Report to Audit Committee

Subject: **Sickness Absence**

Date: **20 March 2018**

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1.   Purpose of the Report

To provide the Audit Committee with further information regarding sickness absence following questions raised at the meeting on 19 December.

2.   Background

2.1   At the Committee meeting on 19 December 2017, consideration was given to a report relating to the Corporate Risk Management Scorecard. Members requested more detailed information be provided to the Committee in relation to sickness absence. Answers to specific questions were provided by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance in a letter dated 16 January and this report sets out additional detail.

2.2   A summary of trends graph at Appendix 1 shows that since April 2017 there has been a continued reduction in sickness absence levels and from September absence has been within the target of 10 full time equivalent days lost per full time equivalent employee.

2.3   Sickness absence is monitored in a number of ways. Reports setting out individual employee absence are provided to Service Managers and Directors on a monthly basis; SLT consider the corporate position on a quarterly basis and sickness absence is a standing item for JCSC. The Service Manager, Organisational Development informs the Committee of the current levels of sickness absence in the organisation, examines trends and highlights areas of concern or improvement. Information is produced for each Service area each month in the form of a poster which is designed to raise awareness of sickness absence levels and aid team discussion. Individual cases are managed in accordance with the Attendance Management Policy by Managers. Where necessary, long term sickness absence is discussed at case conference by Director, Service Manager and Senior Personnel Officer. The purpose of these case conferences is to ensure that best practice, employment legislation and local policies are being applied correctly to support the employee both in their absence and to make an effective and appropriate return to work. Any blockages to this ambition can be identified at these meetings and dealt with by senior management intervention.

2.4   The issue of high levels of sickness absence, and particularly long-term absence during 2017 was a concern during 2017 and was highlighted to JCSC and identified in the Corporate Risk Scorecard reported to Audit Committee. In order to recognise the importance of these issues and encourage a stable and regular pattern of good attendance, a revised package of measures was introduced from 1 January 2018 through a new Attendance Management Policy. The main changes to the policy are:

- A change of the policy title from Sickness Absence Management Policy to Attendance Management Policy. The purpose of this is to widen the scope of the policy and to focus the emphasis on being at work rather than being away from work.
- To introduce into the policy, the opportunity to access talking therapies/ counselling through a newly introduced Employee Assistance Programme. Also, to encourage employees who are absent from work due to mental health issues to take advantage of this support particularly when an occupational health report suggests that there may be benefit.
- The introduction of access to physiotherapy on a "fast-track" basis when recommended by an occupational health physician, to help support a return to work.
- The previous policy statement excluded a single long period of absence (ten or more days for stages one and two, and five or more days for the final stage) from counting towards the number of days to reach a trigger point. This has been removed from the new policy, which means that a single longer period of absence can now move an employee to a trigger point. Audit Committee is to note that appropriate protection is offered to employees absent due to conditions such a recognised disability defined under the Equality Act or conditions relating to maternity or similar.
- The introduction of a clear policy statement to define the maximum length of time that an employee can be absent from work, irrespective of reason. Review will be undertaken after around eight months of absence and unless there is a likelihood of imminent return to work with supporting medical evidence then an expectation is introduced into policy that notice of dismissal will be served, effective at the anniversary date of continuous absence. Appeal rights are also included in the policy.
- Recognition of the Council's commitment to the "Dying to Work" charter. An Employee Support Policy is introduced for employees having been diagnosed with a terminal illness to trigger (by the employee or employer depending on circumstance) a policy provision to allow for a period of one full year, management outside the normal sickness absence management procedures and without unnecessary administrative burden or obtrusive management intervention. The triggering of this Employee Support Policy is designed to support an employee to remain in employed status although they may not be in a position to attend work regularly, or indeed at all.

2.5   In view of the improvement in sickness absence levels it is not considered necessary to include it s an ongoing concern in the corporate risk scorecard. However the situation will be monitored and regularly reviewed.

3.   Proposal

It is proposed that the Committee notes this report.

