

# WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## Report by Executive Director of Corporate Services

Joint Consultative Forum – 23 September 2010

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**Subject: Sickness Absence Reporting – Quarter 1 (2010/2011)**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** To advise the Joint Consultative Forum on the levels of employee sickness absence for the first Quarter 2010/2011 (April, May and June 2010).

### **2. Background**

#### Internal Sickness Absence Reporting

- 2.1** Sickness absence figures are reported on a quarterly basis to the Audit and Performance Committee. 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. Each Department currently prepares its own statistics and Corporate HR collates the information for statutory reporting into 2 categories i.e. Local Government Employees and Teachers.

#### Council Sickness Absence (2009 – 2010) and National Statistics

- 2.3** The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for 2009/2010 were:

<b>FTE Days Lost per FTE Employee 2009/2010</b>	
Local Government Employees	13.26
Teachers	7.41
Council-wide	12.28

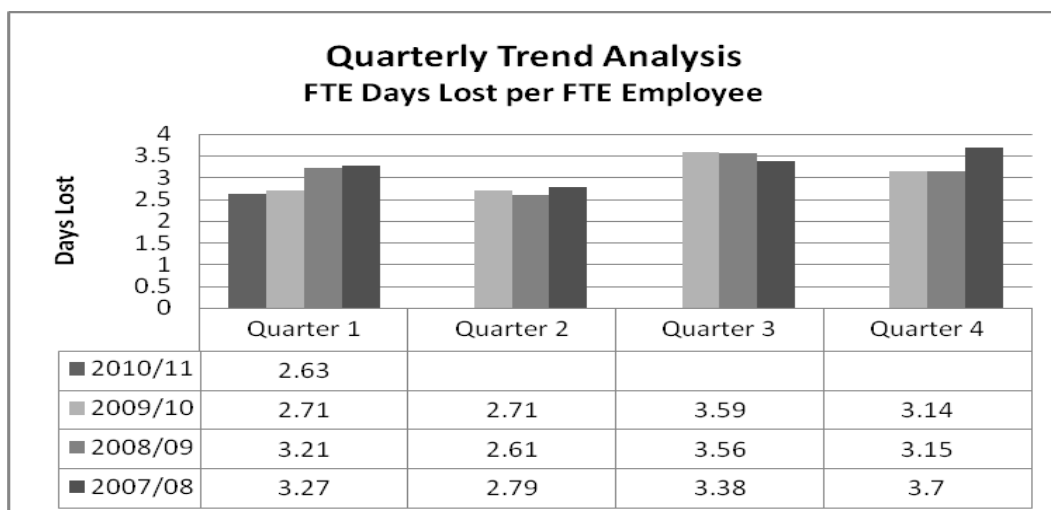
- 2.4** The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development reports that the national average of days lost per employee for all public sector employers is 9.7 days (2009). The CIPD has also reported that Scotland generally reports higher levels of sickness absence than the rest of the UK with an average of 10.1 days per employee.
- 2.5** West Dunbartonshire Council's sickness absence figures are higher than the national average. In 2008/2009 Audit Scotland published figures that showed that West Dunbartonshire Council ranked 23 out of 32 councils for Local Government Employees sickness absence and 14 out of 32 for Teachers.
- 2.6** New targets for sickness absence figures will be set when Audit Scotland publish the figures for 2009/2010 later this year, however West

Dunbartonshire Council is working towards a target reduction of 0.5 FTE days lost per FTE employee year on year.

