

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development

Joint Consultative Forum – 16 December 2011

Subject: Sickness Absence Reporting – Quarter 2 (2011/12)

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) on the levels of employee sickness absence for the second Quarter of 2011/12 (July, August and September 2011).

2. Background

Internal Sickness Absence Reporting

- 2.1** Sickness absence figures are reported on a quarterly basis to the 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: Local Government Employees and Teachers, in line with Audit Scotland requirements.

Data Source changes

- 2.3** This report contains statistics obtained from the Workforce Management System rather than the previous method of obtaining manual reports from departments. 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

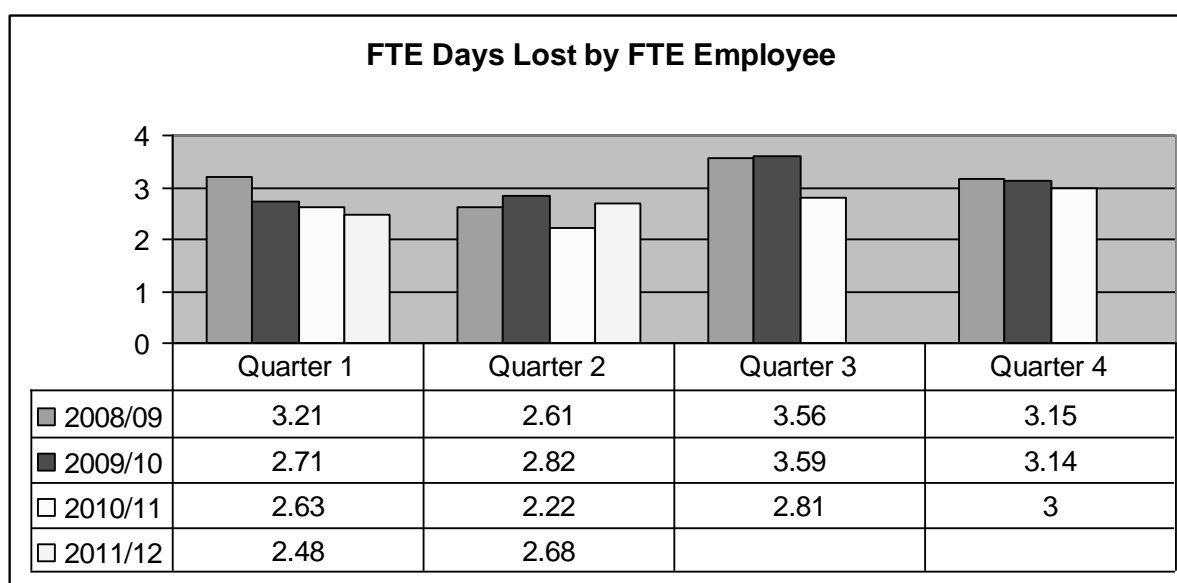
- 2.5** The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reports that the national average of FTE days lost per FTE employee for all public sector employers is 9.1 days (2011). This is an improvement on the figure CIPD reported for the previous year of 9.6 days (2010). West Dunbartonshire Council's council-wide sickness absence figure is therefore significantly higher than the UK national public sector average.
- 2.6** In 2010/11 Audit Scotland figures (still to be ratified) showed that West Dunbartonshire Council ranked 25th out of 32 councils for Local Government Employees sickness absence and 24th out of 32 for Teachers. Last year's rankings were 29th out of 32 Councils for Local Government Employees and 18th out of 32 Councils for Teachers. Although the trend for Local Government Employees is positive, the Teachers ranking for this year represents a significant decrease in relative performance.
- 2.7** In May 2011 the Corporate Management Team set the following targets for 2011/12.

