

Employment and Appeals Committee – 31st January 2020

Sickness Absence Update

Introduction

The previous two quarterly updates (17th July 2019 and 23rd October 2019) have shone a positive light on the Council's sickness absence days lost per full time equivalent (FTE) when comparing to all other Local Authorities in Wales, as well as evidencing a continued improvement within the Council.

The sickness absence update provided at EAC on 17th July 2019 evidenced that Powys County Council had the 3rd lowest sickness days lost per full time equivalent (FTE) for 2018/19, when compared to all other Local Authorities, at a rate of 9.16 per FTE. It was also noted that the average sickness absence days lost per FTE from 2017/18 to 2018/19 had increased across Wales, whereas PCC evidenced a decrease.

This report will continue to focus on the same areas as previous reports, with additional information provided on short-term sickness, number of occurrences and the reasons for absence, as requested by the Committee in the previous meeting.

The sickness data provided in this report has been extracted from the Powys Insight Centre dashboards on 24th January 2020.

Annual Sickness Absence Data

For the 12-month period ending 31st December 2019, the Council's cumulative sickness days lost per FTE is 9.03, which has slightly increased from the 12-month period ending 30th September 2019 which was 8.57 days lost per FTE.

However, when comparing to the 12-month period ending 31st December 2018, which was 9.74 days lost per FTE, it evidences a significant improvement.

The report will investigate the reasons for the slight increase during the last quarter, however it is worth noting that the average is still an improvement when compared to the Council's rate of 9.16 FTE at the end of the 2018/19 financial year.

Annual Sickness Absence Data by Reason

The following table compares the number of absences recorded per sickness category for the 12-month period ending December 2018 and 12-month period ending December 2019. There has been an increase in the number of absences recorded, however as the previous section states, the actual sickness days lost per FTE has decreased.

Sickness Category	12-month period, ending December 2018	12-month period, ending December 2019	Difference
Stomach, liver, kidney & digestion; including gastroenteritis	1568	1558	-10
Infections; includes colds & flu	1722	1498	-224
Test/Treatment; including medical appointment	575	717	142
Stress, depression, anxiety, neurasthenia, mental health & fatigue	574	570	-4
Neurological; including headaches & migraine	511	523	12
Chest & respiratory; including chest infections	442	485	43
Other muscular-skeletal problems	445	376	-69
Eye, ear, nose & mouth/dental; including sinusitis	282	331	49
Return to work form not received	110	263	153
Back & neck problems	224	211	-13
Genito-urinary; including menstrual problems	120	140	20
Accidents/incidents (non-work related)	128	135	7
Pregnancy related	91	101	10
Heart, blood pressure & circulation	70	65	-5
Skin complaints / infections / disorders	74	50	-24
Reactions / side effects	60	30	-30
Cancer	27	26	-1
Diabetes	8	9	1
Other reasons	0	9	9
Nutritional problems	6	7	1
Total	7037	7104	67

For clarity, the category 'Return to work form not received' is usually recorded when the sickness is first input, but the inputter may not know the detail at that time. Self-certification and medical notes should be attached in the background and the inputter should be changing the absence category as soon as known. However, it is also important to note that under GDPR, an employee can withhold the reason for sickness absence from their direct line manager if they wish to do so.

The biggest increase in recorded absences, other than the above, is 'Test/Treatment; including medical appointment' which could suggest that employees are making appointments with their GP, prior to taking another category of sickness.

In terms of absences relating to 'Stress, depression, anxiety, neurasthenia, mental health & fatigue' the figure has reduced slightly when comparing both years, and further monitoring of this category will be undertaken following the launch of the Employee Assistance Programme in late Summer 2019, which is proven in other organisations to help increase attendance and employee well-being.

Quarterly Sickness Data Analysis

The sickness days lost per FTE for the current year April to December 2019 is a cumulative total of 6.6999, which as the table below illustrates, virtually matches the same period in 2018, where a cumulative total of 6.69417 sickness days were lost per FTE.

