

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by Strategic Lead – People and Technology****Educational Services Committee: 4 December 2019**

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**Subject: Employee Wellbeing: Attendance Management  
Education Bi-Annual Update (April – September 2019)****1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with detailed analysis on employee wellbeing and attendance from 1st April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 for Education, Learning and Attainment and a bi-annual update on Council wide attendance for the same period.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1** It is recommended that Committee notes the findings, namely:

- The increase of 185.47 full time equivalent (FTE) days lost in Education, Learning and Attainment compared to the same period last year as outlined in Appendices 3-4;
- The increase in Council wide sickness absence of 3471.84 FTE days lost (approx. 13.6%) compared to the same period last year as outlined in Appendices 1 and 2; and
- A number of services across the Council were restructured in quarter 1 2019 however Education, Learning and Attainment was not impacted by this change. Any historical comparisons for other Strategic Lead areas should be considered as indicative and not an absolute figure. Further information regarding the services impacted is available in section 4.1 of this report.

**3. Background**

- 3.1** The Council is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of all employees. This is driven by the Employee Wellbeing Strategy and supported by initiatives and projects delivered through the Employee Wellbeing Group. The aim of this work is to improve employee morale and engagement, promote a healthier and more inclusive culture and lower sickness absence rates.

## 4. Main Issues

### April – September 2019

**4.1** From 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, a total of 4180.19 days were lost in Education, Learning and Attainment due to sickness absence. This represents an increase of 185.47 FTE days lost compared to the same period in 2018/19.

**4.1.2** Table 1 details benchmarking information to enable comparison to the previous year, the service's best performance in the last 3 years as well as the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) benchmark for the public sector. The FTE figure is shown to provide context of the service size.

**4.1.3** The table shows that both teachers and support employees have lower levels of absences than the Council average. Additionally, if Teachers continue to report a low level of absence for the remainder of the year, it is likely that they will have an annual figure lower than that of the public sector benchmark.

**4.1.4** Table 1 also details that Teachers have reported lower sickness absence levels from April to September 2019 than the same period in the previous year.

Table 1 – Benchmarking Information

Strategic Lead Area	FTE as at 30 Sept 2018	April - September 2018/19**	FTE as at 30 Sept 2019	April - September 2019/20**	Best Annual Performance	Public Sector Annual Benchmark 2018/19*
Council Wide	4643.15	4.78	4784.47	5.37	10.47 (2016/17)	8.4
Education Support	691.04	3.48	756.64	3.52	9.36 (2016/17)	
Education Teachers	865.63	2.12	914.43	1.87	5.28 (2013/14)	

\*Source 2019 CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work report

\*\* Average FTE days lost per FTE employee

**4.1.5** Table 2 details the variance in reported sickness absence levels between April – September 2019 and April – September 2018. Again it is positive to note that Teachers have reported significant decreases in sickness absence however sickness absence for support employees has increased. The percentage increase in sickness absence for Support employees is line with the increase reported Council wide.

**4.1.6** Both groups of employees reported decreases in sickness absence from May to July 2019 which is partly attributed to the summer break but absence levels have been increasing since August and this increase is reflective of the Council wide trend.

Table 2 – Variance in days lost due to sickness absence

Strategic Lead Area	Total FTE days April - Sept 18/19	Total FTE days lost April - Sept 19/20	Variance in April - Sept 18/19 vs April - Sept 19/20 (%)*	Variance April - Sept 18/19 vs April - Sept 19/20 (total FTE days lost)
Council Wide	22127.23	25599.07	13.56%	3471.84
Education Support	2311.11	2658.85	13.08%	347.74
Education Teachers	1869.08	1706.81	-9.51%	-162.27

\*This is calculated based on the variance of actual FTE days lost and not the variance in average FTE days lost per FTE employee as shown in the Headline figure in Appendix 1.

## 4.2 Absence Reasons – Service Performance

**4.2.1** Appendix 1 and 2 provide a detailed breakdown of the reasons for absence Council Wide.

**4.2.2** Table 3 below shows the top 3 reasons for absence from April – September 2019 for Education, Learning and Attainment and compares these to the Council Wide results for the same period. The top 3 reasons for absence Council wide are reflected in the service covered by this report but the rank order is slightly different. The top reason for absence for both Support employees and Teachers is acute medical conditions whilst this is the second top reason for Council wide absence. Absence attributed to acute medical conditions can often be caused by underlying health conditions and as such can be challenging to reduce. Strategic HR, management, Trade Unions and Occupational Health work closely together to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made whenever possible in order to assist employees in remaining at work or returning to work following an absence.

