

**BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**

**RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**Minutes from the Meeting of the Resources and Performance Panel held on Tuesday, 23rd June, 2015 at 6.00 pm in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn**

**PRESENT:**

Councillors B Anota, R Blunt, J Collop, N Daubney, I Devereux, I Gourlay, G Hipperson, P Hodson, H Humphrey, D Tyler and G Wareham

**RP13: APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Middleton and A M Morrison.

**RP14: MINUTES**

The minutes of the Resources and Performance Panel on 2 June 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**RP15: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**RP16: URGENT BUSINESS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7**

There was no urgent business.

**RP17: MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

There were no Members present under Standing Order 34.

**RP18: CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY)**

There was none.

**RP19: MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE FROM OTHER COUNCIL BODIES AND RESPONSES MADE TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS/REQUESTS**

Panel Members noted the responses made by Cabinet at its meeting held on 10 June 2015 to the recommendations made by the Resources and Performance Panel at its meeting held on 2 June 2015 in respect of the following item:

- Review of Overview and Scrutiny.

RP20: **STAFF SICKNESS ABSENCE ANNUAL REPORT 2014/2015**

The Safety and Welfare Adviser presented the annual sickness report and explained that the headline figure this year was an increase in the overall average sickness per employee from 7.57 days for 2013/2014 to 9.69 days for 2014/2015.

The Panel was provided with background information. The Safety and Welfare Adviser explained that sickness absence was categorised by short term, long term and industrial injury. Short term absence covered absences less than 20 days with longer periods being classed as long term. Absences were further categorised into thirteen categories of sickness, to match benchmarking standards. Long term absences were shown as the total number of day's absence with the number of individuals involved. Industrial injuries were shown by the number of day's absence and the number of accidents.

Members were informed that all absence were calculated as full time equivalent (FTE) days.

The Safety and Welfare Adviser explained that the report was structure with five appendices as set out at section 1.3 of the report.

The Panel's attention was drawn to section 2 of the report – Absence Rates. The Safety and Welfare Adviser highlighted the key points as set out below:

- The number of FTE days lost to short term absence increased to 2225.96 from 1830.58, an increase of 22%.
- The number of FTE days lost to long term absence decreased to 2181.13 from 2327.83, a decrease of 6%.
- With the transfer of staff with the creation of Alive Leisure and the associated Alive Management, this was set against a reduction in FTE staffing from 549.57 to 462.13, a decrease of 16%. This did mean that the average short term absence per FTE employee actually increased from 3.33 to 4.82 (an increase of 45%) and the average long term absence per FTE employee also increased from 4.24 to 4.72 (an increase of 11%).
- The number of accidents reduced to 3 (from 6), but saw the total number of days lost to industrial injury increased from 59 to 70 (after an increase last year from 54.5 to 59 days).
- Appendix B showed that absence rates increased by 20% for part time employees, (last year this decreased by 25%) and the absence rate for full time employees increased by 31% (last year decreased by 7.8%).
- Appendix C set out the most common occurring absences by percentage – musculoskeletal, stress/anxiety/depression, stomach/liver, etc, viral/colds/flu, back problems,

eye/ear/nose/mouth/dental/sinusitis, chest-asthma/bronchitis, disability.

It was highlighted that this year saw 14 long term cases account for 1,140 days of the overall figure which accounted for 52% of the long term sickness and 25% of the overall sickness figure. Of those 14 long term cases, there were seven cases under the category of musculoskeletal and surgery, two individuals with cancers, one individual suffered a heart attack and one individual off with mental health issues. In balance though only three individuals were still off at the end of the period, of the other 11, three had left the Council's employment, one was on maternity leave and the other seven had all made a successful return to work.

Appendix A set out comparison figures for the other Norfolk Authorities. The Safety and Welfare Adviser informed Members that since the publication of the Agenda, the figure for Breckland was 11.23 days per employee.

Members were advised of the following costs:

- The salary paid during sickness absence increased by 21% totalling £446,869 (£370,532 last year). A break down of costs by service area was set out at Appendix D.
- The total cost of referrals to the counselling support service during this reporting period was £2,675 (£4,856).
- A total of 207 (202) staff requested the flu vaccination last year at a cost of £1,434 (£3,546).
- This year there had been a significant decrease in physiotherapy referrals, with 21 (12) referrals costing £4,096 (£2,366).
- There was one ill health retirement during the reporting period.
- There were no incidents of death in service during the report period.

