

Report of: Finance Scrutiny Committee

To: Executive Board

Date: 9th. October

Item No:

**Title of Report : Finance Scrutiny Committee recommendations on
Sickness Absence**



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: To report to the Executive Board the recommendations of Finance Scrutiny Committee concluded as part of their discussions with Business Unit Managers on the levels sickness absence

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Goddard

Scrutiny Responsibility: Finance Scrutiny Committee

Ward(s) affected: All

Report Approved by:

[Yellow speech bubble icon] Price – Chair of the Finance Scrutiny Committee

[Yellow speech bubble icon] Penny Gardner – Finance and Asset Management

[Yellow speech bubble icon] Ben Liddar – Legal and Democratic Services

[Yellow speech bubble icon] Policy Framework: No

[Yellow speech bubble icon] Recommendation(s): The committee recommendations are those detailed in the minutes at 1 below. The Executive Board is asked to **[Yellow speech bubble icon] Respond to the Scrutiny Committee:**

1. If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations outlined.

2. If it agrees when will the recommendations be implemented and who **[Yellow speech bubble icon] will take the lead.**

[Yellow speech bubble icon] If it disagrees why.

4. If more information is required from other officers when that will be considered

1. Finance Scrutiny Committee Minutes and Recommendations

27. SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Committee had before it a note (previously circulated and now appended) from the Scrutiny Manager.

The Chair asked Business Managers who had been invited to attend for their comments on the worsening situation, in particular their assessment of the problem, why things are not improving and what they think are the blockages and solutions.

Paul Waters, Revenues and Benefits Business Manager, told the Committee that, had it not been for long-term sickness, the sickness absence figures for his business unit would have been on target. Diagnostic Health Solutions had produced a positive impact on short-term absence. He told the Committee that he considered that the sickness policy was operated properly. He suggested that the introduction of some form of healthy living initiative might reduce sickness absence levels.

Graham Bourton, Oxford City Homes Business Manager, said that the service provided by Diagnostic Health Services had been successful in helping staff to return to work by offering advice concerning their illnesses. He said that he was confident that the former Oxford Buildings Solutions side of the business unit would meet the sickness absence target. In response to comments from the Chair, he confirmed that work practices were reviewed and that procedures were in place to allow, as necessary, staff returning to work after sickness absence to perform light duties for a period after their return to work. He referred to the age of the manual workforce that, he said, affected sickness absence levels. He said that he believed that the existing occupational health service could be improved “quite considerably” to allow medical problems to be addressed more quickly. Access to this service, via appointment took too long and did not match service requirements. He suggested that the service should deliver the outcomes the Council wanted rather than the outcomes the provider of the service wanted.

Graham Stratford, Community Housing Business Manager, referred to the fact that sickness absence levels had improved in recent years. He said that he agreed with Graham Bourton’s comments concerning the occupational health service. He suggested that those reporting as suffering from work-related stress should be seen by the medical advisor within a week of this being known. In relation to sickness absence levels in his unit, he said that nearly half the sickness was due to the long-term sickness of a small number of staff.

Mags Mernagh, Leisure and Cultural Services Business Manager, told the Committee that the young age profile of staff working in the leisure side meant that short-term sickness absence levels would be higher. She said that she queried the accuracy of the figures. She said that the level of muscular-skeletal injuries was to be expected in view of the nature of the work performed by some of the staff in the unit.

Resolved: -

- (1) to re-iterate the Committee's wish that details of sickness absence submitted to future meetings show short-term and long-term sickness absence figures separately and a breakdown by Business Unit**
- (2) to recommend Executive Board: -**
 - (a) in the light of Business Managers' comments concerning the effectiveness of the service provided by Diagnostic Health Solutions, that consideration is given at the end of the pilot period to extending the service across the Council;**
 - (b) that a review of the occupational health service is carried out to produce outcomes for improvement. The review in particular to look at: how the current occupational health service outcomes match the requirements of a diverse range of services, challenges and personnel; how the service can be set as an important part of the improvement framework and how co-ordination between all parties can be improved to produce better outcomes.**
 - (c) the current service is adjusted now so that any employees reporting absence linked to work related stress are seen by the occupational health service immediately.**
 - (d) that the Council considers ways of engaging with its staff on the benefits of a healthy life style.**

2. Background

- 2.1 As part of its debates and considerations on the Council's Key Performance Indicators the committee considered information on levels of sickness absence (attached at appendix 1).
- 2.2 The committee has considered sickness absence levels within it's work programmes for the last 2 years and has received detailed information and advice aimed at, accuracy of data, understanding the problem, better management of outcomes and how the situation can be improved.

2.3 Members were disappointed to see a steady increase in the numbers of sick days taken by staff and noted that the Council had not met its corporate improvement target for 04/05 and 05/06. This was of particular concern as the Council performs in the worst quartile when compared to other Councils.

2.4 After seeing a worsening picture at the first quarter of 06/07 the Committee decided it wished to talk to those directly responsible for delivering on the Council's policies and systems and invited Business Unit Managers with the most challenging problems to gauge:

- Their understanding and assessment of the problem
- Why they think performance is not improving
- What they think the blockages and solutions might be.

The information at Appendix 1 represents details for those Business Units whose managers were invited and shows the position at the end of the first quarter.

2.5 The committee minutes reflect the comments of those managers that attended.

3. Portfolio Holder Comments

None received

4. Strategic Directors Comments

None received

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Background papers:

Finance Scrutiny Committee minutes and agendas



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