**4.2.3** The percentage of absence attributed to minor illness and acute medical conditions is unsurprising given that these absence categories have been established in the top 3 reasons for absence Council wide for some time.

**4.2.4** The level of sickness absence attributed to personal stress is a concern and as such the Employee Wellbeing Group continues to have a particular focus on mental health and wellbeing. Key activities include, but are not limited to, regular promotion of the support services available. Further details of the work of the Employee Wellbeing Group are provided in section 4.4 of this report. Work will continue in this area to establish what additional supports may be beneficial to staff to assist them in maintaining their health and wellbeing.

Table 3 – Reasons analysis – Service performances

	1		2		3	
	Reason	%	Reason	%	Reason	%
Council Wide	Minor Illnes	21.4%	Acute Medical Conditions	21.1%	Personal Stress	15.5%
Education Support	Acute Medical Conditions	33%	Minor Illness	27%	Personal Stress	11%
Education Teachers	Acute Medical Conditions	37%	Minor Illness	25%	Personal Stress	13%

#### 4.3 Absence Duration – Service Performance

4.3.1 Table 4 shows the duration profile for Education, Learning and Attainment and compares to the overall Council-wide duration profile. Long term absence accounts for approximately 78% of Council-wide absence from April – September 2019, which is an increase compared to the same period in the previous year. Both Teachers and Support employees have reported increases in long term absences; this is unsurprising given the level of absences attributed to acute medical conditions.

4.3.2 It should also be noted that as Teachers have relatively low levels of sickness, the proportion of short/long term absence may only be attributable to a relatively small number of cases.

Table 4 – Duration analysis – Service performances

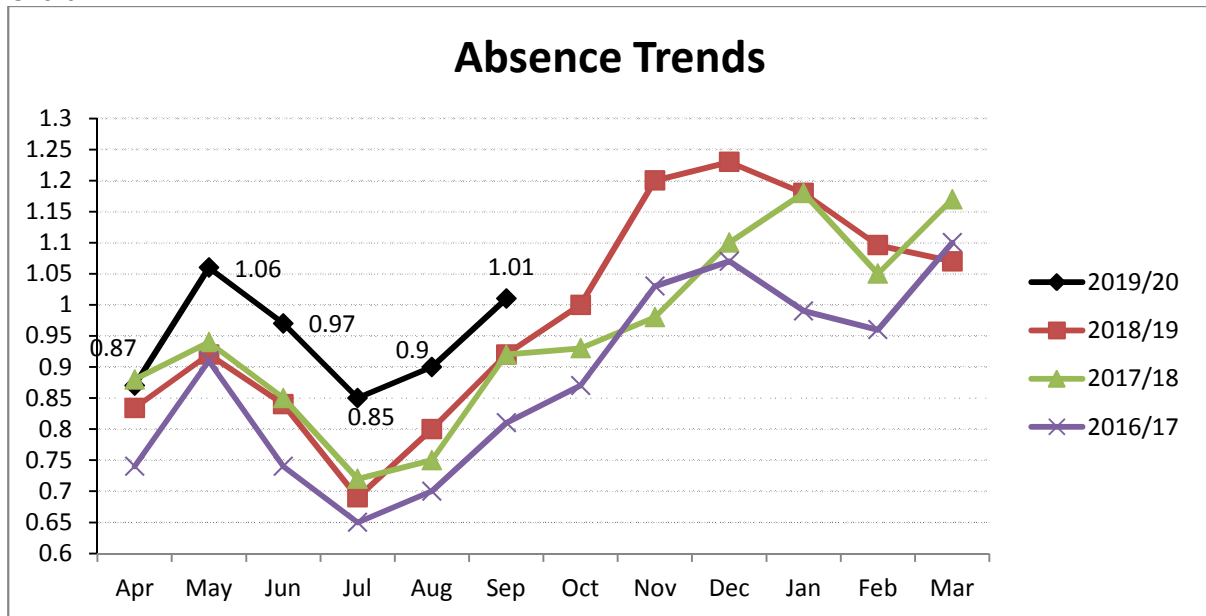
	April - Sept 18/19		April - Sept 19/20	
	Short Term (% of total absence)	Long Term (% of total absence)	Short Term (% of total absence)	Long Term (% of total absence)
Council Wide	30%	70%	22%	78%
Education Support	36%	64%	32%	68%
Education Teachers	37%	63%	34%	66%

