

Appendix B - Directorate approach to reducing sickness absence

The following provides a summary of activity taking place at a directorate level to reduce sickness absence.

1. Adults

Absenteeism within Adult Social Care is now higher than pre-pandemic levels, with long term absence accounting for the majority of days lost, and mental health cited as the most common overall reason for absence. This increase does have an impact on service delivery and the ability to deliver specific programmes of work. The services with the highest absence rates are front line.

Measures are in place to support the reduction of absence, including, some service specific sickness surgeries, access to the Employee Assistance Programme, and a range of mental health and wellbeing resources via the MCC (Manchester City Council) intranet and the MLCO (Manchester Local Care Organisation) extranet, plus focused work to look in depth at some of the issues within services where absence has remained high over a sustained period.

Trauma Informed Care training has been included in the training plan this year for some services, to provide staff with better strategies to help them manage some of the more difficult cases they have to deal with. The Principal Social Worker also makes several welfare calls each week to a portion of the workforce to check on their wellbeing.

An MLCO staff engagement action programme has been developed following on from our 'Freedom to Lead' staff event, and in response to the outcome of our workforce surveys. One element of this is focused on increased Health and Wellbeing and there are a series of activities we will deliver which will contribute to a happy, healthy diverse and engaged workforce as follows:

- Increased promotion of health and wellbeing support available across the wider MFT and MCC system
- Launch of Florence Nightingale Foundation Leadership Support Service to provide a psychological safe space to explore professional challenges via virtual group coaching sessions.
- Explore further what would be helpful in respect of burn out/work-life balance, as key themes identified via staff survey feedback
- Increase the number of Mental Health First Aiders across the MLCO
- Create guidance and guiding principles for managers re: team culture with health and wellbeing at their core
- Launch Schwartz rounds, (conversations with staff about the emotional impact of their work), which provide an opportunity for staff from all disciplines in health and social care to reflect on the emotional aspects of their work.

NB: The Homelessness Service (circa 300fte) and Public Health (circa 54fte) were included in the Adults sickness data from Sept 20 to Aug 21. In Aug and September 21, respectively they separated from Adult Social Care.

2. Public Health

There is no comparative figure for Public Health as this has only been separated out from the wider Adult Social Care figures within the last 12 months. Days lost within Public Health accounts for 0.7% of the whole days lost figure across Manchester City Council and is below the Council average. Sickness absence is discussed quarterly at Public Health SMT including mechanisms of support. This includes the offer of absence clinics and timely intervention of support to staff and managers.

The team has been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response since late 2019 which has been relentless and has impacted on days lost as a result of stress and depression.

Some teams within the service are accessing specialist Health Assured support to rebuild resilience after the pandemic and support them back into business as usual. Increased focus does need to be put on the importance of return-to-work conversations and these will continue to be monitored and form part of the Public Health SMT discussions.

3. Children's

Absence has been increasing in the last 12 months across the Children's Directorate. Currently reporting 15.7 average days lost compared to 11.9 average days in the previous year. Mental Health is reporting as the number one cause of absence.

Recent reporting has indicated some issues with managers' compliance with the policy in terms of support via Attendance Monitoring Review meetings and the completion of the Return-to-Work sessions. Work is being undertaken over the next few weeks to audit some of these cases to understand the reasonings why this is happening, for example do managers have an issue accessing the SAP system so can't record despite completing the meetings or are they simply not aware of their responsibilities within the policy. Following this review a package of management support will be developed to roll out across the directorate. This will include policy sessions, sessions on how to report from the system and non-compliance checking.

Following last year's staff survey which indicated that whilst staff within the Children's and Education directorate are engaged and passionate about the work they do, there are remaining pressures that impact on wellbeing. Flexible working has gone some way to supporting our staff and improving their well-being, but high vacancy rates, turnover and high numbers of agency staff are an ongoing concern impacting our staff. A review of the recruitment and retention strategy and wellbeing strategy is ongoing to continue to address some of these issues. There are however still concerns about the cost-of-

living increases which is encouraging staff to move to other Local Authorities for small increases in salary.

4. Core

The Core has the largest head count of staff across the Council with 1958 (1400 Corporate Services and 558 Chief Executives) but with one of the lowest absence rates, with an average of 8 days lost per employee for the period between September 2021 to August 2022 (9.5 days lost if we included covid absence). This was an increase from the previous year, September 2020 – August 2021 from 6.53 days lost (7.33 including Covid). Absence is generally well managed across the directorate with return to work being completed and recorded on SAP, 92% Corporate Services and 93% across Chief Executives.

The main reason for absence across the directorate is mental health (stress and depression) which accounts for 21.5% of the sickness absence. All long-term sickness cases are being actively managed by the Casework team under the Managing of Attendance policy.

Managers are being supported with training and development in relation to holding difficult conversations and supporting staff with mental health issues, this would include sign posting them to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and or a referral to Healthworks to ensure a medical opinion is sort to ensure that the right support is in place for staff.

Additional support is provided to some service areas who have high levels of absence, and these are in the form of absence surgeries. These generally take place on a monthly basis between the relevant Team Managers and the Casework Officers and give managers an opportunity to review how they are progressing and take on board additional support and guidance from HR.

5. Growth & Development

The Directorate has the lowest absence across the Council, with an average of 7.58 days lost per employee over the period September 21 to August 22 (9.21 if covid absences included). Absence is generally reported and managed well with a high number of return to work discussions recorded.

However, mental health (stress & depression) accounts for a quarter of all absences across the Directorate and some focus on management training to offer support to those who are struggling or unwell should be prioritised. Many of the cases fall into long term absence when earlier intervention and support may have prevented this. There are many pressures with increasing demands on the workforce and the staff survey highlighted more flexible ways of working (ie hybrid) can help to alleviate some of this pressure – some services have articulated their 'ways of working' whilst others still have limited flexibility. Managers do in the majority of areas meet their team members to

discuss wellbeing on a one-to-one basis. The imminent staff survey will reveal more on how staff are feeling, but there is concern in some areas around job security in the light of potential budget pressure.

5. Neighbourhoods

Absence has been increasing in the last 12 months across the Neighbourhoods Directorate. Currently reporting 14.7 average days lost compared to 10.3 average days in the previous year and now higher than pre-pandemic levels. Mental Health is reporting as the number one cause of absence. Although high, absence is generally reported and managed well with a high number of return-to-work discussions recorded.

Measures are in place to support the reduction of absence, including, some service specific absence surgeries led by the Casework Team, promoting access to the Employee Assistance Programme, and a range of mental health and wellbeing resources via the intranet. We also promote employee led Health & Wellbeing activities on the weekly staff comms which are well received, such as on-line mindfulness sessions, Walking from Home YouTube classes and free National Trust tickets. We are currently working through the training plans and if there is any budget left from the Workforce Development budget, we will utilise that for directorate wide mental health support & initiatives.