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REPORT TO:	FINANCE & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 7
DATE OF MEETING:	30 <sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2006	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHAIR OF THE FINANCE & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CLLR JOHN WILKINS	DOC:S:\Cent_Serv\Committee Reports\Finance and Management\2006\30 November 2006\Sickness Absence.doc
SUBJECT:	SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT	REF: DC/SH
WARD(S) AFFECTED:		TERMS OF REFERENCE: FM05

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## 1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 The committee agrees the comments made in this report as the formal response to the recommendations made by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on sickness absence.

## 2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To formally respond to the recommendations made by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on sickness absence.

## 3.0 Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October this committee resolved to approve the following recommendations of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee in respect of sickness absence:

- (1) That, given the financial and other impacts of long term sickness and recognising that each case is unique, consideration be given to defining the timescale for certain actions to take place in resolving long-term absence.***
- (2) That the Head of Human Resources continues to monitor the reporting of sickness absences and completion of Return to Work interview forms and that senior management be advised of any failings in their area of responsibility.***
- (3) That sickness absence performance be reported regularly, not only to senior staff, but throughout the Council to raise awareness of the impact absences can have and to make staff aware of performance against targets.***
- (4) That a programme of work be determined and costed for improvements to corridors, offices and work areas to provide a healthier working environment at the Council's Civic Offices.***

***(5) That the Human Resources Division review, and when appropriate, bring forward proposed amendments to the Sickness Absence Management Policy.***

#### **4.0 Response to Recommendations**

##### **4.1 Recommendation 1 –Long Term absences**

The Council's Sickness Absence Management Policy (section 13) clearly identifies timescales to adhere to in the management of long-term sickness as set out in **Appendix A**. It should be noted that these are indicative timescales and enables each case to be managed on an individual basis.

However, as with most policies there is a need to raise awareness on a regular basis as to the responsibilities of Managers. This is covered during induction with further advice and support provided by Human Resources. In addition, following a review of the current Policy (see 4.5), training will be undertaken for all Managers.

##### **4.2 Recommendation 2 –Monitoring information**

This is agreed.

##### **4.3 Recommendation 3 –Performance reporting**

Sickness absence is reported on a quarterly basis to all Heads of Service in respect of their individual areas and to the Corporate Management Team for information and action. Council wide sickness is reported to the Improvement Panel and this committee as part of the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports.

The Chief Executive has recently undertaken a series of meetings with all staff to thank them for the Council's improved performance but also to highlight those areas where we still need to improve. This included sickness absence and in particular the impact of such absences on colleagues' workload and on budgets. Also, key performance measures that include sickness levels will be recorded on notice boards throughout the building to raise awareness amongst staff.

##### **4.4 Recommendation 4 –Decoration and improvement works**

A one-off capital budget of £50,000 was agreed for 2006/7 to undertake further decoration and improvement works throughout the general areas within the Civic Offices. This essentially involved the painting and re-carpeting of stairwells and corridors. This work commenced on November 6<sup>th</sup> and is due to be completed before Christmas. A number of offices have been painted and re-carpeted in the last two years as part of office moves. There is a small sum, in the region of £11,000 available from this years budget for further painting of offices. The Contractor has been requested to provide a price for the remaining offices that will be undertaken on a priority basis and subject to the remaining budget.

This one-off sum was designed to bring the decoration up to standard and any future works of this nature will be included in the general programme of maintenance for all our public buildings.

#### 4.5 **Recommendation 5 – Review of Sickness Absence Policy**

With the support of all the Trades Unions, the Sickness Absence Management Policy has been reviewed. A number of changes to the existing Policy have been agreed that will become effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007. In particular this includes the management of short- term sickness absences, longer review periods to help sustain improvement and the commencement of formal action.

Currently the procedure is as outlined in **Appendix B**. The changes are to the trigger points in section 12.2 (a) and (b) and with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January will read:

- (a) Ten (*previously twelve*) or more days of self or medically certificated absence and/or
- (b) at least five (*previously six*) separate periods of self or medically certified absence.

