

**WIRRAL COUNCIL
ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**

November 2017

Introduction

There are long standing concerns about the level and cost of sickness absence in the Council and the impact of this absence on employees, services and the Council's ability to deliver its pledges.

This action plan provides a framework for the Council to improve attendance, wellbeing and engagement in the workforce.

1. Key Issues

1.1 Level of sickness

- The Council's sickness absence levels are currently around 10.73 days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) per year. This varies across services. In Children's Services, Social Care this is nearly 18 days lost per FTE per year, compared to 6.99 days per FTE per year in Business Services.
- The Council's target is 10.75 days lost days per FTE per annum. The average days lost in the public sector is 8.0.
- 65 % of absence is long term (over 4 weeks) and 35% is short term.

1.2 Cost of absence

- The cost of sickness absence is high and has a direct impact on the quality and timeliness of services which are already stretched following reductions in budget.
- The approximate cost of absence in terms of lost time for 2016 / 17 was £4.4m (including on costs).
- The cash cost can be seen in the use of cover arrangements through agency staff and additional hours.
- There is a high level of agency use in Children's services. This is very expensive and, whilst not all attributable to covering for sickness, it has an impact on quality and continuity of service delivery. This was identified as one of the significant issues to be addressed within the Ofsted report in 2016.

1.3 Under-reporting of absence

- In 2016 Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR/OD) commissioned an internal audit report to investigate concerns of under-reporting

of sickness absence. The report (published in March 2017) identified evidence of under reporting. This means there is a potential that the Council's absence figures are underrepresented.

- There is also a governance issue as employees may be in receipt of normal salary because they haven't been recorded as sick and they should be paid occupational and/or statutory sick pay.
- This has also resulted in overpayments as employees have received their normal salary rather than sick pay. There have been some cases where this has resulted in the employee receiving more occupational sick pay than they are entitled to. In one case the overpayment was over £6,000. This not only causes issues for the employee but there is a time and financial cost to the Council to deal with the overpayment.

1.4 Reasons for absence

- The most common reason for absence is Mental Health related illness. This has accounted for an average of 35% of absence in the last three years and over a quarter of long term absence is related to mental health.

1.5 Management of absence

- An Internal Audit report March 2017 identified that managers were failing to comply with the Council's Attendance Management policy and procedure.
- This matter was discussed at Audit and Risk Management Committee June 2017 as part of the Annual Governance Statement and discussed by Cabinet in July 2017.
- The Council's most senior managers have accountability for management of attendance set out within their Accountability Statements.
- HR records show that relatively little formal action is being taken by line managers to address unacceptable levels of attendance in line with the policy. This is reinforced by the findings of the Internal Audit report.

2. Aim of the action plan

The aim of the action plan is to:

- Develop a culture where health and wellbeing is valued and supported

- Improve the management of attendance in line with the policy
- Target and respond to key issues in order to improve wellbeing and attendance

3. Key themes of the action plan

- a) Leadership and communication** – from Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Senior Managers in order to ‘make this happen’ and demonstrate the commitment to the new approach to attendance management.
- b) Further training and support** - will be put in place to ensure all managers understand how, and have the skills and confidence to manage attendance and wellbeing.
- c) Performance Management and compliance** - we have developed a detailed performance management report framework which focuses on the management of absence rather than the absence itself. This will enable senior managers to hold managers to account who are not effectively managing the attendance of their staff.
- d) Targeted Action addressing the causes of absence** - HR/OD have previously delivered stress management training, we are now widening this training to focus on managing wellbeing at work including stress and mental health related absence.
- e) Workplace wellbeing** – a workplace wellbeing plan has been developed to be supportive and proactive in our approach to workplace wellbeing.

4. Measuring the effectiveness of the action plan

In order to measure the effectiveness of the interventions in the action plan the following need to be baselined and further indicators developed:

Issue	Indicator	Current	Target
The level of absence	Reduction in the overall days lost due to absence	10.73 days per FTE	Published target 2017-18 10.75 days
Management of attendance	Internal audit	Internal audit report says it is a major risk	Outcome of internal audit report moves from major risk
	Increase in number of Return to Work Interviews being completed	Return to work interview benchmark target to be set by 1 December 2017	1 February 2018 – set new target
	Increase in number of formal hearings being completed	Formal hearing benchmark target to be set by 1 December 2017	1 February 2018 – set new target

Appendix 1 – Attendance Action Plan

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead officer	Resource	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/Comments
1. Leadership and Communication								
High profile communication of Absence levels and expected action as an organisational priority	Presentation and discussion at Corporate management (CMT) team before Senior manager briefing Chief Executive and All Directors to lead with AD HR/OD	CMT	Buy in and support from leadership to roll out attendance management action plan	w/c 18 September	Chief Executive /Assistant Director HR/OD	Assistant Director HR/OD	CMT endorse the approach	Complete
	Trade Union briefing	Trade Unions	Buy in and support from Trade Unions	19 September via Corporate JCC	Assistant Director HR/OD	Assistant Director HR/OD	Meeting taken place and buy in and support gained	Complete
	Meeting with Directors to agree hotspot areas	Directors	To agree hotspot areas for the Council	2 – 31 October	Assistant Director HR/OD	Assistant Director HR/OD	Hot spot areas agreed and shared with SLT	Complete
	Meeting with DMTs in hotspot areas	Directors / Assistant Directors	To outline sickness hot spots in department and outline	1 – 30 November	Assistant Director HR/OD	Dedicated Absence team	Meetings taken place	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead officer	Resource	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/Comments
			proposed performance management framework and support available					
	Meeting with extended DMTs in agreed hotspot areas and/or on request	Senior Managers	To ensure managers understand new performance management reports and reset expectations	November–December	Assistant Director HR/OD	Dedicated Absence team	All DMTs briefed and performance cycle commences	
	Senior Manager briefing	Senior Managers	Senior managers are briefed on new performance management framework, workplace wellbeing plan and expectations are reset for managing attendance	November	Assistant Director HR OD	Assistant Director HR OD	Briefing taken place	
	Communication to Managers	Managers / Team	Managers are aware of	Following Senior	Assistant Director HR	Assistant Director HR OD		

