

Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL B	Date:	16 JANUARY 2018
Heading:	SCRUTINY INTRODUCTION TO CONSIDERATION OF ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT		
Portfolio Holder:	N/A		
Ward/s:	N/A		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose Of Report

Following consultation, Attendance Management was added to the Scrutiny Workplan in 2017. The item was added to the Workplan in order for Members to consider how the Attendance Management Policy was supporting staff at work and helping to manage sickness absence in a constructive way.

This scoping report provides an overview of the Attendance Management Policy for Members to consider and review areas of concern or progress since the last consideration of this topic in 2015.

The Panel recognises that there has been significant work done to establish a comprehensive framework for managers at all levels to deal with absence. Consideration of this topic does not seek to investigate this framework, but rather how effectively these tools have been in supporting employees and managers in improving attendance. To Assist Members in consideration of this topic a Member of the Human Resources Team will be in attendance at the meeting.

Recommendation(s)

Members are requested to;

- Note the information contained in the report;
- Consider any areas of attendance management that would benefit from further Scrutiny involvement;
- Consider any further information required.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Attendance Management was added to the Scrutiny workplan in 2017.

Alternative Options Considered (With Reasons Why Not Adopted)

None at this stage of the consideration, should the topic be progressed the Panel will consult with the appropriate officers to consider all options.

Detailed Information

Scrutiny last considered attendance management in 2015, whereby Members discussed the following initiatives that had recently been introduced;

- The introduction of 'Stress Action Plans' to help identify and address the reasons why employees who are absent with stress are stressed;
- Sending letters to all Ashfield's General Practitioners (G.P's) explaining what support the Council could offer to help employees return to work;
- The introduction of a new 'Employee Assistance Programme' to provide counselling as well as online information and support;
- Quarterly meetings between Human Resources and Service Directors to discuss sickness absences. In addition 'Exception Reports' are now produced for the Service Directors to highlight when employees have not been managed in line with the Attendance Management Policy;
- Promoting healthy lifestyles, with the introduction of workplace health schemes and exercise referral schemes, stop smoking and weight management services, as well as cognitive behaviour therapy or 'talking cures';
- Greater use of the physiotherapy service to help those who are absent with muscular or skeletal problems;

In addition to the initiatives that were already being implemented, Members also raised a number of other issues relating to attendance management. These included;

- Mental health problems / Stress - A key challenge was to encourage people to come forward and acknowledge that they are having difficulties so that they could be helped.
- Hot spot areas – Understanding the different working environments and challenges associated with these;
- Support and training offered to managers to deal with attendance issues;
- Good practice from other authorities to understand the differences in approach to managing attendance.

Attendance Management Policy

The current Attendance Management Policy was approved at Council in July 2013 and subsequently revised in 2015 and 2016. This policy applies to all employees of Ashfield District Council under all terms and conditions. The objective of this policy is to provide a framework for supporting employees to maintain expected levels of attendance and to outline the approach that will be taken in circumstances where employees are unable to maintain expected levels due to reasons related to their health.

The Council is committed to promoting health and well being in the workplace. The policy is designed, therefore, to provide a framework in which an employee is given every reasonable opportunity to improve their attendance. It outlines the steps that will need to be taken to

improve attendance and makes clear the possible consequences in cases where an employee is unable to achieve an acceptable level of attendance.

The Council sets absence triggers for absence under short term and long term absence. If an employee meets any of the following trigger points during a 12 month rolling period they will be invited to attend a meeting with their manager/supervisor. Trigger reports are also reviewed regularly by the Corporate Leadership Team.

