

People Select Committee

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday, 16th October, 2017.

Present: Cllr Jean O'Donnell (Chairman), Cllr Eileen Johnson (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Sonia Bailey, Cllr Di Hewitt, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Barbara Inman, Cllr Elsi Hampton

Officers: Beccy Brown, Jill Douglas (HRC&L); Gary Woods, Annette Sotheby (DCE)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Stefan Houghton

PEO 23/17 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO 24/17 **Scrutiny Review of Sickness Absence**

A 'summary of evidence' document detailing the information received as part of the Sickness Absence review was presented to Members. A summary of the key findings and suggested recommendations were also provided for consideration. Evidence highlighted included:

Policies

- Attendance Management Policy and Procedure briefing sessions had been held.
- Discussion on non-payment for first day of sickness absence.
- Use of Leave Policy rather than sickness absence for bereavement, emergency, care leave etc. A recommendation to ensure staff are made clear of what support they can access was suggested.

Performance

- 2016/17 sickness absence was above corporate target and had increased over the last few years.
- Comparative data with other authorities – noted that Redcar and Cleveland record their sickness absence differently.
- Analysis around gender split, age profile and salary breakdown.
- Length of absence - 71% long-term (29+ calendar days), 19% medium-term (8-28 calendar days) absence, 10% short-term (up to 7 calendar days) absence. Monday had highest absence levels in the week.
- Number of sickness absence occurrences due to physical wellbeing highest in service areas where workforce is predominantly manual (Community Services and Adult Services).
- Higher level of total sickness absence in Adults and Health service area.
- Data on top 6 locations, broken down into separate categories.

Recommendation suggested that a targeted approach to specific locations is adopted, looking at each illness and using collective data.

- 2017/18 – increased corporate sickness absence target to 8 days lost per FTE from 7.6, with an encouraging start noted for the current year. Highest number of absence due to infections thus far.

Support

- Support services provided information to Committee. An employee health and wellbeing plan put together to reduce absence and improve overall health and wellbeing of employees.
- SBC Occupational Health is an in-house service - this differed from other Tees Local Authorities. An increase in take-up of the flu vaccination programme had been seen since being offered by this in-house service.
- Positive feedback had been received about Insight Healthcare, with the majority of employees accessing services whilst at work, rather than when absent from work. There were possible price implications due to higher than anticipated uptake of the service.
- Members discussed the preventative approach of Body 2 Fit, of which some had positive personal experience of the service, and questioned whether more promotion was required to ensure Councillors and staff were aware of all the available services. It was noted that HR would discuss this with Communications Department. Keep fit classes had also been successful and another programme may be planned in future. pilates classes were proposed in the New Year.
- Trigger emails sent to managers reminding them of services when they submit a Day 1 Reporting Form for absence.
- A Mindfulness Programme was due to take place (10 courses) and Members felt it would be useful to monitor the impact of that. Members asked if attendance on the programme could be encouraged as take-up had reduced slightly, possibly due to the big commitment required from employees. It was noted that it may be possible to run less intensive courses over a longer period of time.

Employee Engagement

- Employee Benefit Booklet now given out as part of the induction programme and related information also on the intranet and weekly news bulletin.
- KYIT article recently showed level of sickness absence within the Council.
- HIVE anonymous micro-surveys – results reported back to employees.

Health & Safety

- Health & Safety had given an overview of statutory duties contributing to prevention and mitigation of absences from work due to work activity and the support provided by Health & Safety unit - the difference between proactive and reactive support.
- Discussion took place about the quality of office accommodation – heating, lighting, etc., and the difficulties encountered to keep staff happy. Suggested recommendation proposed premises assessments/half-yearly office checks.

Training

- Training take-up for Health & Safety courses noted – not actively monitored by Health & Safety, but the responsibility of managers.

- Future development for pop-up screen warnings to leave desk and move about and proposed workplace workout from Body 2 Fit.
- HR exploring option for mental health awareness training course. HR confirmed that discussions had taken place with MIND to help roll-out a programme which will hopefully be in place in the New Year.

Employee Feedback

- Trade Union input at last meeting had been noted. Challenges remain around long-term absence meetings which were considered onerous for staff. Pregnancy should not be included in overall sickness absence figures which had been made clear in the new policy. Recommendation suggested for management training in mental health awareness to aid early intervention.
- Focus groups – information received included the good relationship required between line manager and employee.
- Hive Survey - a good response rate had been received with themes noted including facilities management - some quick fixes possible, but level of investment may be required for other issues. SWIS Team looking at how Council staff work and how workplace and working arrangements could be adapted. New infection control package which included in-house flu vaccine. Working from home was discussed – some departments had more flexible working opportunities than others. Open plan offices and the potential for infection were discussed.
- Members asked what percentage of staff work from home and whether a form had to be completed for this for security purposes. It was noted that a small proportion of staff (less than 12) officially work from home, with others working from home occasionally, for which no form was necessary.

Other Organisations (Public/Private)

- Comparative data of Tees Valley Local Authorities and that of Tees Active Limited showed similar practices and policies. Middlesbrough offer access to MRI scan through Alliance Medical.
- Tees Active presentation focused on employee health and wellbeing rather than attendance management. Information given from CIPD absence management survey supported that approach also. SBC staff have access to Tees Active fitness benefits. Tees Active support the prevention of ill health, encouraging staff to be more active and supporting people to remain at work rather than go off sick. The importance of early intervention particularly with regard to mental health was crucial and also the importance of regular dialogue between staff and managers to address issues.

Future Developments

- It was proposed to update all policies and procedures relating to work/life balance and attendance at work into one new policy (Work/Life Balance and Attendance at Work).
- Members asked if a female manager was available for staff to discuss female health-related issues. It was noted that the Occupational Therapist could possibly fulfil this role or discuss specific issues with relevant line management.

The Chair asked if Members had anything to add to the summary of emerging

findings.

HR Officers asked if the Committee would support the following:-

- Better Health at Work Award Continuation of Excellence Award bid.
- A screen 'pop-up' advising staff to take breaks.
- TUC 'Dying to Work' Campaign seeking pledges from employers to support terminally ill employees in the workplace - HR felt this reflected what SBC already did in practice and a link with further information would be sent to Members.

Members asked if there was a support mechanism for Council staff with a terminally ill family member and whether time off would be allowed for this. It was noted that managers should be made aware of such employee circumstances so they could exercise leave policy and allow time off or adjust working hours accordingly. HR provide support and could also signpost to other relevant organisations for wider support.

AGREED – that the information be noted.

**PEO
25/17** **Work Programme 2017-2018**

A draft Sickness Absence final report for Committee consideration would be included in the next meeting on 20th November 2017. It was also intended to present Members with a draft scope and plan regarding the next scrutiny review topic - Mental Health and Wellbeing including Suicide and Self-Harm. This review began in early 2017 but had been postponed, and Members stressed the need for clarity around the review's focus.

The Council Plan had previously been circulated after being discussed in detail at Executive Scrutiny Committee. Members were asked to forward any comments to the Scrutiny Officer, particularly in relation to either the 'Strong Communities' or 'Arts, Leisure and Culture' sections.

AGREED – that the Work Programme be noted.

**PEO
26/17** **Chair's Update**

The Chair had nothing further to report.