

## ATTENDANCE MONITORING FIGURES: APRIL 2007 TO MARCH 2008

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the levels of sickness absence for the Council workforce for the period from April 2007 to March 2008.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members:

- Note the figures outlined in Appendices 1 to 5.
- Continue to monitor attendance in accordance with the Managing Attendance Policy and the Stress Reduction Policy.

### 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council first introduced a Managing Attendance Policy in 1997, to ensure that levels of employee absence were monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The main objectives of the Policy are to identify and remedy any attendance problems, to identify any potential health problem and seek medical advice to the benefit of employees and to provide a corporate overview of attendance levels across the Council.

- 3.2 In 1999, the Council adopted a Stress Reduction Policy which includes the following key statements:

- The Council is committed to a course of action aimed at increasing understanding and awareness of stress and mental health problems at work.
- The Council will take reasonable action to combat the cause of the workplace stress.
- The Council aims to help staff at all levels manage stress in themselves and in those they manage by early recognition and appropriate intervention. The Council provides advice, guidance and awareness training.

- The Council will provide adequate, prompt, critical and incident debriefing and subsequent counselling, when necessary, to employees who, through their jobs, have witnessed or dealt with traumatic incidences.

Included in this Policy is a commitment to monitor and report on the levels of stress related illness across the Council with stress absence notification being investigated within 10 working days notification.

## 4. CURRENT SITUATION

### 4.1 Managing Attendance Policy

Policies for managing attendance have now been in operation for 10 years and figures for year on year comparisons are available to assess the effectiveness of the policy and the actions taken by departments to address absence levels.

During August 2007 the Council's revised Attendance Management Policy was launched and distributed to departments in an easy to use folder with associated procedures enclosed. One major change to the policy is the introduction of trigger points which managers and supervisors can use as a guide when dealing with absence.

Comparisons between the figures for 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 are shown for (a) Teachers and (b) Craft workers and (c) the Council as a whole in **Appendix 5**, together with a breakdown by department for APT&C employees and Manual and Craft employees in **Appendix 1**. To supplement this information the estimated cost of absence per department is provided in **Appendix 4**. This figure is based solely on the employee's salary and does not include additional costs, for example the cost of a temporary replacement for an employee who is off on Long term sick leave. Therefore the overall cost to the Council is likely to be greater than the estimated figure recorded in this report.

The levels of absence have been accounted for by departments as follows:

#### 4.1.1 **Chief Executive's Unit:**

The bulk of absence within the Chief Executives' Unit for January – March 2008 can be attributed to short-term absence i.e. absence of less than 4 weeks duration. However, within the period, three employees were on long-term sickness. Of these, one employee returned to work in early January on a phased basis, and steps are being taken to aid the return to work of the two remaining employees in the next few weeks.

Compared with last year, sickness absence within the Chief Executive's Unit as a whole has increased from 2.8% to 3.1% although the average number of employees within the department only increased by one. Absence within Strategic Finance decreased from 4.5% in 2006 – 2007 to 3.1% in 2007-2008, which in part may be due to a reduction in long-term sickness. Absence within Policy and Strategy saw a very slight increase from 0.5% to 0.6% but overall remains very low. Within Personnel Services, absence has increased from 1.3% to 2.8% and

can be attributed to the long-term absence of two members of staff (both of whom subsequently returned to work) compared to no long-term absence in the same period last year. The Communications Team saw a marked increase in absence from 0.9% in 2006-2007 to 15.7% in 2007-2008 but the long-term absence of one employee in a small section of four people has greatly distorted the figures.

Where appropriate employees were referred to occupational health and offered counselling from the Employee Counselling Service.

#### **4.1.2 Corporate Services:**

All long-term absences within the period were managed with referral to OHP where appropriate. With the exception of four employees, all returned to work before the end of the year and in one case an employee was dismissed on capability grounds. Those who remain absent continue to be managed in accordance with procedures. In regard to manual workers, as there are only two employees in this category, these statistics are easily affected by any period of absence and the 4.89% of days lost to absence correlates to only 22 working days lost over the year.

There is an exercise underway to assess stress related absence with a view to reducing such absence within the department.

#### **4.1.3 Development Services:**

- During the period three employees were off with stress. These employees were offered counselling and support and two returned on a phased basis. One remains sick although it is hoped they will return to work in May.
- Three employees were on long term sick leave and all other absence was short term.
- In accordance with the Council's redeployment procedure one employee was successfully redeployed into a suitable alternative position.

#### **4.1.4 Community Services:**

##### **TEACHING STAFF**

A total of 192 teaching staff were on long term certificated sick leave during 2007/08 ranging in duration from 2 weeks to over a year.

13 of the above staff were referred to the Occupational Health Physician.

Two members of staff have resigned and two have retired. One has submitted their resignation. 137 have returned to work.

##### **APT&C STAFF**

A total of 174 APT&C staff were on long term certificated sick leave during 2007/08 ranging in duration from 2 weeks to over 1 year.

8 members of staff were referred to the Occupational Health Physician.

Two members of staff have resigned, two have retired and 125 have returned to work. One member of staff died in service.

**MANUAL WORKERS**

A total of 6 manual workers were on long term certificated sick leave during 2007/08 ranging in duration from 6 weeks to 1 over a year.

Four members of staff still remain absent.

**Social Work**

For the period October 2007 to March 2008 the figures showed the following:-

Compared to figures for the period October 2006 to March 2007, APT&C Staff absence rose from 6.99% to 7.88% showing an increase of 11.27%.

However, for the same period Manual Staff absence dropped from 10.64% to 9.37%, demonstrating a decrease of 8.81% for the period.