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Short Term Absence

Stage 1 Triggers

- 9 working days or more sickness absence over a 12 month period pro rata for part time or job share employees.
- 3 or more occasions of sickness absence over a 12 month period.
- A pattern of absence that causes concern – one example would be absence on the days immediately prior to / after bank holidays or absence during the same period each year

Stage 2 Trigger

A pattern of an employee entering the Stage 1 process 2 or more times in a 2 year period (for instance if they have entered Stage 1 twice or more in two years)

Stage 3 Trigger

A pattern of an employee entering the Stage 2 process 2 or more times in a 2 year period (for instance if they have entered Stage 2 twice or more in two years)

Long Term Absence

Any continuous absence of 4 calendar weeks or more

Absence from work for part of a working day (i.e. where an employee leaves work having completed less than half a shift) is recorded as sickness absence and therefore will count towards any trigger scores for monitoring purposes.

Additional Workplace Health Initiatives in Place

There has been a considerable amount of work carried out during the last two years to improve performance relating to attendance management and consider initiatives and solutions. These have included the following;

Introduction of PAM Assist

PAM Assist is Ashfield District Councils Employee Assistance programme and provides a useful resource when signposting colleagues to support. The service is free and confidential and staffed by experienced and professional advisors who are available 24 hours of the day to answer your call. Through PAM Assist employees have access to clinical and professional expertise which gives them the chance to talk about all kinds of work and personal issues including:

- Debt advice
- Relationships
- Managing money
- Stress management
- Moving house
- Health advice
- Work issues
- Domestic abuse
- Drug/ alcohol addiction
- Family care and bereavement

Workplace Health Champions

Workplace Health Champions are individuals who possess the experience, enthusiasm and skills to encourage and support other individuals to engage in health promotion activities. Workplace Health Champions can get access to free training and support the workplace health programme at Ashfield District Council.

Workplace Health activities

Workplace Health Initiatives have been provided have included, amongst others;

- Holistic Therapies
- Walking / Fitness groups
- NHS Healthy Heart Checks
- Yoga
- Massages
- Help to stop smoking
- Learning at work

Performance

In quarter 2 (2017/18), the Year to Date actual sickness absence figure was 4.38 days/full time employee. The target is 4.75 days/full time employee. Quarter 3 is due to be reported to Cabinet February 2017. This is a significant improvement on the position when Scrutiny last considered the issue. At this point, the average days' absence per FTE reported was 13.97 for the year. Quarter 3 will demonstrate whether this improvement has been maintained.

Next Steps

In revisiting this topic as a workplan item, Members were in agreement that at this stage, the item does not warrant a full review. The topic was to be revisited to consider how the revised policy was impacting;

- Current performance
- employees, services and the community
- Financial impact
- Current initiatives being undertaken or considered to improve attendance

To support Members in revisiting this topic, A member of the Human Resources team will be in attendance to answer questions and provide a general update to Members on actions the Council has taken and is considering to take to improve attendance and support staff and managers in effectively managing attendance.

Therefore, Members should consider effectiveness of current policies and procedures, impact on staff, managers and the Council and whether there are any other initiatives, actions or revisions to consider.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

- The Council will maintain its commitment to workforce development and support staff through challenging changes
- The Council will maintain its commitment to workplace health and well-being support for all employees.

Legal:

There are no direct Legal implications at this stage, advice will be sought following the initial meeting on this topic.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	Sickness absence has significant resource implications, therefore ensuring Ashfield District Council has the correct policies and practices in place to support employees in improving attendance management is essential. Consideration of this topic should be done in full consultation with Finance should any recommendations be identified.
General Fund – Capital Programme	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	N/A

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Increases in sickness absence, increased stress for employees & impact on customers.	Understanding the measures in place to improve attendance management, support staff and healthy workplace initiatives through the Attendance Management Policy

Human Resources:

Effective attendance management procedures and initiatives ensure that the Council executes its employer responsibilities in a fair, reasonable, consistent, affordable and legally compliant manner.

Equalities

An Equality Impact Assessment was completed as part of the Policy review process and resultant actions were built into the HR Business planning process.

Other Implications:

Engagement from Unison and GMB will be invited should the Panel carry out a full review on this issue.

Reason(s) for Urgency (if applicable):

None

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