

Human Resources Committee

15 June 2007

Sickness Absence: Quarterly Performance Monitoring



Report of Kim Jobson, Head of Human Resources

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To report the performance of the Council and of individual Services on sickness absence during the quarter 1 January to 31 March 2007.

Background

- 2 This is the regular quarterly report to the Human Resources Committee as part of the management of Council performance on sickness absence.

Corporate Performance

- 3 *Figure 1* identifies our current rate of sickness absence for the last quarter and for the 12 months to 31 March 2007, in comparison with our annual target.

DCC Performance for the Quarter Only to 31.03.07	2.61 days per FTE
DCC BV12 for the Twelve Months to 31.03.07	9.84 days per FTE
DCC Annual Target for 2006 - 2007	9.50 days per FTE

Figure 1: Headline BVPI12 Figures for Quarter ending 31 March 2007

- 4 During the quarter to 31 March 2007, sickness absence levels have decreased to **2.61 days** lost per full time equivalent (FTE) County Council employee. This compares with 2.99 days over the previous quarter to 31 December 2006 and 2.71 days in the equivalent quarter to March 2006.
- 5 The sickness figure for the twelve months to 31 March 2007, based on the requirements of BVPI12¹, has decreased to **9.84 days** lost per Council FTE employee. *Figure 2* identifies how this total has been reached. This compares with 9.96 days for the twelve months to 31 December 2006 and 10.02 days for the twelve months to 30 March 2006.

¹ The Audit Commission requirement for calculating this figure is based around the number of working days/shifts lost to sickness absence based around FTE staffing.

Number of days lost to sickness absence between 01/04/06 and 31/03/07		141,548.59
Number of FTE staff at 31/03/06	14,315.44	
Number of FTE staff at 31/03/07	14,440.77	
Average number of FTE staff over 12 month period		14,378.11
Number of days lost per FTE - BVPI 12		9.84

Figure 2: Calculation of current BVPI figure

- 6 Six out of the seven services have recorded a decrease in their sickness absence figures for the quarter, with only Environment recording an increase. Comments from the individual services can be found in this report under the 'Service Performance and Action' section.
- 7 The Resource Link Payroll/HR monitoring system has been partially utilised in the collection of this quarter's data. At present, services are still required to complete the Sickness Absence Pro-forma for collation by the Corporate Human Resources Division.
- 8 A target absence rate is set for the end of each financial year to assist us comply with BVPI requirements. We reached our targets for 2003-4 and 2004-05, but progress was slower in 2005-06 and we failed to hit our target. Therefore, the target for 2006-07 was revised to 9.50 days. Although our current rate is an improvement on the figure from 12 months ago, we have again not reached the prescribed target. Consequently the target for 2007/08 has been set at 9.75 days, improving to 9.60 and 9.50 over the next two years.
- 9 As indicated earlier, we are in the process of transferring data from a series of older recording systems to Resource Link. This move should generate more consistent data across the Council, but the initial effect on the overall statistics is a little uncertain at this stage. Hence, although seeking to maintain a positive trend, we are being more cautious about target setting until the transferral has fully taken place. *Figure 3* gives an idea of the trends alongside targets for last year and the current year.

BVPI	Jan-Mar 2006	Apr-Jun 2006	Jul – Sep 2006	Oct – Dec 2006	Jan – Mar 2007	06-07 target	07-08 target
12	10.02 days	9.55 days	9.59 days	9.96 days	9.84 days	9.50 days	9.75 days

Figure 3: BVPI comparisons

- 10 A breakdown of the absences into short and long term periods² can be found through Appendix 2.
- 11 Appendix 3 shows the quarterly returns for the Service structure for this quarter and the previous three quarters. Following the internal reorganisation

² Short-term absences are defined as up to 20 days.

of Services, we have now reached a point where we can demonstrate trends for a full year within the revised structure.

