

Human Resources Committee

10 August 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 April to 30 June 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 30 June 2007, in comparison with our annual target.

DCC Performance for the Quarter Only to 30.06.07	2.04 days per FTE
DCC BV12 for the Twelve Months to 30.06.07	9.58 days per FTE
DCC Annual Target for 2007 - 2008	9.75 days per FTE

Figure 1: Headline BVPI12 Figures for Quarter ending 30 June 2007

- 4 During the quarter to 30 June 2007, sickness absence levels have decreased to **2.04 days** lost per full time equivalent (FTE) County Council employee. This compares with 2.61 days over the previous quarter to 31 March 2007 and 2.24 days in the equivalent quarter to June 2006.
- 5 The sickness figure for the twelve months to 30 June 2007, based on the requirements of BVPI12¹, has shown a welcome decrease to **9.58 days** lost per Council FTE employee. This figure continues the downward trend of the past 6 months and takes us back to a figure similar to that of 12 months ago. *Figure 2* identifies how this total has been reached. This compares with 9.84 days for the twelve months to 31 March 2007 and 9.55 days for the twelve months to 30 June 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 01/07/06 and 30/06/07		139948.73
Number of FTE staff at 30/06/06	14271.90	
Number of FTE staff at 30/06/07	14932.24	
Average number of FTE staff over 12 month period		14602.07
Number of days lost per FTE - BVPI 12		9.58

Figure 2: Calculation of current BVPI figure

- 6 As in the previous quarter, 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 again been partially utilised in the collection of this quarter's data. The transferring of data from a series of older recording systems to Resource Link is currently progressing. This move should generate more consistent data across the Council, but the initial effect on the overall statistics is still a little uncertain at this stage. 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. As we did not reach the prescribed target the target for 2007/08 was set at 9.75 days, improving to 9.60 and 9.50 over the next two years. *Figure 3* gives an idea of the trends alongside the target for the current year.

BVPI	Apr-Jun 2006	Jul – Sep 2006	Oct – Dec 2006	Jan – Mar 2007	Apr – Jun 2007	07-08 target
12	9.55 days	9.59 days	9.96 days	9.84 days	9.58 days	9.75 days

Figure 3: BVPI comparisons

- 9 A breakdown of the absences into short and long term periods² can be found through Appendix 2.
- 10 Appendix 3 shows the quarterly returns for the Service structure for this quarter and the previous three quarters. Following the internal reorganisation of Services, we have now reached a point where we can demonstrate trends for a full year within the revised structure.
- 11 The formal BVPI calculation requires the inclusion of all permanent local authority employees. However, following feedback at CMT on 27 February 2007, staff who work in aided schools have again not been included in this return from Children and Young Peoples Services – they are classed as employees of the school.

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

Corporate Action

- 12 A huge amount of activity has taken place, in all Services, over the past couple of years 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 national ban on smoking in enclosed places came into effect on 1 July 2007, however the revised Smoking at Work Policy was implemented within the Council on 1 April 2007, making all Council buildings, grounds, car parks and Council vehicles smoke-free. Prior to, and following April this year, there was 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 Managing Sickness Absence policy and procedure 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. The Stress Management Policy, Procedure & Toolkit and Action Plan have now been rolled out and a briefing session for managers was held on Thursday 19 July 2007 covering the policy, procedure and application of the stress management questionnaire.
- 18 This policy will only be effective if it is comprehensively implemented within Services as its effectiveness is dependent upon commitment from managers from the top level to anyone who has a supervisory responsibility for others as well as by individual employees taking responsibility for their own wellbeing. It is important that managers now make use of the toolkit that supports the policy when identifying and discussing stress related issues with individual employees, whether attending or absent from work and draw up action plans to address issues where possible.

- 19 Corporate actions include a project with the NHS Primary Care College to develop a 'Training the Trainers' programme as well as raising awareness with employees through leaflets, health promotional events e.g. healthy eating, fitness, smoking and exercise activities. In addition the new First Line Manager's Programme was launched in May 2007 with a specific half day module of learning devoted to Stress Management linked to the following objective:
- Understand and where applicable apply the main principles of stress management and prevention.
- 20 The programme also takes an in depth look into appropriate management styles and interpersonal skills including assertion techniques and conflict handling approaches. Feedback has been extremely positive.
- 21 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. Services are now beginning to request specific development interventions to address areas of concern e.g. Stress Awareness Raising Sessions, Bullying and Harassment Training. We are also starting corporately, in addition to existing monitoring, to look more closely to identify if there are any 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

