



West Lothian  
Council

**COUNCIL EXECUTIVE**

**SICKNESS ABSENCE – 12 MONTH PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2012**

**REPORT BY HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES**

**A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To report the sickness absence rates within the council for the period from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 and to advise on measures being taken to implement the council's Policy & Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence.

**B. RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the Council Executive notes the content of the report.
2. That the Chief Executive is given delegated authority to set a revised council target for sickness absence.

**C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>I Council Values</b>   | Focusing on our customers' needs<br>Being honest, open and accountable<br>Providing equality of opportunities<br>Developing employees<br>Making best use of our resources<br>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 the 12 month period to 31 March 2012 is lower than at any point during the same period in the previous 4 years.   |
| <b>V Relevance to Single</b>  | National Outcome 15: Our Public Services are   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Outcome Agreement</b>                                 | high quality, continually improving efficient and response to local people's needs. Reduced sickness absence levels increase the efficiency and productivity of the council. |
| <b>VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b> | Sickness absence management is managed through existing service resources.   |
| <b>VII Consideration at PDSP</b>                         | None   |
| <b>VIII Other consultations</b>                          | None   |

## **D. TERMS OF REPORT**

### **D.1 INTRODUCTION**

The council introduced a revised Policy & Procedure on Sickness Absence Management on 1 May 2010. Further revisions were approved by Council Executive on 13 December 2011. This report provides an update on the further progress that has been made in the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

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

The sickness absence Specified Performance Indicator (SPI) for the council for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 is set out in Appendix 1. The SPI has remained consistently lower than at any point during the same period in the previous 4 years and at 3.67% is below the council target of 4%.

A slight increase has been seen in the second part of the year, a similar trend to that experienced in previous years. However, at 3.67% the SPI remains significantly lower than the 4.30% reported for the period to 31 March 2011. This reduction equates to 14,301 fewer days of sickness absence, the equivalent of 63.3 FTE, and based on average salary including oncosts equates to a notional net productivity savings of £1.7 million during 2011/12.

The sickness absence SPI for each service area for the period 1 April to 31 March 2012 is set out in Appendix 2. Whilst the majority of service areas have remained below the council target of 4%, Operational Services, Social Policy, Area Services and Housing Construction & Building Services are above the council target.

In Operational Services and Social Policy significant progress has been made in reducing the level of sickness absence. Operational Services is reporting a reduction from 5.62% as at 31 March 2011 to 4.97% as at 31 March 2012, and Social Policy is reporting a reduction from 5.95% as at 31 March 2011 to 4.35% as at 31 March 2012. Area Services has reported an increase from 4.03% as at 31 March 2011 to 4.43% as at 31 March 2012. Housing Construction & Building Services has also reported an increase from 3.68% to 4.23%.

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

#### Sickness Absence Cases

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 31 March 2012 compared to the previously reported positions as at 31 December, 30 September and 31 March 2011.

Table 1

|                            | Counselling | Stage 1    | Stage 2    | Total       |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Total at 31 March 2012     | <b>538</b>  | <b>562</b> | <b>206</b> | <b>1306</b> |
| Total at 31 December 2011  | 624         | 576        | 189        | 1389        |
| Total at 30 September 2011 | 753         | 538        | 132        | 1423        |
| Total at 31 March 2011     | 937         | 348        | 65         | 1350        |

The total number of employees on stages has decreased slightly from 1,389 as at 31 December 2011 to 1,306 cases as at 31 March 2012. A breakdown of the cases as at 31 March 2012 is set out below in Table 2.

Table 2

|                                      | Counselling | Stage 1    | Stage 2    | Total       |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Cases on going from 31 December 2011 | <b>375</b>  | <b>501</b> | <b>202</b> | <b>1078</b> |
| New cases since 31 December 2011     | 163         | 61         | 4          | 228         |
| Total                                | <b>538</b>  | <b>562</b> | <b>206</b> | <b>1306</b> |

Table 3 below shows an analysis of the movement in the 1,078 cases that were live as at 31 December 2011.

Table 3

|                        | Stage (as at 31.12.11) |            |            |             |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Stage (as at 31.03.12) | Counselling            | Stage 1    | Stage 2    | Total       |
| Counselling            | <b>369</b>             | 4          | 2          | 375         |
| Stage 1                | 79                     | <b>421</b> | 1          | 501         |
| Stage 2                | 1                      | 46         | <b>155</b> | 202         |
| Total                  | <b>449</b>             | <b>471</b> | <b>158</b> | <b>1078</b> |

It should be noted that as at 31 March 2012 the majority of employees have not triggered since December 2011 and as such remain at the same stage in the sickness absence process.

During the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012, the sickness absence team has also worked closely with managers on 731 continuous absence cases across the council. As at 31 March 2012, 575 of these cases had been concluded (484 returns to work, 50 dismissals and 41 other outcomes including employees resigning from their posts or commencing maternity leave), with 156 live continuous absence cases across the council.

## Nurse Led Call Centre

The council currently has a contract with First Care for the provision of a nurse led call centre for the reporting of sickness absence. This currently covers approximately 500 employees within NETS & Land Services and Domiciliary Care and is provided at a cost of £4 per employee per month.

The contract provides for:

- The use of a call centre, serviced by qualified nurses, to capture employee calls when reporting sickness absence;
- Provision of medical advice and guidance to employees who report a sickness absence;
- Provision of medical advice and guidance to employees who are attending work, but who are experiencing symptoms of sickness;
- Advising the relevant manager of the employee's absence, together with any relevant associated information; and
- Logging of all calls and provision of real-time, online data and statistics.

The SPI in NETS & Land Services for 2010/11 and 2011/12 is set out in Appendix 3. During 2011/12 the SPI has remained consistently lower than during 2010/11 ending the year at 3.69%, and below the council target, compared to 4.86% in 2010/11.

The SPI in Domiciliary Care for 2010/11 and 2011/12 is set out in Appendix 4. During 2011/12 the SPI has remained consistently lower than during 2010/11 ending the year at 4.95%, compared to 7.67% in 2010/11.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The continuing reduction in the number of days lost to sickness absence during 2011/12 represents a significant achievement for the council. Not least as this reduction has led to the SPI remaining below 4% throughout the 2011/12.

There are however are four service areas which were above 4% and the HR absence management team will continue to work closely with managers in these areas, and across the council, to achieve a continuing reduction in absence rates.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

Policy & Procedure on Managing Sickness Absence

Appendices/Attachments: 4

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**Date: 29 May 2012**