Corporate Action

- 12 A huge amount of activity has taken place, in all Services, over the past eighteen months to raise the profile of health in the workplace and to support the work towards the attainment of the Bronze Health at Work Award at the end of 2006.
- 13 The 'Working on Well Being site on the Intranet continues to run and gives details of various events across the County and staff discount opportunities.
- 14 The revised Smoking at Work Policy was implemented on 1 April 2007. Prior to, and following this date, there has been considerable publicity generated to ensure that both DCC staff and the general public in County Durham were fully aware of the Council's stance on this subject. Methods used to communicate the message to staff included the Intranet Staff Bulletin Board, electronic on-screen pop-up notices, newsletters and information was also printed on individual employee pay slips. In order to target the information at the general public within County Durham, who use the Council's services on a daily basis, information was published in the Countywide magazine, through branch libraries, the electronic notice board at the entrance to County Hall and press releases.
- 15 Managing Sickness Absence training continues to be an integral part of a manager's development. As the training is now identified in the corporate training programme, newly appointed managers are encouraged to attend at an early stage of their employment. All managers are given a copy of the policy and procedures and the Managers Information Toolkit, which includes general guidance and details of all the forms. In addition, the Corporate Induction programme for new employees covers their role in return to work and sickness interviews linked to the trigger points.
- 16 The Occupational Health Service continues to support the delivery of the training programme offering guidance on the role of the OHS in sickness absence management.
- 17 A further specific intervention is the training of managers in how to respond in a structured way to employees who indicate that they are experiencing stress or are off work because of stress. Linked to the new Stress Management Policy and supported by a manager's toolkit, this forms an additional module within the managing attendance training session.
- 18 One of the major reasons for absence is psychological issues. To support the ways in which managers and employees can address this, the Stress Management Policy and Action Plan have been developed and will be rolled out from June onwards. This can only be effective if it is comprehensively rolled out and implemented within Services as its effectiveness is dependent

upon commitment from managers from the top level to anyone who has a supervisory responsibility.

- 19 Corporate actions include a project with the NHS Primary Care college to develop a 'Training the Trainers' programme; a toolkit to support managers when identifying and discussing stress related issues with individual employees, whether attending or absent from work, to draw up action plans to address issues where possible; raising awareness with employees through leaflets, health promotional events e.g. healthy eating, fitness, smoking and exercise activities.
- 20 Services have been asked to link this work with Staff Survey/IIP Action Plans through the Corporate OD Group as these issues have significant developmental links. The aim is also both on a Service and Corporate basis to identify and target hot spots through absence figures, grievance, bullying & harassment and disciplinary information so that resources can be most efficiently and effectively utilised.

Service Performance and Action – commentary provided by the Services

a) Adult & Community Services

- 21 In Community Support sickness absence is noted as a standing item on the Management Team Agenda and the issue of sickness absence levels will be raised with the team in May's team meeting. There has been one referral to Occupational Health during the period.
- 22 Within the Culture and Leisure Division days lost up to 20 days has increased to 336 from 267 in the last quarter. This increase of 69 days represents 1.07 FTE. The days lost through longer absences (20 days or more) has decreased from 526 to 410.5 which shows the effect of one long-term absence ending. The net result is a move overall from 2.95 FTE to 2.76 FTE. The major cause of sickness absence is mental health which represents 56.2% of absences and this continues to be an area of concern.
- 23 Absences are discussed quarterly at the Service Management Team meetings and also at the A&CS Management Team. Actions are agreed and reported back. In the last quarter a member of staff has been taken through a Capability Hearing and their employment terminated. Three staff are moving to the final stage sickness absence review. Staff are referred to Occupational Health on a regular basis, when appropriate.
- 24 In the Social Care Division the sickness absence figure has reduced from that of the last quarter. The reason for the reduction is due to a decrease in the '20 days and more' figure, demonstrating the ongoing management action towards managing absences accordingly. Mental Health related sickness continues to be the main reason for sickness absence, although there is a reduction in the actual number of days compared to the previous quarter. The biggest reduction (20%) in sickness days was associated with 'other musculo-

skeletal problems' – possibly a consequence of on-going and improved Health and Safety training, including the opportunity for E-Learning in areas such as Safe Manual Handling.

- 25 The targeting of specific action aimed at reducing long-term and short-term sickness absences continues, complimenting the on-going activities within the Sickness Absence management Group (SAMG) meetings. The monitoring in particular is aimed at staff who have been absent for 4 months or more, ensuring a consistent and fair approach to managing absence effectively. There is on-going monitoring of the sickness absence interviews, working with managers to ensure interviews are held in accordance with procedures. Tables are produced and discussed that contain teams with the highest number of sickness absence days with particular attention to those with an increasing trend. Quarterly SAMG and Performance Monitoring days are held, with analysis and monitoring of sickness absence trends/statistics. Social Care managers/supervisors have attended four training sessions during the last quarter, two of these were held for Social care staff only. A meeting was held (in February) with Occupational Health to discuss working practices in an attempt to continuously improve links with the service.
- 26 The meetings/monitoring planned has progressed accordingly, important in maintaining the level of management activity in managing sickness absence. The monitoring of long-term sickness absence along with the on-going work with Corporate Services has resulted in a large number of Final Stage Interviews being held/planned.