	Average Days Lost
Local Government Employees	10.5 FTE
Teachers	7.0 FTE

3. Sickness Absence Statistics

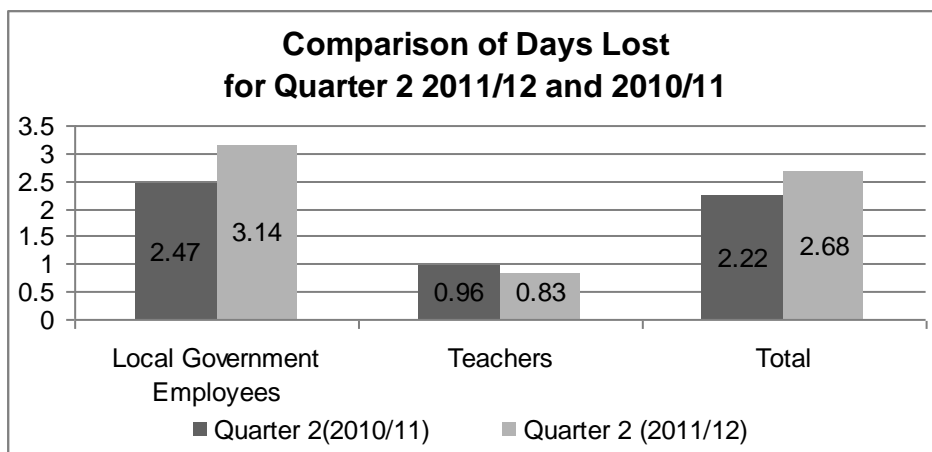
Trend Analysis

- 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).



Days Lost

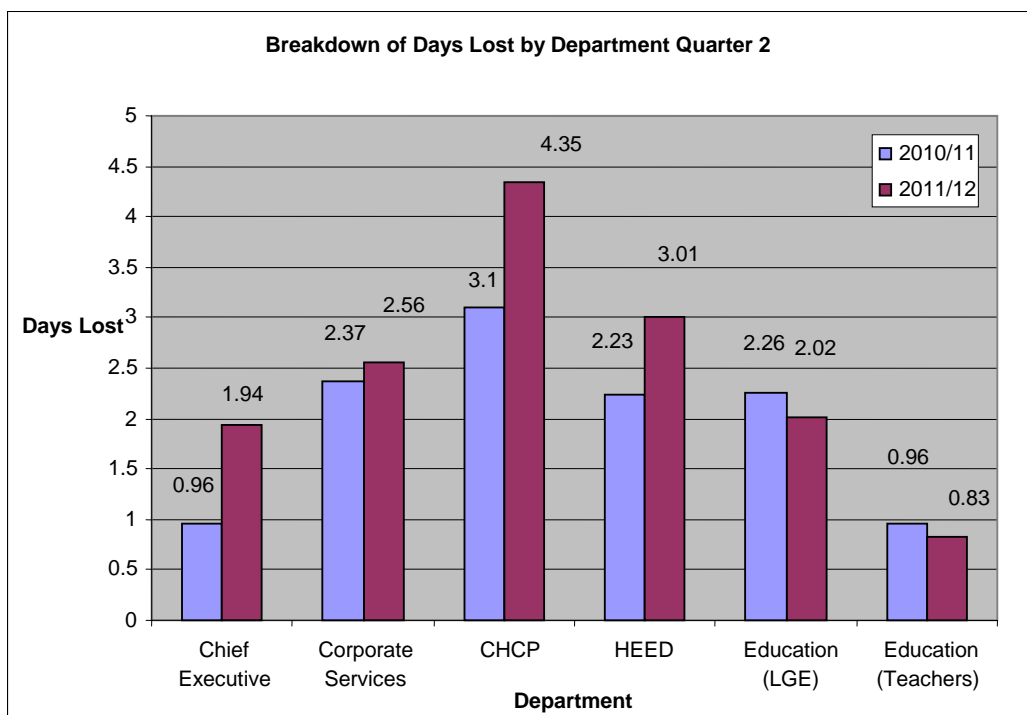
- 3.2** The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for Quarter 2 (2011/2012), compared to the same quarter the previous year, is detailed below, and broken down into the statutory reporting categories:



- 3.3** The Local Government Employee figure of 3.14 FTE days lost per FTE employee is an increase of 0.67 FTE days lost on the figure reported for the same quarter the previous year. Teachers have shown a slight decrease of 0.13 FTE days lost on the previous year. Overall, the Council has shown an increase (0.46) in the number FTE days compared with the same quarter last year.

Days Lost - Departmental Breakdown & Comparison

- 3.4** A departmental breakdown and comparison for Quarter 2 is detailed below.



