



## Report of the Director of Corporate Services

Governance and Audit Committee – 27 September 2022

### Absence Management Audit Report Update

<b>Purpose:</b>	To provide an update on the Absence Management audit report for the above period
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<b>Legal Officer:</b>	Debbie Smith
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<b>For Information</b>	

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 As a result of the first internal audit on Absence Management carried out in 2020, an assurance level of moderate was given.
- 1.2 An action plan was developed to address the issues identified and appropriate implementation steps put in place.
- 1.3 This action plan identified High Risk and Medium Risk actions as previously reported to the committee in September 2021 all recommendations have been implemented, with the exception of;

*“Consideration should be given to having a discussion with the provider of the Interflex system to provide reports highlighting instances of ‘unauthorised absences’ – this was considered non-cost-effective.*

#### 2 Further progress as at September 2022

- 2.1 As reported previously, in line with the Oracle Fusion project a Manager dashboard is in development and nearing readiness for User Acceptance testing This will provide real time information for all Managers with absence

management responsibility and provide them with information on the following:-

- Staff absent due to sickness (within their area only) and days lost
- Return to Work Interviews Outstanding
- Record of Action Meetings Outstanding

This information will also be available to the “Manager’s” Manager, providing additional data and information to improve Absence Management across the authority.

- 2.2 The monthly reminders to Managers has had a positive impact in terms of queries and requests for additional training.
- 2.3 Development of the Learning Module in Fusion is progressing and will provide an additional tool to further improve compliance in completing mandatory sickness management training.
- 2.4 There is continued improvement in terms of completing Return to Work and Record of Action meetings and these details can be provided to the Committee.
- 2.5 Management of Absence Advisors have been appointed in the Education, Place and Social Services Directorates to support Managers in ensuring compliance with our Sickness Absence Policy and to identify proactive ways in managing and reducing sickness.

This has included;

- Support to progress current Long Term Sickness cases of over 6 months and address cases which are progressing into 6 months and over.
- Early interventions in sickness cases to support managers and employees in progressing cases as appropriate.
- Strengthening links with Occupational Health by arranging review meetings with the OH Team to assist Managers by discussing next step plans at an earlier stage.
- Provision of additional dedicated clinics for Social Services staff, to minimise the waiting times between referrals and appointments.
- Manager training, guidance and upskilling.
- Support with Manager Compliance

In partnership with Trade Unions, updated guidance has been developed in relation to the ‘Dying to Work’ Charter.

Stress and Coronavirus related absences are being monitored and have started to decrease. This will continue to be a key focus for the team going forward.

#### 2.5.1 Place Directorate;

- i) Direct support has initially been given to Corporate Building Services, whereby absence levels reduced by 50% during the pilot.
- ii) Absence levels were reduced by 45% during the pilot in Waste, Parks & Cleansing. Absence levels reduced by 57% during the pilot in Housing and Public Health.
- iii) All three departments made vast improvements in terms of Return to Work and Breaches Compliance and have implemented administration systems in the departments to support and prompt managers for all absence related actions.
- iv) Support has just commenced with the Highways & Transportation service.

#### 2.5.2 Social Services;

- i) Support has been required to progress current Long Term Sickness cases of over 6 months and to address a high level of cases which are progressing into 6 months and over. This is still identified as a key priority.
- ii) There is continuation of intervention arrangements to ensure HR advice is provided for all cases at 4 months with allocation of a HR Advisor. The Management of Absence Advisor continues to monitor cases to provide advice on next step and return to work plans, signpost support and progress cases forward. As a result, Long term sickness has reduced against a background of high volumes of cases progressing from intermittent to long term sickness.
- iii) Monthly review meetings continue with the OH Team and a new monthly report supports Managers to complete routine Occupational Health referrals at the relevant stage, in line with the Policy.
- iv) Additional dedicated Social Services clinics continue to minimise the waiting times between referrals and appointments
- v) Whilst most Service areas have now attended Absence Refresher training which has been a key priority over the last 12 months. Policy refresher training is still available to all Managers across the directorate. 16 virtual sessions have taken place since March 2021. Workshops are also available to be delivered on an adhoc basis, to focus on certain targeted aspects of the Policy, as and when required.
- vi) Support with Manager compliance has been the key focus over the last few months. Monthly notification emails are monitored and sent to Managers in terms of outstanding return to work and breach interviews. These are designed to help identify any training / upskilling needs, to offer managers guidance and support and to ensure meetings are scheduled in a timely manner and in line with the Policy.

