

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:**           **CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:**               **11 JULY 2013**

**REPORT BY:**       **HEAD OF HR AND OD**

**SUBJECT:**           **ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE AND  
AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT**

**1.00**   **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

**1.01**   To analyse the performance of the organisation in relation to management of attendance, as reported in the Council's Performance Report to Cabinet in March 2013, and to set out Corporate Management Team's plan and commitment to achieve improvements in performance.

**1.02**   To identify the measures that are currently being taken, to identify actions that are planned for implementation and to consider further to options to improve attendance levels across the organisation.

**2.00**   **BACKGROUND**

**2.01**   The Council's performance on attendance worsened during 2012/13, particularly during quarters 1 and 3. Actions to address the downturn in performance have already been identified and are in the process of being implemented. Further actions to address the low performance are detailed in this report and will form part of specific Action Plans for implementation by service areas.

**3.00**   **CONSIDERATIONS**

**3.01**   The Council has an Improvement Target for attendance - CHR/002 - the number of working days/shifts per full time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence. This indicator was reported as having a 'Red' RAG status for performing below the target for the first three quarters of 2012/13. The annual outturn for 2012/13 was 11.03 against a target of 9.8 days.

**3.02**   The Council has evaluated its approach to managing attendance by reviewing its policy and considering the range of interventions available that are proven to be effective in addressing the main causes of absence and reducing levels of sickness absence overall.

**3.03** Reports on managing attendance published by organisations such as CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) and APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) indicate that the most effective measures for managing attendance include:

- a robust attendance management policy which is followed through at every stage by the manager - i.e. return to work interviews, attendance review meetings, through to dismissal where appropriate;
- an effective policy which separates long term and short term absence and defines approaches for managing each;
- offering flexible working patterns;
- the regular review of patterns of absence, e.g. Fridays and Mondays;
- ensuring work related causes of absence such as excessive work demands or poor working conditions are managed and minimised;
- focused interventions such as physiotherapy for certain work related injuries to enable employees to return to work sooner, helping to reduce long term absence or preventing long term absence from occurring in the first place;
- employee incentives such as rewarding 100 per cent attendance throughout the year by giving an additional day of annual leave.
- a strong attendance culture where the significance of excellent attendance to the service, service users and customers and the financial constraints created as a result of absence are firmly emphasised.

**3.04** As part of our evaluation of current arrangements, we were able to confirm that the Council's policy includes many of the policy-related features recommended above. Managers are required to conduct return to work interviews following each and every absence, to follow through with an attendance review meeting when employees hit the tolerance triggers, to refer to Occupational Health at the appropriate stage and to act on the advice that is given and to proceed to dismissal if the necessary improvements in attendance are not achieved.

**3.05** Other tools include the appropriate and timely use of Risk Assessments, including Stress Risk Assessments, which if used effectively will act as a proactive measure to prevent absences from occurring. In some areas of the Council, 100% attendance is recognised at team and one to one meetings – this practice needs to be implemented consistently across the Council.

**3.06** Heads of Service are provided with monthly management information on long and short term absences and patterns of absence which they cascade down to their managers as an additional prompt to take the

necessary actions to manage attendance issues effectively and within appropriate timeframes.

**3.07** Nevertheless, recent reviews of cases and practices and current performance levels suggest a number of shortfalls in our approach to attendance management. These include the policy not being followed rigorously and consistently by all managers, a lack of a systematic approach to ensuring appropriate follow up on tolerance triggers and referrals to Occupational Health, managers and supervisors not having the requisite skills to manage attendance issues competently, and an organisational culture where managing attendance has not been addressed as a priority.

**3.08** Improvements in managing attendance have been implemented over the last six to nine months, but it is acknowledged that such measures can take some time to have a positive and visible impact on levels of attendance. These are:

- the introduction of a physiotherapy pilot in the Streetscene Service to provide early treatment for injuries / musculoskeletal problems to support employees to remain in the workplace or to promote an earlier return to work;
- the design and introduction of a 'return to work pathway' in Community Services to support the earlier return to work for employees who have been on long term absence and / or to encourage reasonable temporary or longer term adjustments to be made to allow a reintroduction to the workplace sooner;
- the introduction of case conferences between the line manager, the employee (where appropriate), HR and Occupational Health to plan and facilitate a return to work as the earliest opportunity;
- coaching / refresher training of managers and supervisors to improve the quality and rigour of the management of attendance issues starting with key areas where absences are high;
- the inclusion of attendance as a standard item of business on Department Management Team meetings'
- the appropriate and effective use of 'working from home' where this is planned and where the employee is able to undertake meaningful work productively - e.g. where an employee's physical condition post surgery might hinder them attending the workplace, but where they are able to deliver their work objectives from home.

**3.09** As referenced above, a physiotherapy pilot has been operating in Streetscene Services since November 2012. Musculoskeletal problems (including back problems) are the major discernable cause of sickness absence in Flintshire County Council. During 2011/2012, musculoskeletal related absence accounted for over 20% of the absence within the Streetscene Service and was the number one

recorded reason for absence.

