

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development

Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee – 20th April 2011

Subject: Sickness Absence Reporting – Quarter 3 (2010/11)

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee on the levels of employee sickness absence for the third Quarter 2010/11 (October, November and December 2010).

2. Background

Internal Sickness Absence Reporting

- 2.1** 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 Human Resources collates the information for statutory reporting into 2 categories i.e. Local Government Employees and Teachers in line with Audit Scotland requirements.

Council Sickness Absence (2009/10) and National Statistics

- 2.3** The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for 2009/10 for WDC and the Average for Scottish Councils were:

	FTE Days Lost per FTE Employee 2009/10 - WDC	FTE Days Lost per FTE Employee 2009/10 – Ave Scottish Councils
Local Government Employees	13.26	11.6
Teachers	7.41	7.5
Council-wide	12.28	10.58

- 2.4** The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development reports that the national average number of days lost per employee for all public sector employers is 9.6 days (2010). The CIPD (2009) has also reported that Scotland generally reports higher levels of sickness absence across all sectors than the rest of the UK with an average of 10.1 days per employee.

- 2.5** As shown above, West Dunbartonshire Council's sickness absence figures are higher than the Scottish national average for Local Government employees and slightly lower than the Scottish national average for Teachers.

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.

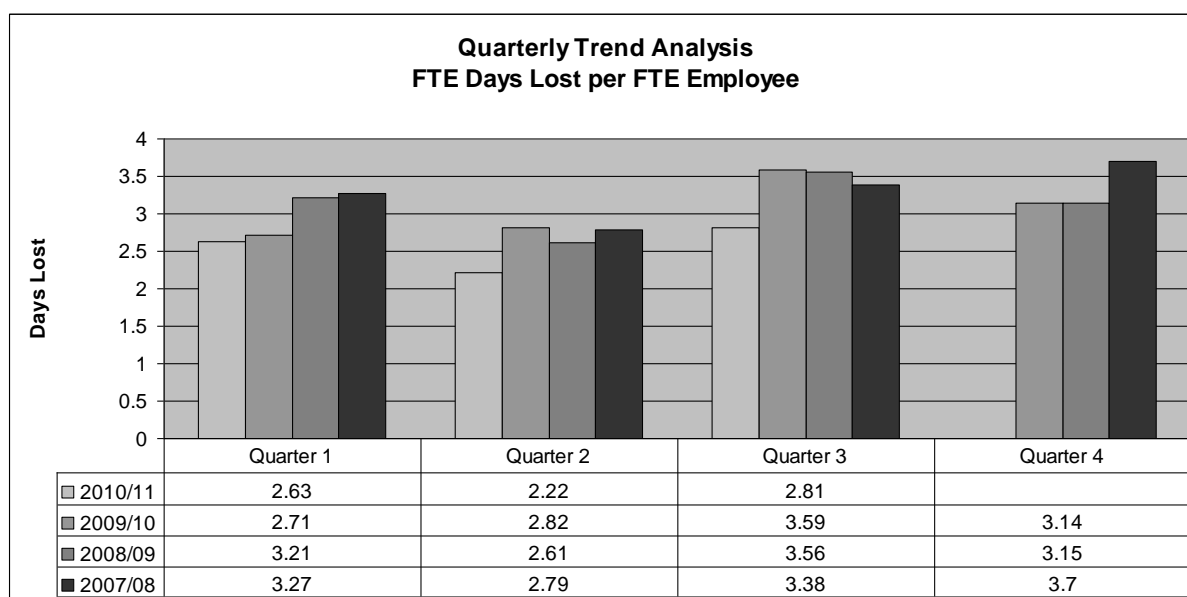
- 2.6** New targets for sickness absence figures have been set by the CMT for this year (2010/11) as a reduction of 0.5 FTE days lost per FTE employee on last year's reported results. This year's target is therefore set at 11.75 FTE days lost per FTE employee.

3. Main Issues

Sickness Absence Statistics

Trend Analysis

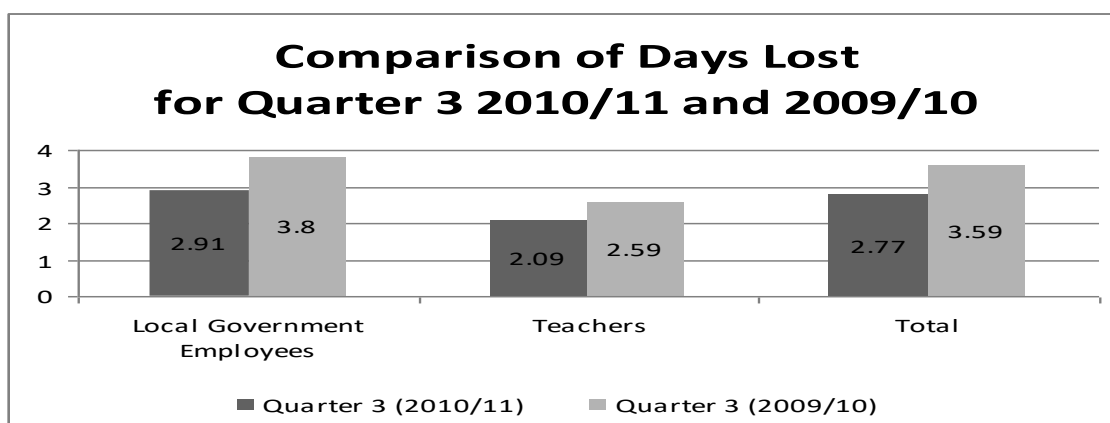
- 3.1** The graph below details the quarterly total FTE days lost per FTE employee for West Dunbartonshire Council for the year 2010/11 and compares it to the previous 3 years (2009/10, 2008/09 and 2007/08).



