

# Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item:  
**A.3**

Meeting Date: 18 July 2013  
 Portfolio: Finance, Governance and Resources  
 Key Decision: No  
 Within Policy and Budget Framework: NO  
 Public / Private: Public

Title: 2012/13 END OF YEAR SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT  
 Report of: Chief Executive  
 Report Number: CE 06/13

**Purpose / Summary:**

This report sets out the authority’s sickness absence levels for the period April 2012 to March 2013, the trends through 2012/13 and other sickness absence related information. The report also provides the Panel with an update on activities the authority is undertaking to reduce levels of sickness absence and proposals to reduce levels further in 2013/14.

**Recommendations:**

1. Consider and comment on the information on sickness absence provided in the report.

**Tracking**

Executive:	N/A
Overview and Scrutiny:	<b>Resources 6 June 13</b>
Council:	N/A

## **1. BACKGROUND**

2011/12's 11.1 days lost per full-time equivalent employee (FTE) to sickness absence was the highest experienced by the authority in 5 years.

As a consequence, efforts were made to address the increasing levels of absenteeism. A Lean Systems Review (a philosophy of continuous, incremental improvement that aligns the organisation to deliver customer value and eliminate waste. It is one of the methodologies currently being used by the Authority as an approach to delivering service reviews that ensures services are fit for purpose and affordable).of sickness absence was also initiated and managers were provided with further support to help reverse the trend. A full update on the Lean Systems Review is provided below.

Appendix A below shows the provisional sickness absence levels for the 2012/13 fiscal year. The level of absenteeism is split by directorate and is represented as both the number of working days lost and the number of working days lost per FTE employee. A figure is also provided for the proportion of the sickness absences that are classified as being long term i.e. over 28 days in duration. The tables also provide a comparison with previous years.

The 2012/13 annual sickness absence level has reduced by 18% to 9.06 working days lost per FTE employee in comparison to last year. The opportunity cost saving of this reduction, based on the absent employees' grades is just short of £96,000.

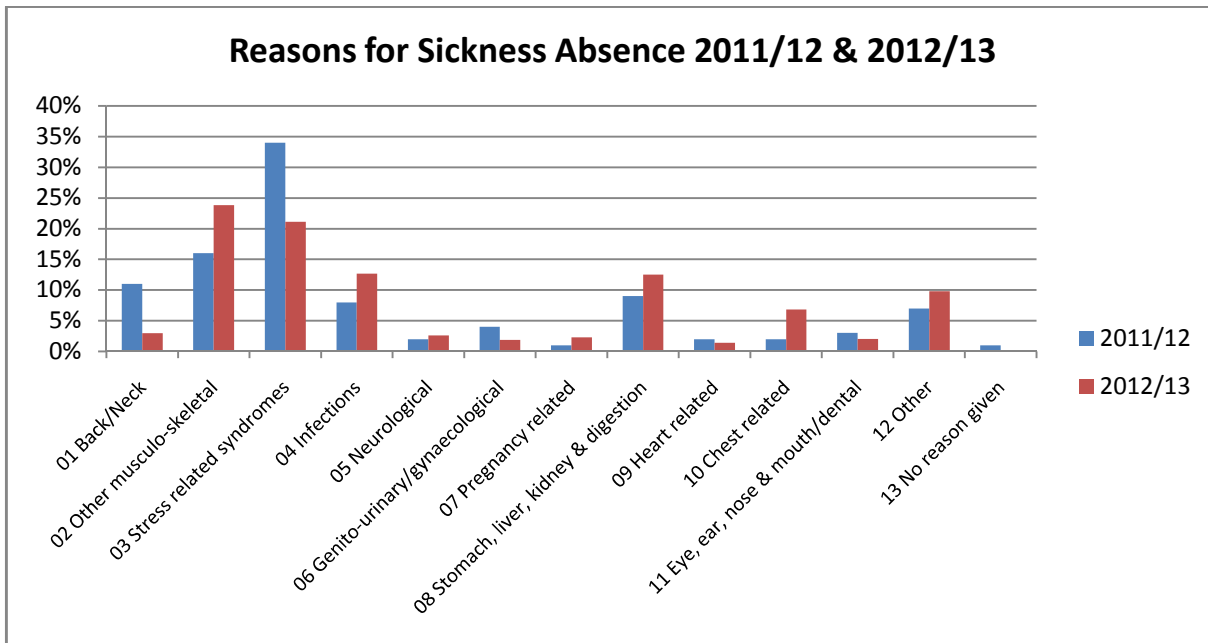
This can be attributed to four out of six directorates experiencing a reduction in absenteeism and nearly 550 less FTE days being lost to short-term absences and 870 less days being lost to long-term absences. Over the year the number of FTE employees has reduced by approximately 30 (5.5%).

