



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Employment Committee

23 September 2020

Report of: Councillor Kelham Cooke

The Leader of the Council



Sickness absence update

This report provides a review of absence statistics at South Kesteven District Council with commentary for the year ending 31 March 2020 and for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020.

Report Author

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Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Administrative	Administrative	All Wards

Reviewed by:	Elaine Pepper, Head of Organisational Development	1 September 2020
Approved by:	Lee Sirdifield, Strategic Director for Transformation and Change	7 September 2020
Signed off by:	Councillor Kelham Cooke, The Leader of the Council	11 September 2020

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

1. That the Employment Committee notes the absence statistics for South Kesteven District Council for the year ended 31 March 2020 and the period 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020 (Quarter 1)

1 The Background to the Report

- 1.1 This report provides sickness absence statistics for the organisation as a whole and a breakdown on both the causes of absence and individual departments' performance.
- 1.2 Due to the cancellation of the Employment Committee meeting in March 2020, the last sickness update provided to Employment Committee was in December 2019 and reported on Quarters 1 and 2 for 2019/2020. This sickness absence update provides the sickness position for the whole year 2019/2020 and the first quarter of 2020/21.
- 1.3 The supporting information used to produce this report is included in the Appendix to Sickness Absence Update.
- 1.4 A sickness update will be provided every three months on the previous quarter's statistics.

Overall Sickness Absence rates.

- 1.5 Sickness absence at South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) is measured using the standard calculation utilised by local authorities - the average number of days absent per person at the Council. The formula for this calculation is to divide the full-time equivalent sickness hours by the full-time equivalent headcount.
- 1.6 The average number of days absent due to sickness per employee (both long- and short-term absence) for the period April 2019 to March 2020 is 12 days. For comparison the average number of days lost per employee due to sickness for the period April 2018 to March 2019 was 10.
- 1.7 The CIPD Health and Wellbeing Report March 2020 indicates that the average number of days absent per employee in the public sector is 8 days.
- 1.8 SKDC has a manual workforce which is a significant proportion of the total headcount (36%) and accounts for 53% of the total absence in the year. Removing the Repairs and Street Care teams from the figures reduces the average number of days absent per employee to 8.7 days which is close to the national average.
- 1.9 The average number of days absent due to sickness per employee (both long- and short-term absence) for the first quarter of 2020/21 (1 April to 30 June 2020) is 1.5 days. This is a reduction compared to the average number of days absent per quarter in 2019/2020 (average of 3 days per employee per quarter).
- 1.10 The estimated cost of absence for 2019/2020 based on a calculation of the total days absent multiplied by the average salary is £600,000.
- 1.11 The estimated cost of absence for Q1 2020/21 based on the same calculation is £77,000.
- 1.12 The Growth and Commercial and Operational directorates have the highest levels of absence. This is typical due to them having the manual workforces of Repairs and Street Care.

Short Term Absence

- 1.13 The most common reasons for short term absence in 2019/20 were: cold and influenza (30%) stress, depression and mental health (15%) and stomach complaints (10%).
- 1.14 For Quarter 1 of 2020/21 the most common reasons for short term absence were stress, depression and mental health (28%), other (22%), other musculo-skeletal 13%. The use of 'Other' as a reason for absence appears to have increased and this is being removed

as an option to be selected so that we have more specific information for reporting on the reasons for absence.

Long Term Absence

- 1.15 Long term absence for 2019/20 is 68% of total absence and short-term absence is 32%.
- 1.16 Long term absence for Q1 2020/21 is 79% and short-term absence is 21%. There were 14 employees with long term absence during the period; 5 returned to work in the period, 1 left employment and there are 4 employees who are in the process of leaving employment.
- 1.17 The most common reasons for long term absence in 2019/20 were: stress, depression and mental health (36%), other musculo-skeletal (28%) and back and neck (22%).
- 1.18 For Quarter 1 of 2020/21 the most common reasons for long term absence were stress, depression and mental health (34%), back and neck (26%), other 18%.
- 1.19 Repairs, Street Care and Housing account for 72% of all absence in Quarter 1 2020/21. Repairs and Street Care typically account for a high proportion of absence due to having a predominantly manual workforce. The high level of absence in Housing is due to some employees on long term absence with serious illnesses.
- 1.20 At the end of Q1 there were 13 employees on long term absence. One of these has since left the organisation with two others leaving shortly. The medical incapability process is being followed with two other employees and this should have a positive impact on the level of long-term absence.

