

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Employment & Appeals Committee      **DATE:** 30<sup>th</sup> October 2012

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART 1** **FOR INFORMATION AND DECISION**

#### **Update on Wellbeing Strategy – Invest to Save Project & Revised Sickness Absence Policy**

##### **1 Purpose of Report**

This report describes the work currently in progress to look at improving the physical and mental wellbeing of staff which will then contribute to improving current absenteeism rates and encourage staff to attend work. In addition it is hoped that these initiatives will improve morale, productivity and quality of life for our staff.

The report also gives an outline of the review and proposed changes to the Sickness Absence Policy.

##### **2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to Resolve:

- (a) That the Wellbeing Initiatives set out in Part A of the report be noted.
- (b) That the Revised Sickness Absence Policy attached at Appendix B be approved from the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012.

##### **3 The Sustainable Community Strategy, the JSNA and the Corporate Plan**

###### **Sustainable Community Strategy Priorities**

- Health and Wellbeing – the proposals within this report will encourage staff to improve their health and wellbeing.

###### **Corporate Plan 2012/13**

The proposals within this report meet the Corporate Plan's objectives as follows:

1. Improve customer experience by improving the physical, mental health and wellbeing of staff which will increase productivity and give a greater customer service;

2. Deliver high quality services to meet local needs by increasing attendance at work which will increase productivity and improve morale of the workforce, this will provide an improved customer satisfaction level from the community on the services provided;
3. Develop new ways of working by introducing a change in how managers deal with sickness absence which will ensure managers tackle sickness absence issues promptly with specialist advice and support;
4. Develop a skilled and capable workforce by ensuring that all managers are trained in the new sickness absence policy and develop their management skills to deal with performance management issues effectively and consistently;
5. Achieve value for money by delivering a saving on days lost. In addition more robust performance management of sickness will mean that workforce attend work and therefore reduce agency costs.

#### 4 **Other Implications**

##### (a) Financial

We have been provided with a budget of £5,000 to deliver this Invest to Save Project.

We currently have 10 FTE days lost to sickness which has cost implications for the Council. The actions / proposals included in this report are hoping to reduce this to 6 FTE in 2 years, from launch of the new sickness absence policy which will deliver savings to the Council.

##### (b) Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating action</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Legal	We have met the statutory consultation timescales with our Joint Trade Unions and have complied with the Green Book Conditions.	
Property	None	
Human Rights	None	
Health and Safety	None	To encourage all staff to consider their working environment, their responsibilities for their own health and safety and worklife balance.
Employment Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff are affected by the Employee Wellbeing Initiatives and have been invited to participate.</li> <li>• The Sickness Absence Policy has been reviewed with our Trade Unions and statutory consultation timelines have been met. However this review does not affect any of</li> </ul>	

	their employment rights.	
Equalities Issues	None	The review of the sickness absence policy has been conducted with representatives from the Disability Forum to ensure that our disabled staff are treated fairly and consulted with the group.
Community Support	None	
Communications	A Communications Plan has been established supported by the Wellbeing Project Group and CMT to ensure that all Wellbeing Initiatives are corporately advertised to all staff.	The Communications Plan will be continually updated as initiatives are completed / developed.
Community Safety	None	
Financial	None	Reduction from 10 days lost due to Sickness to 6 days lost which will give the Council a financial saving and increase productivity levels.
Timetable for delivery	Proposal to launch new Sickness Absence Policy by the end of 2012. Ongoing programme of Wellbeing Initiatives.	Formal Sickness Absence briefings to be arranged for managers and Skills Training to be delivered to assist managers support staff with sickness issues and deal with complex cases.
Project Capacity	None	
Other	None	Need to work with specialist experts (e.g. Occupational Health, NHS and PCT)

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

We have met the statutory consultation timescales with our Joint Trade Unions and have complied with the Green Book Conditions.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the revised Sickness Absence Policy and is attached as Appendix A.