Note that in previous reports a figure has been provided that excludes the shared Revenues and Benefits service. This extra figure was provided because the sickness absence levels were significantly higher in the group of employees that were TUPE'd from Copeland and Allerdale councils and skewed the Carlisle figures. HR has worked closely with managers in this service area and the shared service is now consistently on par with the rest of the authority so a separate figure is no longer required. Monitoring will still continue going forward however.

The seasonal pattern follows previous years as would be expected with peaks being seen in winter months. There is no obvious relationship between level or type of sickness absence and age, gender or contract types.

## Reasons for absences

The causes of sickness absences are categorised into twelve headings as shown in the bar chart below. The causes are self-determined by the absentee. A comparison is made with 2011/12. The bar chart shows what proportion of the total sickness absence is represented by each of the reasons for absence.



In 2011/12 the biggest cause of sickness absence was stress related symptoms with 2118 FTE days lost. A priority throughout 2012/13 was to address this growing issue through encouraging referrals to Occupational Health and the introduction of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in July 2012. As part of this roll out Carlisle & Eden Mind attended July 2012's Management Briefing to talk to managers about what they can do to support staff affected by stress, anxiety and depression.

Nearly one in four employees absent through stress-related reasons in 2012/13 was referred to Occupational Health. For those off long-term this figure increases to one in three.

In 2012/13 the number of FTE days lost to these symptoms reduced by nearly 50%.

The biggest cause of absence in 2012/13 was musculo-skeletal related problems. 1209 FTE days were lost which represents an increase of nearly a quarter on the previous year. Further analysis is required into the causes of these problems but only one in seven of the employees absent with these symptoms were seen by Occupational Health. It is worth noting however that 19 other employees were referred to a physiotherapist without going off sick.

6% of employees have used the 'Active Care' element of the EAP in the first nine months since it was first introduced. Active Care provides employees with access to:

- Stress helpline
- Structured telephone counselling
- Referral to face to face counselling
- Referral to serious illness and accident support

EAP is provided by an independent external organisation who work to a robust professional code of strict confidentiality so it is not known which employees have used these services.

A breakdown of the reasons for sickness absence in each directorate is available to directors on the 'S drive'. Because of the small numbers of employees in certain directorates individuals may be identifiable so a directorate analysis of reasons for absence is not provided in this report. The biggest improvements though, have been made in the following service areas: Revenues and Benefits, Neighbourhoods and Green Spaces and Highways.

### **Benchmarking**

2012/13 sickness absence benchmarking data for the other north west local authorities is currently being compiled by the North West Employers and will be available later in the year.

### **Return to Work Interviews**

Nearly 96% of Return to Work (RTW) Interviews have been conducted for absences occurring in 2012/13. This represents a significant improvement on previous years. The table below gives directorate figures.

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>% of RTW conducted</b>
Chief Executive's Team	100
Community Engagement	93.9
Economic Development	95.9
Governance	100
Local Environment	94.6
Resources	99.2
All Directorates	95.5

The main reasons why the remaining RTW Interviews have not been completed is either because the employee has left the organisation before returning to work or the employee has gone off sick again before the interview was completed.