3.5 The variances in FTE days lost in each department for Quarter 2 are:

Chief Executive	0.98	HEED	0.78
Corporate Services	0.19	Education (LGE)	-0.24
CHCP	1.25	Education (Teachers)	-0.13

All departments with the exception of Educational Services have seen an increase in sickness absence compared with Q2 last year.

3.6 As previously indicated the Workforce Management System has been used this quarter to generate the absence data for the whole Council. The increase in the FTE days lost compared with 2010/11 may be due in part 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

- 3.7** Sickness absence is categorised into duration categories. Detailed below is the percentage of days lost per duration category in Quarter 2 (2011/12).

Absence Duration Category	Percentage of Days Lost Quarter 2	National Public Sector Percentage of Days Lost (CIPD 2011)
Intermittent & Short Term sickness absence (<i>absences between 1 to 5 days</i>)	18%	66%
Medium term sickness absence (<i>absences between 6 days and 4 weeks</i>)	28%	16%
Long term sickness absence (<i>absences over 4 weeks in duration</i>)	54%	20%

- 3.8** The above table shows that the Council is not following national trends in terms of absence durations and further highlights that West Dunbartonshire Council continues to have a significant problem with long term sickness absence.
- 3.9** 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. At the end of September 2011, there were 18 employees who fell into this category and a departmental breakdown is detailed below:

Department	Number of people absent longer than 6 months due to sickness
Chief Executive	0
Corporate Services	1
CHCP	9
HEED	5
Educational Services	3

Absence Reasons

- 3.10** The top 3 reasons for absence for Quarter 2 2011/2012 are detailed below.

	Reason	Number of FTE days Lost	% of all FTE days Lost
1	Minor Illness	4777	30.2%
2	Acute Medical Conditions	2835	17.9%
3	Musculo-Skeletal Condition	2419.5	15.3%

3.10.1 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.

3.10.2 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. A significant proportion of the Council's long term absence is attributable to Acute Medical Conditions.

3.10.3 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.

3.11 Stress was the 4th top reason for sickness absence in Quarter 2 with 14.4 % 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 will be implemented following a comprehensive consultation process and committee approval. These procedures will help managers 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 which has a detrimental impact on morale and service delivery.

4.2 The new Attendance Management policy was approved by Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee and was implemented on 1st September 2011. HR & OD 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 HR&OD.

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** In February 2011, the Council established a short life Absence Member / Officer Working Group which was tasked with considering the causes of absence within West Dunbartonshire Council, and to develop practical solutions to address the problem. The Working Group met on 4 occasions and has produced an Absence Work Plan which will be presented to a future Council meeting for decision on implementation. The specific objectives contained within the work plan are:

Short Term

- Develop an understanding of the workforce absence profile through the use of the Council's HR Information Systems
- Development of a standard range of Management Information to inform Management decision making
- Development, Implementation & Review of a range of Absence Related HR&OD Policies and Procedures
- Benchmarking:
 - Establish regular **external** benchmarking
 - Develop procedures for **internal** benchmarking

Medium / Long Term

- Up-skilling of managers to support the effective and consistent application of Council policy and to understand their responsibility in effective absence management.
- Develop a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme aimed at supporting reduced absence levels and improved Wellbeing
- Develop a mechanism for identification of the cost of sickness absence
- Mainstream outputs of the Work Plan
- Develop and implement a reporting framework to enable monitoring and evaluation of outcomes related to Absence Management by the Audit & Performance Review Committee (ends when all actions under this Work Plan completed).

- 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 with 54% of days lost falling into this category in Quarter 2 (2011/12).
- 5.3** In order to reduce the cost implications of sickness absence, early intervention and a clear individual management plan is essential. The

Attendance Management Policy promotes 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. This is as a result of providing information to support key management decision making in relation to business and employee needs.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** Quarter 2 results for 2011/12 demonstrates that the positive downward trend over the last 3 years is changing. Further analysis will determine whether this is related to the reporting changes outlined in the report.
- 9.2** This demonstrates that there is still 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.

- 9.3** The key objectives identified by the Absence Working Group Work Plan will be presented to a future Council meeting for consideration.
- 9.4** The JCF is asked to note the contents of this report
- 9.5** The JCF is further 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

Wards Affected: Not Applicable