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead officer	Resource	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/Comments
	/Team Leaders	Leaders	new approach to attendance management , workplace wellbeing and reinforce policy requirements	Manager briefing	OD			
	Communication to employees via Managers brief and intranet	All employees	Employees are aware of new approach to attendance management , Workplace Wellbeing strategy and reinforce policy requirements	December	Communications Team / Assistant Director HR/OD	Communications and Engagement manager	Managers brief article and intranet communication published	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead officer	Resources	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/ Comments
2. Further training and support								
Compliance with policy and reporting	One hour desk based training for line managers covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording absence on self-serve • Accessing absence reports • Keeping in touch • OH referrals • Return to work interviews • Absence triggers and warnings • Manager role in applying policy • Sign post to help available 	Targeted managers in 'hotspot' areas and others by application / invitation	Clear understanding at line manager level of roles, responsibilities and use of self-serve system. Reduce under reporting Improved policy application	December – February 2018	Senior HR Manager (Employee Relations, Schools HR and OD)	Line manager time and commitment Human Resources Officers	100% attendance (exception for long term sick and maternity) Increase in policy compliance measured by Return to Work interviews completed and hearings taking place	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead officer	Resources	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/ Comments
	Managers will be required to sign that training has been undertaken							
Managers do not undertake the basic steps in relation to attendance management e.g. Calling an employee back who has rang in sick, undertaking a Return to Work Interview, visiting an employee who is off long term	Short workshop 'Having the absence conversation' ..when they call ..when they RTW ..when they're off again ..when it begins to get serious	Targeted managers in 'hotspot' areas and others by application / invitation	Managers do not 'hold back' from having difficult conversations/ challenging absence / address concerns over an employee's health and wellbeing	December – February 2018	Assistant Director HR/OD	Line manager time and commitment OD to commission training	100% attendance (exception for long term sick and maternity) Increase in policy compliance measured by Return to Work interviews completed and hearings taking place	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead Officer	Resources	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/ Comments
3. Performance management and compliance								
Bespoke management information that can be used to monitor the management of absence	Performance management framework including reports and key questions to facilitate discussions with managers	SLT DMTs Senior managers Team leaders	To ensure the management of attendance is being monitored / challenged Discuss key issues and resolve issues /agree actions To hold managers accountable for noncompliance with policy Identify any workforce or employee issues	1 December 2017	SLT leadership and cascade Assistant Director HR/OD	HR/OD	Reports produced and framework in place	
	Escalation reports showing noncompliance will be part of reports that go	All line managers	Improve the management of attendance and policy application	1 December 2017	Assistant Director HR/OD	HR/OD	Increase in policy compliance to be monitored over 3 – 12	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead Officer	Resources	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/ Comments
	to DMT		<p>Identify trends and issues</p> <p>Manager held accountable for managing attendance and performance</p>				month period	
The level of proactive monitoring of absence and casework support to managers	<p>Redirect HR resource to work alongside managers to drive improvement including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to ones with ADs • Support ADs with senior managers • Work with Director at DMTs • Report monthly to SLT 	Line managers	To ensure that HR have sufficient resource to proactively monitor and identify attendance issues, can support managers in dealing with them and can escalate	October 2017	Assistant Director of HR/OD	HR	Dedicated absence team in place	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead Officer	Resources	How will we know it's been achieved?	Progress/ Comments
We do not record management actions in line with policy electronically	Development of e forms to record on self-serve key actions e.g. Return to Work interviews in line with policy	Line managers	To be better able to monitor management action	November 2017	Assistant Director HR/OD	HR/OD	E-forms are live	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead Officer	Resources	Measure of success	Progress/ Comments
4.Targeted action addressing causes of absence								
Stress and mental health related issues are biggest reason for long term absence Developing manager's skills and ability to manage attendance	Workplace wellbeing Training to delivered to all managers (externally commissioned)	All line managers	Increase line management awareness of their responsibility to promote, encourage and manage workplace wellbeing including stress and mental health related issues.	By 31 March 2018	Senior HR Manager (Employee Relations, Schools HR and OD)	OD Team to commission training £tbc	Training is commissioned Training is rolled out	

Issue	Action	Target	Desired outcome	Timescale	Lead officer	Resources	Measure of success	Progress/ Comments
5.Workplace Wellbeing								
Workplace Wellbeing Strategy	To develop a workplace wellbeing strategy for the organisation	All employees	Council has a workplace wellbeing plan in place with a commitment to deliver by Senior Leadership Team	November 2017	Assistant Director HR/OD	Assistant Director HR/OD	Workplace wellbeing plan launched	
Workplace Wellbeing charter	To commit and achieve workplace charter award	All employees	Council works towards Workplace wellbeing Charter which provides a framework of best practice for managing employee health and wellbeing	Initial assessment by March 2018	Assistant Director HR/OD	Assistant Director HR/OD	Initial assessment is positive	