**3.10** It was agreed that a pilot would be undertaken to establish if tangible benefits could be obtained from providing a managed physiotherapy service and if so, what conditions needed to be in place for the provision of physiotherapy to have a positive impact on employees, their well being and their attendance at work.

**3.11** The intention was that the information and results obtained during the pilot would be used to inform decisions regarding the future delivery of physiotherapy services within Flintshire County Council across other services.

**3.12** The key features of the pilot are:

Direct referral to Pen Y Lon Physiotherapy by line managers when:-

- an employee is absent from work due to a musculoskeletal problem/ injury or
- is likely to go off or
- the employee is at risk of further injury to self or others as a result of a musculoskeletal problem.
- Initial Assessment of employees by Pen Y Lon Physiotherapy followed by a report to line managers and occupational health on condition, recommendations with regard to work and details of proposed treatment
- The provision of up to five physiotherapy sessions where required with update and discharge reports to managers and Occupational Health Physiotherapists and Occupational Health professionals working closely to identify other contributing factors and underlying issues to provide holistic support to managers and employees.

**3.13** The pilot has been positively received by managers and employees and early indicators show that interventions are having an impact on helping employees to stay in work and to come back early.

**3.14** Since the pilot scheme was launched on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2012, 23 people have been referred to Pen Y Lon Physiotherapy via their line managers.

**3.15** Seven people were discharged with advice following an initial assessment with a Physiotherapist. Those employees who required physiotherapy have received on average of 2 – 3 sessions.

**3.16** The average time from referral to initial assessment has been just over 3 days. Waiting time for NHS physiotherapy treatment via General Practitioners is reported to be 3-4 months at present.

**3.17** We are in the process of measuring the tangible benefits of the in-house physiotherapy services in terms of identifying reductions in sickness absence and in particular, musculoskeletal type absences. Initial evidence suggests that employees who would have had extended absence whilst waiting for NHS physiotherapy have returned to work much quicker, having received an appointment within 2/3 days of the referral. This has accelerated their return to work significantly. Further evidence of benefits will be available over the coming weeks.

**3.18** Measures to improve attendance that are being introduced currently are:

- publishing / reporting attendance rates broken down by service to improve visibility of the 'hot spots' in the organisation and to increase the accountability of all managers in managing attendance as a priority;
- identifying targets for improvement for each service / divisional area;
- reporting performance on attendance on a quarterly basis within every service's Quarterly Performance Report and providing a commentary on the reasons for low performance and corrective actions being taken;
- provision of additional management information as part of the suite of reports to include the organisation's 'Top 50' short term / frequent absences and long term absence as an assurance measure for checking that all cases are being managed in accordance with the policy;
- introducing flexible working across the organisation, enabling employees to meet / balance other personal or family commitments more flexibly, thereby reducing sickness absence for those reasons;
- extending the physiotherapy service to other service areas where there are high levels of musculoskeletal related absence (e.g. in direct care and support type services in Community Services);
- extending the concept of the 'return to work' pathway into other services, particularly where there are significant numbers of long term absence cases;
- effective management of attendance as part of the Probationary Period process for new employees so that sickness absence issues are addressed robustly during the first six months of employment;
- further analysis of the main causes of absence and discouraging the use of the category 'other' on the Council's Sickness forms.

**3.19** To support and enable the improvements identified, structured Action Plans will be developed by all services, drilling down to team level as appropriate, to include core elements that will apply to all employees and services, supplemented by additional interventions to address the

particular attendance issues and causes of absence that are pertinent to each service. Managers, Heads of Service and Directors will be accountable for ensuring that the plans are implemented and are monitored and managed on a regular basis to support the step-change required in performance.

- 3.20** On a corporate level, the Corporate Management Team will be responsible for analysing and monitoring trends and levels of performance across the Council.

The Council may consider additional measures to monitor and manage the impact of sickness absence, including the costs. When employees are absent, particularly in front line services, this results in:

- Paying overtime to other employees to cover absence
- Replacing with temporary pool workers or agency workers
- Reduction in performance and productivity
- Reduced customer and service user satisfaction levels and continuity
- Low morale among colleagues who have to take on responsibility for the work of absent employees.

- 3.21** Given the on-going financial pressures for the Council, the need to achieve efficiencies, improve performance and productivity and demonstrate value for money is key. Any improvements in attendance levels, particularly in front line services, will result in savings, or cost avoidance at the very least. The organisation should consider the introduction of specific efficiency targets to underpin the required culture change and to place attendance as a workforce priority.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Members note the analysis and support the on-going work to address attendance levels and underlying causes.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01** The identification of the financial implications / costs on the impact of attendance to be considered in accordance with paragraph 3.21.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01** None

#### **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 7.01** None

**8.00 EQUALITIES**

**8.01** Any proposed changes in relation to new employee incentives, or approaches to attendance management, will be assessed from an equality impact perspective.

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

**9.01** No further implications at this stage.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

**10.01** Further consultation will be required should there be any significant changes to our policy or approach.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

**11.01** Not applicable at this stage although commitment will be sought from the Trade Unions to support and endorse a more targeted approach for managing attendance.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

**12.01** None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS) INFORMATION ACT 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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