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**Report of the Director of Resources**

**Executive Board**

**13<sup>th</sup> May 2009**

**Response to the Central and Corporate Functions Scrutiny Board Inquiry into Attendance Management**

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**Electoral Wards Affected:**

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report provides the Executive Board with details of the recommendations from the recent Central and Corporate Functions Scrutiny Board Inquiry into attendance management and details the response of the Director of Resources.

## 1.0 Purpose Of This Report

This report provides the Executive Board with details of the recommendations from the recent Central and Corporate Functions Scrutiny Board Inquiry into attendance management and details how the Director of Resources proposes to respond to these recommendations.

## 2.0 Background Information

The Central and Corporate Functions Scrutiny Board conducted an inquiry into managing attendance between July 2008 and March 2009. The request had followed concerns about the high levels and costs of sickness absence within the Council. The final report is attached at appendix 1.

The report makes nine recommendations for action.

The Scrutiny Board acknowledged the 'significant amount of work that has been undertaken to establish a framework for managers at all levels to deal with absence'. Sickness absence has fallen from 13.9 days in 2000/01 to a projected out-turn of 11.49 days in 2008/9, an average annual decrease of approximately 0.5 days year on year, which is significant for an organisation the size of Leeds City Council, a view validated by the Improvement and Development Agency.

The actions now proposed strike the right balance between ensuring managers have the confidence and competence to work effectively within this framework and taking a more proactive approach to health and well-being.

## 3.0 Main Issues

Below, each of the Scrutiny Board's nine recommendations are listed along with a response from the Chief Officer (HR).

### Recommendations One and Two

***That the Council's most senior officers instill a culture where all team leaders, at all levels, are expected, and are equipped with the skills, to take responsibility for the attendance management of their staff and that this form part of the team leaders performance appraisal.***

***That all staff recognise their responsibility to foster a culture where good attendance is expected and where unjustified absence will not be tolerated.***

A new Senior Manager's Appraisal Scheme has been introduced which includes feedback on the new Leadership & Management Standards for all Managers and links to the Aspirational Culture.

The new Leadership & Management Standards clearly defines the desired skills and behaviours which we expect all our leaders and managers to demonstrate or work towards through development modules.

Senior managers receive 360 degree feedback as part of their appraisal which highlights how they demonstrate they are working to each behaviour and the impact this has.

Other managers are appraised under the new Manager's Appraisal Scheme which also includes feedback from their managers on their behaviours against the Standards and a similar programme of related development modules.

Two Standards are particularly relevant in ensuring that all managers demonstrate the need to manage staff performance - which includes attendance:

*Motivate Teams, Individuals and Self* ..... 'take responsibility for developing and supporting individuals and teams in maximising their potential to deliver the Council's priorities'.

*Manage Staff Performance* ..... 'deliver high performing services by effectively managing and improving team and individual performance. Ensure that people are clear about what is expected of them and their contribution to the team and the council'.

The Council's Aspirational Culture sets out the behaviours and culture that will deliver real, sustainable change. Three elements are linked to managing attendance: Leadership and Behaviours; Organisational Arrangements; and Routines, Rituals and Policies. Together, these will ensure more effective strategic leadership by developing the capability and competence of senior managers to take forward the council's priorities and ensure greater accountability for delivering service and performance improvements.

The new Managing Attendance Policy provides employees with a reasonable opportunity to improve and maintain their attendance and ensures managers are clear about their responsibilities to manage attendance. A Managing Attendance Pack for Managers has now been produced which will be provided when they attend briefing sessions with Local HR Teams commencing in April 2009.

The packs will comprise:

- A Quick Reference Guide for Managers on managing attendance;
- An Attendance Target Setting Guide for Managers;
- Employee Information arrangements for sick leave, sick pay and managing attendance'
- Guide for meeting staff on Long term sick leave;
- Stress Risk Assessment guidance notes;
- Muscular Skeletal guidance notes.

Together with the Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure and the Guidance Notes this comprises a 'toolkit' of information to assist managers with their responsibility for managing attendance.

The Guide clearly defines manager's roles and responsibilities, which include:

- Ensuring employees are aware of the importance of attendance, the support available to help them to maintain this and the impact of their absence on productivity and colleagues
- Ensuring all employees have an understanding of the managing attendance policy and are aware of their responsibilities and the support available to them

The Council has recently reviewed the induction process for new council employees, including the information they are provided with as they commence employment. The Manager's Induction Checklist requires managers to explain to new staff the need to

establish and maintain good attendance. This will now be reinforced at One Council Induction events held in each directorate.

The Council has recently introduced a Probationary Period for new Council employees which provides a framework within which employees are helped to reach and maintain acceptable standards of performance. The policy and procedure supports a culture and expectation of performance in the early part of their employment, and covers all aspects of performance including conduct and attendance.

