

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Staffing Committee

Date of Meeting: 16th July 2015
Report of: Phil Badley and Brenda Smith
Subject/Title: Attendance Management 2014/2015

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the sickness absence rates within Cheshire East Council (CEC) during 2014/2015, an analysis of the main reasons for this, and indicates the services with higher than average levels of absence. It summarises actions taken so far to address absence and promote good attendance and the findings of recent benchmarking reports. Finally the report summarises the actions to be taken in 2015/2016 as agreed by Management Group Board (MGB).

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 To note the report

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To update the Committee on the current levels of absence across the Council and the actions being taken to improve attendance, in accordance with a previous request by the Committee.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 No specific wards affected.

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 No significant risks identified as a result of this update report. Risks relating to specific issues will be dealt with separately.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The cost of absence causes a requirement for temporary and agency workers in Key Services which has to be met from within the overall budget of the Council.

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 No direct implications arising from this report.

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 Risks relating to service related issues are dealt with locally by departments.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 Overall the report finds that absence was slightly higher in 2014/15 than in the previous year, and that the rate has varied between 11.3 and 12 days per full time employee over the past four years. The most common reason given for absence is stress. An increase in stress-related absence has been identified in the public sector more widely, and the Council will focus more strongly on promoting wellbeing and resilience as part of our engagement approach, whilst continuing to train managers and support them dealing with complex cases of absence.
- 10.2 Overall the report finds that absence was slightly higher in 2014/15 than in the previous year, and that the rate has varied between 11.3 and 12 days per full time employee over the past four years. The most common reason given for absence is stress. An increase in stress-related absence has been identified in the public sector more widely, and the Council will focus more strongly on promoting wellbeing and resilience as part of our engagement approach, whilst continuing to train managers and support them dealing with complex cases of absence.
- 10.3 The report is based on recorded absence in the Council, excluding schools. Overall the average number of days lost per employee during the last financial year was 12, which is a marginal increase over the previous year, as shown below. This measure is known as the Best Value performance Indicator (BVPI).

Table 1

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Days absence per employee excluding schools	11.7	12	11.3	12

Working time lost to sickness absence as a proportion of all working time available in 2014/15 was 4.6% compared with 4.3 % in 2013/14.

CEC has 65% of absence attributed to long term absence, and 35% of absence is short-term. The main reasons for absence and the distribution of absence are shown in Appendix 1.

10.4 Benchmarking

North West Employers' Organisation (NWEO)

The latest NWEO report shows that the increase in absence seen in CEC is similar to the increase across the region for 2014/2015. The CEC absence rate was higher than the regional mean which was 11.02, although as authorities vary in terms of which services they provide in-house, the figures are unlikely to be directly comparable.

10.5 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

CIPD provides an annual attendance report covering the private and public sectors of employment. The 2014 CIPD report is shown in a summary infographic at Appendix 2. Their key findings for the public sector in 2014 include;

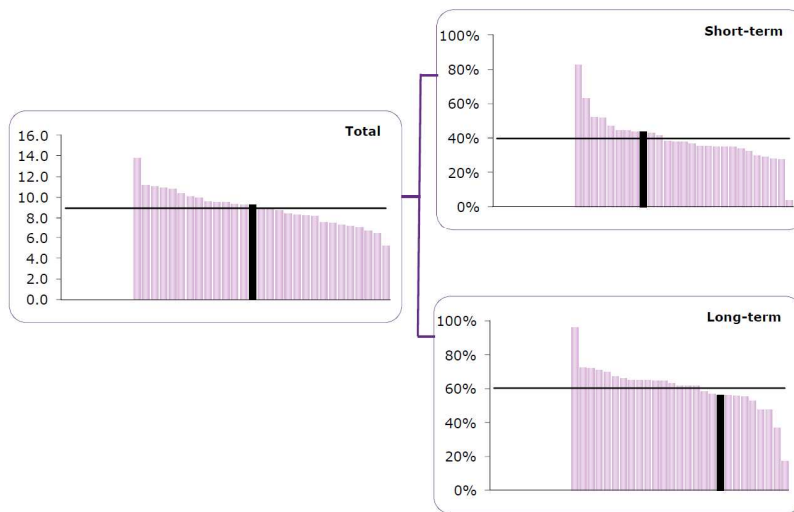
- Stress-related absence had increased in three fifths of public sector organisations and stress is the most common cause of long term absence (as in CEC)
- Common causes of stress in the public sector are reported as workload, management style and relationships at work.
- Musculo-skeletal injuries are also one of the main causes of long and short-term absence.
- Reduced budgets in the public sector highlight the imperative of understanding the causes and costs of absence in order to target initiatives effectively and evaluate the potential savings that might be achieved.

The report also indicates that absence tends to be higher amongst manual workers, and in the care sector, and that absence in the North West is the highest of the English regions.

10.6 Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA)

Benchmarking against other public sector employers in the CIPFA benchmarking Club showed that CEC was slightly above average in its sickness rates in 2013/2014, as shown in the graph below. (These figures include schools and CEC is the highlighted bar). The comparisons for 2014/15 will be reported when the data is available from CIPFA.

