

Title of Report:	Absenteeism Report – Quarter 1-4 2020/2021
Committee Report Submitted To:	Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	9 June 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Innovation and Transformation
Outcome	Improve Service Delivery
Lead Officer	Director of Corporate Services / Head of ODHR

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals. N/A		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with Quarter 1 - 4 (1 April 2020 to March 2021) information regarding Absenteeism throughout the Council.

2.0 Background

Absenteeism within the Council is closely monitored and reviewed in accordance with Policies and Procedures, and in line with NJC Terms and Conditions.

ODHR Business Partners work closely with each of the Directorates, Managers and Supervisors to assist and support through a range of preventative proactive measures alongside the reactive including referrals to Occupational Health, absence review meetings, referrals for Ill Health Retirement.

3.0 Performance Improvement Plan 2019/2020, continuing in 2020/2021

3.1 Progress to date – Quarter 1 - 4 (1 April 2020 to March 2021) Objective 4, Performance Improvement Plan

Outputs

- OD/HR continue to co-ordinate a programme of training for employees and line managers on the Council's newly revised Sickness Absence Policy which came into effect on 1st July 2020.
- To date 116 line managers and 254 employees have been trained on the new policy (total 370 employees).
- Face to Face training is required in the Operations Department and preparations are being made to provide this training now that restrictions have been relaxed.
- Work is ongoing with stakeholders to identify and agree further measures to support employees such as access to private Health Care, access to specific treatments, health insurance etc.
- In light of COVID-19 Occupational Health appointments are mostly by telephone, however face to face appointments can be arranged if required.
- Continuing on from the previous quarter, Councils' highest reason for sickness absence is the Sickness Category including conditions such as Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue syndrome. However, it is noted there is a reduction of 1,392.79 days from the 2019/20 figures (See Table 4 for further analysis).
- Employees who are absent due to a stress or a stress related absence are referred immediately to Occupational Health so that interventions can be put in place at an early stage. Employees are also reminded of the counselling services provided by Inspire.
- In Quarter 4, 25 employees availed of these services, 5 of which are new referrals.

- The Health & Well Being Group activities for employees continue to be cancelled as a result of COVID 19 restrictions, however plans are in place for activities in Quarter 1 2021/22.
- OD/HR continue to issue emails to staff covering a variety of topics in relation to general health and wellbeing including Mental Health.
- ODHR work closely with the PR department in providing wellbeing content for the weekly Staff News.
- Council are mindful of the unique and difficult time we are working in and have been providing practical advice and solutions for staff who continue to work from home. Further details provided in Section 6.

3.2 Outcomes

- A 2.5% reduction in the number of days lost to Council through long term sickness (*9,382.64 in 2019/20, target 9,148.07 days in 2020/21, actual 6,128.20 days*)
- A 2.5% reduction in the average number of days lost per employee through sickness absenteeism (*17.66 days per employee in 2019/20, target 17.22 in 2020/21, actual 11.41 days per employee*)
- We will maintain the average time for an Occupational Health Review from 4 weeks to 2 weeks

3.3 Quarter 4 Performance Against Targets

Table 1 Quarter 1 - 4 Performance Against Targets and in-Year Comparisons

	12 months ending 31/03/20	2.5% reduction target against same period last year	12 months ending 31/03/21	On Target/ Not On Target
Average number of days lost per employee through sickness absenteeism	17.66	17.22	11.41 (35.41% reduction)	On Target
Number of Days lost to Council through long term sickness	9,382.64	9,148.07	6,128.20 (34.69% reduction)	On Target
Average time for an Occupational Health Review (We will maintain the average time for an Occupational health Review from 4 weeks to 2)	4 weeks	2 weeks (from 4 weeks to 2 weeks)	2 weeks	On Target
Staff members engaging in Council's wellbeing activities				

4.0 Analysis of Quarter 4 Data

Table 2 – Analysis of Absenteeism Data

April – December	2020/21	2019/20
No. of employees absent	174	347
Long Term as % of total absence <i>(absence greater than 20 days)</i>	89.49%	85.57%
Short Term as % of total absence <i>(absence less than 20 days)</i>	10.50%	14.43%
Average days lost per employee <i>(combined short and long term)</i>	11.41	17.66

Table 3 – Top 5 reasons for Absence*

April – December	2020/21	2019/20
Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue	53%	45.83%
Musculo-skeletal problems	11%	10.26%
Stomach, liver, kidney and digestion	9%	6.82%
Back and neck problems	8%	6.15%
Infections	8%	4.21%