In response to questions from Councillor Devereux regarding what training supervisors and managers receive on absence management, the Safety and Welfare Adviser explained that managers went through an in house sickness absence training programme provided by a Personnel Officer and himself. The Panel was advised that the training programme was currently being reviewed and explained that sickness absence could not be looked at in isolation and therefore an overview of sickness and other absences would be included to deliver absence management training.

Councillor Blunt asked if return to work interviews took place following an absence. In response, the Safety and Welfare Officer outlined the process for the return to work interviews up to Executive Director level. The Panel was informed that at a previous meeting the Safety and Welfare Officer had given a presentation on sickness management

absence. The Chairman, Councillor Humphrey commented that the same presentation could be scheduled into a future Panel meeting.

In response to questions from Councillor Devereux regarding the cost saving of leavers not replaced in the same period, the Assistant Director explained that the Council did not have a policy for replacing staff who left the authority. It was explained that there was sometimes when an employee left the authority and during the period of recruitment there was a gap. The Assistant Director explained that all vacancies were reviewed by Management Team to justify replacement.

Councillor Devereux asked if the sickness absence training formed part of the key competency set for these roles. In response, the Safety and Welfare Adviser explained that during appraisal interviews there was a link relating to sickness absence management, and if this had not been achieved then it was possible that the overall targets were not met.

Following further questions from Councillor Devereux, the Leader, Councillor Daubney explained that the Council did not have a policy regarding replacing employees when leaving the authority. However, there was a policy not to increase the headcount without Cabinet approval. The Leader advised that when an employee left the authority, the Management Team would take the opportunity to see if there was a better way to undertake the role or whether any savings could be achieved.

In responses to questions from Councillor Blunt regarding the number of employees who had particular levels of sickness, the Safety and Welfare Adviser explained that a report could be run and that the information would be provided to the Panel at a later date.

In response to questions from the Chairman, Councillor Humphrey relating to sickness absence costs and a requirement to undertake any recommended counselling and physiotherapy, the Health and Safety Adviser outlined the process involved with long term absence, including referral to occupational health for an opinion. It was highlighted that the Council encouraged the employee to take up counselling or physiotherapy in order to assist them in returning to work. The Health and Safety Adviser explained that the Council did not currently have a policy regarding the requirement for an employee to take up counselling or physiotherapy.

Councillor Collop asked if other Norfolk authorities used the same criteria as the Borough Council. In response, the Safety and Welfare Officer explained that he had contact with fellow officers in other Norfolk authorities and advised that apart from Great Yarmouth Council, all other Norfolk authorities used the same criteria as the Borough Council.

In response to questions from Councillor Gourlay regarding sick pay arrangements, the Health and Safety Adviser explained that it depended upon the length of service and gave the following examples:

- 1 year service, 2 months full pay, 2 months half pay.
- 5 ' service, 6 months full pay, 6 months half pay.

The Chairman, Councillor Humphrey commented that it would be useful to know the statistics for the number of employees who had taken little (less than 2 days) or no sick leave. In response, the Safety and Welfare Officer explained that work was currently being undertaken to extract this information.

In response to questions from Councillor Humphrey regarding the average number of sickness absence days per employee, the Health and Safety Adviser explained that he did not have the information to hand, but would email the details to the Panel.

Following questions from Councillor Hodson relating to sick pay, the Health and Safety Adviser explained that the Borough Council had adopted the national terms and conditions from the Local Government Organisation. Discussions had been recently held at Management Team regarding the current sick pay scheme. The Panel was advised that sick pay was in some cases a lifeline where a long term absence such as cancer had been diagnosed. However, it did on some occasions prove difficult to determine which cases were genuine and which were not.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel noted the Annual Sickness Report 2014/2015.

RP21: **PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET FORWARD DECISIONS LIST**

The Panel noted its Work Programme and the Cabinet Forward Decisions List as it related to Resources and Performance.

Councillor Devereaux referred to the monitoring of the Corporate Business Plan and asked why Quarter 1 had not been included on the Panel's Work Programme. In response, the Assistant Director undertook to ask Management Team why Quarter 1 had not been included and email a response direct to the Panel.

RP22: **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Resources and Performance Panel would be held on **Tuesday 21 July 2015** immediately following the Audit and Risk Committee commencing at **5.30 pm** in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn.

**The meeting closed at 6.45 pm**