(e) Workforce

All staff are affected by the change in policy and Trade Unions have been involved in discussions prior to and during the consultation process. The aim of the wellbeing initiatives and revised Sickness Absence Policy is to improve wellbeing and reduce sickness.

5 **Supporting Information**

Part A – Wellbeing Initiatives

- 5.1 Further to the last Employment and Appeals Committee on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012, a Wellbeing Project Group has now been established which includes representatives from all directorates, trade unions and Health and Safety Representatives, and the group is addressing the following issues:
- Developing new approaches for supporting staff that ensure high levels of overall employee wellbeing;
  - Develop new approaches to supporting attendance management and reduce sickness absence;
  - Ensure managers are properly trained and equipped to support staff;
  - Analyse levels of wellbeing across the council to identify trends or areas of particular need and analyse staff engagement;
  - Make proposals for other measures to incentivise staff attendance.
- 5.2 The group has identified specific actions as priorities to address the above points and an update on progress is given below:
- 5.3 The new Occupational Health provider, which started on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012 is working closely with managers to support them with their staff wellbeing issues and provide advice to enable a pro-active response to deal with sickness / health issues. Benefits include specialist advice, earlier intervention and faster response times following management referrals and closer working relationships with our current Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and the mediation service to ensure joined up wellbeing solutions for staff. Regular contract meetings are held with Occupational Health to monitor the effectiveness of this approach and discuss any other support strategies they recommend we could implement.
- 5.4 In partnership with Slough Community Leisure, all staff have received an invitation to use the leisure facilities as a 'taster opportunity' at Slough or Langley Leisure Centres during September. This includes 3 free fitness classes a week and free swimming during the week or weekend. Staff can also trial the 'Feel Good Factory' which is aimed at encouraging those staff that have not taken regular exercise or feel limited due to their weight or disabilities to do light exercise within a professionally staffed environment and have their weight, Body Mass Index measured and monitored over a fixed period. All of the leisure activities are aimed at encouraging staff to use the local fitness facilities and to continue to take regular exercise after the free trial period, taking advantage of the generous staff discount on gym membership which includes swimming, classes and spa.

- 5.5 To link into the Health and Wellbeing Initiative, we have ascertained that we do not have any employee base data to identify which areas we should be focusing our efforts, although we have sickness statistics, this does not give us data on the particular areas of concern for all employees, only the reasons for sickness for those staff that are absent due to sickness. Therefore, in partnership with our Employee Wellbeing contractors, PPC, we have hired a 'Health Kiosk' which measures employees key health metrics, this includes weight, blood pressure, heart rate, body fat content, body mass index and hydration quota. The kiosk will give staff an indication of the areas they may need to concentrate on and will also give the Council a corporate report which will give the authority data on the health metrics of all staff that used the kiosk. The Health Kiosk has been based at 5 different sites from the 3<sup>rd</sup> September for a period of 3 weeks, to encourage staff from all areas to make the best use of the kiosk during this period. From the data received, over 70% of the workforce have used the kiosk.
- 5.6 The results from the kiosk will enable the group to plan some targeted work to address the key issues, therefore 2 Health and Wellbeing Fairs have been organised for the 2<sup>nd</sup> October and the 17<sup>th</sup> October and we have invited internal and external organisations to participate in the event, some of whom are listed below:
- Occupational Health,
  - PPC,
  - Slough Community Leisure,
  - Health Advisors from Berkshire NHS,
  - Smoking Cessation representatives,
  - Slimming World,
  - Health and Safety
  - Drug and Alcohol representatives.
- 5.7 This is an opportunity for all staff to come along and have a conversation with professionals about a particular issue or just come along for further information.
- 5.8 Finally, the new Catering Company, COMPASS have been promoting a number of healthy eating options and will be working towards the Catering for Health Award which will demonstrate that we are offering staff healthier options to choose which will make them consider their diet and eating habits.
- 5.9 A Communications Plan has been developed to ensure that any Wellbeing Initiative is publicised corporately and linked to the Wellbeing Strategy.

