

Human Resources Committee

14 March 2008



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 October to 31 December 2007.

Background

- 2 This is the regular quarterly report to the HR 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 December 2007, in comparison with our annual target.

DCC Performance for the Quarter Only to 31.12.07	2.47 days per FTE
DCC BV12 for the Twelve Months to 31.12.07	9.23 days per FTE
DCC Annual Target for 2007 - 2008	9.75 days per FTE

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

- 4 The sickness figure for the twelve months to 31 December 2007, based on the requirements of BVPI12¹, has shown a welcome decrease to **9.23 days** lost per County Council FTE employee. This figure is inside our target figure for 2007-08 of 9.75 days. *Figure 2* identifies how this total has been reached. This also compares favourably with 9.65 days for the twelve months to 30 September 2007 and 9.96 days for the twelve months to 31 December 2006.

Number of days lost to sickness absence between 01/01/07 and 31/12/07		136,850.89
Number of FTE staff at 31/12/06	14,436.97	
Number of FTE staff at 31/12/07	15,229.48	
Average number of FTE staff over 12 month period		14833.23
Number of days lost per FTE - BVPI 12		9.23

Figure 2: Calculation of current BVPI figure

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

- 6 The figure of 9.23 days is our best performance since the end of 2001 when our rate stood at 9.30 days per FTE. It is also a 30% improvement on our poorest performance in December 2003 when the absence levels peaked at 13.10 days per FTE.
- 7 Although a welcome improvement, this current position must be treated with some caution. The quarter of data dropped from the relevant calculation process at this stage (October – December 2006) was a particularly poor quarter for our sickness levels. There will be no similar advantage when measuring the final BVPI figure for the period to the end of March 2008.
- 8 The Resource Link Payroll/HR monitoring system has once again been partially utilised in the collection of this quarter’s data. It is still anticipated that this development should ultimately generate more consistent data across the Council. However, at present, Services continue to complete the Sickness Absence Pro-forma for collation by the Strategic Human Resources Division.
- 9 *Figure 3* below shows the recent trend in performance against our current target.

BVPI	Oct – Dec 2006	Jan – Mar 2007	Apr – Jun 2007	Jul – Sep 2007	Oct – Dec 2007	07-08 target
12	9.96 days	9.84 days	9.58 days	9.65 days	9.23 days	9.75 days

Figure 3: BVPI 12 performance 2007-08

- 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. However, it remains somewhat uncertain when assessing Service trends over the 12-month timeline because of the movement of staff groups across Services during internal reorganisations. As with other recent reports, people who work in aided schools are excluded from the data.
- 12 The current performance measurement framework structured around BVPIs is to be terminated by the Government at the end of the 2007-08 measurement period (March). Therefore, our formal reporting of our annual figure at that time will be our last under that system. The National Indicator Set due to replace BVPIs does not include for an indicator that measures and compares sickness absence levels. However, we will obviously continue to collect sickness data and work is currently underway within a national consultation exercise, to assess how this will be done alongside maintaining a consistent comparator programme.
- 13 Referring back to the final 2006-07 performance, more data has become available that demonstrates our position from a national perspective (England and Wales) with other local authorities. Our BVPI reported figure for 2006-07 was 9.84 days per FTE. This compared with a national average of 9.44 days – a marginal improvement on this relationship in relation to the 2005-06 data³. Our 2006-07 performance was far better than Metropolitan Borough Councils (average 11.01),

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

³ The 2005-06 figure for DCC was 10.02 days per FTE against a national average of 9.60 days.

but was poorer than the average County Council figure that stood at 8.40 days per FTE.

- 14 However, information was provided within the last HR Committee report that showed that most of the 34 County Councils operate in the least deprived areas of the country⁴ - County Durham is the only County Council of the 34 that figures in the quartile identifying those areas of the highest deprivation. A project underway in our Occupational Health Service has demonstrated that the levels of deprivation have a significant impact on the sickness rates of a Local Authority. In addition, the occupational mix of some other County Councils is more conducive to lower rates of absence as they have outsourced large areas of 'blue-collar activities' that often have higher sickness rates than 'white-collar' groupings.
- 15 Information was also demonstrated in the previous report that demonstrated that our performance from a regional perspective was more favourable. Comparison of a dozen unitary and county authorities in the north-east showed us with the second best sickness rate. Further detail has now become available that compares our 2006-07 performance with District Councils in our area – this is highlighted through the table shown as *Figure 4*.

