

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Corporate Services

Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee – 22 December 2010

Subject: Sickness Absence Reporting – Quarter 2 (2010/2011)

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee (CEGC) on the levels of employee sickness absence for the second Quarter 2010/2011 (July, August and September 2010).

2. Background

Internal Sickness Absence Reporting

- 2.1** Sickness absence figures are reported on a quarterly basis to the CEGC. 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 – 2010) and National Statistics

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

	FTE Days Lost per FTE Employee 2009/2010
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 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.

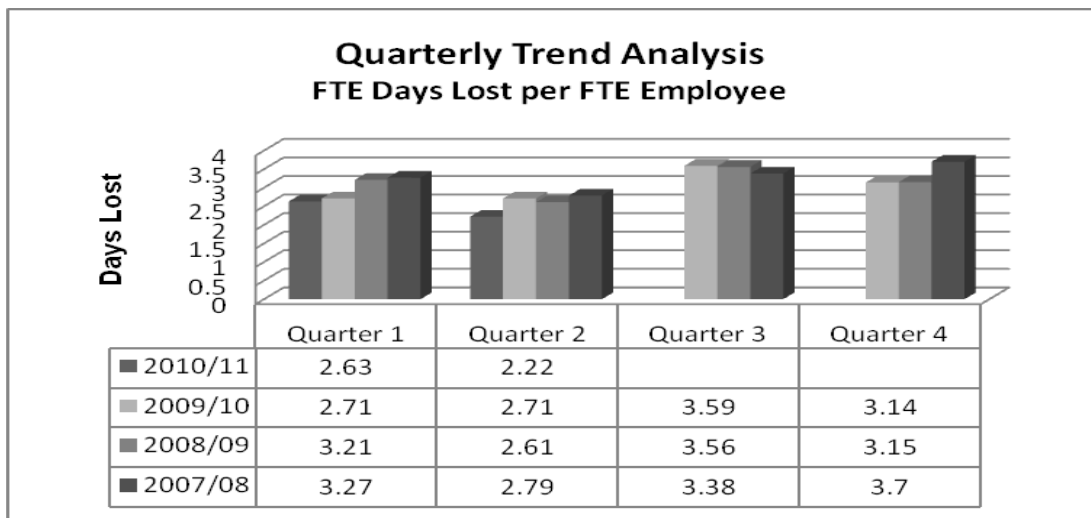
- 2.5** West Dunbartonshire Council's sickness absence figures are higher than the Scottish national average. In 2008/2009 Audit Scotland published figures that showed that West Dunbartonshire Council ranked 23 out of 32 councils for Local Government Employees sickness absence and 14 out of 32 for Teachers.

2.6 New targets for sickness absence figures will be set when Audit Scotland publish the figures for 2009/2010 later this year, however the interim target is a reduction of .5 days.

3. Sickness Absence Statistics

Trend Analysis

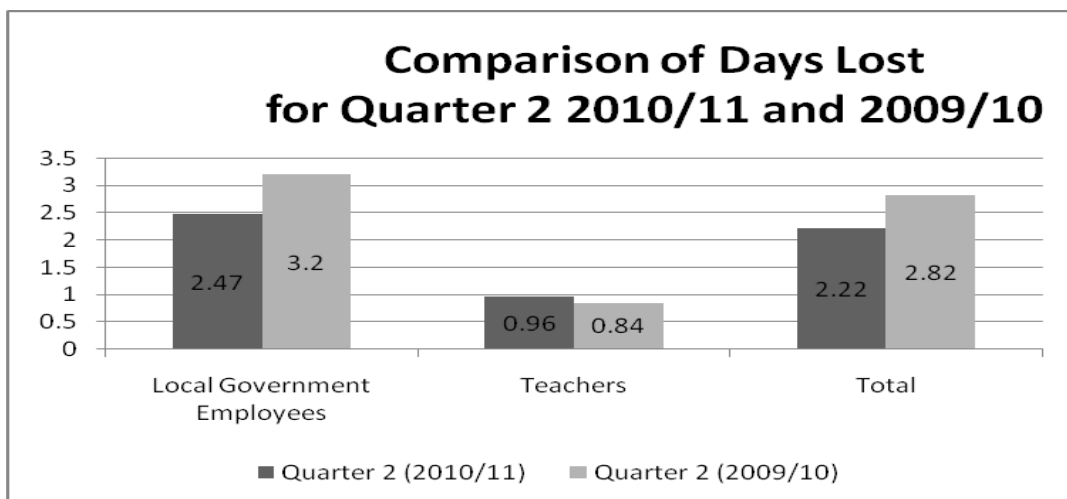
3.1 The graph below details the quarterly total FTE days lost per FTE employee for West Dunbartonshire Council for the year 2009/10 and compares it to the previous 3 years (2009/10, 2008/09 and 2007/08).