- vii) Stress and Coronavirus related absences continue to be reported and monitored on a monthly basis. Advice and Guidance is offered in terms of key support services as cases arise.

2.5.3 Education Planning & Resources – Catering & Cleaning:

- i) Work is ongoing to increase return to work compliance within this area. The rate of return figure is now considerably less as a result of the appointment of the Management of Absence Advisor in this area. We are looking to introduce a collaborative approach to the completion of the forms where the employee works across both catering and cleaning.
- ii) The Advisor completes all sickness meetings on behalf of the managers within Catering & Cleaning to ensure that all outstanding breaches are completed. Refresher and/or new training will then be provided to the managers.
- iii) With regard to long-term sickness, monthly meetings take place with the Catering & Cleaning Team Leader. Progress has been made where final absence review meetings have been completed.
- iv) Weekly catch up meetings with the Catering & Cleaning admin staff that deal with sickness have been introduced.
- v) Roles and responsibilities in relation to the management of absence processes have been reviewed. These will be introduced and incorporated into the day to day management of sickness within the section.

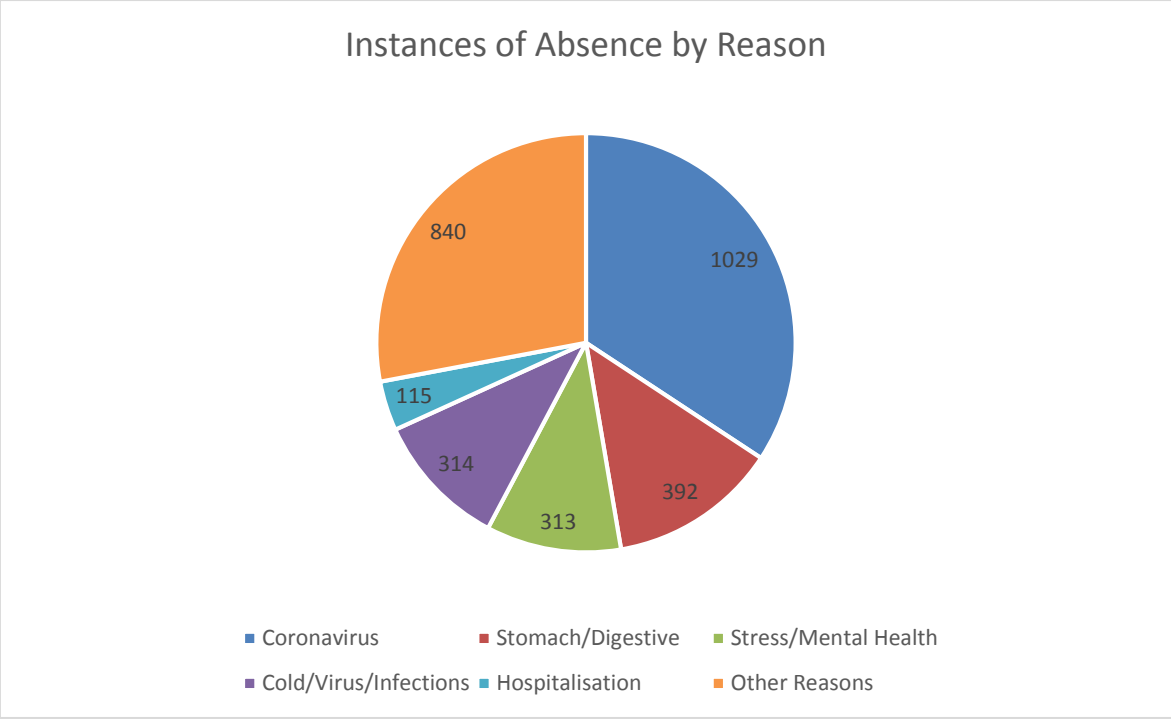
### 3. Sickness Data

For information purposes, please see the following table in relation to sickness absences since 2019/20;