The department continues to vigorously address attendance management issues as well as concerted application of the Council’s managing absence procedures on an ongoing basis. During the period 29 employees were sent to the Occupational Health Physician and six retired on the grounds of ill health.

**Occupational Health Referrals**

B&C	MAKI	OLI	H&L
15	5	7	2

**Ill Health Retirements**

B&C	MAKI	OLI	H&L
1	1	3	1

	2006/7		2007/8	
	OCT - DEC	JAN - MARCH	OCT - DEC	JAN - MARCH
<b>APTC</b>	6.61%	7.31%	7.60%	8.15%
<b>MANUAL</b>	10.78%	10.53%	8.57%	10.13%

	OCT – MARCH 06/07	OCT – MARCH 07/08
<b>APTC</b>	6.99%	7.88%
<b>MANUAL</b>	10.64%	9.37

**4.1.5 Operational Services:**

For the period April 2007 to March 2008, Central Services have monitored all departmental absences and have identified areas of concern to Heads of Service and Line Managers. To improve outcomes, Central Services have provided direct

support given to relevant Line Managers along with additional training on the Council's Managing Attendance Policy.

Following referral to the Occupational Health Physician where appropriate, 5 employees were retired on ill health grounds with a further 3 having their employment terminated following unsuccessful attempts to redeploy them. Two other employees decided to retire on option with 6 resigning from their posts; 8 staff were dismissed using the Statutory Dismissal Procedure.

While Line Managers have reported success in managing some long term sickness issues with staff members, the overall impact upon sickness absence percentages has been largely static.

Period	Facility Services	Roads & Amenity Services	Central Services
April – June 2007	4.6 %	6.04 %	8.1 %
July – Sept 2007	5.05 %	5.23 %	6.22 %
Oct – Dec 2007	5.81 %	5.57 %	8.91 %
Jan – Mar 2008	4.76 %	6.94 %	8.1 %

#### 4.2 **Stress Reduction Policy**

**Appendix 2** provides details of the Council's levels of absence due to stress whether work related or not, for the period April 2007 to March 2008. The information was obtained from medical and self certificated forms where the reasons for absence were given as stress, depression, anxiety state etc.

In comparison to figures for 2006/07, while the total number of days lost due to stress has decreased, the percentage of stress related absence has remained static across the Council, accounting for 17.8% of days lost due to sickness absence. Table one below shows stress related absence as a percentage of each department's days lost due to sickness absence.

**TABLE ONE**

Department	Days lost due to stress as a % of total days lost 2006/2007	Days lost due to stress as a % of total days lost 2007/2008
Chief Executive's Unit	14.6 %	26.0 %
Corporate Services	13.2 %	23.0 %
Development Services	37.9 %	31.0 %
Community Services	24.5 %	23.9 %
Operational Services	4.3 %	4.3 %
Council Total	17.8 %	17.8 %

#### 4.3 **Accident Statistics**

Details of accident figures for 2007/2008 are outlined, on a departmental basis, in **Appendix 3**.

## **5. ACCOUNTS COMMISSION – STATUTORY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – SICKNESS ABSENCE**

**5.1** The Council is required to provide information for publication on the percentage of days lost due to sickness absence and the figures for the Performance Indicators are detailed in **Appendix 1**.

Please note the change made by the Accounts Commission in the grouping of employees for reporting the statutory performance indicator to them, commencing in the financial year 2004/2005.

Our Performance Indicator figures reported to the Accounts Commission for 2007/2008 are shown below, compared to last year's Performance Indicator:-

	<b>2006/2007</b>	<b>2007/2008</b>
Chief Officials and Local Government Employees	5.4	5.6
Craft Employees	6.3	5.4
Teachers	3.1	3.2
<b>All employees</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>5.0</b>

Audit Scotland has, this year, published a report for **2006/2007** comparing the performance of Scottish Councils. Argyll and Bute has the following placing out of the Councils who submitted reliable data:-

Chief Officials and Local Government Employees	7 <sup>th</sup>
Craft	16 <sup>th</sup>
Teachers	3 <sup>rd</sup>

## **6. CONCLUSION**

**6.1** Overall the Council's absence figures for 2007/2008 have increased in comparison to 2006/2007. Issues surrounding the implementation of single status during 2007/2008 have lowered the morale of some employees and could account for some slight increases in absence levels across the Council.

This however, would not explain the increase in teacher's absence levels since they were not party to the single status agreement and their pay and terms and conditions were therefore not affected by this.

The aim is to secure increased levels of attendance in all departments. For this to happen it is necessary to ensure that departments continue to adopt a rigorous approach to monitoring attendance and that Managers and Supervisors continue to fully acknowledge their responsibilities in this process and undertake relevant

training to ensure they have the skills required to deal with absence as it occurs. During the year this has been evident within Operational Services who have focused on attendance and dedicated specific resources to managing absence; this has resulted in a reduction in overall absence levels for the department despite single status issues affecting the morale of some employees.

## **7. IMPLICATIONS**

- Policy:** The Managing Attendance Policy should be adhered to by all Council departments. The Stress Reduction Policy should be adhered to by Elected Members, Managers and Employees. Employees involved in managing attendance should receive the relevant training to allow them to do this effectively.
- Financial:** Increased levels of expenditure on sickness payments to employees, lost productivity. Increased costs associated with the provision of temporary absence cover.
- Personnel:** Increased pressure on those employees who remain at work and continue to provide a service while colleagues are off ill. This could potentially lead to limited or restricted service provision to the Council's service users, or incidences of work related stress for colleagues who are left to cope with extra work.
- Equal Opportunities:** The application of Managing Attendance and Stress Reduction Policies should be undertaken within the overall context of the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.
- Legal:** The Council is required to be aware that failure to address incidences of work related stress may result in litigation.

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June 2008

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