attending Setting the Standard sessions to demonstrate work-based exercises.

Comfort in the workplace was also discussed, including correct temperature and the difficulty this presented in open plan offices. Members asked if this could be a topic in the Hive micro-survey and were advised that a Better Health at Work forum could also be carried out.

Stress and the way people cope with it was discussed. It was recognised that some people do lead stressful lives, and work was ongoing to support this, allowing staff time off to deal with personal issues if required.

AGREED – that the information presented be noted.

**PEO**     **Work Programme 2017-2018**  
**10/17**

AGREED – that the Work Programme be noted.