

1 December 2003

**Sickness Absence Levels in
Social Services Department**

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1. To report progress on the Scrutiny project which is looking at sickness absence levels in Social Services Department.

Progress to Date

2. The Working Group has been meeting since July 2003. The Group also includes representatives from Human Resources Committee who are playing an active role in this project.
3. Evidence has been taken so far from Social Services Department, in the form of both current and historical data about sickness absence levels and causes of sickness absence; and also about how sickness absence is managed within County Durham Care, where levels are highest. Members have also received evidence about the County Council's current and developing policies on managing sickness absence. There has been some input from Users and Carers about the impact of sickness absence upon those who receive services.
4. The Group has received regular updates about sickness absence levels. Social Services Department is devoting considerable efforts to reduce sickness absence and we have heard that levels have begun to fall (by 0.2% in 2002/03 compared with the previous year). Levels in the first two quarters of 2003/04 are below 8% as compared with nearly 9% in the same period in 2002/03.
5. Further meetings are planned with the County Council's Head of Occupational Health and to examine best practice in other local authorities and the private sector. The Group hopes to engage with the Unions before concluding the project, hopefully early next year.

Recommendation

6. Members are asked to note progress on the Social Services Sickness Absence Scrutiny project.

Head of Overview and Scrutiny

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