



**PARTNERSHIP AND RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**SICKNESS ABSENCE (1 APRIL 2018 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2018)**

**REPORT BY HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES**

**A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To report on the management of sickness absence in the council over the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018 together with a brief commentary on the early application of the new Policy and Procedure on Supporting Attendance at Work.

**B. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Panel notes the content of the report.

**C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

<b>I Council Values</b>	Focusing on our customers' needs
	Being honest, open and accountable
	Providing equality of opportunities
	Developing employees
	Making best use of our resources
	Working in partnership
<b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)</b>	The policy seeks to strike a balance between effective management of sickness absence and the promotion of a healthy workforce taking into account the council's obligations under Equality legislation.
<b>III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers</b>	None
<b>IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators</b>	The sickness absence SPI for 2018/19 at the start of the first quarter of the year was higher than it has been in any of the last 3 years (other than for June 2018 when it dipped marginally below the June 2017 figure).
<b>V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement</b>	National Outcome 15: Our Public Services are high quality, continually improving and

		responsive to local people's needs. Reduced sickness absence levels increase the efficiency and productivity of the council.
<b>VI</b>	<b>Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>	Sickness absence is managed within service budgets.
<b>VII</b>	<b>Consideration at PDSP</b>	None
<b>VIII</b>	<b>Other consultations</b>	None

## **D. TERMS OF REPORT**

### **D.1 BACKGROUND**

The Council Executive on 26 June 2018 approved a Policy and Procedure for Supporting Attendance at Work which replaced the former Policy and Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence with effect from 1 September 2018.

This report covers the 5 month period from 1 April 2018 to 31 August 2018 when the former policy was in operation and the month of September when the new policy became effective.

### **D.2 SICKNESS ABSENCE RATES**

#### Standard Performance Indicator – Council Wide

The sickness absence Standard Performance Indicator (SPI) for the full council for the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018 (2018/19) is set out at Appendix 1 of this report together with the SPI performance indicators for the full years (2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18).

The SPI for September 2018 is 4.99%, which is marginally lower than at the same point in 2017 (5.22%). A total of 4655 employees were absent from work for the previous rolling 12 months.

#### Standard Performance Indicators – Services

The sickness absence SPI for each service area (figures for teaching and non-teaching staff shown separately), for the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018 is set out at Appendix 2.

Of the seven council service areas (Education Service is counted as one service although the chart reflects teaching and non-teaching figures separately), four reported sickness absence rates above the council target of 3.6% (CE Support, Finance & Property, Housing Customer & Building Services, Operational Services, and Social Policy).

Corporate Services (1.81%), Education Services (2.95%) and Planning & Economic Development (2.60%) are the only services reporting below the Council target of 3.6%.

A history of the last 3 years SPI's per service are attached as Appendix 3.

### Long-Term/Continuous Absence (1 April 2018 – 30 September 2018)

Of the days lost due to sickness absence during this period, a significant proportion of those absences are attributable to long term absence. Provision 4.9.2 of the council's Policy and Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence, defines a period of continuous (long-term absence) as; 'a period of absence in excess of 4 weeks'. In the Supporting Attendance at Work Policy this is referred to as continuous absence as in paragraph 5.7.'

A further breakdown of days lost for the four services with rates above the council sickness absence target indicates the following:

- Of the total number of 3,105 days lost in CEO Support, Finance & Property 2,211 (71.24%) is attributable to long-term/continuous absence and were accounted for by 64 employees.
- Of the total number of 13,557 days lost in Housing, Customer & Building Services, 10,555 (77.86%) is attributable to long-term/continuous absence and were accounted for by 249 employees.
- Of the total number of 27,497 days lost in Operational Services, 22,708 (82.58%) is attributable to long-term/continuous absence and were accounted for by 518 employees.
- Of the total number of 21,213 days lost in Social Policy 17,404 (82.04%) is attributable to long-term absence and were accounted by 435 employees.

The average percentage days lost due to long term absence across the four services was 80.89%. The average percentage of sick days lost due to long term absence across the council as a whole was 76.89%. The average length of long-term absence during the period was 74 days with the longest absence lasting 260 days.

### Disregarded Absences (1 April 2018 – 31 August 2018)

One of the key changes to the Policy & Procedure on Sickness Absence introduced in December 2011 and further developed in November 2012, relates to the automatic disregard of periods of absence relating to hospital treatment, industrial injury, or bereavement of a family member or dependant. Employees absent due to those reasons do not have that period of absence taken into account in determining whether they should progress to the relevant stage of the sickness absence procedure.