It requires managers to identify expectations and standards required in the job role and to support the employee in meeting those standards and promotes better supervision and performance management in the early part of a new starter's employment.

### **Recommendation Three:**

***That HR in conjunction with the Trade Unions run focus groups to find out what individuals are saying about their attendance habits.***

A regular HR/Trade Union forum to discuss attendance matters has been in existence since 2008. Focus groups with employees have also been used successfully on matters related to developing a well-being strategy and also to establish the new in-house Occupational Health service.

HR Leadership Team will consider this recommendation to ascertain how best to capture individual employees views on attendance. Their findings will be discussed at a future management-trade union forum.

### **Recommendation Four:**

***That the Council pilots a 'shift swap' scheme within 'Environments and Neighbourhoods'.***

The Chief Environmental Services Officer has agreed to run a pilot 'shift swap' scheme within his service area.

### **Recommendation Five:**

***That the City Council in the first instance develops formal links with Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust to share best practice in the area of attendance management and that consideration is given to Leeds City Council leading on the development of a wider 'best practice' network.***

The importance of establishing links and learning from best practice is recognised. The Council has forged some good relationships in this area of work, including other Core City and regional local authorities. There has not, however, been any regular liaison with the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (LTHT) on matters relating to improving attendance. There are many parallels between the organisations in terms of size and complexity and there will undoubtedly be areas of best practice that could be shared.

Communication channels will, therefore, be established for liaison and sharing of best practice with LTHT.

In addition to this, a multi-agency group, including the NHS, has been established across the City in response to Recommendation 7.

### **Recommendation Six:**

***That the Council continues with its pro-active approach to health and well-being under the Happy, Healthy and Here Programme. In particular, it would encourage careful evaluation of pilots such as Vielife and rehabilitation and return to work, to see if there is merit in rolling them out across the Council.***

***It is also important that the Council is aware of its role and influence as an exemplar employer across the City and we would encourage the City Council to work with the Healthy Leeds partnership to coordinate existing and develop new health and well-being initiatives across the city. The new Workplace Health Improvement Specialist should be supported in their role in making this happen.***

The Happy, Healthy and Here Programme will continue to be the vehicle for improving safety, well-being and attendance across the Council. The Vielife and rehabilitation pilots will be fully evaluated when they come to an end. If deemed to be successful, a business case will be put forward for rolling these out to a wider audience. The Vielife pilot has clearly defined success criteria built into the pilot contract.

The Council will continue to embrace its role as an exemplar employer and will work closely with the new Health Improvement Specialist, by providing opportunities to positively influence the Council's health and well-being agenda.

### **Recommendation Seven:**

***That the City Council actively pursues becoming a Fit for Work pilot area.***

Following Dame Carol Black's appearance at Scrutiny, this has been actively explored. LCC has registered an interest with the Government and have attended one of their briefings for interested parties.

The Council would only be eligible to bid as part of a cross-city, multi-agency partnership and to this end has forged links with organisations including the NHS, Leeds University, Leeds Occupational Health Advisory Service, Leeds MSK Services. The application process is in three stages and the partnership has submitted a bid which met the first deadline of the 20<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Recommendation Eight:**

***That the introduction of fit notes is endorsed and implemented as soon as is possible.***

It is expected that the introduction of Fit Notes will be an effective mechanism to both help people stay in and return to work much more quickly. LCC will ensure that it works closely with General Practitioners to ensure this can have maximum effect for council employees. At the time of writing this report, no firm dates had been set.

### **Recommendation Nine:**

***That the City Council explores practical ways in which jobs may be adjusted in order to respond to fit notes and therefore encourage return to work.***

It is recognised that the introduction of fit notes will have an impact on the Council in terms of adjustments, temporary redeployment and other support. The new in-house Occupational Health service is perfectly placed to offer this advice and provide training and support to line

managers. A new 'Reasonable Adjustment' toolkit was also launched in March 2009, which provides practical help and guidance on a range of issues.

#### **4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

There are no specific implications for Council Policy and Governance.

#### **5.0 Legal And Resource Implications**

This work has been incorporated into the HR Service Plan for 2009-10.

#### **6.0 Conclusions**

The Central and Corporate Functions Scrutiny Board Inquiry into managing attendance has considered existing good practice and made nine recommendations. This report has detailed the Director of Resources response to these recommendations. The input from Dame Carol Black has helped to encourage multi-agency work across the City to explore how Leeds City Council can become involved in funded activity to support the national agenda around work, health and well-being.

#### **7.0 Recommendations**

The Executive Board is recommended to accept the Scrutiny Board recommendations, subject to the comments in this report.

#### **8.0 Background Papers**

The Scrutiny Board report is attached at Appendix 1.