#### Part B – Sickness Absence Policy Review

- 5.10 It is inevitable that people will become ill and sometimes need to take time away from work, but the Council rightly expects a high level of attendance from its employees and needs to be in a position to support that. High sickness absence levels can lead to reductions in service delivery and effectiveness, increased costs and undue pressure on colleagues, all of which are unsustainable in the current climate. As a result, one of the key actions the group needed to address was the Sickness Absence Policy.

- 5.11 It was agreed at the first Wellbeing Project Group Meeting that a separate work group should be set up to look at reviewing the Sickness Absence Policy, this group consisted of directorate managers, trade union and Disability Forum representatives. The group compared Slough's existing policy against neighbouring authorities and discussed the particular areas that needed to be addressed to improve sickness absence within the Council.
- 5.12 The draft Sickness Absence policy was consulted on from 6<sup>th</sup> August to 5<sup>th</sup> September, comments were received and these have been reviewed and incorporated into the revised policy, where appropriate. The final draft is attached as Appendix B for approval. The key changes to the policy are as follows:
- Notification – daily contact to managers by phone to confirm sickness absence, unless covered by a medical certificate. This will enable managers to discuss sickness absence at an early stage and look at ways to support the employee back to work.
  - Trigger Points – reduced persistent short term absence triggers to 6 days over 6 months. This will encourage managers to address sickness absence earlier and involve our Occupational Health service for advice and guidance to manage the particular sickness issue. Managers will have earlier involvement in sickness absence cases which in other local authorities has led to a reduction in the sickness statistics.
  - A GP certificate will be required for every days sickness if staff are within the formal sickness absence process (unless disability related sickness). It is hoped that this will be a deterrent for those staff who take persistent short term absence and prevent them from taking days sickness when they could make it to work, however it is clear that if there is a genuine sickness then staff should not come to work until they have fully recovered.
  - If staff do not provide a GP certificate pay will be withheld immediately and retrospective pay will be made on receipt of certificate.
  - A requirement for staff to attend Occupational Health appointments and if non attendance staff will only receive Statutory Sick Pay until they attend the appointment (unless there are exceptional circumstances for non attendance). Non attendance at Occupational Health appointments is costly and a waste of resources, this will ensure that staff co-operate with the process and enable managers to get the appropriate medical advice. There was previously a recharge to the manager for non attendance however this method now puts the responsibility onto the employee.
  - Formal review periods will be up to 3 months with monthly interim review meetings. Formal review periods were always part of the policy however managers were not consistent with the review periods being set therefore it was felt that a maximum 3 month review period was fair and would demonstrate if an improvement had been made.

- 5.13 It is also proposed to review the Managers Guidance on Sickness Absence. In addition a review has been done on the sickness absence training, this is specifically designed to equip managers with the skills to support staff with long term sickness absence issues as well as address persistent short term absence in a consistent and fair way. This will be time tabled in line with when the policy is launched.

#### Summary of outcomes and benefits

- 5.14 It is hoped that by developing these wellbeing initiatives and launching the revised Sickness Absence Policy the following benefits will be achieved;
- We will have corporate data about our staff's health statistics which will enable us to promote meaningful wellbeing initiatives to encourage staff to consider their lifestyle choices;
  - A robust sickness absence policy will reduce sickness absence;
  - Employee attendance at the Health and Wellbeing Fair which enable staff to discuss concerns with professionals and raise awareness of where to go for support with particular issues;
  - Increased membership at Slough Community Leisure will ensure that staff are using the local leisure activities and considering their work life balance options;
  - Effective Management Training, which will be more descriptive and will develop the appropriate management skills to performance manage staff effectively when dealing with sickness absence issues.
  - Start of an ongoing programme to raise staff awareness on a range of well being initiatives.

#### 6 **Appendices (attached)**

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix B – Proposed Revised Sickness Absence Policy

#### 7 **Background Papers**

Agenda and Minutes: Employment and Appeals Committee – 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012.  
Consultation and Responses to Sickness Absence Review.