2018/19		2019/20	
Month	Average Days Lost Per FTE	Month	Average Days Lost Per FTE
Q1 - Apr-18	0.75552	Q1 - Apr-19	0.55333
Q1 - May-18	0.79262	Q1 - May-19	0.72002
Q1 - Jun-18	0.72423	Q1 - Jun-19	0.75502
Q2 - Jul-18	0.68941	Q2 - Jul-19	0.69900
Q2 - Aug-18	0.56196	Q2 - Aug-19	0.54287
Q2 - Sep-18	0.65833	Q2 - Sep-19	0.76946
Q3 - Oct-18	0.84019	Q3 - Oct-19	0.91157
Q3 - Nov-18	0.83708	Q3 - Nov-19	0.89550
Q3 - Dec-18	0.83483	Q3 - Dec-19	0.85313
Cumulative Total	6.69417	Cumulative Total	6.69990

Looking month by month, there are two periods of variance to note. The first being April to May in both years, where sickness is reduced in 2019/20, however between September and November the sickness has increased in 2019/20.

Having assessed the categories of absence recorded, comparing October 2018 and October 2019, the data evidences that there was an increase in the number of absences recorded from 668 to 757, with the largest increase in the following ‘*Stomach, liver, kidney & digestion; including gastroenteritis*’ from 118 cases to 147 which could be caused by a seasonal virus, easily passed in office environments.

Sickness Absence Occurrences

When comparing the 12-month period ending December 2018 and December 2019, the following can be observed:

Absence Occurrences	January – December 2018	January – December 2019	Difference
1 Occurrence	1550	1480	-70
2 Occurrence	809	744	-65
3 Occurrences or +	692	754	+62

Initial analysis has identified that 53% of the 754 ‘3 occurrences or more’ are in Schools, 14% in Highways, Transport & Recycling and 10% in Adult Services, therefore further investigation is required to understand why there has been an increase in an employee being absent 3 or more times during the year, and what can be done to better support this.

However, it is worth noting that the above figures do come with a caveat that due to the rolling 12-month absence reporting, the 2 or 3 plus occurrences may span multiple years. Therefore, an individual may have had 2 absences in 2018, with the third in 2019, which would output in the 2019 figures.

Short-Term and Long-Term Sickness

Short-term sickness is defined as any absence less than 28 calendar days, whereas a long-term absence is an absence equal to or greater than 28 calendar days.

The following data details the number of absences recorded against short-term and long-term absences for each of the last seven quarters:

2018/19 – Absences Recorded

Calendar Days	Q1 April - June	Q2 July - Sept	Q3 Oct - Dec	Q4 Jan - Mar
Short-Term (< 28 days)	1295	1025	1998	2034
Long-Term (>= 28 days)	335	288	302	371
	(154 are over 4 months)	(125 are over 4 months)	(127 are over 4 months)	(143 are over 4 months)

2019/20 – Absences Recorded

Calendar Days	Q1 April - June	Q2 July - Sept	Q3 Oct - Dec	Q4 Jan - Mar
Short-Term (< 28 days)	1307	1028	1992	n/a
Long-Term (>= 28 days)	327	297	295	n/a
	(137 are over 4 months)	(105 are over 4 months)	(90 are over 4 months)	n/a

Whilst the Q1 and Q2 are comparable for both 2018/19 and 2019/20 in terms of the number of absences recorded, it is worth noting of those absences falling in to the long-term category of calendar days lost, the number that exceed 4 months has continued to reduce by 17 absences (11%) in quarter 1, 20 absences (16%) in quarter 2 and 37 absences (21%) when comparing both years.

These positive reductions in employees absent for over 4-months can be attributed to the investment by WOD and Council in to employing Case Load Workers, who have been proactively working with Services to support employees in returning to work.

When comparing the above tables with the previous two sections, the data suggest that whilst the number of absences are slightly reducing, particularly long-term absences, the length of short-term absences may be increasing slightly and discussions will be held with the Business Intelligence team as to how to best capture this.

It is important to note that individual absences recorded in the tables above can span quarters therefore a cumulative total of the above cannot be assessed.

