

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:**           **CABINET**

**DATE:**                 **TUESDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**REPORT BY:**         **HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND  
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**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 the plan and commitment, led by Heads of Service and the Corporate Management Team, 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 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.
- 2.02    The Council's performance is average compared to peer organisations. 'Average' is not considered to be acceptable and requires more Directorate and management team focus to achieve the desired impact on lowering levels of sickness absence.

### **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;
  - 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 although a more intensive review of our policy and practices is required. 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 strongly 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 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 (pending an evaluation of the physiotherapy pilot in Streetscene) 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.

3.10 To support and enable the improvements identified, structured Action Plans will be developed by all services with a target date for completion of 18 October 2013, to include service targets for improvement. The plans will drill down to team level as appropriate and will 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.

- 3.11 In service areas such as Streetscene and Community Services, work is already advanced in setting out and implementing improvements in the way in which attendance is managed. In Streetscene, a high level review and analysis of sickness data to identify underlying causes for the increase in absence (including, but not limited to comparison of sickness levels year on year since and the split between long/short term absence) is being undertaken. The outcomes from these activities will be used to develop the detailed Action Plan, which will be owned by Streetscene Senior Management Team (SMT) and reviewed on a monthly basis, with a peer review undertaken by DMT on a quarterly basis.
- 3.12 In putting these arrangements into place, one of the most critical aspects is ensuring that all advice and recommendations received from Physiotherapy and Occupational Health referrals are followed through promptly by managers and employees, otherwise the improvement in outcomes will not be realised. This places a greater emphasis on managers to direct more of their time and capacity in managing attendance as a priority.
- 3.13 In Community Services, the Directorate Management Team is in the process of developing their Action Plan which includes measures to promote health and wellbeing and to improve attendance at work. One of the key developments is the establishment of a Cross Directorate Working Group which includes representatives from each service area, HR & OD, Workforce Development and Occupational Health. This working group meets on a monthly basis to review absence data, to identify areas of concern and to agree strategies to improve attendance both on a service and individual level.
- 3.14 The focus on attendance continues at the Directorate Quarterly Review Meeting where quarterly workforce information is reviewed and strategies for improvement discussed and agreed. An alternative approach is also on trial as the Community Service Bulletin will start to feature articles on Health & Wellbeing to promote and encourage healthy living amongst the workforce. As a result of this renewed focus on attendance, Quarter 1 figures for 2013/14 (i.e. May to July 2013) showed a reduction in absence across all service areas in Community Services from 16.87 day's lost per employee to 10.84 days which represents a significant improvement. Continued and concerted effort is required to make further improvements in performance.
- 3.15 In summary, the Heads of Service and the Corporate Management Team (as a collective) will be responsible for analysing and monitoring trends and levels of performance across the Council and ensuring that targets for improvements are achieved. In fulfilling these

responsibilities, there is a clear expectation that:

- Action Plans are developed and are given greater management priority in terms of monitoring, management, challenge and delivery and are owned by Heads of Service and management teams;
- Heads of Service report their performance against targets in their Performance Reports to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Prompt action is taken to follow up and act on advice received from Occupational Health and Physiotherapy referrals to facilitate an earlier return to work and to maximise the value of the advice / intervention;
- A more flexible approach is adopted in finding alternative work, on a temporary basis, to facilitate an earlier return to work. This must include seeking alternatives across services and departments and must not be restricted to jobs / roles in the employee's own service;
- More targeted work is done around outcomes for longer term absence cases, including accelerated return to work plans.

#### 4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 That Members note the analysis and the requirements and expectations for Heads of Service, managers and Corporate Management Team in managing attendance 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.

#### 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.

**CONTACT OFFICER: Helen Stappleton**  
**Telephone: 01352 702720**  
**E-mail: [helen.stappleton@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:helen.stappleton@flintshire.gov.uk)**