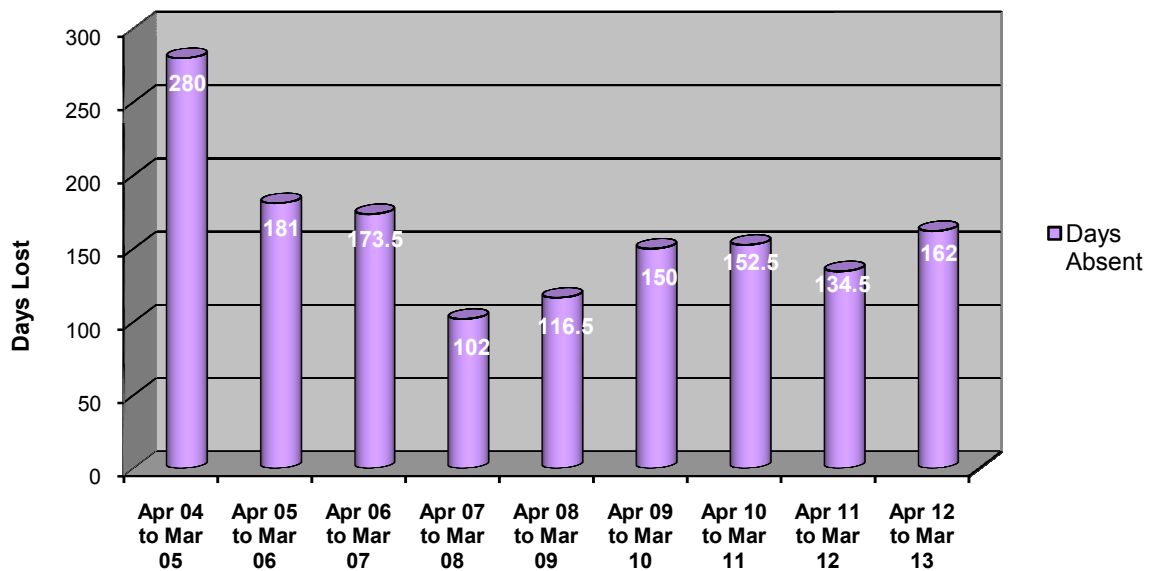
## Flu jabs

From the funds obtained as a result of the holiday purchase scheme, the authority paid for 96 members of staff to receive a flu jab in 2012/13. There is insufficient evidence about what effect these jabs have had on the level of sickness absence this year. Staff are to be offered the jab in 2013/14 so further sickness data following these jabs should allow more concrete evidence to be gained before accurate conclusions are made.

## Absences as a result of accidents at work

The graph below shows the trend in the number of days lost to sickness absences that have resulted from accidents occurring whilst the employee was at work.

**Carlisle City Council Year on Year Absences resulting from declared accidents at work**



There is an overall downward trend in these types of sickness absences but, due to the workforce size and total days lost to sickness absence decreasing, the proportional of the days lost caused by work-related accidents is actually increasing.

Note that in 2012/13 over two-thirds of the days lost could be attributed to two employees who were absent long-term.

## Improvement Actions

A small team of officers with the required knowledge and skills commenced a Lean Systems Review of sickness absence in January 2012.

Initial research and discussion identified the need for:

- timely, accurate and accessible sickness figures; and
- ensuring staff feel valued through regular contact and consistent application of policy and procedures.

This has resulted in managers inputting sickness absence directly into Trent to improve timeliness of sickness statistics being available and reduce administrative duplication.

Trent training for managers was completed in October 2012. Managers have also been reminded of the importance of regular contact with staff during sickness absence.

There has been an improvement in sickness absence information available to managers.

There are now:

- Monthly reports for managers to show sickness levels by service area. Managers have been encouraged to use this report at team meetings and Directorate Management Team meetings and to have sickness absence as a fixed agenda item at these meetings.
- Information relating to the proportion of Return to Work Interviews carried out in each directorate.
- Individual's sickness absence history over the last three years available to line managers.
- Trigger reports to show manager's performance against adhering to the Attendance Management Policy.

