


Report of: Head of Legal and Democratic Services




To: Executive Board


Date: 7 January 2008

Item No:

Title of Report : Sickness Absence Management



Summary and Recommendations


Purpose of report: To present to Executive Board recommendations made
 the Finance Scrutiny Committee that were overlooked at  previous
board meeting.



Key decision: No



Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jim Campbell, Better Finances Portfolio Holder





Scrutiny Responsibility: Finance Scrutiny Committee


Board(s) affected: n/a

Report approved by: Andy Collett (Financial & Asset Management)
Jeremy Thomas (Legal & Democratic Services)


Policy Framework: n/a


Recommendation(s): The Executive Board is asked to respond to the
utiny Committee's recommendations:

-  If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations outlined.
-  If agrees when will the recommendations be implemented and who will take the lead?
-  If it disagrees why?
-  If more information is required from other officers when that will be considered?

Background

1. At the meeting of the Executive Board meeting on 3 December 2007 some recommendations from the Finance Scrutiny Committee regarding sickness absence were submitted as an annex to the report on Performance Monitoring. Unfortunately these recommendations were overlooked and are now brought back for the Board's consideration.

Recommendations

2. The Finance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 30 October 2007 considered a report on sickness absence and resolved: -
 - (1) to express disappointment at the increase in sickness absence levels and to note that it is unlikely that the target for the year will be met and the implications this will have for the Council;
 - (2) in view of the deterioration in the sickness absence levels and the protracted period over which attempts have been made to improve them, to **RECOMMEND the Executive Board:-**
 - (a) **to come forward with proposals for a clear and considered plan for improvement with the focus being on City Works, Oxford City Homes and Leisure and Culture which the Committee considers are the three units where most gains can be made;**
 - (b) **that the proposals should include, in view of the high level of sickness absence attributed to stress and musculo-skeletal injuries, an investigation of the reasons for such absences and management arrangements, in particular, the reporting, analysis and improvement in sickness absence levels.**
3. At its meeting on 22 November 2007 the Committee considered a report on Performance Monitoring and resolved to **RECOMMEND the Executive Board that action to embed sickness absence reductions into the appraisal targets for senior officers is a key level for improvement and that this is actioned as agreed with immediate effect.**

Additional Information

4. The Committee wrote to the Chief Executive and Leader to see evidence that agreements previously made to embed sickness absence improvements into the appraisal targets for senior managers had happened. They further wanted to see what action was proposed within this in light of the significant underperformance. The letter from

the Finance Scrutiny Committee to the Chief Executive, and the response of the Strategic Director, Finance and Corporate Services, are set out in Annex 1.

Comments from Portfolio Holder (Councillor Jim Campbell)

5. None received.

Comments from the Human Resources Business Manager

6. There has been close co-operation between Oxford City Homes, City Works and Human Resources to ensure that sickness absence procedures are followed through. This work has already borne fruit.

City Works are working with external consultants to develop and deliver interventions to reduce stress. In the new financial year they will deliver training for managers around the HSE's competency framework for managing stress at work. This will be closely monitored so that we are able to roll this approach out to other parts of the Council where we identify it's required.

HR is working with our Occupational Health Advisers to increase the effectiveness of management referrals and to encourage active dialogue between managers and the OH service.

HR is working with the OH service to introduce a fast-track referral approach for musculoskeletal and psychological conditions. There is clear evidence that early referral for assessment and therapy leads to significantly earlier returns to work. A report is being developed for Management Board on the likely costs and proportion of our cases likely to benefit from this approach.

Specific targets for sickness absence management and reduction are to be made for all Directors and Heads of Service.

Recommendation

The Executive Board is asked to respond to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations:

If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations outlined.

If agrees when will the recommendations be implemented and who will take the lead?

If it disagrees why?

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

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or

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Background papers : None

Letter from the Finance Scrutiny Committee to the Chief Executive

I write on behalf of the Finance Scrutiny Committee. Please acknowledge your receipt of this request.

At the recent Finance Scrutiny Committee meeting, consideration was given to a report detailing the performance in managing sickness absence. Recommendations from this will be presented to the Executive Board in December.

On previous occasions when this matter had been discussed, the Committee had been told that, as a key to improving absence levels and performance in this area, targets had been placed in the objectives and performance appraisals of senior staff. The Committee would like confirmation that this happened and what action has been taken in light of the significant under performance recorded at the half-year.

The Committee would like to consider your response at its November meeting.

Response (from the Strategic Director, Finance and Corporate Services)

What targets say

Peter asked me to progress this at our weekly team meeting. He asked for clarity on what is in Directors' targets this year.

For information all Directors had three generic targets and three ones that were specific to their area. My targets for this year do not have a generic or specific target for reducing sickness, and I have not cascaded a target about sickness to my business managers.

My targets do include a generic target which is to "develop effective arrangements for monitoring key performance indicators and BVPIs within my directorate".

My understanding at the time the targets were set was that this generic target included BVPIs to do with sickness, and I've monitored sickness data which has come from HR. When we discussed this at the weekly team meeting the understanding of Directors was similar - that this generic target did encompass sickness - but went further to include other across the board and specific BVPIs as well.

What we agreed to do

Peter then asked that I write to all Business Managers to clarify that this cascaded generic objective did include sickness.

I'll send you a copy of that note to Business Managers.