Days lost per FTE



10.7 Action taken by CEC over 2014/2015

There will always be a level of unavoidable absence due to serious health conditions. HR supports managers dealing with long term absence by regular monitoring and ensuring cases are managed supportively to achieve a timely return to work wherever possible. Some absence is potentially avoidable however and this is in part related to levels of engagement. As the level of absence attributed to stress in 2013/2014 was a concern when reported last year, a Task Group on Stress and Resilience was formed, chaired by Brenda Smith, Director of Adults Social Care and Independent Living. The group includes staff from a wide range of services including Public Health as the work fits with the wider agenda to promote health in the work-place as well as for residents, HR Delivery, Health and Safety, Workforce Development, Occupational Health Unit (OHU), Operational Service Managers, and the Unions.

- 10.8 The Task Group is taking the approach that developing resilience is a critical business issue which needs to be addressed from the three angles of the organisation, managers and individual staff. Pressures will always exist at work and in personal lives, and employers can help to create a work environment where pressure is managed appropriately and there is less likelihood of staff going off sick. The pace of change will continue in the Council and it is vital to support staff during such change. Managers will be helped to encourage a strong culture of team-work, with a clear focus on the right priorities, and well designed job-roles. Individuals will be offered support to help build their approach to managing workplace challenges. Enabling everyone to work well and productively is good for the residents of Cheshire East as the Council continues on its journey of doing more with less and finding creative new approaches to the delivery of effective services.

- 10.8.1 North West Employers' Organisation have commented that this is a strong and positive approach as it enables a range of inputs to be co-ordinated from across the Council.

- 10.9 The actions taken over the past year to promote good attendance are summarised in Table 2 below, including the main actions taken by the Stress and Resilience Task Group. The table shows actions aligned with the good practice recommended by CIPD.

Table 2

Good practice	Steps taken In CEC in 2014/15
Develop line manager capability to manage absence	Training sessions for managers have been increased. Twelve courses delivered in 14/15 - targeted to the services with higher absence levels. Courses on managing stress are included on Workforce Development prospectus.
An audit of policy, procedures and systems to ensure an organisation provides a working environment which protects the well-being of the workforce and is able to identify and support troubled employees.	The attendance management toolkit for managers was launched. The Health and Safety guidance has been revised, with streamlined Stress-Risk Assessments. Training emphasised the need to design jobs well. Resources to support employees reviewed. Fresh guidance drafted for launch mid-2015.
Problem-centred approach – following up issues which have occurred in the work-place to ensure ways are found to solve any continuing problems, e.g. using risk assessments, examining sickness levels, employee feedback, and/or claims for compensation	Directors followed up on stress identified in the Staff Survey 2014. Risk assessments used in individual cases. Sickness levels examined in management meetings.
Well-being approach – this takes the view that the aim is to maximise employee wellbeing. This takes a proactive approach to identifying ways to create and promote a healthy workforce and working environment.	As part of the Task Group's work; CEC materials on well-being have been reviewed. Guidance has been prepared to help staff and managers and promote resources. Calendar of wellbeing activities (Appendix 3) is being delivered, including short sessions for staff on resilience, a full day pilot event for CLB on resilience. Very positive feedback. Four staff have been trained as Resilience Champions. Wellbeing messages promoted in Team Talk.

Employee-centred approach – this works at the level of the individual to provide education and support to help them deal with problems they are facing. This approach focuses on counselling and stress management training.	2014/2015 was the first full year of the Employee Assistance programme. Provider has given a report – see Appendix 4. Workforce Development offered regular training courses on stress management. Learning Lounge materials promoted and enhanced e.g. with materials from Mindful Employer.
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10.10 The programme of wellbeing activities will be promoted throughout the 2015/2016 year. This forms the basis of an early intervention approach to attendance. Many long term absences cannot be prevented as they are due to illnesses such as cancer or stroke, or involve lengthy testing before diagnosis and treatment. However if the Council emphasises wellbeing, promotes a climate of resilience, and continues making counselling available swiftly through the Employee Assistance Programme, it is possible that shorter-term absence and stress-related absence will fall. The focus on wellbeing has been strengthened and will continue throughout 2015/2016.

10.11 **Main actions for 2015/2016**

- Publish the guidance prepared by the Stress and Resilience Task.
- Improve the information about absence rates provided to managers so that they have more regular updates. The data will be part of the new Dashboard of HR metrics.
- Promote the Employee Assistance Programme on a quarterly basis.
- Promote all the wellbeing measures available in the Council on Centranet and in the Care4CE Handbook and utilise Team Talk to promote and maintain the wellbeing principles and how the organisation supports these.
- Review and refresh the training provided to managers and to staff and ensure it reflects the focus on prevention, and on developing resilience, rather than stress once it has become a problem.
- Continue to update the materials available on the Learning Lounge.
- Support all managers in encouraging them to complete stress audits and to follow up by team discussion to ensure local issues are being brought into the open and solutions identified. The Health and Safety team will promote this in the second quarter of the year.
- Utilise the Public Health initiatives for wellbeing of the population and reinforce to be focused on the work environment, using the National

Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance which was published in June 2015.

- Model behaviours which reinforce the principles of work life balance and healthy working practices.
- Review the impact of agile working on the health of the workforce and develop appropriate actions.
- Review the opportunities for workplace technology and environmental solutions to stay physically well and healthy e.g. explore exercise equipment and healthy standing desks in office areas.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writers:

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