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<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>19 AUGUST 2010</b>
<b>REPORT OF THE:</b>	<b>HEAD OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LOUISE SANDALL</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT - SICKNESS ABSENCE REVIEW</b>
<b>WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>

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## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform members of the review undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny committee on Sickness Absence at Ryedale District Council.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 It is recommended that members receive the concluding report on the committees review of sickness absence at Ryedale District Council and note the impact of the committees involvement.

## **3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 To ensure continuous improvement in Ryedale District Council's sickness absence levels.

## **4.0 BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Overview and Scrutiny committee on 9 April 2009 agreed to review sickness absence within Ryedale District Council as a result of the sickness absence levels remaining substantially higher than the nation average and in comparison to local authority neighbours.
- 4.2 The committee resolved 'That a review of sickness procedures be undertaken as part of the Committee's work programme, and the review commence with the Sickness Policy, before moving onto the other suggested areas'.
- 4.3 The committee approached the review by:
- Reviewing the Sickness Absence Policy
  - Receiving a presentation from North Yorkshire County Council
  - Reviewing the management information statistics
  - Inviting UNISON to a task group meeting

- Receiving a presentation from Selby District Council

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

- 5.1 National context, 'the average worker took 6.4 days off sick in 2009, the lowest since 1987. The main reason for the improvement was progress in the public sector, where absence went from 9 days in 2007 to 8.3 days in 2009. The average in the private sector is 5.8 days'. CBI absence report 2010.
- 5.2 Ryedale District Council monitors sickness absence by the former best value performance indicator (BVPI) 12 to ensure a consistent record of analysis. BV12 is the calculation of average number of days per full time equivalent (FTE) employee. The table below gives Ryedale District Council results since 2005.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/2009	2009/2010
<b>Ryedale</b>	<b>6.68</b>	<b>11.88</b>	<b>8.99</b>	<b>10.68</b>	<b>8.89</b>

- 5.3 In comparing Ryedale District Council to our neighbouring authorities, Ryedale has one of the highest levels of sickness absence in North Yorkshire.

## 6.0 REPORT

### **Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure Review**

- 6.1 The review of the sickness absence management policy concluded that the policy was fit for purpose however the procedures needed improving. The following points were highlight for development:
- The document had a negative tone
  - Not enough information in the procedures means there is too much managers' discretion
  - The procedures need to be open and give clarity about roles and responsibilities and who it is aimed at.
  - More information on when to issue targets for absence and warnings.
- 6.2 The procedures were revised in consultation with UNISON to include the above points and also with the following changes:
- Step by step guides on how to manage sickness absence, from both the employees and the line managers role
  - Differentiate between short term and long term sickness absence
  - Provide a managers toolkit
  - A question and answer section
  - Credit cards issued to all staff with details on the correct reporting procedures.

### **Presentation from North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC)**

- 6.3 An officer and member from NYCC were invited to the committee to discuss their approach to managing sickness absence. A number of key points were discussed at the committee; thank you payments; attendance awards, removal of car user allowances, direct link between attendance and increments.
- 6.4 The committee concluded that a discussion should take place with UNISON over the NYCC approach. UNISON concluded that they are oppose to the direct link between

and attendance and increments and they do not support 'thank you' payments for good service and accelerated progression for exceptional performance.

### **Management Information**

- 6.5 Sickness Absence statistics is a key tool in monitoring and analysing sickness absence. The committee reviewed the management information which is provided on a monthly basis to the Senior Management Team.
- 6.6 The committee concluded that comparative data from other local authorities should be included where possible and that information should be included about zero absences and the percentages of self certified and certified.

### **Task Group Overview and Scrutiny and representatives from UNISON**

- 6.7 The committee provided UNISON the opportunity to present their suggestions on the impact of sickness absence, together with UNISON's recommendations for reducing sickness absence.
- 6.8 The topics which UNISON presented on were:
- Data Collection and Analysis
  - Setting Targets
  - The Use of Incentives – Rewards and Penalties
  - Intervention and Support
  - Positive Work Environment
  - Management of Attendance Policy
- 6.9 Data Collection and analysis, the committee agreed to extend the management information to include number of self certified days against number of certified days as a percentage of the total sickness absence days; Less than 6 working days; Between 6 days and 20 days; trend analysis of main causes of absence; and percentage of staff who have taken no sickness absence.
- 6.10 The committee further agreed that a Health and Well being Group be formed, this group has already had its first meeting and its first event, A Well Being Fair, which was well received by staff.
- 6.11 The committee recommended that a training programme be put together on the revised procedures, this has been done and delivered in conjunction with UNISON, with further sessions scheduled in the autumn.
- 6.12 The committee further recommended that managing stress in the workplace is critical especially in the current climate. Responding to Change workshops have been run for all staff, the workshops have received excellent feedback. Bite size sessions on stress are also planned to be held during the year.
- 6.13 The committee agreed that the current Occupational Health Service provision needs moving from a reactive service to a pro-active service with a Wellbeing plan and action plan forming part of the specification.
- 6.14 A review of the flexi scheme has taken place and consultation has taken place with service unit managers, UNISON and staff focus groups. This will conclude in more

flexible working procedures for all staff. This scheme is hoped to be implemented in the autumn.

### **Presentation from Selby District Council**

- 6.15 The final part of the review was to discuss management of attendance with another Local Authority who has maintained low sickness absence, this authority was Selby.
- 6.16 The presentation from Selby outlined their approach to managing attendance and covered the following key points:
- Absence management policy
  - Training and Support
  - Accountability
  - Monitoring
  - Action
  - Follow up
- 6.17 It was recognised that the policy and procedures were very similar to Ryedale's. The key differences are:
- At formal interviews the line managers manager attend the meeting
  - More emphasis is put on attendance management at induction stage
  - Selby's lines of accountability are clearer by involving manager's managers at an early stage
  - Attendance management is linked into managers appraisals
  - Selby write to all staff who have not been absent from work due to sickness
  - The cost of sickness absence is highlighted throughout the process with mangers
- 6.18 Following on from this presentation Ryedale is going to consider how and when line managers manager's should be involved in the attendance management process. All managers will have attendance management in their appraisals and the induction process will emphasis Ryedale's attendance management procedures. In regards to celebrating those who have not had any sickness absence in 12 months HR will have further discussions with UNISON on how this is best implemented.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 Overview and Scrutiny review of Absence Management has concluded a number of new initiatives and improvements in the monitoring of sickness absence within Ryedale District Council.
- 7.2 The key findings of the review are:
1. That the procedures should be expanded on to ensure they are user friendly and meaningful
  2. The policy and procedures need to be adopted consistently across the authority
  3. The triggers points within the policy should remain as they are
  4. Sickness monitoring should also include positive reporting
  5. The formation of a Health and Well being Group
  6. Ryedale should explore ways of celebrating those staff and departments who have no sickness absence in the year
  7. Regular training should be given to staff
  8. Induction programme to be extended to cover the Absence management policy and procedures
  9. A review should take place on flexi time and annual leave

10. Currently sickness absence should not have a direct link to pay progression
- 7.3 The reviews success is in part evidenced by the 2009/2010 sickness absence figure of 8.89 days per employee. This is now the lowest figure that the authority has had since 2005/2006.
- 7.4 The committee would like to extend its thanks to UNISON, North Yorkshire County Council and Selby District Council for there participation in this review.
- 7.5 The review commenced in April 2009 and completed in August 2010 (18 months).

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