



Report to Joint Consultative and Safety Committee

Subject Absence Management

Date 16th November 2006

Author Head of Personnel and Organisational Development

1. Purpose of the Report

To present options on improving absence management.

2. Background

At the Personnel and Resources Committee on 30th November, the Chief Executive presented a report proposing changes to the current sickness absence procedures. These would have the effect of 'tightening up' the trigger points for action once an employee had already been placed within the absence management procedure.

Following consultation with UNISON, they were unable to support the proposals. The Members of the Committee considered their comments, and passed a resolution that this JCSC meeting be convened to consider the proposals put forward by the Chief Executive and proposals put forward by UNISON.

Attached to this report as Appendix A is a copy of the original report presented to Personnel and Resources Committee which outlines the current situation and the proposed changes to the absence management policy. At the time of writing this report, UNISON are preparing their proposals and these will be circulated to Members of the Committee.

3. Proposal

It is proposed that Members of the JCSC consider the issue of absence management and the options put forward for achieving improvements. The final proposals will then be put to Personnel and Resources Committee for ratification.

4. Resource Implications

In considering any proposals, the resource implications will need to be assessed. The costs of any proposals should be met by an improvement in the levels of sickness absence. Lower levels of sickness absence will mean a reduced requirement for cover eg Agency staff or overtime, and an increase in productivity.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members consider the various options for improving sickness levels.



Report to Personnel and Resources Committee

Subject Sickness Absence Procedure

Date 30th October 2006

Author Chief Executive

1. Purpose of the Report

To seek approval for changes to the Council's Absence Management Procedure.

2. Background

The current sickness management policy, including the Absence Management Procedure and Attendance Incentive Scheme has been in place since April 2003. The sickness figures have improved from 2002/03 to 2005/06 as follows:

2002/03	12.98
2003/04	11.56
2004/05	11.49
2005/06	10.87

However, at the end of the first quarter in 2006/07, the figure had increased to 11.42, and the latest figure for year to date (ie to end of September 2006) is 11.10.

The concern is that the level of sickness absence continues to be too high and that the downward trend is being reversed. The targets set in the Corporate Plan have not been achieved.

To continue to make an impact on sickness levels consideration has been given to changes that could be implemented in terms of Absence Management. There is no proposal to change the Attendance Incentive Scheme.

A summary of the current procedure is given below:

- The current Absence Management Procedure is triggered when an employee's absence exceeds 3 occasions or 9 working days.
- If there is no underlying reason for this absence, a 1st stage notification of concern is issued. This requires the employee not to be absent for more than 3 occasions or 9 working days within the next 12 months.
- If the employee falls below the standards, and there is no underlying reason, then a 2nd stage notification of concern is issued. This requires the employee not to be absent for more than 1 occasion or 5 working days within the next 6 months.
- If the employee falls below the standards and there is no underlying reason, then a final hearing is called. This may result in dismissal.

3. Proposal

In order to address this issue, it is proposed that the sickness absence procedure is 'tightened up'. This will ensure that once an employee has been placed into the procedure, they will be required to improve upon their attendance levels both in the immediate future and on an on-going basis. The detailed changes are as follows:

1. After issuing a 1st stage notification, the employee is required not to be absent on any occasion in the next calendar month.
2. After issuing a 1st stage notification, the employee is required not to be absent for more than 1 occasion or 5 working days within the next 6 months or for more than 3 occasions or 8 working days within the next 12 months.
3. After issuing a 1st stage notification the employee is required not to be absent for more than 3 occasions or 8 working days within any rolling 12 month period over the next two years.

If an employee fails to meet these standards, they would progress to the 2nd stage of the procedure no changes are proposed to this. The Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure will need to be amended to reflect these changes.

In addition to these changes to procedure, it is proposed that management explore the use of external health management service. The service offered is a front line telephone service, operating 24/7 to which all employees must report their sickness absence. The operators are all trained nurses and through questioning symptoms, can give the employee immediate medical advice. This

helps to reduce the length of their absence by ensuring that they get appropriate treatment as soon as possible.

There is an annual cost to this service, however the providers claim that this can be covered through reduction in sickness absence and the associated costs of temporary cover and overtime. The success of the service can be measured and if it is not delivering the savings, it will be possible to withdraw and return to the current reporting arrangements.

The service brings additional benefits in terms of the support available to employees on health issues – even if they are not absent. The service provides management information on trends, accidents and stress related absences.

4. Resource Implications

There are no additional resource implications from changes to the absence management procedure, however it would be anticipated that absence levels will reduce as a consequence leading to savings in sickness payments and cover for absence.

The costs of the Absence Management service will be met by savings from the reduction in sickness absence.

5. Consultation

There has been formal consultation with UNISON on these proposals. Their response is attached to this report.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- i. The changes to the Absence Management Policy and Procedure as outlined above are agreed.
- ii. Officers pursue the implementation of an Absence Management Service, choosing the most appropriate provider to deliver improvements in absence levels.

**Gedling
Branch
of**



Janet Brothwell
Head of Personnel & Organisational Development

Re: Response to Sickness Absence Policy

Dear Janet

Following our discussion and your request that I formally reply to you regarding the Sickness Absence Procedure, please accept this email as the formal response from Unison.

The Sub Committee has reviewed and met over the Sickness Absence Procedure and conclude that the existing procedure is fit for purpose and that the sickness absenteeism increase recently experienced is not due to the ineffectiveness of the procedure, but more to its application. We are aware that some members have high absenteeism and Unison does not support members of staff who do not have genuine cause for absence. However, we feel the proposed changes to the procedure do not and would not target the intended members of staff. The changes would penalize the whole Council, the majority of whom are hard working responsible people, which is evident due to the Councils overall CPA rating and IIP Awards. Unison would welcome and support a combination of stronger application of the procedure by line management, which is felt is currently lacking, training for managers who are expected to apply the procedures and a set of incentive schemes. We are currently trying to determine a scheme/s which we feel would help reduce absenteeism and also be cost effective to the Council, the primary objective being the reduction in sickness absence.

As requested by you, I also consulted John Clayton PASC Assistant Supervisor, who has stated the following

Hi Paul

I feel that the present sickness policy is OK. It is the Management that needs to deal with the problem and sort out the few who spoil it for the many.

Regards

*John Clayton,
PASC Assistant Supervisor*

Please accept this letter as Unisons objection to the proposed changes to the Sickness Absence Procedure. The Committee wishes to work with the Council through JCSC to enable further discussions to help develop a solution to the problem that has been highlighted.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Clayton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chair Unison Gedling Branch