Avg FTE Sick per FTE	19/20	20/21	21/22	Apr 22 - Jul 22
Directorate	Avg FTE Sick per FTE (APR to MAR)	Avg FTE Sick per FTE (APR to MAR)	Avg FTE Sick per FTE (APR to MAR)	Avg FTE Sick per FTE (APR to JUL)
Corporate Services (From April 22)	N/A	N/A	7.58	3.21
Finance (From April 22)	N/A	N/A	7.81	2.80
Education (Central)	14.46	10.05	17.39	6.89
Place	14.24	10.39	14.53	5.32
Resources (up to March 22)	6.58	4.49	N/A	N/A
Social Services	16.67	16.59	19.40	6.17
<b>TOTAL FOR AUTHORITY (Central)</b>	<b>14.12</b>	<b>11.52</b>	<b>15.40</b>	<b>5.48</b>

Please note that these figures include Schools and Covid-related absences. A further initial report has been run to exclude Covid-related absences for the period from April to August 2022 and indicates a total Average Sickness Rate of 6.84 which reduces to 5.50 when Covid-related absences are excluded.

The reasons for absence for this current financial year have been broken down as follows;



Please note that the above chart identifies the main reasons for absence as identified in Oracle. “Other Reasons” includes a whole range of reasons where instances are less than one hundred.

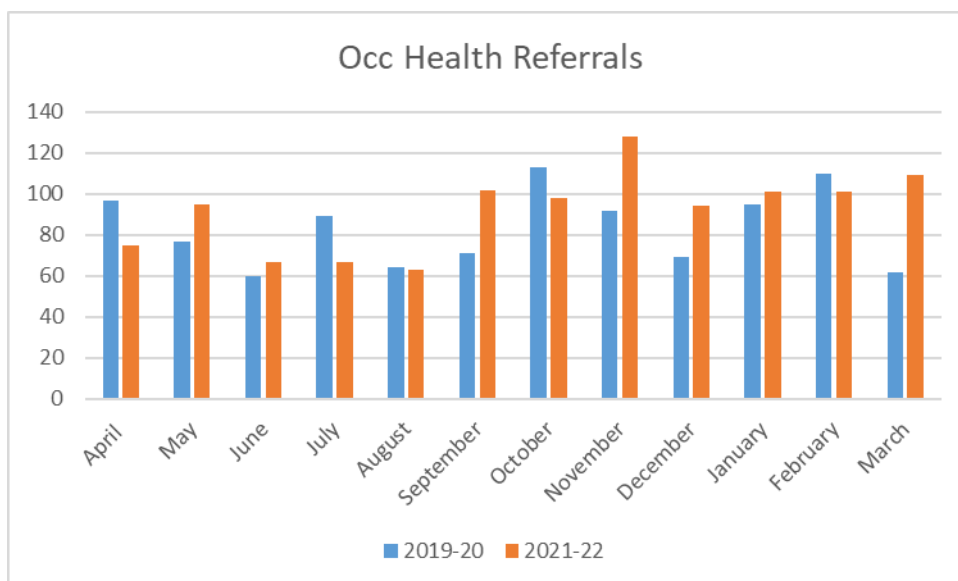
**4. Occupational Health Support**

Occupational Health (OH) continue with dedicated clinics for Social services and Place. Stress Management & Counselling (SMAC) have launched a bereavement support group. OH & SMAC have jointly launched a long term sickness support group.

OH have restarted the menopause cafes and Health Fairs, which include free health checks. Additional counselling sessions are being provided to cut waiting time to avoid stress related absence.

An additional in-house Occupational Health Officer has been recruited on a part time basis via ERF funding, with a further applicant to be interviewed shortly. There remains a vacant Principal Occupational Health Adviser post after three rounds of advertisement. A new external OH contract to supplement internal resource, and provide Occupational Health Physicians is due to be tendered in September.

The number of Occupational Health Referrals for the last two financial years are illustrated below;



## 5. Integrated Assessment Implications

5.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5.2. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

5.3. Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

5.4 There is no direct cumulative impact on people and /or communities other than to ensure that services are supported through provision of suitable resources, with appropriate governance, in line with Council policy. There are no implications identified through the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process.

**6. Financial Implications**

6.1 There are no financial implications other than those set out in the body of the report.

**7. Legal Implications**

7.1 There are no legal implications other than those set out in the body of the report.

**Background Papers:** None.

**Appendices:** Appendix A - Impact Assessment Report.