*Appendix 1 provides further details

Table 4 – Analysis of Stress and Stress Related Absences

	12 months ending 31/03/20	12 months ending 31/03/21	Difference
Total days absent under the Sickness Category for Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue	5,025.38	3,632.59	Reduction of 1,392.79 days
Stress listed as sickness reason – Total Days absent	2,501.08	1,647.16	Reduction of 853.92 days
Work related Stress listed as sickness reason – Total days absent	1,306.73	918.06	Reduction of 388.67 days

5.0 Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan

The Council have been involved in the development of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan. This Strategy has been developed to guide the work of the Local Government in the longer term, and to focus on the action plan for 2020 - 2023. The Vision for the Strategy is based on the acronym **ASK**:

Accept

One of the key messages to come out of the consultation was the need to accept that anyone at any level in Councils and the NIHE can have poor mental health, and to work towards a culture where mental health can be discussed openly. As organisations, we need to demonstrate a visible commitment to mental health in the workplace by providing an environment where individuals feel accepted and safe to speak openly about mental health including their personal experiences.

Support

The Group seeks to ensure that individuals in Councils and the NIHE feel supported in relation to their health and wellbeing and that, if they are experiencing poor mental health, they know how and where to access support.

Knowledge

Mental health is about wellness rather than illness and is not merely the absence of a mental health condition. Mental health exists on a continuum, or range: from positive, healthy functioning at one end through to severe symptoms of mental health conditions at the other. The Group seeks to support individuals at all levels in Councils and the NIHE to have access to the knowledge and tools to support anyone experiencing poor mental health and create healthy workplaces.

Activities are being considered for 2021/22 based on the Strategy and Action Plan.

6.0 Support provided to Staff during year – COVID arrangements

- Flexible working arrangements available such as parental leave, special leave, annual leave, toil and flexi
- Encouraging staff to have breaks during the day and to take annual leave
- Importance of regular staff contact/communication using methods such as whatsapp, MS Teams, Phone calls, Staff Newsletter
- Initiatives from Inspire – Nutrition Workshops / Resilience Workshops
- Stress Control Classes through Health Trusts delivered by professionals offering suggestions/advice/support, and providing staff time to attend same
- Supervisors and Managers applying practical and sensible solutions, managing workloads and priorities, whilst delivering services, mindful of public and expectations

- Agile Working Policy is currently in draft and will be presented to Trade Unions in the coming months.

This quarterly report will continue to be provided to Audit Committee, and the information will also be feed through Council's Performance Improvement Plan.

7.0 Recommendation:

It is recommended that Council notes the report presented.

Appendix 1 Absenteeism Analysis Summary

Analysis summary 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020

Analysis	No. Emps	No. Incidents	No. Days	%
Back and neck problems	33.00	35.00	674.14	6.15
Chest and respiratory	29.00	32.00	214.04	1.95
Eye, ear, nose and mouth/dental	13.00	14.00	134.22	1.22
Genito-Urinary/Gynaecological	3.00	4.00	22.92	0.21
Heart, blood pressure and circulation	10.00	11.00	428.57	3.91
Infections	90.00	101.00	461.26	4.21
Musculo-skeletal problems (excluding back and neck	27.00	28.00	1124.88	10.26
Neurological	22.00	25.00	106.86	0.97
Other	45.00	46.00	1908.17	17.40
Pregnancy (excluding Maternity Leave)	7.00	9.00	160.76	1.47
Stomach, liver, kidney and digestion	81.00	90.00	704.11	6.42
Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue syndrome	98.00	105.00	5025.38	45.83
Total	458.00	500.00	10965.31	100

Analysis summary 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021

Analysis	No. Emps	No. Incidents	No. Days	%
Back and neck problems	19	21	558.22	8.15
Chest and respiratory	6	6	95.98	1.40
Eye, ear, nose and mouth/dental	6	6	69.47	1.01
Genito-Urinary/Gynaecological	1	1	15.00	0.22
Heart, blood pressure and circulation	1	1	12.97	0.19
Infections	31	32	553.03	8.08
Musculo-skeletal problems (excluding back and neck	22	23	752.92	11.00
Neurological	6	8	55.53	0.81
Other	18	20	497.76	7.27
Pregnancy (excluding Maternity Leave)	1	1	13.11	0.19
Stomach, liver, kidney and digestion	24	29	590.71	8.63
Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue syndrome	57	59	3632.59	53.05
Total	192	207	6,847.29	100