

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development

Joint Consultative Forum – 22 September 2011

Subject: Sickness Absence Reporting – Quarter 1 (2011/12)

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise the Joint Consultative Forum on the levels of employee sickness absence for the first Quarter of 2011/12 (April, May and June 2011).

2. Background

Internal Sickness Absence Reporting

- 2.1** Sickness absence figures are reported on a quarterly basis to the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF). Quarterly Sickness Absence Reports identify how the Council is performing in relation to previous quarters and years and identifies if annual targets are likely to be achieved.

Statutory Performance Indicators

- 2.2** West Dunbartonshire Council is required to annually report organisational sickness absence to Audit Scotland. Human Resources collate absence for statutory reporting into 2 categories i.e. Local Government Employees and Teachers in line with Audit Scotland requirements.

Reporting changes

- 2.3** This report contains statistics obtained from the Workforce Management System. The absence data shown for HEED was extracted from the WMS for Quarter 1. Absence data for all other departments have been gathered using the existing manual collation processes.

As part of the continued development of the Workforce Management System, from Quarter 2 all absence statistics will be obtained from the Workforce Management System. It is hoped that in time this will provide more accurate and consistent data and will streamline the data collection process.

It should be noted, however, that use of a different source of data may result in some minor variations for comparison, which will be monitored and reviewed.

Council Sickness Absence (2010/11) and National Statistics

2.4 The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for 2010/11 were:

	FTE Days Lost per FTE Employee 2010/11
Local Government Employees	11.26
Teachers	7.66
Council-wide	10.65

2.5 The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reports that the national average of days lost per employee for all public sector employers is 9.6 days (2010). West Dunbartonshire Council's sickness absence figures are higher than the UK national public sector average.

2.6 In 2009/10 Audit Scotland published figures that showed that West Dunbartonshire Council ranked 29 out of 32 councils for Local Government Employees sickness absence and 18 out of 32 for Teachers.

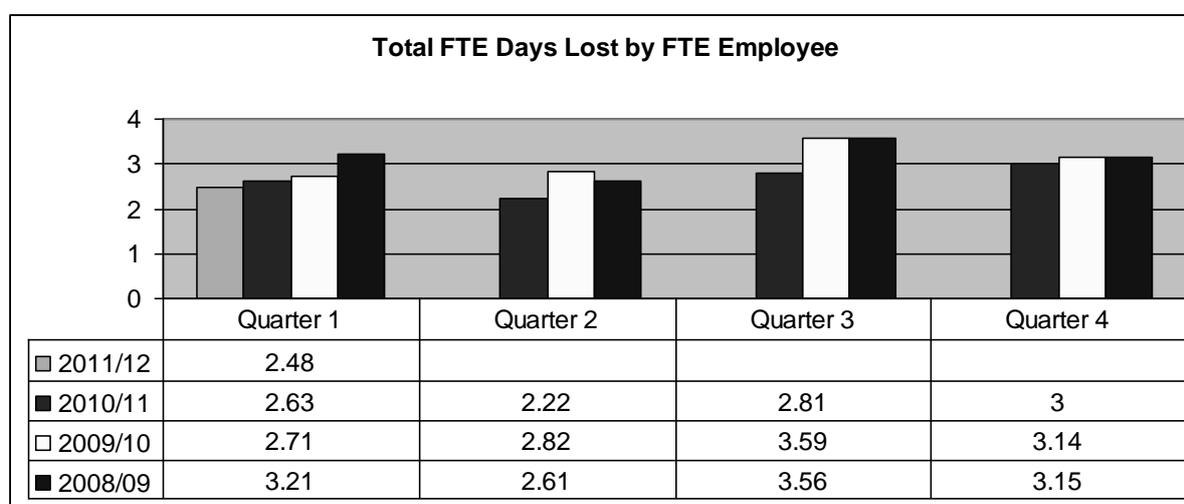
2.7 In May 2011 the Corporate Management Team agreed the following targets for 2011/12.