### 3. Sickiness Absence Statistics

#### Trend Analysis

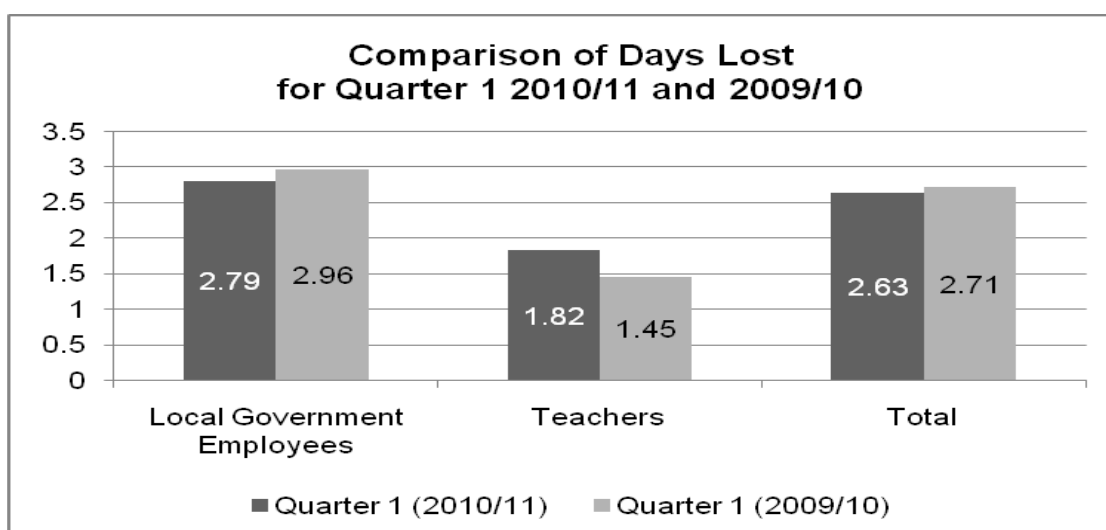
- 3.1 The graph below details the quarterly total FTE days lost per FTE employee for West Dunbartonshire Council for the year 2009/10 and compares it to the previous 3 years (2009/10, 2008/09 and 2007/08).



- 3.2 Quarter 1 result (2.63 FTE days lost per FTE employee) for this year (2010/2011) is the lowest reported figure for the four years shown.
- 3.3 Analysing the sickness absence data shows that no specific reason can be attributed to this reduction, and it was identified that there are reductions across the board in relation to the absence durations and absence reasons.

#### Days Lost

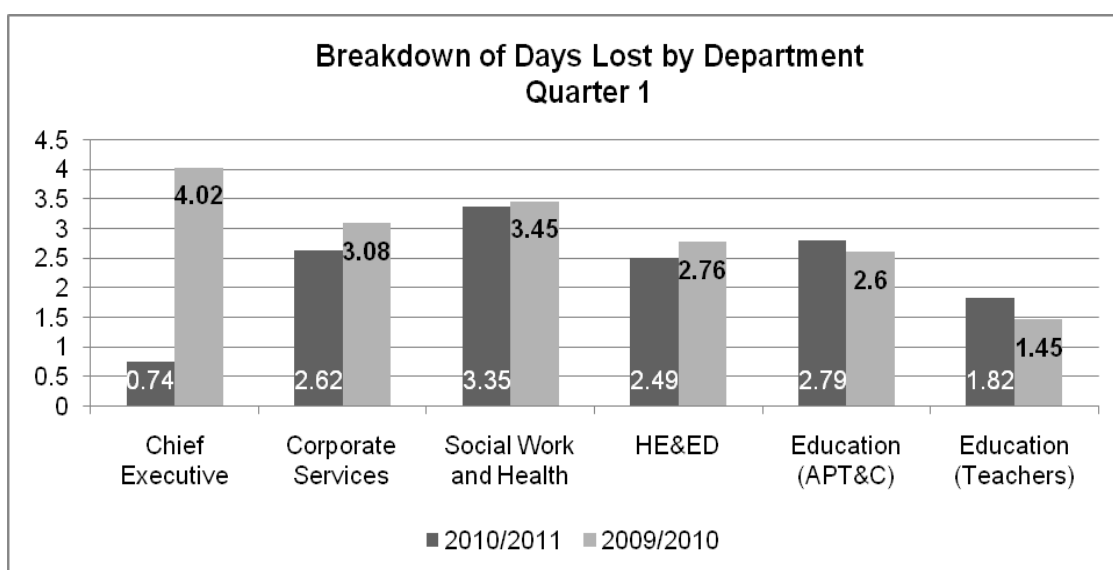
- 3.4 The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for Quarter 1 (2010/2011), compared to the same quarter the previous year, is detailed below, broken down into the statutory reporting categories:



- 3.5** The Council wide figure of 2.63 FTE days lost per FTE employee is a slight decrease on the figure reported for the same quarter the previous year (decrease of 0.08).
- 3.6** Teachers have shown a marked increase in the FTE days lost (increase of 0.37). This is the third quarter that there has been an increase in the reported FTE days lost per FTE employee for teachers when compared to the previous year. The increases can be related to absences for acute and recurring medical conditions. Improved reporting will allow greater analysis of reasons for this trend and will be reported in future reports.

#### Days Lost - Departmental Breakdown & Comparison

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



- 3.8** The variances in FTE days lost in each department for Quarter 1 are:

Chief Executive	-3.28	Education (APT&C)	+0.19
Corporate Services	-0.46	Education (Teachers)	+0.37
Social Work & Health	-0.1		
HE & ED	-0.27		

#### Absence Durations

- 3.9** Sickness absence is categorised into duration categories. Detailed below is the percentage of days lost per duration category in Quarter 1 (2010/2011).

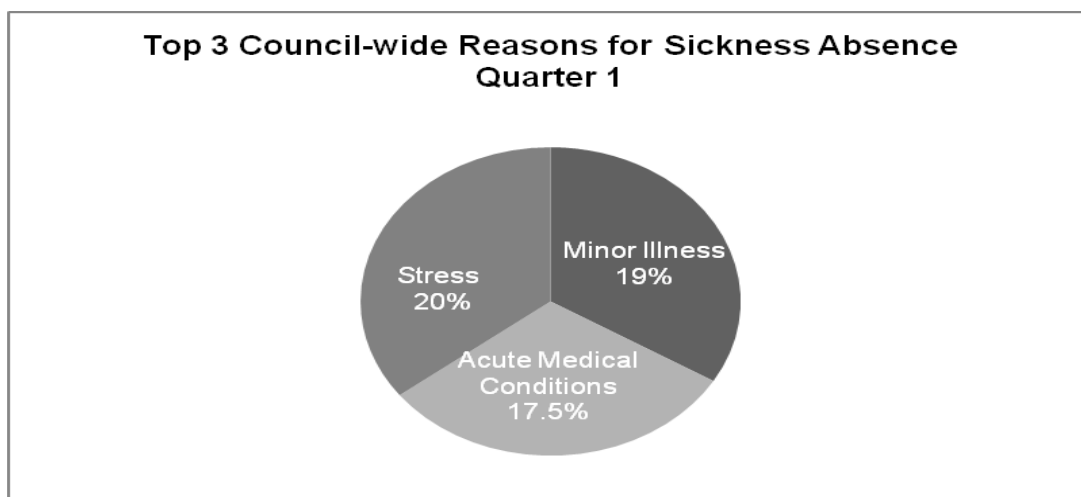
Absence Duration Category	Percentage of Days Lost Quarter 1	National Public Sector Percentage of Days Lost
Intermittent & Short Term sickness absence (absences between 1 to 5 days)	18.58%	57%
Medium term sickness absence (absences between 6 days and 4 weeks)	27.09%	18%
Long term sickness absence (absences over 4 weeks in duration)	54.32%	27%

- 3.10** The above table shows that the Council is not following national trends in terms of absence durations. The National Public Sector figures for Percentage of Days Lost were taken from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Developments Annual Survey Report 2009. The Council-wide figures are consistent with the breakdown of absence durations within Departments.
- 3.11** Long term sickness is a significant factor for absence within **all** Departments and an Absence Management Action Plan is being developed by Human Resources to address this issue.
- 3.12** Work has been undertaken to identify those employees who have been absent for 6 months or longer due to sickness absence. In total there are 34 employees who fall into this category and a departmental breakdown is detailed below:

<b>Department</b>	<b>Number of people absent longer than 6 months due to sickness</b>
Chief Executive	0
Corporate Services	2
Social Work and Health	12
HE & ED	14
Educational Services	6

#### Absence Reasons

- 3.13** The top 3 reasons for absence for Quarter 1 2010/2011 are detailed below.



