

South Lakeland District Council
Human Resources Committee
Tuesday 14 June 2022
Annual Sickness Absence Report 2021-22

Portfolio: Cllr Eamonn Hennessy
Report from: Simon McVey- Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources
Report Author: Kira King – HR Specialist
Wards: N/A
Forward Plan: N/A

Links to Council Plan Priorities: The recognition of a highly skilled and healthy workforce is embedded into the council plan which shows how essential a motivated workforce is to providing excellent customer services.

1.0 Expected Outcome and Measures of Success

1.1 This report provides details of employee sickness absence in the Council during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that Human Resources Committee:-

- (1) Approve the report with any actions to be taken moving forward.**
- (2) Approve the target for sickness absence for 2022/23 of 7.50 days to be maintained.**

3.0 Background and Proposals

3.1 Sickness Absence is measured and reported as “Days lost through sickness per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employee”, using the calculation conventions of the former National Performance Indicator BV12. This is a standard format, which allows realistic comparison with other organisations. It includes sickness absence attributable to employees who have left employment during the period under review, and fixed term employees. It does not include sickness absence attributable to casual staff or Members.

Sickness Absence Targets

3.2 During the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the Council had an average full time equivalent (FTE) of 413.5. The Council lost **4668.6** working days through sickness absence, compared to **4040.5** in the previous year (**an increase of 628.1 days, 15.5%**). This is equivalent to **11.29** days per FTE employee per annum. This represents an increase of 1.14 days per FTE employee compared to last year which was 10.15 and an increase of 3.79 days over the target of 7.5 days per FTE employee agreed by the Human Resource Committee.

3.3 Of the total number of days lost, **3674.7** days were lost through long-term absence. (Long term absence is defined as any absence lasting for a period of four working

weeks or more). This is equivalent to 78.7% of all sickness absence for the period under review. In the corresponding period in the previous year **3052.1** days were lost which was equivalent to 75.5% of all sickness absence.

In 2021/22 there were 62 incidences of long term absence which were supported by the HR team, compared to 60 incidences last year.

The average duration of a long-term absence was 59.2 days, compared to 53.7 days in the previous year.

3.4 For each directorate area the Long Term Sickness figures for 2021/22 are as follows:

Directorate Area	Total Days of Long Term Absence lost	Total number of Staff on long term sickness absence	Average number of days lost per employee on long term sick
Strategy, Innovation and Resources	311	6	51.8
Customer and Commercial Services	3363.7	56	60.1

3.5 Of the total number of days lost, **993.9** days were lost through short-term absence. (Short term absence is defined as any absence lasting less than a period of four working weeks). This is equivalent to 21.3% of all sickness absence for the period under review. In the corresponding period in the previous year **988.4** days were lost which was equivalent to 24.5% of all sickness absence.

In 2021/22 there were 342 incidences of short term sick, compared to 237 incidences last year.

The average duration of a short-term absence was 2.9 days compared to 4.17 days in the previous year.

3.6 For each directorate area the Short Term Sickness figures for 2021/22 are as follows:

Directorate Area	Total Days of Short Term Absence lost	Total number of Staff on short term sickness absence	Average number of days lost per employee on short term sick
Strategy, Innovation and Resources	119.9	34	3.5
Customer and Commercial	874	158	5.5

Pro-active Measurement and Actions

3.7 The Human Resources Service regularly measures days lost through sickness absence and monthly reports are sent to Leadership Team. Managers also have access to run their own team's absence reports. In addition, managers are supported in monitoring and reducing levels of absence in their service area. This report provides an annual overview, outlines progress achieved, and provides information about ongoing work being undertaken to enable the Council to manage sickness absence effectively.

- 3.8 The increased level of pro-active support available to employees, for example include: free confidential counselling, the Employee Assistance Programme, occupational health provision, the Pay Care Health cash plan, the launch of the Mental Wellbeing at Work Policy, resilience workshops, the launch of Cheerful Tuesday wellbeing sessions, wellbeing surveys, targeted wellbeing team talks and regular wellbeing updates on Sharepoint.

Categories for Absence

- 3.9 The reason for absence category is taken from the employee directly or fit note and consistently entered onto iTrent.

- 3.10 The top reasons for absence through sickness, by percentage of days lost, are:

1. Stress, depression, anxiety and fatigue (760 days, 16.3%)
2. Musculoskeletal non work related (672.6 days, 14.4%)

An analysis of the days actually lost, by reason for absence, is attached as Appendices 1 and 2.

