

REPORT TO: Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 2 June 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Corporate and Policy

SUBJECT: Sickness Absence

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a report on the number of working days lost in 2008/09.
- 1.2 To report on absence management and interventions currently being introduced to assist managers in effectively managing employee absence.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the report be noted; and**
- (2) quarterly progress reports be brought to the Board.**

3.0 SICKNESS STATISTICS

- 3.1 The total number of days lost due to sickness, per employee, for 2008/09 is 13.52. This is an increase from the third quarter BVPI which was 10.07 days. Many of those days lost were due to colds/flu over the Winter period. By comparison the figure for 2007/08 was 12.46 days.

4.0 OBSERVATIONS

- 4.1 Sickness levels are a key indicator for any organisation, given their impact on both cost and productivity. However, of equal importance is for the Council to have a healthy workforce. Sickness levels can reflect current issues within the Authority. Undoubtedly, Efficiency Programmes and the current economic climate can have an impact on people's morale and wellbeing. Of course, these issues can also be found across workforces up and down the Country.
- 4.2 Given the increase in sickness levels it was agreed by Management Team that certain actions be undertaken to:
 - better understand the reasons behind the figures; and
 - increase the pro active management of sickness absence across the Authority.

Detailed below are those actions and activities being undertaken.

5.0 Absence Management and Interventions

- 5.1 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Annual Absence Management Survey 2008 suggests that the main cause of short-term absence is minor illnesses such as colds, flu, stomach upsets, and that the return to work interview is rated as the most effective approach to the management of this. The three most highly rated approaches to managing long term absence are occupational health support, rehabilitation programmes and flexible working.
- 5.2 To support the Managing Absence Policy, Halton provides a range of measures such as Return to Work interviews to, amongst other things, help to identify if there is an underlying cause for the absence, remind employees that they were missed etc.
- 5.3 The Council also balances the approach to absence management by having in place, significant support and flexibility to help individuals with health problems and assist people to balance their work and home lives, such as OHU (Occupational Health Unit) support through counselling, physiotherapy, periods of rehabilitation following long term sickness absence, ill-health redeployment where necessary, flexible working practices, home working. There are also a raft of associated personnel policies such as Stress Management Policy, Dignity at Work Policy, No Smoking Policy to improve employees well being and ensure that workplace stress is not a feature of employees working lives. The starting point is always to understand the reasons for absence.

In addition, the Working Flexible for You Strategy has identified a range of supportive measures and much working is undertaken with regards to Health, i.e. healthy eating, back strengthening workshops, yoga workshops, and encouraging activity with walks, cycle routes etc.

- 5.4 To ensure all managers are fully conversant with the Corporate Sickness Absence Policy a series of refresher training sessions have been rolled out over the last three months. The training includes how to undertake return to work interviews, when absence becomes a capability issue and when to move into that procedure, monitoring absence and what they should be doing to identify and improve problems, both at individual employee level and/or team level, agreeing periods of rehabilitation etc. A total of 185 managers have attended the training. The feedback received from all managers has been extremely positive. Managers are supported in addressing staff absences with the support of the Assistant Personnel/Welfare Officers. As a result of these interventions managers across the Authority are reporting improvements in the levels of absence. Careful monitoring is taking place and it is hoped that overall rates should improve.

5.5 The Assistant Personnel/Welfare Officers attend Directorate Management Teams, on a monthly basis, to provide information on levels of absence, reasons, costs and to provide advice on any problem areas.

5.6 The Management Team will also receive a report on sickness absence on a quarterly basis outlining trends and patterns of sickness, so that comparative performance can be assessed. It is suggested that this Board also receives those monitoring reports in future.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Managing Absence Policy, was reviewed and jointly agreed with the trade unions in January 2007. As sickness absence continues to be monitored across the Authority the Sickness Absence Policy will be kept under review to ensure absence is managed effectively.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

7.1 **Children and Young People in Halton**
Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton
A Healthy Halton
A Safer Halton
Halton's Urban Renewal

Clearly sickness absence has an impact across all priorities and it is important that it continues to be managed effectively.

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 Failure to monitor absence levels and trends may lead to increased levels of ill health and appropriate support may not be given to employees. Sickness absence also increases costs and reduces productivity.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

9.1 The Council is better protected from future challenge of Disability discrimination or other discrimination if all employees are treated equally and fairly with regard to their sickness absences.

10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Failure to address levels of sickness absence will lead to increasing costs for the Authority.

11.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.