

**REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE AND
FINANCE SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 6 January 2015

Subject: Staff Survey and Sickness Absence
Monitoring Results and Action plans

Responsible Officer: Jon Turner, Divisional Director of HRD
and Shared Services

**Scrutiny Lead
Member area:** Performance Lead Member –
Councillor Adam Swersky
Policy Lead Member-
Councillor Stephen Wright

Exempt: No

Wards affected: None

Enclosures:

1. Staff Survey Results
2. Management Information –Screen Shots
3. Data on sickness absence distribution
4. Directorate action plans

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

Summary

This report sets out the latest staff survey and sickness absence monitoring results and action plans.

Recommendations:

The committee is requested to consider the adequacy of the action plans already being implemented

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

This report provides:

- An overview of the staff survey results, and proposed departmental action plans.
- An update on the Council's sickness absence monitoring for 2014/2015.

By taking action in response to the staff survey results, management will be able to respond better to staff, create and establish a vision and act to improve staff purpose.

The management and focus on sickness absence will improve the cost effectiveness of staff and improve productivity.

Staff Survey

The staff survey was conducted against a challenging backdrop which included changes to terms and conditions in 2013/14 and a 1% reduction in pay. Looking ahead there is continued uncertainty for staff arising from planned budget reductions.

47% of staff completed the survey which is a reduction on the numbers who completed the previous survey in 2011, which was 56%.

The headline results of the survey show that our levels of engagement with staff have fallen and are now back to 2008 levels.

Overall satisfaction with working for the council has fallen significantly as has understanding of the strategic direction and corporate priorities. Perception that the council is good at managing change has also fallen.

On a positive note senior manager visibility is high and staff feel more empowered to make decisions and that their managers trust them in their work.

When the results are broken down it is clear that there are differences in staff views depending on the department they work in. Staff in Community Health and Wellbeing provided the most positive results, with above Harrow average scores across all indicators, followed by Resources. Results were less positive for Children and Families and parts of Environment and Enterprise.

In the Education and Commissioning Department of Children and Families all but 3 of the benchmark indicators are below the Harrow average and the National Benchmarks.

A number of staff engagement events have taken place over the last few months and have provided the opportunity for further feedback from staff.

A council wide communications review has been implemented and the Making a Difference Group (a staff group set up to take forward equalities issues, offering a signposting service for advice and information) are contributing to actions on equalities.

Directorates have analysed their own results and drawn up their action plans with input from staff members. Environment and Enterprise set up a project team and have undertaken further analysis, and held face to face meetings and surveys with staff before producing their action plan.

Action Plans

There are a number of recurring themes across all directorates and departments. These are:

- Reviewing corporate communications and communications across departments.
- Understanding the equalities satisfaction gaps and prioritising actions with the Making a Difference Group.
- Transitioning to the new appraisal process including the provision of development.
- Reviewing the Council's Protocol for Managing Change, providing training for managers and ensuring restructures follow the protocol.

Directorate action plans are attached as appendix 1 to this report. Children and Families has yet to finalise their plan to respond to staff feedback. It has been recommended given results that Children and Families review the process completed by Environment and Enterprise in the Environmental Services area and complete similar work in Early Intervention Services. Their approach being recognised as good practise.

Sickness Absence Results in Summary

The council's sickness absence records for 2014/15 to the end of Quarter 2 show an average days lost per full time equivalent (fte) employee (excluding schools) of 9.48 days per annum, calculated on a rolling year.

The permanent and temporary fte is 1,842 employees (excluding schools).

61.5% of the total absence is long term sickness (more than 4 weeks) and 38.5% is short term sickness.

Information on sickness absence performance is included in the Council's workforce data set which is reported to Improvement Boards on a quarterly basis.

The headline data shows the results for each directorate for both short-term and long term absence (more than 4 weeks).

By directorate the figures are:

Resources – 7.36 days (43.9% short term, 56.1% long term)
E and E- 13.23 days (32.8% short term, 67.2 long term)
CHWB – 8.83 days (41.8% short term, 58.2 long term)
C and F- 8.56 days (38.1% short term, 61.9% long term)

Absence rates for CHWB have risen this year and this is in part attributed to the transfer of staff from Business Support Services from Children and families to CHWB.

In E&E the high levels of sickness absence are partly attributed to the physical nature of many of the jobs and working outside in all weathers. Long term sickness absence in E&E is a higher percentage of absence rates than other directorates. The directorate has carried out more analysis of rates and have seen some reduction over Q1 figures following actions taken.