- 3.2** Quarter 3 result (**2.81** FTE days lost per FTE employee) for this year (2010/11) is considerably lower than the Quarter 3 results for the last 3 years and in comparison to Quarter 3 2009/10 there has been a 22% reduction in sickness absence.

Days Lost

- 3.3** The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for Quarter 3 (2010/11), compared to the same quarter the previous year, is detailed below, and broken down into the statutory reporting categories:

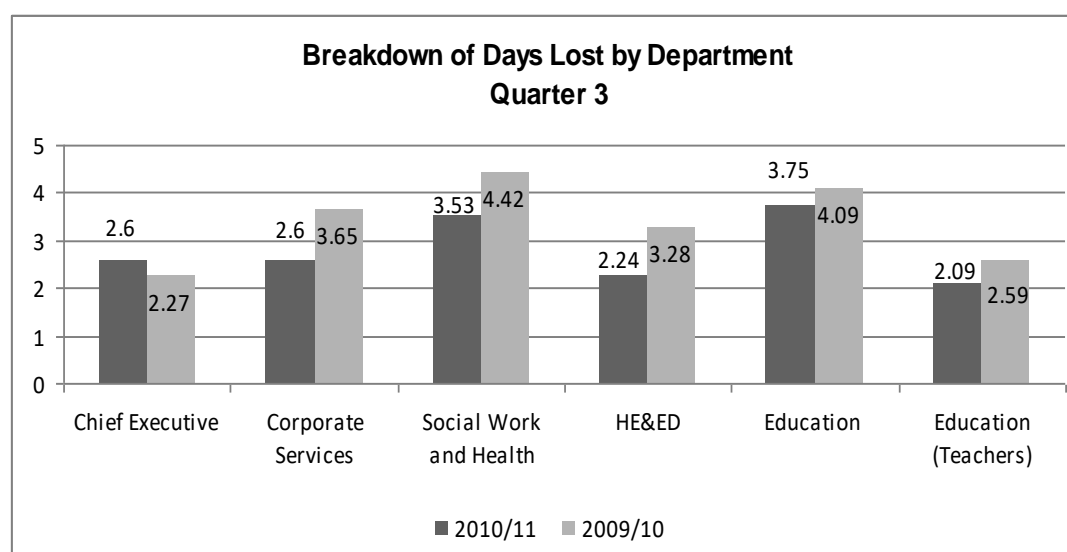


3.4 The Local Government Employees figure of 2.96 FTE days lost per FTE employee is a decrease on the figure reported for the same quarter the previous year (decrease 22%).

3.5 In addition, the Teachers' figure of 2.09 FTE days lost per FTE employee is a decrease on the figure reported (2.59) for the same quarter in 2009/10 (decrease 19%).

Days Lost - Departmental Breakdown & Comparison

3.6 A departmental breakdown and comparison for Quarter 3 is detailed below.



3.7 The variances in FTE days lost in each department for Quarter 3 are:

Chief Executive	+0.33	HE & ED	-1.04
Corporate Services	-1.05	Education	-0.34
Social Work & Health	-0.89	Education (Teachers)	-0.50

Absence Durations

- 3.8** Sickness absence is categorised by duration. Detailed below is the percentage of days lost by duration category in Quarter 3 (2010/11).