Return to Work Interviews

- 1.21 The rate of completed return to work interviews for 2019/2020 is 88%.
- 1.22 The rate of completed return to work interviews for Q1 2020/2021 is 95%. The actual number of return to work interviews not completed in the period is 4. These have been followed up with managers who have been reminded about the importance of carrying out return to work interviews.
- 1.23 An HR dashboard has now been developed which provides up to date information on sickness absence including completed return to work interviews. This information will be used in discussions with managers at HR business partner meetings and will address and challenge any issues of non-completion.

Mental Health Related Absence

- 1.24 Mental health related absence continues to be one of the highest reasons for both short- and long-term absence. It currently accounts for 28% of short-term absence and 34% of long-term absence.
- 1.25 The March 2020 CIPD report indicates the majority of organisations are making little headway in reducing workplace stress, which remains a particular issue in public sector organisations, many of which have experienced budget, resource and staff reductions over the last few years.
- 1.26 In terms of time lost due to mental health related absence there has been a 25% reduction in Q1 2020/2021 compared to the same period last year.
- 1.27 Support for mental health related absence is available through an employee assistance programme, a number of trained mental health first aiders and stress management

training for staff. Wellness action plans are also used to help an employee and their manager identify triggers for poor mental health and agree what support can be put in place.

- 1.28 There has been an increased focus on mental wellbeing during Covid-19 and the Human Resources team have provided information and sources of support available on a regular basis through weekly Wellbeing communications.
- 1.29 Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs) have provided information and feedback on the use of their services. The majority have seen approximately 3 members of staff each in their official capacity. In the main these are self-referrals but there have been some instances where line managers have contacted the MHFAs to raise concerns.
- 1.30 Feedback has been positive, both from a user and MHFA point view, indicating that the MHFAs and other initiatives help to raise awareness and encourage people to talk and to take positive steps to better their mental health.

Next Steps

- 1.31 Human Resources will continue to support line managers in reducing both short-term and long-term absences. Line management training which covered absence management was provided in early 2020 and future new managers will receive training in both absence management and carrying out return to work interviews.
- 1.32 The Organisation Development and Change team have developed an automated dashboard of absence information which enables Human Resources to monitor and analyse absence statistics on a regular basis. This information will feed into HR business partner meetings with managers resulting in actions and updates in respect of absence case management.
- 1.33 HR business partner meetings will encourage an increased focus on return to work interviews to improve the current completion rate.
- 1.34 Human Resources will encourage managers to use Wellness Action Plans with employees who they identify as having poor mental health and for all mental health related absence. This will enable a more proactive approach and should reduce absence levels.
- 1.35 Information gathered in the recent mental health survey indicates that not all staff are aware of who the mental health first aiders are and what their role is. Human Resources will include details about the mental health first aiders in their response to staff on the findings of the survey.

2 Financial Implications

- 2.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Richard Wyles, Interim Director of Finance

3 Legal and Governance Implications

- 3.1 The Committee may wish to see sickness absence reporting and monitoring through a suite of employment based indicators, to align with the new Corporate Plan objective of being a high performing Council

Legal Implications reviewed by: Shahin Ismail, Director of Law and Governance

4 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

4.1 Equality and safeguarding implications are considered in HR Policy and the HR Handbook. There are no additional equality and safeguarding implications resulting from this report.

5 Risk and Mitigation

5.1 There are no risks arising from this report.

6 Community Safety Implications

6.1 There are no community safety implications relating to this report.

7 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council's declaration of a climate emergency?

7.1 The recommendations in this report have no carbon impact.

8 Other Implications (where significant)

8.1 There are no other implications relating to this report.

9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix to Sickness Absence Update

Report Timeline:	Date of Publication on Forward Plan (if required)	Not applicable
	Previously Considered by: Employment Committee	5 June 2019
	Final Decision date	Not applicable