Local Government Employees	10.5 FTE
Teachers	7.0 FTE

3. Sickness Absence Statistics

Trend Analysis

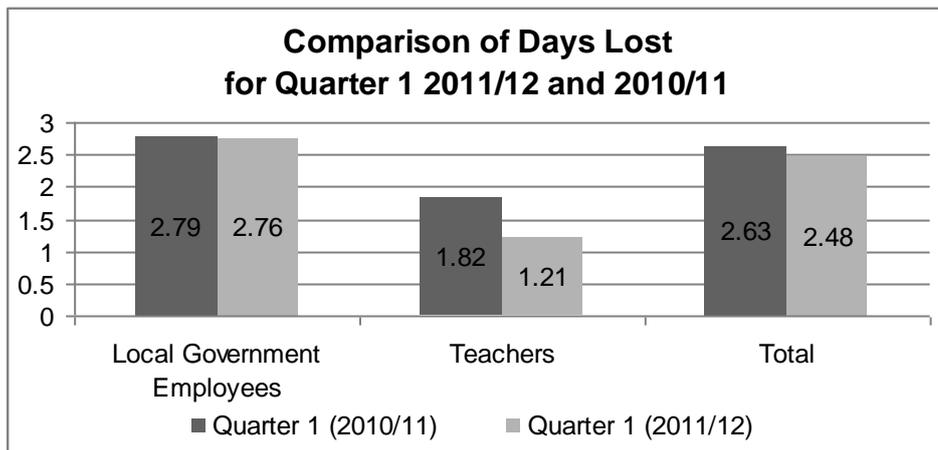
3.1 The chart below details the quarterly total FTE days lost per FTE employee for West Dunbartonshire Council for the year 2011/12 and compares it to the previous 3 years (2010/11, 2009/10 and 2008/09).



- 3.2 The reported 2.48 FTE days lost per FTE employee for Quarter 1 for the year 2011/12 has decreased from the previous three years.

Days Lost

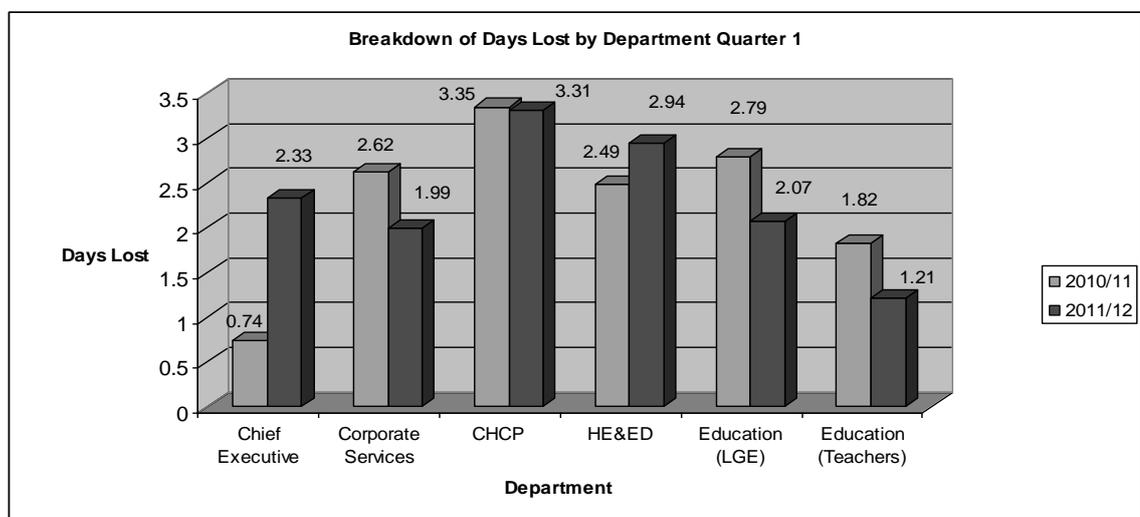
- 3.4 The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for Quarter 1 (2011/2012), compared to the same quarter the previous year, is detailed below, and broken down into the statutory reporting categories:



- 3.5 The Local Government Employees figure of 2.76 FTE days lost per FTE employee is a decrease of 0.03 FTE days lost on the figure reported for the same quarter the previous year. Teachers have shown a marked decrease of 0.61 FTE days lost on the previous year. This is a positive start to the annual figures for Teachers. Overall, the Council has shown a small decrease in the number FTE days compared with the same quarter last year.

Days Lost - Departmental Breakdown & Comparison

- 3.6 A departmental breakdown and comparison for Quarter 1 is detailed below.



3.7 The variances in FTE days lost in each department for Quarter 1 are:

Chief Executive	+ 1.59	HE & ED	+ 0.45
Corporate Services	- 0.63	Education (LGE)	- 0.72
CHCP	- 0.04	Education (Teachers)	- 0.61

3.8 The significant increase in FTE days lost in the Chief Executive's Department may have been influenced by substantial re-structuring. The overall FTE employees in the department have increased from 35 in 2010/11 to 142 in 2011/12.

3.9 As previously discussed, the Workforce Management System has been used this quarter to generate the absence data for the HEED department. The increase in the FTE days lost in HEED compared with 2010/11 may be due to this change. Human Resources will continue to monitor and review Workforce Management System generated absence data to improve data collation and validity.

Absence Durations

3.10 Sickness absence is categorised into duration categories. Detailed below is the percentage of days lost per duration category in Quarter 1 (2011/12).

Absence Duration Category	Percentage of Days Lost Quarter 1	National Public Sector Percentage of Days Lost (CIPD 2010)
Intermittent & Short Term sickness absence (absences between 1 to 5 days)	19%	66%
Medium term sickness absence (absences between 6 days and 4 weeks)	28%	16%
Long term sickness absence (absences over 4 weeks in duration)	53%	20%

3.11 The above table shows that the Council is not following national trends in terms of absence durations and this is consistent throughout the departments.

3.12 HR provides a monthly report for discussion with Directorates, which identify those employees who have been absent for 6 months or longer due to sickness absence, including details on Occupational Health intervention. As at the end of June 2011, there are 17 employees who fall into this category and a departmental breakdown is detailed below:

Department	Number of people absent longer than 6 months due to sickness
Chief Executive	1
Corporate Services	0
CHCP	8
HE & ED	5
Educational Services	3

Absence Reasons

3.13 The top 3 reasons for absence for Quarter 1 2011/2012 are detailed below.

	Reason	Number of FTE days Lost	% of all FTE days Lost
1	Minor Illness	3782	25.6%
2	Acute Medical Conditions	2725	18.5%
3	Musculo-Skeletal Condition	2699	18.2%

3.13.1 Minor Illness - covers ailments such as coughs and sore throats, cold and flu, headaches and migraines. The ailments are normally self-limiting and little can be put in place to prevent employees from contracting these. Following national indicators it should be expected that minor illness is one of the top reasons for sick absences within any organisation.

3.13.2 Acute Medical Conditions - includes heart attacks and strokes. Early referral to Occupational Health is being actively progressed by HR with each Department for detailed information on the likely duration and measures to assist employees to return to work.

3.13.3 Musculo Skeletal - employees who suffer from musculo-skeletal conditions benefit from early referral to Physiotherapy Services provided by Occupational Health. Managers are encouraged to pro-actively to prevent employees from being absent due their condition if they are referred at the onset of their symptoms.