From 1 April 2018 to 31 August 2018, of all days lost to sickness absences, 17.47% were disregarded under this provision; however, these days lost still count towards the sickness absence SPI. A total of 104 employees' absences were disregarded. From 1 September 2018 disregarded absences are no longer available.

The three most common reasons for disregarded absences in the quarter are Surgery (45.17%), Mental & Behavioural (14.27%) and Accidents & Injuries (10.01%),.

The average length of a disregard absence was 20 days, with the longest period of absence lasting 104 days.

### Analysis of Categories of Absence (1 April 2018 – 30 September 2018)

The most common reason for long-term/continuous absence across the council during the period fell within the category of Mental and Behavioural (26,671 days). This category constituted 24.53% of all long term absence and 27.60% of all absences for the period (long/continuous and short/intermittent).

The next four most common categories of long term absence across the authority were:

- Musculoskeletal (15,087 days) constituting 13.58% of all long-term absence and 15.61% of all absence
- Surgery (9,108 days) constituting 8.10% of long-term absence and 9.43% of all absences.
- Accidents, Injuries and Poison (8,489 days) constituting 7.21% of all long-term absence and 8.79% of all absence.
- Neoplasms (3,754 days) constituting 3.80% of all long-term absence and 3.89% of all absences.

## **D.3 MANAGEMENT OF SICKNESS ABSENCE**

### **i) Sickness Absence Case Management**

The absence management team within HR Services has continued to work closely with managers across the council, providing advice and guidance on the management of sickness absence and monitoring the application of the Policy & Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence. Table 1 below shows the number of employees at each stage of the Policy & Procedure as at 30 September 2018, compared to the previously reported positions.

**Table 1**

	<b>Counselling/ Informal Review Meeting</b>	<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Total at 30 September 2018	346	438	293	1077
Total at 30 September 2017	590	515	225	1330
Total at 30 September 2016	1022	488	180	1690

A breakdown of live cases as at 30 June 2018 is set out in Table 2.

**Table 2**

	<b>Counselling/ Informal Review Meeting</b>	<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Cases on going from 30 June 2018	304	374	267	945
New cases since 30 June 2018	42	64	26	132
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>1077</b>

## **ii) Other Support Initiatives**

### Occupational Health Contract

It is proposed that the council's current Occupational Health Contract will go out to tender in December 2018 with the implementation of the new contract on 1 June 2019. Discussions have taken place with West Lothian College with a view to considering a shared agreement for occupational services including counselling and physiotherapy.

### HR Adviser Input – Management Meetings

During Quarter 2 (2018/19) six of nine service areas in receipt of targeted input and support from Human Resources reported reductions in overall sickness absence levels.

### Employee Assistance Programme

An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is currently being trialled in the council and will run for seven months (introduced on 1 November 2018).

An EAP is a telephone based counselling services which is available 24/7, accessible at any location at any time via a free telephone number. Instant access is provided to a trained counsellor and a discussion can take place to determine the most appropriate intervention(s) i.e. structured telephone counselling, referral for face to face counselling, referral to other services etc.

This option supplements the 'face-to-face' consultation service already provided.

### Healthy Working Lives

The Healthy Working Lives Winter Programme ran from 5 – 10 November 2018. A wide range of health information was made available to council employees at St David House, West Lothian Civic Centre, Kirkton Service Centre, Whitehill Service Centre and Strathbrock Partnership Centre.

This year the programme focused on "*Love to Ride*" which runs various campaigns to encourage more people to cycle. The programme also featured "*Macmillan at West Lothian*", for those affected by cancer as well as the "*Steps in Work*" challenge which invites employees in groups to undertake the most steps in a week.

The council has retained the Healthy Working Lives Gold Award accreditation for another year.

## **D.4 INTRODUCTION OF NEW POLICY FOR SUPPORTING ATTENDANCE AT WORK**

The Policy for Supporting Attendance at Work Policy approved by the Council Executive on 26 June 2018 was implemented on 1 September 2018.

To support the rollout of the new policy 20 managers training sessions were delivered to more than 600 participants following completion of an accompanying e-learning module before they attended.

In accordance with the recommendations set out in the Council Executive report on 26 June 2018, a programme of monthly meetings with the trade unions (Teaching

and Non-Teaching) has been put in place that are scheduled until September 2019. Discussions in those meetings focus on the application of the new policy and the supportive measures that can be put in place to improve levels of attendance at work.

Given that the new policy has only been in operation since from 1 September 2018 it is still too early to assess the longer term impact of the policy. However, one of the key changes brought about under the new policy is the discontinuation of the provision in the former policy for certain sickness absences to be automatically disregarded (referred to earlier at D2 of this report). Instead, the new policy provides for wider management discretion to be exercised not to progress an employee to the next formal stage of the procedure in extenuating circumstances where certain criteria is met.