A revamped Attendance Management Policy and Procedures document has been developed and implemented. Changes include:

- Line manager to contact employee on first, fourth and eighth days of absence and weekly contact thereafter.
- Policy easier for managers to use with the development of checklists, new forms and more example letters.
- Referrals encouraged to the Employee Assistance Programme, especially with employees absent due to the reason of 'Stress, depression, anxiety, neurasthenia, mental health & fatigue syndromes' as all advice and statistics show that early intervention is essential.
- Reduction in the process of managing short term sickness absences by immediate referral to Absence Support Meeting when triggers are met.
- All Carlisle City Council staff, including those within Carlisle hosted shared services, now included under one policy.

Monthly drop in sessions to provide managers with assistance in the use of Trent is ongoing and successfully used. All new managers are automatically booked onto these.

#### **Actions still to be completed:**

- Payroll implications in relation to sickness absence to be calculated and run straight from Trent (currently use a ledger) - available from April 2014.
- Paternity logged on Trent - available from April 2014.

- Occupational Health (OH) report linked to person on Trent electronically. All electronic filing of personal documents is currently being implemented and will be complete by the autumn.
- Additional reporting on physiotherapy, OH and counselling. Work is on going for System Manager to be able to store information against those who haven't been off sick, but have been referred. This will be available later this year.
- E-learning packages will be available for staff and managers shortly.

## **2. PROPOSALS**

The Lean review recommendations are implemented and the authority continues to monitor sickness absence levels.

## **3. CONSULTATION**

The report was reviewed by the Senior Management Team on 14 June 2013.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel are asked to comment on the end of year sickness information with a view to driving continuous improvement.

## **5. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES**

Monitoring sickness absence to help ensure the staff resources available to deliver the Carlisle Plan are maximised.

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**Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:**

- None

## Appendix A: Provisional 2012/13 Sickness Absence Figures

### 1. All Directorates

PI Code	PI Name	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
CC912	Working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE	9.3	11.1	9.1
CC912_num	Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	5910	6200	4782
	Number of working days lost due to sickness absence			5371
CC923	Proportion of sickness absence that is long term (over 28 days)	47%	58%	57%

### 2. Community Engagement

PI Code	PI Name	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
CE912	Working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (average)	9.2	14	8.8
CE912_num	Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	2132	2700	1626
	Number of working days lost due to sickness absence			1784
CE923	Proportion of sickness absence that is long term (over 28 days)		67%	51%

### 3. Economic Development

PI Code	PI Name	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
ED912	Working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (average)	5.7	4.7	4.3
ED912_num	Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	320	206	191
	Number of working days lost due to sickness absence			206
ED923	Proportion of sickness absence that is long term (over 28 days)		30%	42%



<b>4. Governance</b>				
<b>PI Code</b>	<b>PI Name</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
GV912	Working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (average)	5.8	5.1	5.4
GV 912_num	Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	143	108	121
	Number of working days lost due to sickness absence			136
GV923	Proportion of sickness absence that is long term (over 28 days)		51%	57%

<b>5. Local Environment</b>				
<b>PI Code</b>	<b>PI Name</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
LE912	Working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (average)	10.2	11.8	9.7
LE912_num	Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	2262	2436	1859
	Number of working days lost due to sickness absence			2042
LE923	Proportion of sickness absence that is long term (over 28 days)		58%	59%

<b>6. Resources</b>				
<b>PI Code</b>	<b>PI Name</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
RS912	Working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (average)	10.2	8.4	13
RS912_num	Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	840	636	925
	Number of working days lost due to sickness absence			1143
RS923	Proportion of sickness absence that is long term (over 28 days)		43%	67%

<b>7. Chief Executive's Team</b>				
<b>PI Code</b>	<b>PI Name</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
CT912	Working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (average)	10.7	6.7	3.3
CT912_num	Number of FTE days lost due to sickness absence	214	114	60
	Number of working days lost due to sickness absence			61
CT923	Proportion of sickness absence that is long term (over 28 days)		61%	0%