

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 20TH JANUARY 2020

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 27TH NOVEMBER 2019

“482 Q2 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT 2019/2020 (REF) –

The report set out the sickness absence figures for the six month period 1st April to 30th September, 2019 as part of the agreed performance management arrangements. Cabinet had considered the report on 18th November, 2019 and had referred it to the Scrutiny Committee for its consideration.

There had been a significant increase in absence levels during the first half of 2019/2020 compared with the same period for the previous financial year. The absence rates were set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report and showed an increase from 3.71 days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) (April to September 2018) to 4.74 days lost per FTE (April to September 2019). The target for Quarter 2 (April to September 2019) was set as 3.71 days lost per FTE.

An analysis of the figures in each Directorate was set out in paragraph reference 2.7 of the report to Cabinet with an analysis of the reasons for absence set out in paragraphs reference 2.13 to 2.25.

It was reported that the increase in absence levels was largely due to the increase in long term absence rates together with an increase in absences within Schools. With Schools having almost 50% of the workforce, any increase in this area was likely to cause an increase Council wide.

There continued to be scrutiny of absence cases which took place on a monthly basis between the HR Business Partnership and Occupational Health teams, particularly reviewing staff with absences over four weeks and those who had regular absences to provide early intervention and support. Absence was discussed at Directorate Management Teams as part of their service-based action plans. Committee was advised that the figures for comparison with the rest of the Welsh Authorities would not be available until later in the year, but these would be shared when available. The Vale of Glamorgan Council's current annual forecast for 2019/2020 was 11.66 days lost per FTE. This was a significant increase on absence levels for the Council over the past few years. For 2018/2019 the Council's absence figure was 9.12 days lost per FTE as a comparison. Paragraphs reference 2.27 to 2.29 of the report to Cabinet listed the number of initiatives the Council continued to support for staff.

The performance management approach to absence management was to continue throughout 2019/20 with further updates to be provided to Cabinet and Scrutiny as required.

It was noted that overall stress continued to be the most common reason for sickness absence and although this was common within the Public Sector and Local Government. Stress related absence in the Council had reduced from 29.2% in 2017/18 to 28.8% in 2018/19. In the recording of stress absence this was now split into non-work and work related stress and as the Council had 12 months of data, further analysis would take place during 2019/20 which would assist with understanding the reasons for the absence as well as looking at ways to assist the health and welfare of employees and inform Occupational Health and the Employee Counselling service to achieve this objective.

A table with the five most common absence reasons for each Directorate was set out at paragraph reference 2.20 of the report to Cabinet and data included the FTE days lost and percentage of absences in each of the reasons.

The report highlighted the Council's employee assistance programme which remained available to all employees. Work was continuing to develop positive health support in a number of areas as outlined below:

- Flu vaccinations had been offered to all employees during September to December 2018 and a total of 1,566 vaccinations had been administered to employees. The 2019 sessions had already commenced and data would be provided in the End of Year Sickness Report;
- A new Occupational Health (OH) Nurse was appointed in January 2019;
- The OH service was offering health screening to all employees every Thursday (subject to other work commitments). This included: height, weight, BMI, Blood Pressure, Cholesterol and Blood Sugar Tests. Appointments could be made via iDev and if employees did not have access to iDev their manager could book one on their behalf or they could contact OH direct to make the appointment for them;
- The Council had also chosen to install a further two Public Access Defibrillators at the Civic and Docks offices in January 2019. The Alps and Court Road depots both had defibrillators installed in March 2018. Over 80 employees had been trained in the use of the defibrillators, and although training was non-essential it was seen as good practice to offer the training.
- The Council had nearly 40 trained (via Time to Change Wales) mental health champions whose primary role involved:
 - Promoting health campaigns e.g. World Mental Health Day;
 - Encouraging colleagues to participate in the Council's wellbeing initiatives / challenges;
 - Involvement in events and collaborative working with other Champions across the Council and other organisations;
 - Role modelling and promoting a healthy culture within the workplace;
 - Organising activities e.g. lunch-time walks, Yoga sessions, book club, hobby group etc;
 - Signposting colleagues to relevant services.

A Member raised concerns in relation to the new Waste collection arrangements on staff as he had been aware, for example, that in his Ward four houses had placed 31 green bags for collection and his concern related to the weight and amount of refuse collectors would have to collect. The Member stated in his view there should be a limit as to the number of bags that residents could put out. The Operational Manager for Employee Services advised that further work was currently being undertaken in relation to musculoskeletal absence and following the changes in the blue print of the waste collection service, HR was tracking what was happening with a small working group looking in more detail at the issues.

In referring to Schools operating as their own Governing Body and the difficulty the Council had in managing Schools' absences, it was requested that in future reports sickness at Schools be separated from Corporate data in order that Members could see the whole picture for the employees it was directly accountable for.

Members welcomed the increased uptake in relation to flu jab appointments, with the Head of Service stating that the Council was now on its second batch of flu vaccinations and would possibly be looking to obtaining a third batch. Other mitigating initiatives had also been introduced with the establishment of a Wellbeing Group which was also looking at the targets that were currently set. The Chairman commented that more flexibility should also be considered with for example further agile working and a common-sense approach to home working being undertaken.

Having regard to the Council's initiative of purchasing annual leave, it was also requested that a further breakdown be included in future reports of how many staff purchased leave and the departments they were in.

Having regard to cleanliness and hygiene issues, a Member also suggested that the toilet facilities be reviewed with a re-emphasis on personal hygiene being made.

In referring to the issue of stomach ailments, again Members sought any information that was available in this regard to be presented to Committee, with it subsequently being

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T further data capture information as outlined above be presented to future meetings of the Committee and the Committee's forward work programme be amended accordingly.
- (3) T H A T Cabinet be informed of the Committee's intention to seek further information and to report back once that information has been received.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) Having regard to the report.

(2&3) Following consideration at the meeting and a view to receiving further data in order to make informed recommendations if required.”