b) Chief Executive's Office

- 27 Sickness levels are still high due to four people being absent illness throughout the quarter. All staff on long-term sick are being monitored, with relevant involvement from Occupational Health. Management continues to follow the corporate procedure.

c) Children and Young People's Services

- 28 Although this service has been one of those significantly affected by structural reorganisation they have continued to highlight comparisons between some staff groupings over the year:

	1 Jan – 31 Mar 2006	1 Jan – 31 Mar 2007
Support Staff in Schools	2.62	2.19
Teaching Staff in Schools	2.39	2.02
Headquarters Staff	1.62	1.92

- 29 Absences are managed by respective Line Managers and in schools by Head Teachers and Governing Bodies. The Local Authority is not able to influence the outcome of sickness related absences in Voluntary Aided Schools.

Therefore, as indicated earlier, the figures for staff absences within these schools have not been included in this return.

- 30 A group of Local Authority Officers meet on a half-term basis to consider school based absences and offer support and guidance to Head Teachers and Governing Bodies in respect of managing sickness absence and applying related policies.
- 31 Refresher courses aimed at assisting Head Teachers in managing sickness absence are to be scheduled.
- 32 Sickness related absences by centrally employed staff continue to be managed in accordance with the policy including referrals to Occupational Health through to returns to work on a phased basis or ultimately capability hearings.
- 33 Work continues on monitoring and scrutinising absences for all staff. Support continues to be provided by School & Governor Support, Corporate Human Resources colleagues and Staffing.

d) Corporate Services

- 34 There has been a decrease in sickness absence in the quarter (2.17 days) as compared to the previous quarter ended 31 December 2006 (2.37 days). This also compares favourably with the figures against the same quarter in the previous year (2006) when sickness levels stood at 2.44 days.
- 35 All absences are actively managed in line with the County Council policy on sickness absence. A detailed monthly report is produced and discussed at CSMT to ensure that it remains a service priority. This information is also shared with staff.
- 36 Sickness reviews and appropriate referrals to Occupational Health have been undertaken. Most of the problems are down to a small number of long-term absentees and appropriate action is being taken, while some have now returned to work.

e) County Treasurer's

- 37 Sickness levels have reduced since the last quarter due to a reduction in long-term absence.
- 38 Ongoing monitoring is taking place in accordance with sickness absence procedures and advice sought from Occupational Health when appropriate.
- 39 Three staff on long-term sickness absence have recently returned to work. Only one member of staff remains in this category.

f) Environment

- 40 The figures have increased by 13% in the last 3 months. Although there has been a reduction in the number of days lost due to long-term absence (25%), days lost due to short-term absence has increased significantly (34%).
- 41 Staff who hit the trigger points continue to be monitored according to the corporate guidelines.

g) Service Direct

- 42 The sickness ratio for the current quarter at 3.05 shows a decrease from the previous quarter which was 3.32. The March quarter in 2006 was 2.90. Long-term sickness has decreased from the previous quarter from 2.16 to 1.87.
- 43 Sickness reviews are continuing to take place where employees hit the trigger points and follow through to capability interviews where appropriate. The details held within the operational areas have improved the gathering of information which should help progress employees through the various stages of the policy.

Next steps

- 44 The next planned quarterly report will come to the HR Committee of 15 June 2007 covering the period April to June 2007.

Recommendation

- 45 You are asked to note the data and the commentaries on progress given by Services and corporately.

Contact: Kim Jobson, Head of Human Resources
Tel: (0191) 3833240 or e-mail kim.jobson@durham.gov.uk or
Julie Burgess (HR Adviser) Tel: (0191) 3834198 or e-mail
julie.burgess@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

None directly.

Staffing

Short-term absences have a continuing impact on provision of adequate cover across the services. The spasmodic and unpredictable nature of this type of absence affects satisfactory provision in the short term.

Equality and Diversity

The Council may consider the equalities monitoring of sickness absence levels as such, and is required to monitor formal action affecting employees.