3.2 Quarter 2 result (**2.22** FTE days lost per FTE employee) for this year (2010/2011) is the lowest reported quarterly figure for the four years shown.

Days Lost

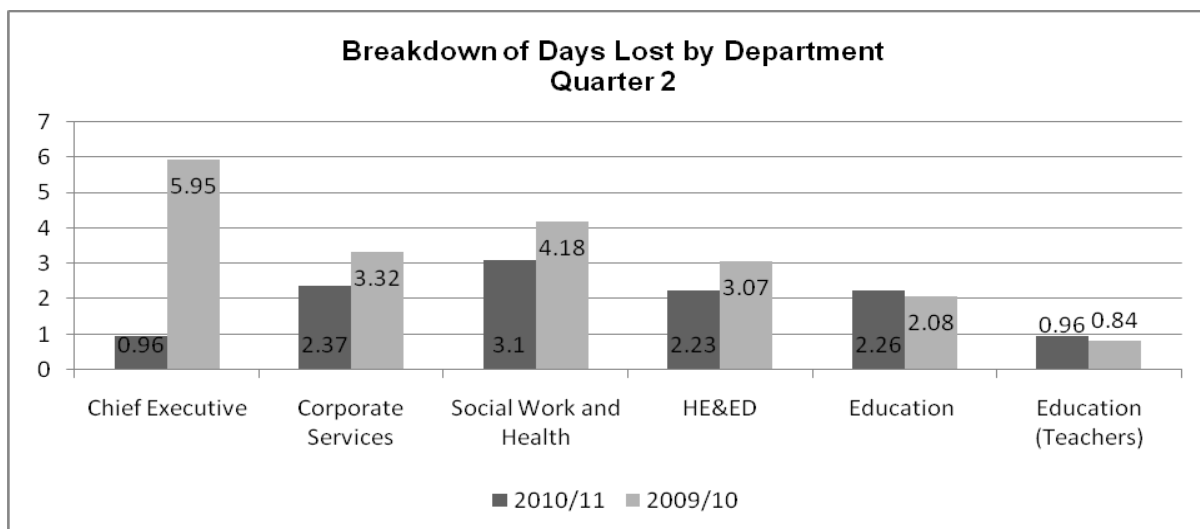
3.3 The total FTE days lost per FTE employee for Quarter 2 (2010/2011), compared to the same quarter the previous year, is detailed below, broken down into the statutory reporting categories:



- 3.5** The Local Government Employees figure of 2.47 FTE days lost per FTE employee is a decrease on the figure reported (3.2) for the same quarter the previous year (decrease of 0.73 or 23%).
- 3.6** Teachers have shown an increase in the FTE days lost (increase of 0.12 or 14%). This is the fourth 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 2 is detailed below.



- 3.8** The variances in FTE days lost in each department for Quarter 2 are:

Chief Executive	-4.99	Education	+0.18
Corporate Services	-0.95	Education (Teachers)	+0.18
Social Work & Health	-1.08		
HE & ED	-0.84		

Absence Durations

- 3.9** Sickness absence is categorised by duration. Detailed below is the percentage of days lost by duration category in Quarter 2 (2010/2011).

