RYEDALE
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

DATE: **9 APRIL 2009**

HEAD OF SERVICE: **HEAD OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
                         LOUISE SANDALL

REPORTING OFFICER: **HR MANAGER**
                         GAIL MATTHEWMAN

SUBJECT: **SCOPING REPORT FOR SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SICKNESS PROCEDURES**

WARDS AFFECTED: **ALL**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider undertaking a review of sickness absence as part of its work programme and to agree the scope and programme for any such review.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS
2.1 That members consider:
    (a) Whether to undertake a review of sickness absence as part of the Committee's work programme; and
    (b) that if (a) above is approved, the scope and timetable of the review be agreed.

3. BACKGROUND - National statistics
3.1 The overall sickness absence level for all local authorities in England and Wales 2006/2007 was 9.6 FTE days per employee. This compares favourably to previous years and shows a general downward trend across all types of authority. Source LGE Survey 06/07.

3.2 It is estimated that sickness absence can cost councils around 3 per cent of gross budget. More significantly, reducing sickness absence by one percentage point is equivalent to having 20,000 more people working in local government providing additional resources at no cost. Source LGE April 08.

3.3 The average annual cost of absence (2007) per employee in the Local Government sector was £682 per annum and each employee had an average of 8.5 days absence per year. Source CIPD Absence Management Report (July 2007). See Annex A for a full breakdown of the national statistics.

3.4　In 2006/7, Ryedale District Council sickness absence average was 11.88 days per person, in comparison to the National figure of 9.6.

4.　INTRODUCTION

4.1　Sickness Absence Statistic (BVPI 12) is nationally reported on, this enables us to look at all Local Authority data. The Authority's internal systems for recording sickness absence are robust and the declared absence rate is very accurate. Human Resources have specifically looked at Ryedale's neighbouring authorities and our family (as determined by the Audit Commission).

4.2　In comparing Ryedale District Council to our neighbouring authorities; In 2005/2006 Ryedale had the lowest sickness absence figure (6.68), in 2006/2007 Ryedale then became the second to highest (11.88) in the region. In 2007/2008 Ryedale was the third highest (8.99) in the region. *Please refer to Annex B.*

4.3　Absence levels were relatively low following the introduction of the current sickness absence policy in 2005/06. The following year the long-term sickness absence more than doubled, which has resulted in the overall figure increasing. Short-term absence also increased in 2006/7. 2007/08 shows that short-term absence decreased to similar levels to 2005/06. Long-term absence decreased compared to the previous year.

4.4　It is forecast for 2008/2009 that Ryedale will report an estimated between10 and 11 days lost due to sickness absence.

4.5　Recorded reasons for absence comply with national categories, which help to ensure statistical information is consistent throughout all Local Authorities.

4.6　Reasons - 2007/2008

	Short-term absence	Long-term absence
Highest reason	Infections (including influenza, cold, cough and throat infections).	Stress, depression, anxiety, mental health & fatigue (including mental illnesses such as anxiety and nervous debility/disorder).
2nd Highest reason	Stomach, liver, kidney, digestion (including diarrhoea, vomiting and other gastro-intestinal illnesses).	Other

5.　REPORT

5.1　Ryedale District Council's current sickness absence policy was revised and implemented in June 2004. Please refer to Annex C for a copy of the current Sickness Absence Policy.

5.2　Implementation of Sickness Absence Policy. The current policy aim is to '…reduce sickness absence levels by establishing a culture of high attendance. This will be achieved by:

- **Providing support to employees returning to work**
  Occupational Health referrals enable managers to support employees on returning to work. Return to work interviews are also done as standard by managers.

- **Consistently and fairly applying this Policy**
  Managers are trained in the policy. The policy is available to all staff in the organisation and can be found on the intranet.

- **Monitoring the levels of sickness absence**
  Management Information is provided to the Corporate Management Team detailing all sickness absence by department. All managers receive trigger point information. Performance information is collated on a monthly basis and recorded in Covalent – Please refer to Annex D.

- **Setting targets for levels of sickness absence**
  The policy indicates that targets should be set for employees where absence monitoring is taking place.

- **Regularly reviewing sickness levels against the targets**
  When managers set targets for employees, these are reviewed on an at least monthly basis, this could alter depending on what is agreed by the individual and the manager.

- **Providing adequate support to managers including appropriate training**
  Managers are supported through Human Resources, Company Health and the Health and Safety Officer.

- **Developing and implementing initiatives to ensure a healthy workforce**
  Ryedale District Council offers a number of initiatives to promote a healthy workforce for example, flexible working hours, discounted membership of gyms, free fast track service to Ryedale Counselling. Ryedale also offers to all staff a canteen, which provides healthy options in the homemade menu.

- **Managers identifying the issues which impact on the levels of sickness and taking the appropriate action.**
  Managers identify issues from Return to Work discussions, from Occupational Health and from general discussions with their teams, for example being aware of levels of workloads.

5.3 **Current Action Plan for improving sickness absence in Ryedale District Council**
  a) A number of processes have been identified to help Ryedale District Council sickness absence improve.

  b) Management Information is being improved by producing reports to go to all managers and their line managers.

  c) Sickness Absence is going to be a standard agenda item on CMT, SMT and Service Unit Managers meetings.

d) Further training for all managers is going to be introduced over the coming months and this will include role-playing activities to ensure managers have the confidence to manage sickness absence.

e) Well being and preventative packages and information will be sought from our Occupational Health provider to see if we can do more to prevent our employees being absent from the work place due to sickness.

f) All return to work forms including any agreed actions will to be copied to Human Resources.

g) Revised procedures, containing greater detail and guidance will be produced. Please see Annex E for a detailed action plan for the revised procedures for managing attendance.

5.4 Is the sickness absence policy fit for purpose?
a) It is considered that the current sickness absence policy is fit for purpose. However the procedures are not adequate. This is evidenced from meetings with the staff forum and from meetings with managers. The staff forum felt the policy had a negative tone; that there was not enough information; and that too much is left to managers' discretion. The procedures need to be open and give clarity about roles and responsibilities and who it is aimed at. Managers felt that the current procedures do not provide enough information and that there is confusion over when to issue targets for absence and warnings.

b) Revised procedures are currently being developed, these procedures will detail actually how to manage sickness absence, from both the employees and the line managers role; provide a managers toolkit; and a question and answer section. The draft procedures will go to the staff forum and to all managers for their views. At the final draft stage the trade union will be consulted.

5.5 Areas for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider
- Policy Review
- Procedures Review
- Trigger point Review
- Monitoring and Management Information
- Role of Occupational Health – expanding preventative measures
- Reasons for Sickness absence
- Best Practice; internally and externally
- Considering other options on payment of Occupational Sick pay

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a budget of £5,000 that it can use to assist in undertaking any review.

7. CONCLUSION
7.1 The issues relating to Sickness Absence are wide ranging and cross cutting throughout the Authority. Human Resources are actively working on delivering an improved procedural document to supplement the policy. It is

concluded that the current performance is a concern based on comparative data.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:
LGE Survey 06/07
LGE April 08
Source CIPD Absence Management Report (July 2007)

OFFICER CONTACT: Please contact Gail Matthewman, HR Manager if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted on 01653 600 666 ext 350 or email – gail.matthewman@ryedale.gov.uk.