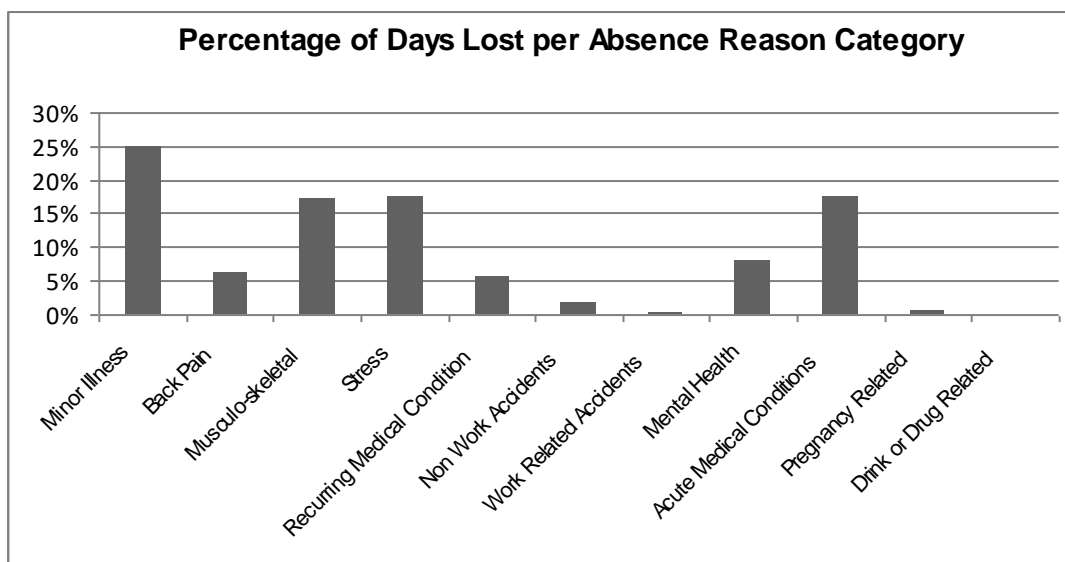
Absence Duration Category	Percentage of Days Lost Quarter 3	National Public Sector Percentage of Days Lost
Intermittent & Short Term sickness absence (absences between 1 to 5 days)	25.33%	57%
Medium term sickness absence (absences between 6 days and 4 weeks)	32.06%	18%
Long term sickness absence (absences over 4 weeks in duration)	42.60%	27%

- 3.9** Long term sickness absence (absence over 4 weeks) has reduced during the course of this year from 54.32% of absence in Quarter 1 to 42.60% in Quarter 3.
- 3.10** The above table shows that the Council is not following public sector 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.
- 3.11** Long term sickness is a significant factor for absence within **all** Departments and this year an Absence Management Action Plan has been implemented by Human Resources aimed at addressing long-term sickness.
- 3.12** Work has been undertaken to identify those employees who have been absent for 6 months or longer due to sickness absence. These cases require immediate intervention and ongoing management in partnership with line management. In total there are 20 employees who fall into this category as at the end of Quarter 3. This is a reduction from the 26 employees who fell into this category in Quarter 2. A departmental breakdown is detailed below:

Department	Number of people absent longer than 6 months due to sickness
Chief Executive	0
Corporate Services	1
Social Work and Health	7
HE & ED	5
Educational Services	7

Absence Reasons

- 3.13** There are 11 reasons for absence categories within West Dunbartonshire Council. These are detailed below for Quarter 3 of 2010/11.



- 3.14** The top 4 reasons for sickness absence within the Council are outlined below.

3.14.1 Minor Illness - covers ailments such as coughs and sore throats, cold and flu, headaches and migraines. These 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 responsible for providing detailed information on the likely duration and measures to assist employees to return to work.

3.14.3 Musculo-skeletal Conditions – employees who suffer from musculo-skeletal conditions benefit from early referral to Physiotherapy Services provided by Occupational Health. This will be used pro-actively to prevent employees from being absent due their condition if they are referred at the onset of their symptoms.

3.14.4 Stress - employees absent due to stress can also benefit from early referral to Occupational Health. The new Stress policy is currently under development by HR. Stress Management Training will delivered to Line Managers in March 2011 aimed at up-skilling Managers to identify, support and effectively manage stress related issues at work. Individual stress management techniques will be promoted to staff 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** At Council on 23 February 2011, Members approved the establishment of a Member/Officer Absence Working Group. The remit of the Working Group is to develop a comprehensive Absence Management Plan to encompass all aspects of employee absence, with measurable outcomes. The Working Group will comprise of: 3 Elected Members; Head of HR&OD; 2 Senior HR&OD Officers; 4 Senior Line Managers (1 from each Department); 1 representative from Finance, and 1 representative from the Trade Union Convenors.
- 4.3** The Working Group will serve for a period of 12 months and will support the development of a robust and joined up focus across the Council in facilitating improved performance in the management of absence and at its conclusion the Group will report findings and recommendations to full Council.
- 4.4** A new Attendance Management policy has been developed in consultation with the trades unions and this will be returned to the Member/Officer Absence Working Group for finalisation. The new policy is driven by the need to improve consistency, fairness and to provide a framework for the effective management of sickness absence.
- 4.5** 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. An Action plan is in place and work is progressing to scope this project.
- 4.6** In light of the significant problem of long term sickness one of the key priorities for 2010/11 is to identify long term critical cases i.e. those over 6 months. These cases require immediate intervention and ongoing management in partnership with line management.

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.

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 18th out of 32 councils (2009/10) and for Local Government Employees the Council rates as 29th out of 32 Councils (2009/10) (Audit Scotland). This represents a significant fall in last year's ranking which was 14th out of 32 for Councils for Teaching Staff (2008/9) and 23rd out of 32 Councils for Local Government employees (2008/9).

7. Equalities, Health & Human 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 will have a differential impact on those covered by the Act.
- 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 Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee is asked to note:
- the contents of this report and to request further information if required.
 - the new targets agreed for West Dunbartonshire Council for 2010/11.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All