- 22 In Learning, Libraries & Culture days lost up to 20 days have decreased from 336 days down to 285.5 days, this decrease represents 0.83 FTE. Days lost 20 days or more has decreased from 410.5 down to 330.5 which demonstrates again the effect of a long-term absence ending. The net result is a move overall from 2.76 FTE to 2.37 FTE. This is a move in the right direction but higher than the same quarter in 2006. Mental Health is our main cause of sickness absence at 65.18% and this is a continuing cause for concern.
- 23 Absences are discussed quarterly at the Service Management Team meetings and also at the Adult and Community Services Management Team. The new DCC Stress Management policy was noted and some senior managers are to attend the training. All staff absences are reviewed to ensure Sickness Absence Reviews and other appropriate action takes place. One member of staff was taken through a Capability Hearing in June and their employment terminated. Another member of staff is due to attend a Capability Hearing in July. One member of staff who has had a Final Sickness Absence Review now has an agreed action plan. This will be reviewed in October to ensure that the agreed targets have been achieved.
- 24 In Community Safety, within Learning, Libraries and Culture, the majority of the absenteeism (40 days) on this occasion was due to the ongoing debilitating condition of one employee who is suffering from a bad back. A sickness review has been undertaken and an action plan for return to work developed and implemented.

- 25 In Adult Care there has been a further reduction in the sickness absence days lost per employee for the quarter, down 0.43 days on the previous period. The main reason for the reduction is the increase in the number of (long-term absentee) leavers on grounds of Capability – 10 in this period compared to 3 in the previous. Mental Health related illness continues to be the main reason for sickness absence however, the number of days has decreased compared to the previous period. There has been a reduction in the short-term absence days which is a result of a decrease in 'infection' related sickness.
- 26 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. A meeting was held with colleagues from Community Support and Libraries, Learning & Culture as part of an integrated approach to the sickness absence management processes.
- 27 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 and an increase in the number of leavers following Capability Hearing, helping to reduce the sickness absence within Adult Care.

b) Chief Executive's Office

- 28 Sickness has reduced due to a low number of days lost up to 20 days. There are still four people on long-term sick and Occupational Health is still aware of these people. Long-term sickness is still being monitored and management continue to follow the corporate procedure.

c) Children and Young People's Services

- 29 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 Apr – 30 Jun 2006	1 Apr – 30 Jun 2007
Support Staff in Schools	1.91	1.71
Teaching Staff in Schools	1.55	1.38
Headquarters Staff	1.63	1.53

- 30 Absences are managed by respective Line Managers and in schools by Head Teachers and Governing Bodies. As the Local Authority is not able to influence the outcome of sickness related absences in Voluntary Aided Schools, figures for staff absences within VA schools have not been included in this return.
- 31 Local Authority Officers continue to meet on a half-termly basis to scrutinise school based absences and offer support and guidance to Head Teachers and Governing Bodies in respect of managing sickness absence and applying related policies.
- 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. Absences are progressed/chased to ensure that they are managed within the prescribed timetables. Full assistance and advice is always available from Corporate HR and the Staffing teams.
- 33 There has been a decrease in sickness related absences in this quarter, with the average per employee dropping from 2.33 to 1.73 days. During the same period there has been three weeks of school holidays, for the Easter and Whit breaks.
- 34 The figures reported for former Social Care and Health staff show that there has been:
- A reduction of days lost per employee;
 - No change in the main reasons for absence;
 - A reduction in short-term absenteeism;
 - An increase in the number of leavers on capability grounds;
 - A slight reduction in the number of employees who have been absent for nine months or more.

d) Corporate Services

- 35 There has been a decrease in sickness absence in the quarter (1.92 days) as compared to the previous quarter ended 31 March 2007 (2.17 days). This also compares favourably with the figures against the same quarter in the previous year (2006) when sickness levels stood at 2.14 days.
- 36 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.
- 37 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

- 38 There has been a significant reduction in sickness absence from 2.8 to 1.9 days per FTE, since the last quarterly report. This has been achieved through a return to work of staff on long-term sickness absence and a seasonal reduction in short-term absences.
- 39 Ongoing monitoring is taking place in accordance with sickness absence procedures and advice sought from Occupational Health where appropriate.
- 40 A capability hearing for one member of staff is scheduled for July.