Council	2005-06 (days per fte)	2006-07 (days per fte)
Durham County Council	10.02	9.84
Chester-le-Street	12.24	11.09
Derwentside	12.01	11.04
Durham City	13.18	12.31
Easington	8.70	8.59
Sedgefield	11.20	13.80
Teesdale	9.82	5.31
Wear Valley	7.38	9.50

Figure 4: BVPI comparisons with District Councils

- 16 Coming back to the absences in the last quarter (October – December 2007) and the reasons for absence, 22.20%⁵ of the time taken off relates to Mental Health issues with a further 13.21%⁶ being classed as 'Other Musculo-Skeletal' sickness. However, any analysis of the reasons for absence data must bear in mind that 29.76% of absences⁷ was recorded amongst the separate 'Other' grouping, which should not be used as a "catch-all" category. The number of absences being recorded by Services as 'Other' remains a factor in distorting these returns.
- 17 Services are again requested to examine their procedures, where this is applicable to them, to ensure that types of absences are recorded accurately.

Corporate Action

- 18 The Audit Commission has previously notified the Council of its intention to review the arrangements in place for the management of sickness absence in local authorities in Durham and Teesside. The study is seeking to establish what is working well and identify areas for development, examining the approaches which

⁴ Information taken from the Government's indices of deprivation.

⁵ Down from 25% in the quarter July – September 2007.

⁶ Down from 13.99% in the quarter July – September 2007.

⁷ Up from 22.72% in the quarter July – September 2007.

lead to reductions in absence levels and the background to increases in sickness absence levels. The outcome of the review will seek to:

- Identify areas of good practice that can be shared across councils in the study;
 - Identify areas of work practice that can be shared separately with the individual councils with recommendations for improvement;
 - Identify any common factors which lead to the high levels of sickness absence across the group to establish potential remedial action; and
 - Establish reasons for the disparity between the best and worst performing councils in the group to establish lessons for improvement.
- 19 The work of the Auditors started with a document review. A comprehensive range of information relating to the Council's approach to sickness absence management was provided to them in December. They have gone on to interview key personnel and talk to small focus groups of staff/middle managers. At this stage, their aim is to report back to councils later this month.
- 20 The Stress Management Group has met again to review the Stress Management policy and is undertaking a further update of the policy in the light of feedback from managers. This will provide managers with more guidance into practical measures that they can use to support staff. The group is also considering the production of a leaflet for staff which sets out some of the main contact points and provides more advice on the difficult and not infrequently raised issue of what to do if the stress is created by an immediate supervisor/manager. The group is also looking to identify good practice in Services which has had an impact on reductions in stress related absence levels/issues such as grievances/bullying & harassment complaints and which can then be shared across the Council.
- 21 One of the key factors to the success of the Stress Management Policy is buy in at a senior level. There is evidence that some managers are still not aware of this policy and how they can use it both to support staff to return to work and also to identify stressors in the workplace and start to address them before absences occur. The revised policy will be published shortly on the Intranet and copies circulated to the Human Resource/Personnel teams within Services. Chief Officers are asked to ensure that the details of the revised policy are cascaded to and discussed at all management groups/team meetings within Services.
- 22 A Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is currently examining the issue of Stress Management within DCC, including looking at how stress is identified in the workplace, what processes are in place to deal with stress related issues/sickness absence and the impact of stress related sickness absence on the Council and the individuals affected by it. Members of the Stress Management group have provided reports to and attended a meeting of the group, and further meetings were scheduled.

Service Performance and Action – commentary provided by the Services

a) Adult & Community Services

- 23 The overall A&CS figure has increased slightly compared to the last quarter, and also for the same period last year. We are still hopeful of achieving our sickness absence target rate set for the year (5.75%) with a reduced final quarter figure.
- 24 Mental Health related sick leave, which is the main contributor to A&CS sick days, recorded a decrease for the current period, however the increase in the overall rate was caused by a rise in Infection (colds, chest infection, influenza) related sickness absence. Infections, along with 'other musculo-skeletal problems' are the main increases over the last two periods, with infections recording a 100% increase (407 days up to 805 days). This expected seasonal increase mirrors the trend of last year too.
- 25 The rise in the seasonal (short term) sick leave coincides with the increase in 'days lost up to 20 days'. Long term sick leave days remain static. Staff absent from work for 18 months or more is nil for the second consecutive quarter, and there has been an increase in the number of Capability Hearing related leavers, from 6 to 8 over the two periods.
- 26 There continues to be the targeting of specific action aimed at reducing long term and short term sickness absence, working with managers providing advice, guidance and support where necessary. The monitoring for long term sick leave is aimed at staff that have been absent for 4 months or more, ensuring any appropriate actions/support have been applied to managing the absence. This work compliments the on-going activities of the Sickness Absence Management Group who meet every 3 months.
- 27 As planned, the Stress Management Toolkit was discussed at the last Sickness Absence Management Group meeting in November and subsequently documentation (including Sickness Absence Interview forms, Supervision forms) have been updated to raise the awareness of using the toolkit.
- 28 The 'Managing Persistent Absenteeism' Workshops went ahead as planned in December 2007, targeting teams with the most prevalence in this area. The Workshops provided managers with information, advice, guidance and tools to be used in managing persistent absenteeism. Feedback from the managers who attended was very positive and therefore additional sessions are to be planned.
- 29 As part of the ongoing restructure within A&CS, meetings have been scheduled (January/February 2008) with Libraries, Learning and Culture to discuss the integration of managing sickness absence processes to ensure consistency and best practice throughout the Service. In addition, as part of the restructure, A&CS have acquired the duties of a post that were previously only used within Adults provider services - Absence Management Co-ordinator. This post will assist managers throughout A&CS in applying the sickness absence management procedures and participate in the monitoring functions.