CHWB has set an absence target of 7.5 days per FTE. Environment and Enterprise which has the highest absence levels has set a target of 10 days per FTE.

In relation to London Councils, Harrow is in the fourth quartile for the average number of days lost due to sickness absence for 2013 -2014 according to the Human Capital Metrics Survey conducted by Haringey Council on behalf of all London Councils.

It is worth noting that the same survey shows Harrow is in the fourth quartile for employees aged 50 to 64 and has the highest number of employees aged 65 and older.

This may contribute to high levels of absence. When we look at reasons for absence Harrow's levels of sickness due to back problems, is in the fourth quartile and has risen since last year.

However, it should be noted that the Council cannot verify the information submitted for the survey by other Councils.

Some further data on the distribution of sickness absence across the year and by grade is **Appendix 2**.

Action Plan Summary

HRD has reviewed and streamlined the sickness absence policy and procedure. These are currently being consulted on. The aim of the review has been to simplify the policy and procedure and help to improve sickness absence management.

Directorates have their own action plans to address identified issues and improvement. These are set out in summary at **Appendix 3**.

The Council's general approach that follows the ACAS guidance (<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/q/k/Managing-attendance-and-employee-turnover-advisory-booklet.pdf>) is to:-

- Promote the health and well-being of the workforce- through training and events, an employee assistance scheme, an occupational health service, work-life balance and flexible working policies and leave provisions that include special leave (paid and unpaid as appropriate) that Directors can approve to enable staff to cope with difficult domestic and family matters. The staff engagement board is planning a Health and Wellbeing day for the new year.
- A sickness absence policy and procedure- the current policy and procedure is being reviewed, made simpler and more explicit. Managers are being consulted on the policy.
- Train managers in their responsibilities and good practice in relation to sickness absence- various forms of training are already underway and a new programme will be included in the further roll-out of manager and employee self -service
- Provide managers with reports from SAP to enable them to understand sickness absence in their area down to individual level and to check that return to work interviews and trigger points are being implemented
Screen shots of the kind of information available to managers are **Appendix 4**.

In accord with recognised good practice, the Council uses the return to work interview and follow-up action plan as key elements along with 'trigger points' to manage sickness absence. These are combined with detailed information for managers on sickness absence in their service area including the standard Bradford Factor ratings as explained below.

The Bradford Factor

The Bradford factor is a way of illustrating how disruptive frequent short-term sickness absence can be. Bradford factors are a way of highlighting those individuals with serious absence and patterns of sickness absence, which give cause for concern.

The Bradford factor is not a trigger but should be used when identifying "where to start" where large numbers of employees hit the triggers. This information is available to Managers as part of their management information on sickness absence.

The Bradford factor is calculated as $S \times S \times D = \text{Bradford factor}$.

S is the number of spells (occasions) of sickness absence in the last 52 weeks.

D is the total number of days' sickness absence in the last 52 weeks.

The 'trigger points'

The Council's sickness absence triggers are as follows:

- Three separate sickness absences of any duration in a three month period, or
- Five separate sickness absences or a total of twelve days sickness absence in a twelve month period, or
- A pattern or type of sickness absence that causes concern e.g. regular absence, often leaving work a few hours early due to sickness, frequent medical appointment, or
- Single episode of four continuous weeks (long term sickness absence)

Financial Implications

The direct cost of all staff sickness absence (excluding the cost of schools sickness absence and agency cover) in 2013/14 was £2.5m.

The action plans set out within the report do not require any additional budget funding but will require management time in directorates to support their effective implementation.

Environmental Impact

There is no environmental impact arising from the action plans

Risk Management Implications

High levels of sickness absence and low levels of staff satisfaction / engagement present risks to achieving high performance and productivity. Action taken and planned by the Council and Directorates to mitigate these risks are set out within the report.

Equalities implications

Equalities are explicit in the Staff Survey. Questions in the staff survey included equalities questions. The Making a Difference Group are making recommendations to feed into the action plans.

Council Priorities

The action plans are designed to assist the Council's management of the workforce and in turn support the achievement of the Council's priorities in relation to improving services to the community.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Not required for this report

Ward Councillors notified: . NO
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Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Jon Turner, Divisional Director of HRD and Shared Services 0208 424 1225 or Ext 2225

Background Papers:

Enclosures:

1. Staff Survey Action Plans
2. Sickness absence distribution data
3. Directorate Action Plans in summary
4. Management Information –Screen Shots