Training will be provided to all Officers who have responsibility for applying this Policy.

It has been agreed that an assessment of revised Sickness Absence Management Policy will be completed after 6 months. This will be undertaken with the Trades Unions.

In addition it is accepted that we also need to recognise good attendance and the method of undertaking this is currently being considered.

#### 5.0 **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 None arising directly from this report although a reduction in overall sickness is considered as an efficiency gain and may reduce the reliance on agency staff thus reducing the budget.

#### 6.0 **Background Papers**

- 6.1 The current sickness management policy is available on the Intranet – click on corporate services/human resources/sickness absence management.

## **SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT**

### **Long Term Sickness absence**

The following is an extract from the current Sickness Absence Management Policy;

#### **13.0 PROCEDURE - LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE**

13.1 It is essential that the manager/supervisor and employee maintain contact during a period of long term sickness absence. This should be done by arranging to see the employee either at home or at the Council's offices (whichever is preferable to the employee). Contact may also be maintained by telephone (see paragraph 13.2).

13.2 The manager/supervisor should make telephone contact with the employee (or representative) by no later than two weeks of continuous absence. However this will depend on the nature of the illness and/or whether there are exceptional circumstances for not doing so. The purpose of telephoning the employee is to check his/her welfare and the position regarding his/her health.

The option of seeing the Council's Occupational Health Advisor should also be put to the employee at this time. The manager/supervisor must make a file note of the telephone conversation with the employee or his/her representative. This must be placed on the employee's personal file. The same practice applies to any other telephone conversation that the manager/supervisor may have with the employee (or representative) during the course of his/her sickness absence.

13.3 The manager/supervisor must make arrangements to see an employee by no later than four working weeks of continuous absence due sickness. However this will depend on the nature of the illness and/or whether there are exceptional circumstances for not doing so. When making arrangements to see an employee, the manager/supervisor should ensure that:

- A member of Personnel and Development is able to accompany them.
- The employee is informed that a fellow employee or a trade union official can accompany them.

13.4 The purpose of visiting the employee will be to check on his/her welfare, review the position regarding his/her health and to determine an appropriate course of action. A file note must be made of the discussion, which will be placed on the employee's personal file. A letter to the employee confirming action to be taken may also be appropriate.

13.5 The employee can request to see the Council's Occupational Health Advisor at any time during the first four weeks of continuous sickness absence. After this period of time a referral by the manager/supervisor to the Occupational Health Advisor must take place unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing this. Other referrals may occur as appropriate during the management of the sickness absence. In addition to the first four weeks of continuous absence, the employee can request to see the Occupational Health Advisor at any time. The request should be made through their supervisor/manager.

13.6 Following a referral, the advice from the Council's Occupational Health Advisor will be discussed with the employee (and their representative as appropriate). A member of Personnel and Development will support the manager/supervisor conducting the meeting. An appropriate course of action will be decided. This should be confirmed to the employee in writing. Notes of the meeting should also be taken and placed on the employee's personal file.

## SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

### Short Term Sickness absence

The following is an extract from the current Sickness Absence Management Policy;

#### Trigger Points

- 12.2 Following a return to work interview the manager/supervisor may decide that more formal action is required. This is likely where an employee has, in the preceding twelve-month rolling period, an unacceptable level of sickness absence. This is defined as: -
- (a) Twelve or more days of self or medically certificated absence and/or
  - (b) At least six separate periods of self or medically certificated absence.
  - (c) An unacceptable pattern of absence, for example, regular Friday or Monday absence or some other recurring pattern.
- 12.3 Trigger point 10.2 (a) will be pro rata'd (on the basis of days worked per week) where the employee works less than 5 days per week.
- 12.4 When an employee hits a trigger point, their manager/supervisor must arrange an attendance-monitoring interview. Other absences relating to sickness/illness giving rise for concern may result in the employee being asked to attend an attendance-monitoring interview. Before taking any action, the manager **must ensure they have accurate and up to date information on the employee's sickness absence.**