3.14 Stress was the 4th top reason for sickness absence within Quarter 1 with 1644 FTE days lost, or 11.1 % of all absence. Absence reasons are reported by the employee via either a Self Certificate or a Statement of Fitness for Work issued by their GP. It is not possible to identify from these documents whether the absence is due to work related stress or personal stress. New procedures are being developed to support the new Stress Policy which is due for implementation later this year. These procedures will help to identify the cause of stress and will provide measures and guidance on how to support employees.

4. People Issues

- 4.1** The effective management of absence is critical as those still at work often find themselves absorbing workloads for their absent colleagues and this has a detrimental impact on morale and service delivery. There are considerable HR issues in managing a changing approach to attendance management. There must be a commitment by trades unions and managers in the development and implementation of rigorous new policies, procedures and processes to ensure that absence management is dealt with much more robustly. It is hoped for the future that we develop our new approaches on a partnership basis.
- 4.2** The new Attendance Management policy was approved by Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee and was implemented on 1st September 2011. Human Resources & Organisational Development are fully supporting the implementation of this policy through the delivery of training sessions to Managers and briefing sessions for employees from September 2011 to December 2011. Thereafter, application of the policy will be supported on an ongoing basis by the Policy and Employee Relations Team within Human Resources & Organisational Development.
- 4.3** Following review of the absence reporting and recording pilot, "*HR Connect*", within Corporate Services and Chief Executive's Department the procedures for reporting and recording absence will continue. It is anticipated that the HR Connect reporting procedures will be rolled out across the Council in line with the ongoing implementation of the new Workforce Management System.
- 4.4** An Absence Member/Officer Working group has been established following a Council decision in February 2011 to consider the reasons for sickness absence levels within West Dunbartonshire Council and to recommend measures to reduce sickness absence.
- 4.5** In light of the significant problem of long term sickness one of the key priorities for 2011/12 is to continue to identify long term critical cases i.e. those over 6 months, requiring immediate intervention in the first instance and to manage these cases in partnership with line management and HR Business Partners.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** Absence has a significant impact upon the cost of service delivery, particularly where overtime and/or replacement costs are incurred to deliver essential services.
- 5.2** Long term sickness absence is a significant factor for absence with 53% of days lost falling into this category in Quarter 1 (2011/12).
- 5.3** In order to reduce the cost implications of those on sickness absence, the Council will need to consider what steps can be taken to actively manage the

employee's sickness absence from an early stage. The Attendance Management Policy promotes holding regular meetings with absent employees and seeking Occupational Health reports for early prognosis on anticipated return to work. Where it is established that an employee will not or is unlikely to be able to return to work, steps should be taken to end employment rather than letting the sickness absence continue indefinitely.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** If there is no significant improvement in the absence rates there is a high risk that the Council will continue to be one of the poorest performing Councils in relation to absence.

7. Equalities, Health & Humans Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** An Equalities Impact Assessment Screening has been undertaken on the management of sickness absence within West Dunbartonshire Council. It noted that a high level of employees on long term sickness absence will be covered by the Equality Act 2010 and therefore any measures to manage long term sickness absence are likely to have a differential impact on those covered by the Act.
- 7.2** Policies and procedures that impact on sickness absence (Attendance Management Policy, Stress Policy, etc.) will undergo Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessments in their own right to ensure that no groups are disproportionately affected.

8. Strategic Assessment

- 8.1** The effective management of sickness absence supports the following strategic priorities for 2011/12:

Economic and Social Regeneration

Effective absence management reporting contributes to the Council objective of improving health and wellbeing by providing information to support key decision making to support business and employee needs.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** There is considerable work to be undertaken to reduce sickness absence within West Dunbartonshire Council. Effective and consistent management of absence should positively impact upon cost, performance, and service delivery.
- 9.2** The Joint Consultative Forum is asked to note the contents of this report and to request further information if required.

- 9.3** The Joint Consultative Forum is asked to note the targets agreed for West Dunbartonshire Council for 2011/12. Local Government Employees – 10.5 FTE days lost, Teachers – 7.0 FTE days lost.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None