#### 4.4 April – September 2019 Council-wide Performance

4.4.1 Chart 1 below shows that, in quarters 1 and 2, the Council’s absence performance deteriorated by approx. 11% compared to the same period in the previous year. Based on historic performance it is likely that absence levels will continue to increase during quarter 3 and potentially decrease again in quarter 4. However, given the higher levels of absence in the first half of

2019/20, it is likely that the total absence levels for 2019/20 will be higher than in previous years.

Chart 1



**4.4.2** Table 5 (below) shows absence levels for quarters 1 and 2 (2019/20), by Strategic Lead Area, and associated bi-annual figures for 2018/2019 to allow comparison. Please note that the FTE days lost per FTE employee which is reported for each Strategic Lead Area is based on where employees were located as at 30 September 2019.

**4.4.3** It should be noted that a restructure took place in quarter 1 2019 and as such a number of services either moved to another Strategic Lead area or are now reported as a stand alone service. As such any historical comparisons in relation to these services should only be considered as an indication.

Table 5 – Total FTE days lost April – Sept 2019 and levels of Variance

Strategic Lead Area	Total FTE days April - Sept 18/19	Total FTE days lost April - Sept 19/20	Variance in April - Sept 18/19 vs April - Sept 19/20 (%)*	Variance April - Sept 18/19 vs April - Sept 19/20 (total FTE days lost)
Council Wide	22127.23	25599.07	13.56%	3471.84
People & Technology	141.35	99.87	-41.53%	-41.48
Regulatory	180.38	95.41	-89.06%	-84.97
Resources	1004.35	1334.23	24.72%	329.88
Chief Exec Office Total	NA	785.91*	NA	NA
Child Healthcare & Criminal Justice	1797.83	1789.36	-0.47%	-8.47
Community Health & Care	6824.65	8831.06	22.72%	2006.41
Finance & Resources	0	0	0.00%	0
Mental Health, Addiction & Learning Disabilities	928.03	895.86	-3.59%	-32.17
Strategy, Planning & Health Improvement	28.23	184.11	84.67%	155.88
HSCP Total	9599.29	11700.39	17.96%	2101.1
Environment & Neighbourhood	3202.58	2873.04	-11.47%	-329.5441216
Housing & Employability	1027.82	1144.49	10.19%	116.6715385
Regeneration	2204.91	2782.07	20.75%	577.16
Roads & Transportation	NA	221.87**	NA	NA
Regeneration, Environment & Growth Total	6435.31	7021.47	8.35%	586.16
Strategic Management	0	6.94	100.00%	6.937857143
Strategic Management Total	0	6.94	100.00%	6.937857143
CCCF	586.37	876.56	33.11%	290.185
Education Learning & Attainment (Support Staff)	2311.11	2658.85	13.08%	347.737168
Resources (Pro)	NA	8.73***	NA	NA
Transformation & Public Service Reform (Excl. Teachers)	4223.56	4287.73	1.50%	64.17
Local Government Employees Total	20258.16	23892.2	15.21%	3634.04
Transformation & Public Service Reform (Teachers)	1869.08	1706.81	-9.51%	-162.27

## 4.5 Employee Wellbeing Group

**4.5.1** The Employee Wellbeing Group continues to make progress through wellbeing initiatives, employee support mechanisms and working with trade unions and local partners to identify and address areas for improvement. Updates on progress are reported to Performance and Monitoring Group on a monthly basis. Actions completed since the last report to this Committee in May 2019, or which are currently being progressed, include the following:

- Regular meetings for both the Managers' group for Employee Wellbeing and the Wellbeing Advocates group have been established and taking place quarterly . These groups look ahead to the Employee Wellbeing theme for the next quarter and work together to identify appropriate actions in support of same.
- Throughout quarters 1 and 2, activities took place including an Employee Wellbeing Information Event where providers displayed stalls, employees had an opportunity to participate in health checks and learn more about the Employee Supports available. This was well attended and a follow up event is planned for the Senior Management Network.
- Digital skills were an area highlighted by Wellbeing Advocates and the Wellbeing Managers' group as a source of anxiety for some employees. In order to ensure that employees feel supported to develop these skills and thereby reduce any related anxiety, a range of communications were shared highlighting the learning and development opportunities available including Microsoft Outlook and Excel training.
- A new Menopause guidance document has been launched to support employees and managers which was followed up with training intended to raise awareness about the impact of the menopause. This was delivered in conjunction with the Trade Union Learning Fund.
- The Disability Passport Guidance was launched; this replaces the Tailored Adjustment guidance and provides employees and managers with guidance regarding supporting employees who have a disability.
- A range of promotional communications highlighting the importance of physical activity including walks in Levensgrove Park, the Cycle to Work scheme and a summer walking challenge.
- West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust continue their regular visits to Council premises to promote their discounted membership deals for employees and carry out health checks.
- The pilot project with Headtorch has continued with selected groups of employees and managers receiving training on mental health awareness.
- The Council's submission for Healthy Working Lives Award was successful and the Gold standard award has been maintained.
- A number of communications were shared during Suicide Prevention week and on Mental Health day to highlight the support available to employees in relation to mental health. This included additional resources that have been added to the Employee Wellbeing Intranet pages for advice on mental health and financial wellbeing.

- Training sessions designed to raise awareness of mental health were delivered in conjunction with the Trade Union Learning Fund and it is our intention to ask these employees to become Wellbeing Advocates
- Further developments have taken place to enhance the functionality of HR21; this marked the start of a programme of work to automate the administration of sickness absence reporting for managers where possible. This work will continue into quarter 3 and 4.
- A review of the current Attendance Management policy has now been concluded with Trade Union colleagues. It was agreed that the new policy sees a change in focus with more emphasis on support and developing a different tone in dealing with absence. A communication plan to support the roll out is currently being developed.
- Following a review, HR data used to inform workforce planning and supporting managers with attendance management is now being used to better effect.
- The Council was awarded the Gold Award for the support provided to Reservists and their family.
- Following a tendering exercise, a new provider was secured for the provision of the Employee Counselling Service. The change in provider, now the same as the OH provision, took effect in September and a range of communications were shared with employees and management to inform them of the change.

## 5. People Implications

- 5.1 Effective and robust management of absence can have a positive impact upon employees, promoting early return to good health and work. The results for April – September 2019 indicate an overall increase in sickness absence for the service covered by this Committee. However, levels remain below the Council average. The services are engaged with the Employee Wellbeing Group and are committed to supporting employee wellbeing through the implementation of actions developed through the group.

## 6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1 Based on the average cost of a day (£138), table 6 provides the estimated productivity loss associated with absence across the Council and the Strategic Lead areas. This does not include any associated costs such as cover or overtime.

Table 6 – Cost of absence

Strategic Lead Area	April - September 19/20 Value of Lost Productivity (approx.)
Council Wide	£3,053,558
Education Support	£318,933
Education Teachers	£257,933

- 6.3 There are no procurement implications.



## **7. Risk Analysis**

- 7.1** There is a risk that managers do not fulfil their role and comply with the policy and in turn Council-wide absence continues to increase.
- 7.2** While it is evident in many instances that the necessary and proactive steps are being undertaken, such as early referral to occupational health, there is still a significant amount of work to do to continue to reduce absence.
- 7.3** Without maintaining and continuing to improve attendance there continues to be a risk of detrimental impact on service delivery, loss of productivity and reduced team performance.

## **8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 8.1** This report is for noting only, therefore no EIA is required. Any associated policies are subject to Equalities Impact Screening and Assessment if required.

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1** Consultation is on-going with trades unions in the main through the Wellbeing Group, the local Joint Consultative Committees, Convenor meetings and, for more strategic matters, through the Joint Consultative Forum.

## **10. Strategic Assessment**

- 10.1** Effective attendance management will support the Council's aim to make best use of both financial and human resources resulting in a positive impact upon service provision.

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**Appendices:**

Appendix 1	Council Wide Q1 2019/20 Absence Summary
Appendix 2	Council Wide Q2 2019/20 Absence Summary
Appendix 3	Education, Learning and Attainment Q1 2019/20 Absence Summary

Appendix 4 Education, Learning and Attainment Q2  
2019/20 Absence Summary

**Background Papers:** None

**Wards Affected:** None