- 3.11 Since the previous reporting year the Council has seen the biggest increase in:

1. Other reasons (increased to 12.5% of sickness with 584.9 days in 2021/22 compared to only being 5.1% with 204.3 days in 2020/21)
2. Disease/ Cancer treatment (increased to 10.6% of sickness, with 493 days in 2021/22 compared to 3.8% with 152.5 days in 2020/21)

- 3.12 The biggest reduction since the previous reporting year has been:

1. Headache, migraine, all neurological problems (has decreased to be 3.5%, 164.6 day in 2021/22 compared to 9.6% with 388.7days days in 2020/21)
2. Musculoskeletal work related (has decreased to 6.6% with 308.5 days in 2021/22 compared to 12% with 484.4 days in 2020/21)

- 3.14 Absence due to non-work related stress/depression has decreased since last year. A total of 848.6 days was reported last year, however this decreased to 760 days in 2021/22 (10.4% decrease, 88.8 days). Non-work related stress/depression had previously increased for the year 2020/21 by 14%.

- 3.15 Absence due to work related stress has increased since last year. A total of 277.5 days was reported for 2021/22 compared to 180.6 days for last year this year (an increase of 53.6%, 96.9 days).

The Council is continuing to manage stress related absences through the use of the stress assessment process, which includes:

- Active day 1 care through our employee assistance programme. With agreement from the employee a referral is made on day 1 of the absence. A qualified counsellor will arrange a call and agree a programme of activity with the employee. This supports with the identification of Stress incidences on the first day of absence and appropriate support and prompt measures can be taken to deal with any issues leading to or causing stress absence.
- Resilience training provided by a trained psychologist for all staff.
- Occupational Health service which staff can access.
- Our Employee Assistance Programme which provides a multitude of counselling options.
- The introduction of our Wellbeing at Work Policy. This provides useful tools to managers and employees to support with wellbeing activity
- Training on the Wellbeing policy for managers
- The introduction of management team talks

- The introduction of cheerful Tuesdays
- The introduction of wellbeing updates and resilience training

Pro-Active Management of Sickness Absence

- 3.16 It is proposed to continue this pro-active management in sickness absence by continuing to set the challenging target for 2021/22 of **7.50** days per employee per annum.
- 3.17 A range of pro-active actions were introduced in the last financial year to help meet the proposed target and reduce absence further:-
- Revision of all sickness absence reason categories to align with national published data to assist benchmarking and more detailed absence for manager's reviews. In addition to this, more specific reasons have been introduced to capture work and non-work related musculoskeletal sickness absence.
 - Provision of seminars on work life balance, priority setting techniques, team working, well-being events and motivational sessions.
 - Two categories of stress have now been established to monitor workplace and personal stress to support employees and take actions that are appropriate and timely.

Further Actions and Activities

- 3.18 The following pro-active actions will continue, where appropriate, to assist managers in the management of sickness absence.
- The introduction of a Mental Wellbeing at Work policy to raise awareness of mental health and to support managers and employees with proactive measures in supporting each other with mental health conditions.
 - The introduction of a Smart Working policy that allows all staff to be flexible in their work life balance.
 - Providing training to equip managers with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage sickness absence. The use of policies and procedures such as "Attendance Management", "Mental Health at Work" and "Smart Working".
 - Advising managers each time employees reach a sickness absence trigger point.
 - The return to work interview is monitored by Human Resources and managers are advised where they are overdue.
 - Absence reviews are conducted in line with the Attendance Management Policy with full support from Human Resources.
 - The Council utilises professional Occupational Health advice in managing levels of absence, particularly long-term absence.
 - A free confidential Counselling Service is available for all employees.
 - A free confidential Employee Assistance Programme is available for all employees.
 - The Council offers the opportunity for employees to join the Pay Care Health Cash Plan which allows for regular dental, optical check-ups, etc, which should contribute to reduced levels of sickness absence.

Absence due to COVID

- 3.19 It is important to mention the impact of COVID on overall absence figures for 2021/22. As part of the local government terms and conditions if an employee is prevented from attending work because of contact with infectious disease they shall be entitled to receive normal pay. The period of absence on this account shall not be reckoned against the employee's entitlements under this scheme.

- 3.20 For the purposes of reporting sickness absence, any absence related to COVID, either self-isolation or being absent due to contracting COVID has not been counted toward the overall sickness absence reporting figures.
- 3.21 For information purposes the Council has had a total of 724 days lost which are attributable to COVID. This was a decrease from the previous year where 1493 days were lost. Should this figure have been added to the totals above the overall absence figures would total 5,392.5 days for the period 2021/22.