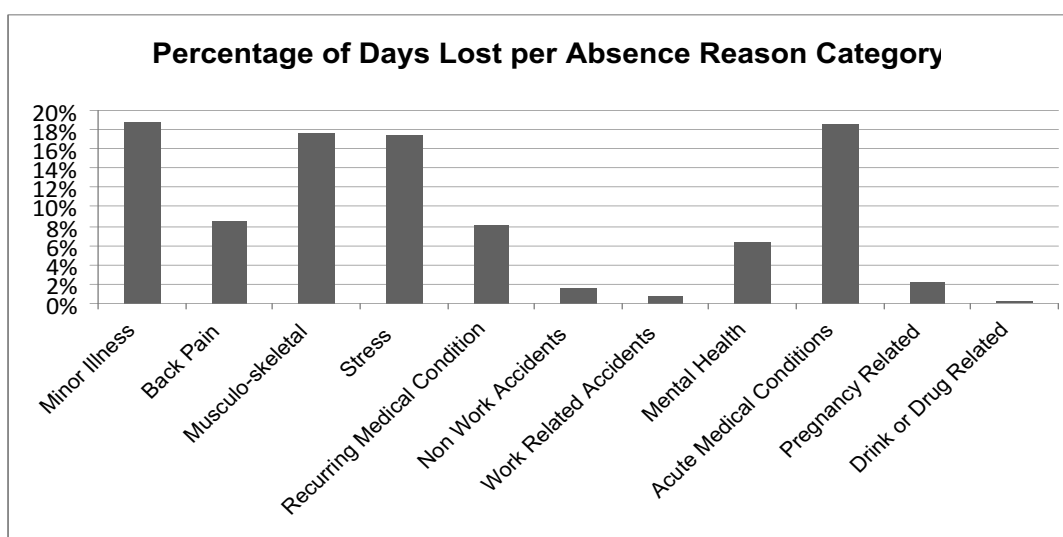
Absence Duration Category	Percentage of Days Lost Quarter 2	National Public Sector Percentage of Days Lost
Intermittent & Short Term sickness absence (absences between 1 to 5 days)	23.15%	57%
Medium term sickness absence (absences between 6 days and 4 weeks)	33.22%	18%
Long term sickness absence (absences over 4 weeks in duration)	43.63%	27%

- 3.10** Analysing the sickness absence data shows that there has been a 40% reduction in the number of days lost due to long term sickness (absence over 4 weeks).
- 3.11** 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. The Council-wide figures are consistent with the breakdown of absence durations within Departments.
- 3.12** Long term sickness is a significant factor for absence within **all** Departments and last quarter an Absence Management Action Plan was developed by Human Resources to address long term sickness.
- 3.13** 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 26 employees who fall into this category as at 30 September; this is reduction from the 34 employees who fell into this category in Quarter 1. A departmental breakdown is detailed below:

Department	Number of people absent longer than 6 months due to sickness
Chief Executive	0
Corporate Services	2
Social Work and Health	10
HE & ED	9
Educational Services	5

Absence Reasons

- 3.14** The reasons for absence for Quarter 2 2010/2011 are detailed below.



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

3.15.1 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.

3.15.2 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.

3.15.3 Musculo-skeletal Conditions – employees who suffer from musculo-skeletal conditions benefit from 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.

3.15.4 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 developed for managers and employees on stress and mental health; how to identify and manage it. Promotion of stress management and the supports already in place will continue in conjunction with the Healthy Working Lives Group.

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 A new Maximising Attendance Policy is being developed and it is anticipated that this will be due for implementation by 31 March 2011.

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.

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 14th out of 32 councils and for Local Government Employees the Council rates as 23rd 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 Equality Act 2010 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 CEGC is asked to note the contents of this report and to request further information if required.
- 8.3** The CEGC 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.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None