Short-term Sickness

The table below illustrates the number of employees actively sick at the end of each of the last 4 quarters. It is worth noting that where this report has previously identified a spike in absences during Autumn 2019, the following tables backs this trend up:

Directorate	Active sickness absences under 28 days			
	31/03/2019	30/06/2019	30/09/2019	31/12/2019
Childrens & Adults	22	17	32	9
Economy & Environment	31	20	38	24
Education	50	39	84	19
Legal & Democratic Services	0	0	1	1
Transformation & Resources	3	4	6	3
Totals	106	80	161	56

Due to the Council's Directorate restructure in March 2019, the active sicknesses as at 31st December 2018 cannot be reported in the table above, however the total stands at 78, which is approximately a 29% reduction, when comparing both annual dates.

The Council's headcount as at 31st December 2019 was 5856, which equates to 0.96% of the workforce being on active short-term sickness.

When breaking down the Directorate into Services, the following can be observed:

Directorate	Service	Active sickness absences equal to or over 28 days 31/12/2019	Headcount of employees per Directorate as at 31/12/2019	% of active sickness versus headcount
Childrens & Adults	Adult Services	5	599	0.83%
	Childrens Services	4	361	1.11%
	Commissioning (Children & Adults)	0	40	0.00%
	Childrens & Adults	0	3	0.00%
Economy & Environment	Highways, Transport & Recycling	12	557	2.15%
	Housing and Community Development	12	751	1.60%
	Economy & Environment	0	2	0.00%
	Property, Planning and Public Protection	0	159	0.00%
Education	Schools	16	2950	0.54%
	Education	1	20	5.00%
	Schools Service	0	99	0.00%
	Youth Services	2	56	3.57%
Legal & Democratic Services	Corporate Legal & Democratic	1	71	1.41%
Transformation & Resources	Digital Services	0	124	0.00%
	Finance (Section 151)	2	133	1.50%
	Transformation and Communications Service	0	44	0.00%
	Workforce & Organisation Development	1	76	1.32%
Totals		56	5856	0.96%

Long-term Sickness

The data shows an increase in the number of employees on active long-term sickness absence on the last date of each of the last 4 quarters. This is mainly due to an increase in the number in the Education Directorate, specifically within Schools, however further analysis is being undertaken to establish whether Schools have now updated their sickness records following the end of the last term.

	Active sickness absences equal to or over 28 days			
Directorate	31/03/2019	30/06/2019	30/09/2019	31/12/2019
Childrens & Adults	22	25	27	34
Economy & Environment	31	36	41	48
Education	73	74	47	73
Legal & Democratic Services	0	0	1	0
Transformation & Resources	4	8	7	2
Totals	130	143	123	157

Due to the Council's Directorate restructure in March 2019, the active sicknesses as at 31st December 2018 cannot be reported for comparative accuracy in the table above, however the total stands at 141, which is approximately a 10% reduction this year when comparing both annual dates.

The Council's headcount as at 31st December 2019 was 5856, which equates to 2.68% of the workforce being on active long-term sickness.

When breaking down the Directorates into Services, the following can be observed:

Directorate	Service	Active sickness absences equal to or over 28 days 31/12/2019	Headcount of employees per Directorate as at 31/12/2019	% of active sickness versus headcount
Childrens & Adults	Adult Services	20	599	3.34%
	Childrens Services	13	361	3.60%
	Commissioning (Children & Adults)	1	40	2.50%
	Childrens & Adults	0	3	0.00%
Economy & Environment	Highways, Transport & Recycling	21	557	3.77%
	Housing and Community Development	25	751	3.33%
	Economy & Environment	0	2	0.00%
	Property, Planning and Public Protection	2	159	1.26%
Education	Schools	71	2950	2.41%
	Education	1	20	5.00%
	Schools Service	0	99	0.00%
	Youth Services	1	56	1.79%
Legal & Democratic Services	Corporate Legal & Democratic	0	71	0.00%
Transformation & Resources	Digital Services	1	124	0.81%
	Finance (Section 151)	0	133	0.00%
	Transformation and Communications Service	0	44	0.00%
	Workforce & Organisation Development	1	76	1.32%
Totals		157	5856	2.68%