30 The monitoring activities have continued and new initiatives will be sought as part of looking at ways of managing sickness absence effectively. The numbers of cases that progress to Capability Hearing remain at an expected level, consistent and timely with corporate policy. The Sickness Absence Management Group continue to monitor trends and discuss new initiatives at tackling sickness absence within the Service.

b) Chief Executive's Office

31 There has been a significant decrease in sickness absence for the Chief Executive's Office in the quarter (1.92 days) as compared to the previous quarter ending 30 September 2007 (2.67 days).

32 There are two long term absences. One of these has been the subject of a formal hearing, with the decision to terminate employment, though this is still subject to appeal. The other absence is being managed through the sickness review process.

33 All absences have been actively managed in line with DCC policy on Sickness Absence Management. Sickness reviews and appropriate referrals to Occupational Health have been undertaken.

c) Children and Young People's Services

34 This Service continues to highlight comparisons between some staff groupings over the year:

	1 Oct – 31 Dec 2006	1 Oct – 31 Dec 2007
Support Staff in Schools	3.39	1.62
Teaching Staff in Schools	2.14	1.89
Headquarters Staff	1.23	4.66

35 In comparison to the previous year's figures, there has been an obvious decrease in school based absences. The figures for headquarters staff now reflect the larger number of staff based within CYPS since the restructuring of Adult & Community Services and Children's Services.

36 Sickness absence continues to be monitored across CYPS. The meetings in respect of absences for school based staff take place regularly across the academic year and focus on assisting schools to address levels of absence where appropriate. Advice and guidance is available from the CYPS HR Team, Strategic Human Resources and School & Governor Support Service. Reports are presented at SMT meetings to identify strategies to further decrease the overall percentage absence rates.

37 As stated above, school based staff absences have decreased during the last quarter, where there was only one holiday period of a week during October (half-term). Work continues with managers to address sickness levels within the Service, including ongoing training, and new systems are being developed to record and monitor sickness absence as the new CYPS Service develops.

d) Corporate Services

- 38 There has been no change in sickness absence in the quarter as compared to the previous quarter ended 30 September 2007. This also compares favourably with the figures against the same quarter in the previous year (2006) when sickness levels stood at 2.37 days.
- 39 As stated in the previous quarterly return, Strategic Human Resources have now moved to within the remit of the Chief Executive's Office and the sickness absence information is now reported separately.
- 40 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.
- 41 Sickness reviews and appropriate referrals to Occupational Health have been undertaken. Most of the problems were down to a small number of long-term absentees and appropriate action was taken and some have now returned to work.

e) County Treasurer's

- 42 Two members of staff remain on long term sickness absence. In one case, a review has revealed a need for adjustment in working practices. The other colleague is being monitored in line with sickness absence procedures.
- 43 One member of staff with recently declared "work related stress" is being handled in accordance with the Stress Policy.
- 44 A decision was taken at a capability hearing to terminate the contract of a member of staff who is currently serving his notice.

f) Environment

- 45 There has been an increase of 32% in sickness absence since the last quarter. This is mainly due to an increase in the number of long term absences.
- 46 One member of staff is currently under notice following a capability hearing. Following sickness monitoring, three members of staff who were absent more than 6 months have returned to work during this quarter, which should reflect in figures for the next quarter. A further capability hearing is to be held with a member of staff who has been absent 7 months. A member of staff who was absent 8 months has been made redundant.

g) Service Direct

- 47 The sickness ratio for the quarter at 3.79 days lost per FTE shows an increase from the previous quarter which was 3.35 days lost per FTE. The current quarter is also higher than the equivalent quarter of December 2006 which was 3.32 days. Long-term sickness has increased from the previous quarter from 2.23 to 2.33 days. The December quarter in 2006 was 2.16 days.