Human Resources are responsible for monitoring the consistency of application of discretion across council services and in this regard, since the introduction of the new policy out of 21 cases considered, 13 have resulted in discretion being applied.

The application of the new policy will continue to be monitored and progress reported back to the Panel on a quarterly basis in the normal manner. In addition, the application of the new policy will be subject to review after 12 months (September 2019) and the outcome reported back to the Council Executive.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The level of sickness absence in the authority for the first quarter of 2018/19 continues the upward trend evident over the last 5 years. However, the expectation is that the introduction of the new Policy for Supporting Attendance at Work will better support the reduction of sickness absence across the Council and begin to reverse that trend.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

- Policy & Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence
- Policy & Procedure for Supporting Attendance at Work

Appendices/Attachments: 3

1. Sickness Absence SPI% History – Full Council
2. Sickness Absence SPI% all services – 2018/19
3. Sickness Absence SPI% History - Services

Contact Person: Fraser Mackenzie, HR Manager – Policy & Advice (01506 281422)

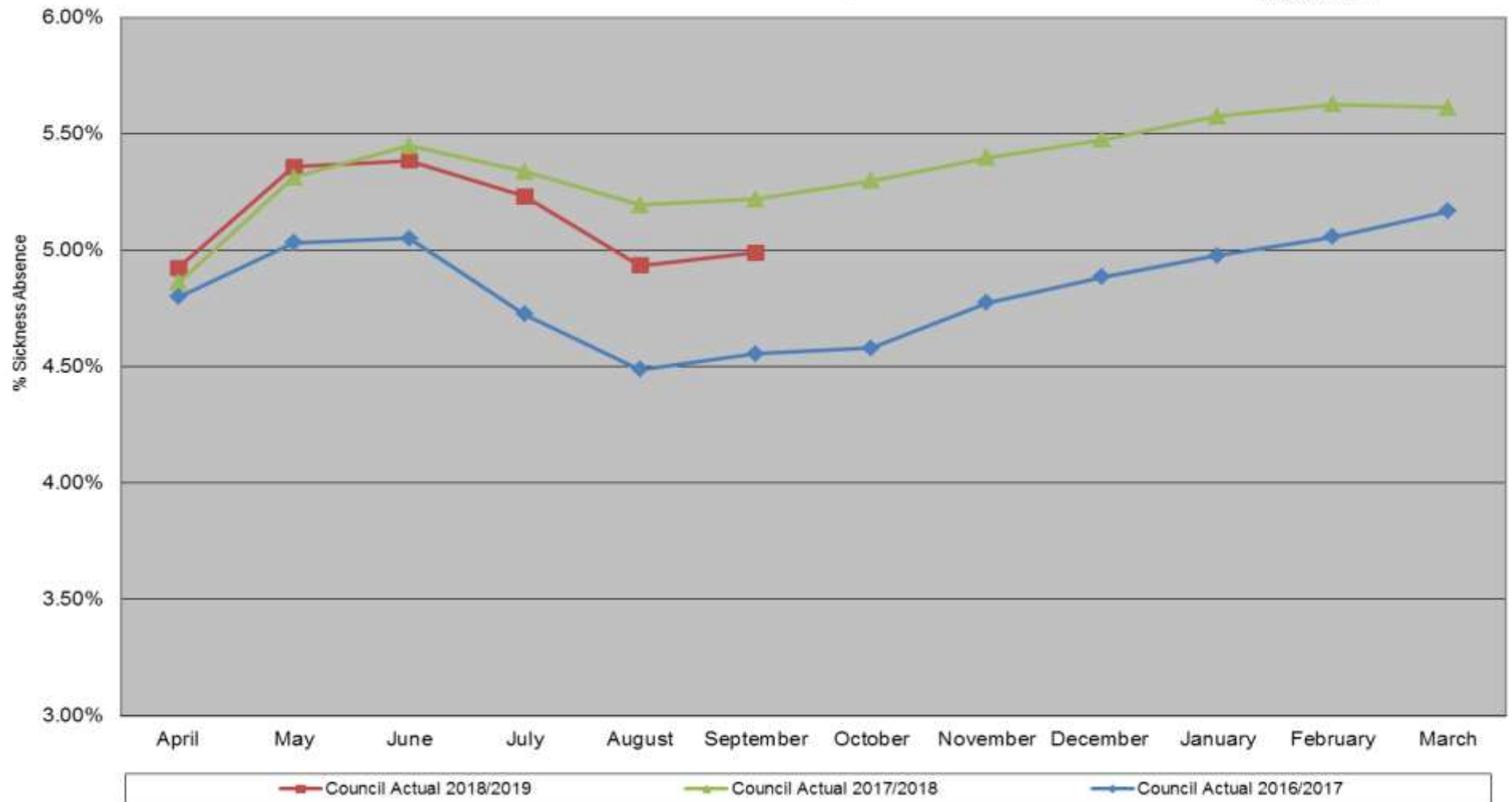
**Julie Whitelaw**

**Head of Corporate Services**

**Date: 7 December 2018**

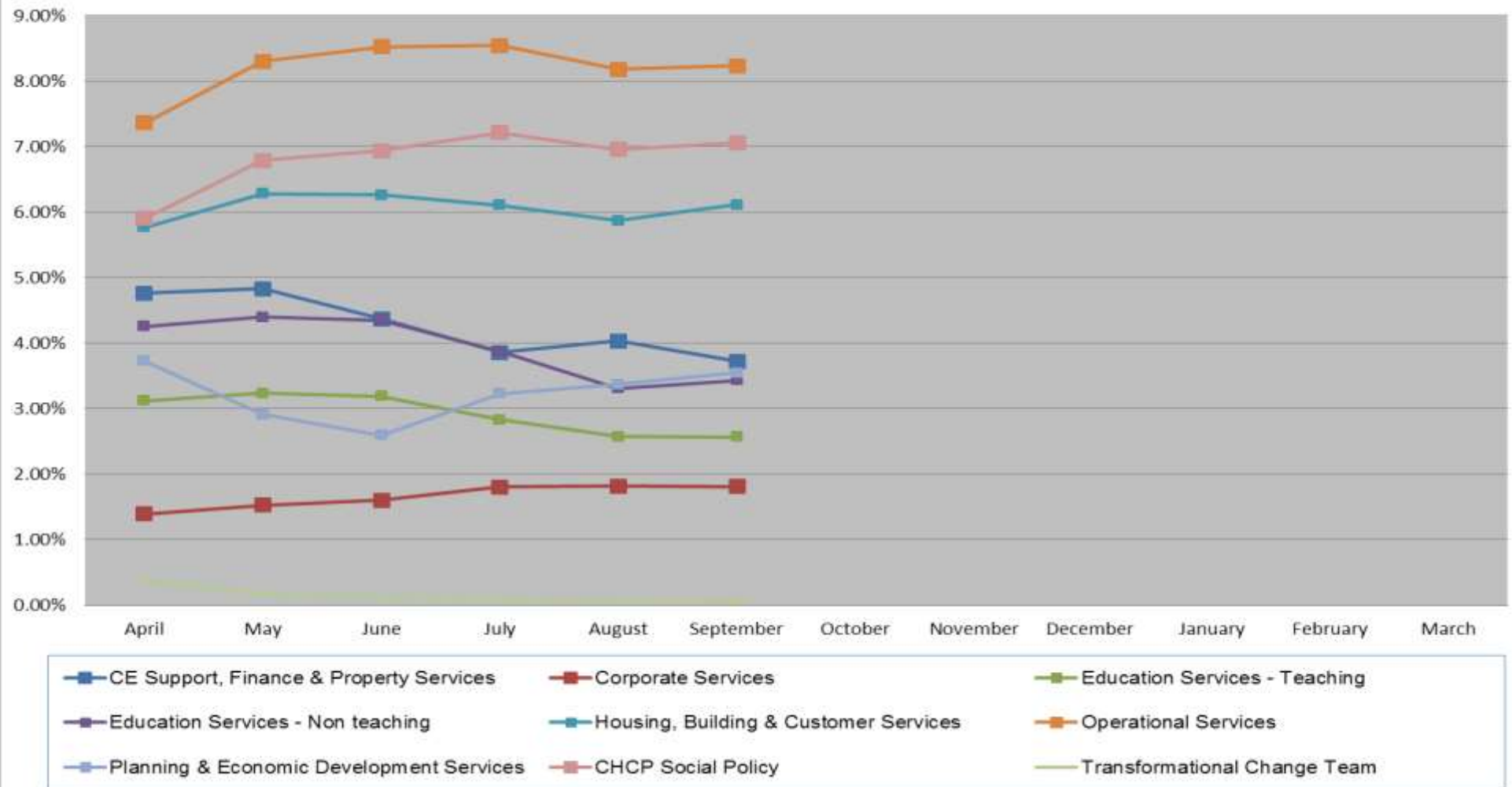
Sickness Absence SPI% History Full Council

Appendix 1



Sickness Absence SPI% all Services - 2018/19  
(Education Split)

Appendix 2





## Services SPI % History - 2016/17 to date

Appendix 3

2016/17 2017/18 2018/19