f) Environment

- 41 The figure has increased by 10% from the previous quarter. However this quarter is the first to include all staff in the new Integrated Transport Unit which includes 40 Driver/Attendants. This group of staff have accounted for 41.7% of the total sickness for the Service, the majority of which is due to long-term absences. The sickness for the remainder of the Service has improved by 30%.
- 42 Management continue to be informed when trigger points have been hit in accordance with the Corporate guidelines and Occupational Health has been involved as required. However, it is recognised that the role of the Driver/Attendant is different to the majority of the staff in the Service which has led to significant rises, of over 50%, in days lost due to Mental Health and Musculo-skeletal problems within this Service.
- 43 As set out above, with the exception of those members staff transferred into the Integrated Transport Unit, actions previously identified have been effective and resulted in a 30% reduction in sickness absence.

g) Service Direct

- 44 The sickness ratio for the quarter at 2.53 days lost per FTE shows a decrease from the previous quarter which was 3.05 days lost per FTE. The June quarter in 2006 was 2.90. Long-term sickness has decreased from the previous quarter from 1.87 to 1.69. The June quarter in 2006 was 1.75.
- 45 Ongoing reviews continue to be carried out in all areas and have led to two employees leaving on capability grounds in the current quarter. In the previous quarter there were 6 employees who left on grounds of capability which has contributed to a significant reduction from previous quarter levels.
- 46 The 2.53 value is the lowest quarter recorded since the information has been produced in this format going back to 2001.

Next steps

- 44 The next planned quarterly report will come to the HR Committee of 16 November 2007 covering the period July to September 2007.

Recommendation

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

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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 01.04.07 - 30.06.07					
	Number of Days Lost				
Service	Up to 20 days	%	More than 20 days	%	Total No. of Days
Adult and Community Services	2529.4	33.1	5121	66.9	7650.4
Chief Executive's Office	146	46.8	166	53.2	312
Children and Young People's Services	7591.03	41.6	10663.08	58.4	18254.11
Corporate Services	411.5	64.1	230	35.9	641.5
County Treasurer's	107.5	37.7	178	62.3	285.5
Environment	438.5	37.1	742	62.9	1180.5
Service Direct	692	33.3	1388	66.7	2080
COUNCIL	11915.9	39.2	18488.1	60.8	30404.0

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

Durham County Council Sickness Absence

Service:	Quarter			Quarter			Quarter			Quarter		
	1 Jul - 30 Sep 2006			1 Oct - 31 Dec 2006			1 Jan - 31 Mar 2007			1 Apr - 30 Jun 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	2315.06	8620.10	3.72	2364.70	9600.40	4.06	2345.30	8833.60	3.77	2290.20	7650.40	3.34
<i>Adult Care</i>	1966.40	7774.10	3.95	2031.70	8542.40	4.20	2013.30	7824.10	3.89	1964.30	6892.20	3.51
<i>Adult LD Services</i>	16.66	53.50	3.21									
<i>Libraries, Learning & Culture</i>	269.00	587.50	2.18	269.00	793.00	2.95	270.00	746.50	2.76	260.00	616.00	2.37
<i>Community Support</i>	63.00	205.00	3.25	64.00	265.00	4.14	62.00	263.00	4.24	65.90	142.20	2.16
Chief Executive's Office	214.00	787.00	3.68	212.00	689.00	3.25	223.00	590.00	2.65	267.00	312.00	1.17
C&YPS	10029.13	14537.36	1.45	10034.82	27853.59	2.78	10065.77	23470.17	2.33	10562.58	18254.11	1.73
<i>Support Staff in Schools</i>	3780.83	4830.96	1.28	3838.56	13030.55	3.39	3877.45	8503.57	2.19	4051.69	6945.92	1.71
<i>Teachers</i>	4452.25	4452.30	1.00	4455.45	9518.34	2.14	4449.24	8999.90	2.02	4561.14	6286.36	1.38
<i>Former Education Staff</i>	760.55	1165.50	1.53	768.11	944.50	1.23	764.38	1469.20	1.92	975.25	1489.50	1.53
<i>Former SC & H Staff</i>	1035.50	4088.60	3.95	972.70	4360.20	4.48	974.70	4497.50	4.61	974.50	3532.33	3.62
Corporate Services	351.99	657.00	1.87	342.05	810.00	2.37	343.41	745.50	2.17	334.11	641.50	1.92
County Treasurer's	151.13	387.00	2.56	148.00	458.00	3.09	147.09	409.00	2.78	153.10	285.50	1.86
Environment	452.40	774.00	1.71	459.40	860.00	1.87	457.20	971.00	2.12	504.25	1180.50	2.34
Service Direct	870.00	2958.00	3.40	876.00	2912.00	3.32	859.00	2622.00	3.05	821.00	2080.00	2.53