- 48 Management continues to review the sickness levels as part of the monthly Senior Management Team meetings. A lot of effort is made to ensure that the whole process maintains a high profile throughout the service although it has proven extremely difficult to make significant reductions to the levels experienced.
- 49 Capability reviews continue to take place and one employee left on the grounds of capability in this last quarter.

Next steps

- 50 The final end of year figures will be reported in future relating to the 12-month period to the end of March 2008.

Recommendation

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

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

(Does the decision impact on a future Unitary Council?)

No decision required within the report. Information is included to demonstrate how our sickness rate compares with the District Councils.

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 and Rurality

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 developing strategies such as the Stress Management Policy will contribute to an improvement in the health of its workforce and subsequently assist in an improvement in sickness absence levels.

Appendix 2

Short and Long-term Sickness Absence 01.10.07 - 31.12.07					
	Number of Days Lost				
Service	Up to 20 days	%	More than 20 days	%	Total No. of Days
Adult and Community Services	3137	32.8	6427.8	67.2	9564.8
Chief Executive's Office	91.4	57.3	68	42.7	159.4
Children and Young People's Services	10957.04	49.5	11196	50.5	22153.04
Corporate Services	209.67	61.3	132.37	38.7	342.04
County Treasurer's	380	57.9	276	42.1	656
Environment	708	43.3	928	56.7	1636
Service Direct	1178	38.5	1881	61.5	3059
COUNCIL	16661.1	44.3	20909.2	55.7	37570.3

Short and Long-term Sickness Absence 01.07.07 - 30.09.07					
	Number of Days Lost				
Service	Up to 20 days	%	More than 20 days	%	Total No. of Days
Adult and Community Services	2876.3	30.7	6478.4	69.3	9354.7
Chief Executive's Office	74	33.3	148	66.7	222
Children and Young People's Services	7186.2	43.1	9479.43	56.9	16665.63
Corporate Services	252	74.6	86	25.4	338
County Treasurer's	245.5	36.6	426	63.4	671.5
Environment	739.5	58.9	517	41.1	1256.5
Service Direct	917	33.6	1810	66.4	2727
COUNCIL	12290.5	39.3	18944.8	60.7	31235.3

Appendix 3

Quarter Comparisons

Service:	Quarter			Quarter			Quarter			Quarter		
	1 Jan - 31 Mar 2007			1 Apr - 30 Jun 2007			1 Jul - 30 Sep 2007			1 Oct - 31 Dec 2007		
	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Employee	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Employee	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Employee	FTE	Days Lost	Days Lost per Employee
Adult and Community Services	2345.30	8833.60	3.77	2290.20	7650.40	3.34	2293.90	9354.70	4.08	2274.20	9564.80	4.21
<i>Adult Care</i>	2013.30	7824.10	3.89	1964.30	6892.20	3.51	1972.40	8614.30	4.37			
<i>Adult LD Services</i>												
<i>Learning, Libraries & Culture</i>	270.00	746.50	2.76	260.00	616.00	2.37	258.00	522.50	2.03			
<i>Community Support Division</i>	62.00	263.00	4.24	65.90	142.20	2.16	63.50	217.90	3.43			
Chief Executive's Office	223.00	590.00	2.65	267.00	312.00	1.17	83.25	222.00	2.67	83.13	159.40	1.92
Children and Young People's Services	10065.77	23470.17	2.33	10562.58	18254.11	1.73	10838.30	16665.63	1.54	10951.57	22153.04	2.02
<i>Support Staff in Schools</i>	3877.45	8503.57	2.19	4051.69	6945.92	1.71	4188.22	5688.51	1.36	4223.62	7978.08	1.89
<i>Teachers</i>	4449.24	8999.90	2.02	4561.14	6286.36	1.38	4668.79	4121.92	0.88	4728.90	7669.86	1.62
<i>Headquarters Staff</i>	764.38	1469.20	1.92	975.25	1489.50	1.53	1981.29	6855.20	3.46	1999.05	6505.10	3.25
<i>Former SC & H Staff</i>	974.70	4497.50	4.61	974.50	3532.33	3.62						
Corporate Services	343.41	745.50	2.17	334.11	641.50	1.92	285.12	338.00	1.19	285.26	342.04	1.20
County Treasurer's	147.09	409.00	2.78	153.10	285.50	1.86	289.20	671.50	2.32	296.87	656.00	2.21
Environment	457.20	971.00	2.12	504.25	1180.50	2.34	539.43	1256.50	2.33	530.45	1636.00	3.08
Service Direct	859.00	2622.00	3.05	821.00	2080.00	2.53	813.00	2727.00	3.35	808.00	3059.00	3.79