

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 6TH FEBRUARY, 2025

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 18TH DECEMBER, 2024

“ Q2 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT 2024/2025 (REF) –

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised Committee that the report detailed the sickness absence figures for the period 1st April to 30th September, 2024. Absence figures had increased slightly based on the same period as the previous year but had improved on figures for 2022/2023.

The Head of Service drew Members’ attention to a number of initiatives as identified in paragraph 2.1 of the report that had been introduced by the Council to manage the key drivers in tackling presenteeism. The Council considered it very important that staff were given the support they required and were working with colleagues within the Health and Safety, Occupational Health and Organisational Development and Learning sections to support staff. Support was also provided to staff if required via the Westfield Health Service with a 24 hour advice line available for staff. This service had previously been provided by Care First, however due to a number of issues the Council had negotiated a new contract with Westfield Health.

In commenting on the report, the Chair advised that it was good to note that the “Other” category was going to be removed from the current list of categories as she felt it was an inconsistent term that was being used.

With regard to issues relating to mental health, Councillor Carroll enquired as to whether the reference referred to all mental health issues. The Head of Service advised that this was not the only descriptor, there were also neurological mental health illnesses, however she further said that the Department was considering broadening the category being aware that a number of employees could only tick the category as stress which was therefore not capturing the accuracy of the information.

Councillor Dr. Johnson enquired as to whether the descriptors that were being used were NHS descriptors and whether benchmarking could be undertaken with other Local Authorities. He also said that although a significant amount of statistical information was contained within the report, he wanted to ensure that this was being assessed to ensure that people were in work and healthy. Councillor Dr. Johnson also enquired as to why there were fewer absences in the month of August with the response that this was because of schools, and as they were not open at this time it impacted broadly on the statistics. The Head of Service stated that she would be looking at long term and short term absence going forward, in particular with regard to schools, and the timeliness of reporting long term absence. Councillor Dr. Johnson further enquired as to whether it would be worthwhile asking the WLGA to support the Council in providing information and advice regarding a consistency of

approach in collecting data across the 22 Welsh Local Authorities to ensure that all were analysing in the same way. The Head of Service said she would be happy to refer the suggestion to the WLGA for consideration.

Councillor Loveluck-Edwards in commenting on the statistics said that in her view it was about focusing on what the stresses in the workplace were and how the Council could assist staff. With regard to musculoskeletal illnesses, there was a high percentage of linked absences and she enquired whether the age profile had been taken into consideration and how they were referred to Occupational Health. In response the Head of Service said that the levels of stress were referred to the Occupational Health Team and the Health and Safety and Wellbeing Team were developing action plans and stress risk assessments. Following a query regarding referrals to physio, it was noted that the Occupational Health Team worked with GPs who actually made the referrals.

Councillor Wood in referring to the numbers being fairly inconsistent and being up and down throughout the year suggested that a Working Task Group be set up to look into the matter further and to identify solutions in order to make a detailed impact. The Head of Service in response said that a Task Group had been established and although all were aware that it was a difficult nut to crack effort was certainly being made.

In conclusion Councillor Carroll, said that it was important that the Council understood exactly what was keeping people out of work and drew attention to the UK Government's policy about getting people back into the work place.

Having considered the report, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Cabinet be informed of the following recommendations of the Committee:

- (1) That the results of the review being undertaken by the Council's HR Business Partner Team (which includes the Health and Wellbeing Team) be reported to the Committee in six months' time;
- (2) That an update report relating to the effectiveness of the Westfield Health Service be provided to the Committee in six months' time;
- (3) That further updates be provided to the Committee relating to options to align the descriptors for reporting sickness with NHS descriptors and that the Welsh Local Government Association be asked to support a piece of work being undertaken with regard to a consistency of approach across all Local Authorities in Wales.
- (4) That statistical data and age-related information relating to musculoskeletal absence be detailed in a further report to Committee and costings be included for physio provision by the Council where it may be considered appropriate.

Reasons for recommendations

(1-4) Having regard to the contents of the report, discussions at the meeting and for further consideration by the Committee."