- 3.14** The top 3 reasons for sickness absence within the Council are Stress (20% of days lost), Minor Illness (19%) and Acute Medical Conditions (17.5%); the Council has not followed national trends since July 2009. Musculoskeletal Conditions (16.6%) are nationally in the top 3 reasons but within the Council this has been superseded by Acute Medical Conditions. Musculoskeletal Conditions are currently the fourth top reason for sickness absence.

3.14.1 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.

3.14.2 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.

3.14.3 Stress - employees absent due to stress can also benefit from early referral to Occupational Health. The current Stress in the Workplace Policy, being reviewed by the Stress Steering Group, details the framework for supporting an employee suffering from both personal and work-related stress. A training programme is being proposed for managers and employees on stress and mental health; how to identify and manage it. Promotion of stress reduction and the supports already in place will continue in conjunction with the Healthy Working Lives Group.

#### **4. People Implications**

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 A new Maximising Attendance Policy is being developed and is due for implementation in the next few months.

4.3 Following review of the absence reporting and recording pilot, "*HR Connect*", within Corporate Services and Chief Executive's Department the new procedures for reporting and recording absence will continue. It is anticipated that the new procedures will be rolled out across the Council in line with the ongoing implementation of the new Workforce Management System.

4.4 In light of the significant problem of long term sickness one of the key priorities for 2010 – 2011 is 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 through the development and delivery of an Absence Management Action Plan. At the end of the quarter (30 June 2010) there were 34 employees who were absent for at least 6 months.

#### **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 just over 53% of days lost falling into this category in Quarter 1 (2010/2011).
- 5.3** A recent House of Lords judgement, *Stringer v HRMC*, states that employees continue to accrue their statutory leave entitlement of 28 days leave (which derives from the European Working Time Directive), throughout sickness absence, even if this period of sickness absence is over 2 leave periods. Employees will accrue the leave for the entire duration of their sickness absence and must be allowed to take it on their return to work, whenever that is, or to be paid in lieu of it if their employment terminates. The judgement does not apply to any additional contractual annual leave over the 28 days statutory entitlement, and as such additional contractual leave can be treated differently.

## **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. For Teaching staff West Dunbartonshire Council rates as 14<sup>th</sup> out of 32 councils and for Local Government Employees the Council rates as 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 32 Councils (Audit Scotland).

## **7. Equalities Impact**

- 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 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and therefore any measures to manage long term sickness absence will have a differential impact on those covered by the DDA.
- 7.2** Policies and procedures that impact on sickness absence (Maximising Attendance Policy, Stress in the Workplace Policy, etc.) will undergo Equalities Impact Assessments in their own right to ensure that no groups are disproportionately affected.

## **8. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 8.1** There is considerable work to be undertaken in the consistent collection of data to enable the effective management of absence in West Dunbartonshire Council resulting in reduced impact upon cost, performance, and service delivery.
- 8.2** The Joint Consultative Forum is asked to note the contents of this report and to request further information if required.
- 8.3** The Joint Consultative Forum is asked to note that new targets will be set for sickness absence when Audit Scotland publishes all Scottish local authority sickness absence figures for 2009/2010, however West Dunbartonshire Council continues to work towards a target reduction of 0.5 FTE days lost per FTE employee year on year.

**Joyce White**  
**Director of Corporate Services**

**Person to Contact:** Tricia O'Neill, Head of Human Resources &  
Organisational Development  
Tel 01389 737584  
Email: [tricia.o'neill@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:tricia.o'neill@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

**Appendices:** None

**Background Papers:** None