

## **Budget and Performance Panel**

### **Reducing Sickness Absence**

#### **Background**

For the financial year 2011/12 an average of 9.56 days was lost to sickness absence per employee. That represents the best year for attendance to date (records exist from 2000 onwards). It is impossible to compare statistics with other organisations as methods of recording vary significantly, as do job profiles and workforce profiles, and so the Council compares its progress with its own previous records

The headline figure does not of course mean that all employees have 9 days of sickness absence in a year. It is an average figure, and covers absences caused by both long term and short term absences. Absences exceeding 20 working days are treated as long term; this may be for example where the absence is caused by broken limbs or cancer.

#### **Current year**

To continue with improvement the Council's current target is to achieve a sickness absence level of less than 9.0 days lost per employee by the end of the current financial year.

At the end of Quarter 1 of 2012/13, absence levels totalled 1.95 days lost per person, which was below the first quarter target of no more than 2.25 days lost to sickness absence per person.

The figures for Quarter 2 are not yet available. However, at the end of August 2012, absence totalled 3.62 days lost per person, which is still below the target of 3.75 for this point in the year. This gives an average of 2.68 days lost due to long term absence and 0.94 days per person lost to short term absence, a ratio of roughly 3:1. Based on the sickness rate at the end of August the Council is on target to achieve its end of year target. However, absence rates tend to climb during the winter months, due to an increase in seasonal viruses, and therefore close management of absence will be required to achieve the target of 9.0 days or less.

#### **Action taken to reduce sickness absence**

Over the last two years Lancaster City Council has taken a number of positive steps to assist employees in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and has also enhanced the range of supportive measures available to employees if they become unwell. The aim of this work has been to improve access to health information, to allow staff to make informed choices, and importantly to improve levels of attendance.

In tandem with these measures work has been taking place on revisions to the Council's Sickness Absence Management Policy, which was introduced in 2006. Following consultation and agreement by JCC and Personnel Committee, a revised policy has recently been put in place. The revised policy provides a much clearer framework for managers and employees, further clarifying roles and responsibilities, placing greater emphasis on communication throughout the duration of the absence, as well as follow up supportive action upon return to work. The introduction of a



revised Sickness Absence Management Policy should have a positive impact on absence levels.

Other positive actions taken over the last two years include:

- Health and Wellbeing events, which have been held at each of the 3 main sites, with the most recent event taking place at WLD in July 2012. The particular focus at the WLD event was on encouraging the male staff, who outnumber female approximately 5:1, to take greater care of their health. Central to the day was the provision of individual health checks
- The Council has expanded the range of supportive measures for those staff who require additional assistance in returning to or remaining at work; which includes physiotherapy, counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy and access to a health and fitness referral scheme
- On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 the HR Team launched a new section on the Intranet on Health and Wellbeing, to provide staff with a central point for all queries and questions relating to health matters. Arranged around the segments of an orange, the eight segments cover:
  - healthy choices
  - health and safety information
  - occupational health
  - positive mental health
  - physical wellbeing
  - work life balance
  - travelling to work
  - health links

In addition, for those staff who do not have access to the intranet, notice boards across the Council are regularly updated with a range of health information

- A 'Pedometer Challenge' event was run in April/May 2012. 12 teams of 4 from across the Council competed against each other to walk the most steps in a two week period. Individuals were encouraged to walk 10,000 steps a day and all involved made extra efforts to incorporate more walking into their daily routine, by leaving the car at home, walking to the shops and so on.

In recognition of our efforts Lancaster City Council was successfully awarded a Bronze Partners in Health Award from NHS North Lancashire in July 2011. This was followed by a Silver Partners in Health Award in June 2012. Lancaster City Council is one of only three organisations in North Lancashire who have been achieved Silver status.

Head of Governance  
5.10.12