4.0 Appendices Attached to this Report

Appendix No.	
1	Reason for absence by percentage of days lost – 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022
2	Reason for sickness absence by percentage - 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022
3	SLDC days lost through sickness absence per full-time equivalent (FTE) employee per annum - 2004/05 to 2021/22

5.0 Research and Consultation

- 5.1 All data used in this report relating to South Lakeland District Council has originated from the Council's iTrent Human Resources computerised system.
- 5.2 External benchmarking has also taken place to assess our performance against other relevant external organisations. The Council's absence figure for 2020/21 of 10.15 days which is higher than that recorded for the UK Public Sector in an xperthHR Survey which was recorded at 9.2 days. Appendix 3 of the report, provides the SLDC sickness absence figures between 2004/05 and 2021/22.
- 5.3 Absence comparison data has been produced by XperthHR nationally and has been provided below for comparison.

National Comparative Data	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
XperthHR National report on Absence-Public Sector	10 days	9.2 days	9.2 days	8.4 days	9.7 days	9.8 days	9.08 days	8.2 days	9.1 days
XperthHR National report on Absence-Private Sector	6.7 days	8.7 days	6.4 days	4.4 days	5.6 days	6.5 days	7.8 days	6.6 days	8.8 days
SLDC	11.29 days	10.15 days	10.88 days	8.92 days	7.31 days	8.99 days	8.54 days	7.4 days	6.5 days

- 5.4 The report will be shared with our unions prior to HR committee.

6.0 Alternative Options

- 6.1 Not applicable – the report is provided for information.

7.0 Implications

Financial, Resources and Procurement

- 7.1 From the iTrent Human Resources computerised system it is calculated that the cost of sickness absence for the financial year was £357,853.21. This figure does not include on costs or the cost of cover, overtime or flexi-time being worked to cover absences.
- 7.2 The cost of absence in 2021/22 was £265,626. The increase in days from last year (+628) has seen an increase in costs of £92,227 calculated on the same salary basis as above.

Human Resources

- 7.3 The Council's Attendance Management Policy provides details of how employees will be managed during sickness absence.

Legal

- 7.4 There are no legal implications to this report.

Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment

- 7.5 Have you completed a Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment? No
- 7.6 If you have not completed an Impact Assessment, please explain your reasons: A sustainability impact assessment has not been carried out. It has no impact on climate change. This report does not have any registered significant environmental effects.
- 7.7 Summary of Health and Sustainability Impacts

		Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Environment and Health	Greenhouse gases emissions		X		
	Air Quality		X		
	Biodiversity		X		
	Impacts of Climate Change		X		
	Reduced or zero requirement for energy, building space, materials or travel		X		
	Active Travel		X		
Economy and Culture	Inclusive and sustainable development		X		
	Jobs and levels of pay		X		
	Healthier high streets		X		
	Culture, creativity and heritage		X		
Housing and Communities	Standard of housing		X		
	Access to housing		X		

	Crime		X		
	Social connectedness		X		

Equality and Diversity

7.8 Have you completed an Equality Impact Analysis? No

7.9 If you have not completed an Impact Analysis, please explain your reasons: There are no trends in the sickness absence analysis figures indicating any equality or diversity issues.

7.10 Summary of Equality and Diversity impacts

Please indicate: P = Positive impact; 0 = Neutral; N = Negative; Enter "X"					
Age	P		0	X	N
Disability	P		0	X	N
Gender reassignment (transgender)	P		0	X	N
Marriage & civil partnership	P		0	X	N
Pregnancy & maternity	P		0	X	N
Race/ethnicity	P		0	X	N
Religion or belief	P		0	X	N
Sex/gender	P		0	X	N
Sexual orientation	P		0	X	N
Armed forces families	P		0	X	N
Rurality	P		0	X	N
Socio-economic disadvantage	P		0	X	N

Risk

Not applicable – the report is provided for information purposes.

Contact Officers

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Background Documents Available

None

Tracking Information

Signed off by	Date sent	Date Signed off
Legal Services	30/05/2022	31/05/2022
Section 151 Officer	30/05/2022	31/05/2022
Monitoring Officer	30/05/2022	31/05/2022
CMT	N/A	N/A

Circulated to	Date sent
Lead Specialist	N/A
Human Resources Lead Specialist	19/05/2022

Circulated to	Date sent
Communications Team	N/A
Leader	N/A
Committee Chairman	
Portfolio Holder	19/05/2022
Ward Councillor(s)	N/A
Committee	
Executive (Cabinet)	N/A
Council	N/A