4.   Resource Implications

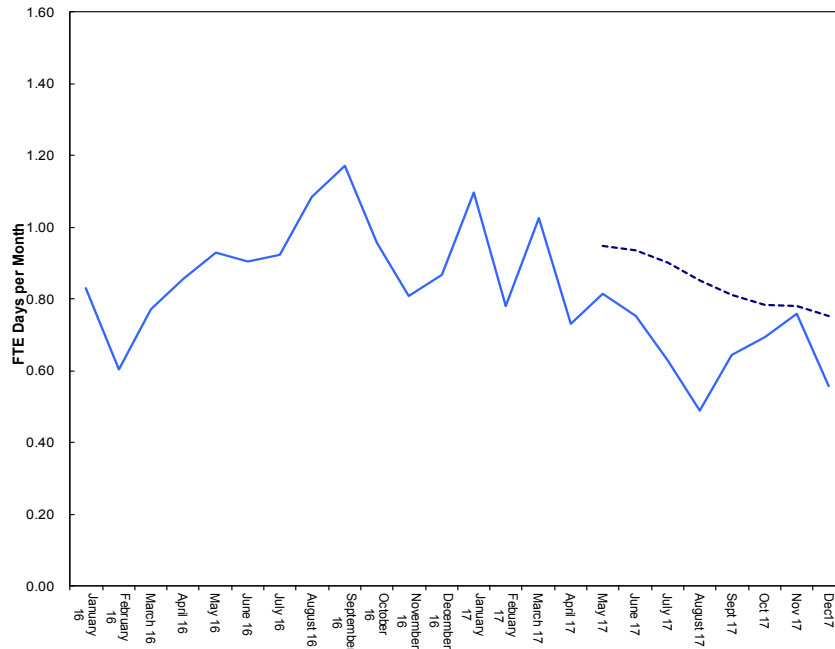None arising from this report.

5.   Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note this report.

6.   Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of trends graph year to date.

Summary of trends graph; year to date at December 2017

Summary of Trends

FTE Days per FTE in Current Month

Month	Total Absence %	No of FTE Staff	12 Month Average (%)	FTE Days per FTE in Current Month	FTE Days per FTE 12 Month Average	FTE Days per FTE per Month Average
January 16	4.16	381.49	2.76	0.83	7.01	0.58
February 16	2.88	384.42	2.78	0.61	7.01	0.58
March 16	3.67	384.63	2.86	0.77	7.24	0.60
April 16	4.08	385.75	3.01	0.86	7.66	0.64
May 16	4.65	388.82	3.20	0.93	8.18	0.68
June 16	4.12	389.18	3.40	0.91	8.78	0.73
July 16	4.40	387.34	3.64	0.92	9.36	0.78
August 16	4.93	390.93	3.91	1.09	10.02	0.84
September 16	5.32	390.53	4.18	1.17	10.81	0.90
October 16	4.55	389.26	4.27	0.96	11.07	0.92
November 16	3.67	389.12	4.24	0.81	11.00	0.92
December 16	4.34	387.30	4.23	0.87	11.00	0.92
January 17	5.23	387.81	4.32	1.10	11.22	0.94
Febuary 17	3.90	387.61	4.41	0.78	11.42	0.95
March 17	4.47	385.87	4.47	1.03	11.73	0.98
April 17	4.06	379.37	4.47	0.73	11.61	0.97
May 17	3.88	384.12	4.41	0.81	11.38	0.95
June 17	3.43	379.47	4.35	0.75	11.25	0.94
July 17	2.99	378.65	4.23	0.63	10.84	0.90
August 17	2.22	378.65	4.01	0.49	10.23	0.85
Sept 17	3.07	374.69	3.82	0.64	9.75	0.81
Oct 17	3.16	379.55	3.70	0.69	9.42	0.79
Nov 17	3.46	383.00	3.68	0.76	9.38	0.78
Dec 17	2.93	379.78	3.57	0.56	9.05	0.75