Accommodation

None specific.

Crime and disorder

None.

Sustainability

None

Human rights

None specific.

Localities

None

Young people

None specific.

Consultation

Chief Officers may wish to share data in this report within their Services to promote awareness of the issues.

Health

It is anticipated that strategies such as the Working on Well Being will contribute to an improvement in the health of its workforce and subsequently assist in an improvement in sickness absence levels.

Short and Long-term Sickness Absence 01.01.07 - 31.03.07					
	Number of Days Lost				
Service	Up to 20 days	%	More than 20 days	%	Total No. of Days
Adult and Community Services	3415.25	38.7	5418.35	61.3	8833.6
Chief Executive's Office	277	46.9	313	53.1	590
Children and Young People's Services	12265.74	52.3	11204.43	47.7	23470.17
Corporate Services	557.5	74.8	188	25.2	745.5
County Treasurer's	193	47.2	216	52.8	409
Environment	741	76.3	230	23.7	971
Service Direct	1019	38.9	1603	61.1	2622
COUNCIL	18468.5	49.1	19172.8	50.9	37641.3

Short and Long-term Sickness Absence 01.10.06 - 31.12.06					
	Number of Days Lost				
Service	Up to 20 days	%	More than 20 days	%	Total No. of Days
Adult and Community Services	3282.2	34.2	6318.2	65.8	9600.4
Chief Executive's Office	376	54.6	313	45.4	689
Children and Young People's Services	13835.45	49.7	14018.14	50.3	27853.59
Corporate Services	549	67.8	261	32.2	810
County Treasurer's	212	46.3	246	53.7	458
Environment	553	64.3	307	35.7	860
Service Direct	1016	34.9	1896	65.1	2912
COUNCIL	19823.7	45.9	23359.3	54.1	43183.0

Durham County Council Sickness Absence

Service:	Quarter			Quarter			Quarter			Quarter		
	1 Apr - 30 Jun 2006			1 Jul - 30 Sep 2006			1 Oct - 31 Dec 2006			1 Jan - 31 Mar 2007		
	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Emp	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Emp	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Emp	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Emp
A & CS	2336.90	7979.90	3.41	2315.06	8620.10	3.72	2364.70	9600.40	4.06	2345.30	8833.60	3.77
<i>Former Social Care</i>	1990.40	7395.90	3.72	1966.40	7774.10	3.95	2031.70	8542.40	4.20	2013.30	7824.10	3.89
<i>Adult LD Services</i>	14.50	70.00	4.83	16.66	53.50	3.21						
<i>Culture & Leisure</i>	269.00	412.00	1.53	269.00	587.50	2.18	269.00	793.00	2.95	270.00	746.50	2.76
<i>Community Support Division</i>	63.00	102.00	1.62	63.00	205.00	3.25	64.00	265.00	4.14	62.00	263.00	4.24
Chief Executive's Office	200.00	520.00	2.60	214.00	787.00	3.68	212.00	689.00	3.25	223.00	590.00	2.65
C&YPS	9892.80	18890.47	1.91	10029.13	14537.36	1.45	10034.82	27853.59	2.78	10065.77	23470.17	2.33
<i>Support Staff in Schools</i>	3728.82	7110.99	1.91	3780.83	4830.96	1.28	3838.56	13030.55	3.39	3877.45	8503.57	2.19
<i>Teachers</i>	4387.48	6807.78	1.55	4452.25	4452.30	1.00	4455.45	9518.34	2.14	4449.24	8999.90	2.02
<i>Former Education Staff</i>	714.10	1165.50	1.63	760.55	1165.50	1.53	768.11	944.50	1.23	764.38	1469.20	1.92
<i>Former SC & H Staff</i>	1062.40	3806.20	3.58	1035.50	4088.60	3.95	972.70	4360.20	4.48	974.70	4497.50	4.61
Corporate Services	345.36	739.00	2.14	351.99	657.00	1.87	342.05	810.00	2.37	343.41	745.50	2.17
County Treasurer's	159.33	415.50	2.61	151.13	387.00	2.56	148.00	458.00	3.09	147.09	409.00	2.78
Environment	467.51	483.00	1.03	452.40	774.00	1.71	459.40	860.00	1.87	457.20	971.00	2.12
Service Direct	870.00	2976.00	3.42	870.00	2958.00	3.40	876.00	2912.00	3.32	859.00	2622.00	3.05