

Committee: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 30 January 2020

Title of Report: Scrutiny Review Absence Management

Report by: Councillor Bill Wearing, Chair of Scrutiny Management Board

Cabinet Member: Councillor Janet Willis, Cabinet Member for Customers, Transformation and Fire and Rescue

What is the Report About? (Executive Summary)

1. This report invites Cabinet Members to consider the findings and recommendations arising from the Attendance Management Task and Finish Group. The full report is attached as Appendix 1.

Background to the Proposals

2. The Task and Finish Group held a one-day session on 14 November 2019 in County Hall, Kendal.
3. Based on the current absence data, members agreed to hear from the Assistant Directors from Customer and Community Services, Integration and Partnerships, Adults and Provider Services about their action plans for managing absence. This included deep dives into the data on absence for their areas of responsibility, including the causes and numbers of absences for 2018/19, demographic factors and the key issues in the relevant service areas.
4. Officers contributing to the review on the day were:
 - Simon Higgins, Assistant Director - Customer and Community Services
 - Fiona Musgrave, Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships
 - Catherine Whalley, Assistant Director - Adults
 - Pam Duke, Assistant Director - Provider Services
5. Paul Robinson, Assistant Director – Organisational Change, also provided members with an update on the Organisational Development (OD) Programme, on behalf of Steve Healey, Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the Organisational Development Board.
6. Three frontline managers who volunteered to have a discussion with members about their experiences of absence management also attended:
 - Dan Chalmers, Operations Manager – Highways & Transport
 - Emma Kershaw, Registered Manager for Riverside House
 - Stella Armstrong, Operations Lead, Service Centre

7. Members considered a range of information in advance and during the Task and Finish session, which included corporate and service area specific data and trends, benchmarking information, examples of internal and external good practice, and pieces of national research on absence management.
8. The Task and Finish Group is making 5 recommendations to Cabinet on actions to improve absence management across the Council and reduce absence in service areas with current high levels of absence. These are that:
 - **Recommendation 1:** Occupational Health services be reviewed to ensure there is effective mental health capacity and specialist training in place to offer greater advice, support and guidance for managers and employees.
 - **Recommendation 2:** A targeted, multi-disciplinary team approach should be implemented over a short period of time for services with high levels of absence and those furthest from target. This will provide a wraparound package of support and advice to address the levels of absence – including, but not limited to, People Management staff, data analysts, service managers and Health and Wellbeing Coaches (HAWC's). It is suggested that a pilot could take place with Provider Services teams.
 - **Recommendation 3:** The resource levels of the People Management team should be reviewed to ensure that the service has the capacity and expertise to provide the necessary focus and intensive support to services and managers addressing absence management challenges.
 - **Recommendation 4:** That health and wellbeing conversations are embedded in everyday business across the organisation, including CMT, DMT's, management and team meetings and individual appraisals and ongoing discussions throughout the year.
 - **Recommendation 5:** That measures be taken to ensure that existing tools and guidance for managers to support managing absence are well-communicated and fully embedded in all parts of the council, and that technological and automation opportunities to simplify and rationalise the policy, processes and administration requirements for managers, in relation to managing absence, are fully explored and maximised.

Conclusion

The Absence Management Task and Finish Group welcomed the opportunity to have a deeper discussion with Assistant Directors into the key issues for their service areas, as well as holding a supportive discussion with frontline managers. From the evidence gathered, witness presentations and the discussions that followed, Members felt they had a better understanding of the issues in each of the directorates, the actions being put in place, and further actions to improve absence management across the Council.

Options Considered and Risks Identified

9. Cabinet may wish to approve or reject the proposed Task and Finish Group's recommendations.

Council Plan Priority – How do the Proposals Contribute to the Delivery of the Council's Stated Outcomes? (Outcomes - People in Cumbria are Healthy and Safe, Places in Cumbria are well connected and thriving, the Economy in Cumbria is growing and benefits everyone)

10. The recommendations made by the Task & Finish Group relate to the health and wellbeing of council staff and improved absence management which enables the Council to deliver improved outcomes.

Health and Safety Aspects – What needs to be considered?

The County Council has a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated legislation and regulations to ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, adequate health and safety management arrangements are in place to protect employees, members, customers and visitors to County Council related services. This report includes consideration of attendance and absence management including the causal factors and organisational controls to manage the risks.

All recommendations made are intended to support improvements in health and wellbeing at work and as such support the overall health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce as outlined in the Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy Statement agreed annually by Cabinet.

What is the Impact of the Decision on Health Inequalities and Equality and Diversity Issues?

11. The decision to agree the recommendations has no direct impact on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues.

Appendices and Background Documents

Appendix 1 – Absence Management Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Final Report

Key Facts

Electoral Division(s):

Executive Decision	Key Decision Included in Forward Plan	Exempt from call-in	Exemption agreed by scrutiny chair	Considered by scrutiny, if so detail below	Environmental or sustainability assessment undertaken?	Equality impact assessment undertaken?
Yes	No	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A

Previous relevant Council or Executive decisions

None.

Consideration by Overview & Scrutiny

Considered by the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Management Board, December 2019.

Background Papers

None.

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