

To: City Executive Board

Date: 26th. November
Item No:

Report of: Chair of Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Sickness absence performance against target

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To advise the City Executive Board of the recommendations made by the Value & Performance Scrutiny Committee on sickness absence management.

Key decision - No

Executive lead member: Councillor Price

Report approved by:
Councillor Campbell – Chair of Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan commitment to improving value for money

Recommendation(s): To consider the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on the report into sickness absence reporting as set out in paragraph 4 below. The City Executive Board is asked to respond to the scrutiny committee:

If it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations as outlined

If it agrees what actions will be taken and when

If it disagrees why

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

Introduction and Background

1. At its meeting on 10 November 2008, the Value & Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the report of the Interim Human Resources Business Manager on sickness absence delivery against target to the second quarter. The report had been commissioned by the committee to show more detailed information to help focus in on the reasons for and possible solutions to poor performance in this area. The report is attached at **Appendix 1**
2. The report examined not only sickness absences on a long term and short term basis in each service area but calculated the costs of this to the Council and compared our performance to that of authorities within the “nearest neighbour” group. This information was adjusted to show performance of both manual and non-manual employees
3. After hearing comments from the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council and the HR Services Manager members discussed and concluded:
 - The target for the current year was to be missed by some way with overall performance not showing any substantial improvement over the last 5 years. The cost of this to the Council both in cultural and financial terms is significant
 - The actions outlined in the last report to the committee for more targeted HR intervention had not shown any marked improvement in outcomes
 - The conditions that brought about the most absence incidents are categorised as stress/depression and musculo-skeletal. It was not clear the extent of the conditions that had been placed in this category and further analysis was needed to identify problems and therefore bring forward good solutions
 - The problem was one in both the manual and non-manual workforce with our performance in both areas being within the bottom quartiles nationally (when last reported)
 - Policies are being rewritten to make them shorter and clearer for managers and staff alike and the extensive training of middle managers (in this and many other areas) beginning in the new year would provide some confidence that the skills to improve existed within Council structures
 - That the solutions to the continuing sickness absence problems within the Council needed to be tackled as a matter of urgency by the new HR manager based on a sound analysis of the issues
4. **The Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations made in the report at Appendix 1 and would support and further recommend:**

- 4.1 The nineteen page sickness absence policy be simplified, targeting actions and responsibilities of senior managers, managers, employees and Human Resources
- 4.2 Any new policies launched are accompanied with extensive training programmes for all and promotional campaigns
- 4.3 Monitoring information on sickness absence is given priority attention at service, directorate and corporate levels providing clear senior officer responsibility for improvement
- 4.4 Particularly in areas of very poor performance, for there to be clear and focused actions for improvement and more persistent approaches to ensure targeted improvements are achieved. The areas of greatest attention should be City Leisure, Oxford City Homes and City Works
- 4.5 That further analysis is provided for the absences listed within stress/depression and musculo-skeletal categories in both long and short-term absence. This to be used to pin point the range of issues and solutions. This to be provided to the committee
- 4.6 To welcome the management training programme outlined by the Chief Executive and to see solutions that showed improvement results within a year
- 4.7 That options for reward systems should be brought forward using positive solutions on a collective rather than individual basis. That these should be brought to the scrutiny committee for consideration
- 4.8 That improvements in this area be a priority target for the new Head of HR in the coming year
- 4.9 That a further review of Occupational Health be undertaken to ascertain if current arrangements are making a positive contribution to improvement in this area and if changes need to be made.

5. Committee Minutes

The minute will reflect the commentary set out in the introduction and background above.

6. Comments from the Board Member

No comment

7. Comments from the Chief Executive

No comment

8. Legal Comments

No comment. Jeremy Thomas, Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

9. Finance Comments

No comment.. Ian Sheppard - Finance

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