

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE

9 MAY 2012

Stress/depression, mental health & fatigue related sickness absence

Background

Sickness absence caused by stress/depression, mental health or fatigue has long been the most common reason for sickness absence at Wiltshire Council. During the 2011-2012 financial year, these reasons accounted for 21% of all sickness days lost.

This has been identified on quarterly reports and this report now aims to give further information surrounding this potential issue.

All information within this report relates to sickness absence recorded as Stress/Depression, mental health or fatigue only unless stated otherwise.

2011-12 financial year analysis

An analysis of the available information for the financial year 2011-12 shows that:

- 6% (331) of employees across WC have taken sick leave due to these reasons
- The average number of days taken per incident is 15 days.
- These reasons account for 21% of all sickness days taken, equating to a sickness rate of 1.8 days per FTE.
- 50% of individuals, who took one absence due to these reasons, later had a second absence for the same reasons.

Staff absent do not always provide information about the reason for the stress/depression, mental health or fatigue, as a result we are unable to determine exactly how much of this absence is work related. Of the total absence for these reasons we do know that 39% were not work related and 19% were. The reason for the remaining 42% cannot be determined. The absences that were recorded as work related lasted a median of 55% longer than those which were recorded as not work related.

Comparative information

When comparing the above information to that of 2010-11, we can see that:

- Wiltshire Council lost approximately 1000 FTE sickness days less during 2011-12 compared to 2010-11 which shows that despite the major changes that the council has, and is, making has not caused an increase in sick days due to these reasons.
- This accounts for half of the reduction in days lost to overall sickness during 2011-12 when compared to 2010-11, a reduction of 2000 days in total.
- The percentage of total sick days lost to these reasons during 2010-11 was slightly higher, yet similar, at 23%.

Benchmarking information shows that a high percentage of sick days lost to these reasons is a common occurrence across other public sector organisations. Essex (23%), Buckinghamshire (20%), Oxfordshire (20%) & Hampshire (17%) see a similar percent of

sickness days lost for the same reasons. Our overall DLA benchmark (37 local authorities) also shows a figure of 17%.

Services that appear to see the most employees absent

There are certain service directorates where absences occur more often:

Service Directorate	% of individuals taking an absence due to these reasons
Waste Management Services	12%
DCS Adult Care Operations	11%
DCS Business Change	9%
Children & Families Social Care	8%
Children's Commissioning and Performance	8%

Positions that have high percents of employees absent

The following positions have had the highest percent of individuals in role absent:

Service	Position
Children & Families Social Care	Care officer
Schools and Learning	Teaching Assistant
DCS Adult Care Operations	Support Worker
Neighbourhood Services	Civil Enforcement Officer
DCS Adult Care Operations	Resource specialist

Purely looking at the absences recorded as work related, the following positions appear most vulnerable to taking sickness absence:

Service	Position
Neighbourhood Services	Civil Enforcement Officer
Schools and Learning	Teaching Assistant
Children & Families Social Care	Personal Adviser
Children & Families Social Care	Social Worker
DCS Adult Care Operations	Support Worker

Action taken at Wiltshire Council to reduce stress related absences

The council has a range of practices and services in place to help maintain levels of employee well-being and avoid or foreshorten stress-related absences.

These include specifically:

- Employee well-being policy
- Risk assessment template with guidance notes
- Management Matters workshop on Managing Pressure, Preventing Stress to provide managers with the awareness and tools to undertake team and individual assessments and identify appropriate and timely interventions.

- Access to an occupational health service allowing clinical assessment of stress-related ill-health and provision of professional advice to support both the employee and the manager.
- Access to a confidential employee well-being telephone helpline that provides signposting to a variety of internal and external support services.
- Access to a funded professional counselling service for employees.
- Access for managers to human resource services to support constructive and supportive management of ill-health, performance and attendance.
- Information for employees on The Wire.

The council also supports employee well-being indirectly through:

- Policy and procedures to ensure proper job descriptions, induction, personal development and supervisory support.
- Procedures for employees to raise concerns about their health, risks to their health and any action or behaviours which may contribute to workplace stress; and policy and procedures which ensure those concerns are properly investigated and resolved.
- Open and transparent communication policy and specific and detailed consultation with staff representatives.
- Provision of a range of family-friendly policies to support work-life balance.
- Provision of a range of staff benefits including those designed to support and encourage healthy lifestyle choices.
- Suitable working environments and the provision of equipment and materials to ensure employees are able to undertake their duties in comfort and safety.

At a benchmarking meeting (March 2012) attended by representatives from HR we were told that East Sussex County Council is also looking at the amount of sickness that they have due to these reasons. We are therefore able to contact and work with them to help identify any more measures that we can use to help reduce this lost time.

As a service HR & OD is also looking to undertake a systems thinking review of the way sickness absence is managed to ensure that best practice and efficient processes and procedures are in place.

Conclusion

Although stress/depression, mental health or fatigue remains the most common reason for sickness absence at Wiltshire Council, the days lost has reduced dramatically in comparison to last year. These reasons also appear to cause a similar percent of sickness days across all public sector authorities showing that Wiltshire Council is not out of line with levels seen elsewhere.

Sickness rates at Wiltshire Council are below the level seen across local government so although some parts of this report may cause concern we can be sure that the above actions are working to reduce the levels of sickness wherever possible.

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