

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	Tuesday 1 March 2022
Subject:	Levels of Disciplinary, Grievance, Dignity at Work and Sickness Absence		
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

To provide a report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of levels of discipline, grievance, dignity at work and sickness absence within the Council (excluding schools).

Recommendation(s):

The Overview & Scrutiny - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Receive the report in terms of discipline, grievance, dignity at work and sickness levels.
- (2) Note the latest information in respect of ongoing work.
- (3) Note the initiatives currently being implemented.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

The recommendations reflect the request made by Overview & Scrutiny – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services Committee for information.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

N/A

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs - N/A

(B) Capital Costs – N/A

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):	
N/A	
Legal Implications:	
N/A	
Equality Implications:	
There are no equality implications.	
Climate Emergency Implications:	
The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	N
Have a neutral impact	Y
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y
For more information contact julia.thorpe@sefton.gov.uk or stephanie.jukes@sefton.gov.uk (tel. 0151 934 4552).	

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: Achieving the correct application of procedures, facilitating the protection of the most vulnerable.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: N/A
Commission, broker and provide core services: Absences can have a detrimental effect upon core service delivery
Place – leadership and influencer: Correct workforce allocation allows leadership and influencing
Drivers of change and reform: N/A
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: N/A
Greater income for social investment: N/A
Cleaner Greener N/A

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6724/22.) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.4724/22) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

N/A

Implementation Date for the Decision

N/A

Contact Officer:	Marie Lambert
Telephone Number:	Tel: 0151 934 3388
Email Address:	marie.lambert@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

Annex 1 – Breakdown of Disciplinary, Grievances and Dignity at Work complaints for the period 1st October 2020 to 30th September 2021

Annex 2 – Sickness Absence by Service Area for 01/04/2021 to 30/09/2021

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the levels of disciplinary, grievance, dignity at work and sickness absence within the Authority (excluding schools).

1.2. The management of the workforce is an important activity to ensure outcomes for our communities are achieved and to ensure that the workforce is appropriately managed and motivated.

2. Disciplinary, Grievance and Dignity at Work

2.1 Annex 1 provides a breakdown of formal cases from October 2020 to September 2021.

2.2 The organisation enjoys a comparatively good level of cases and this reflects on the whole, both the good overall industrial relations environment, the partnership approach that is undertaken and also the work undertaken within departments.

2.3 A lot of effort is taken to avoid formal procedures where possible.

3. Suspensions

- 3.1 In the period October 2020 to September 2021, 6 employees were suspended from duty (not including schools).
- 3.2 Suspension takes place in order to facilitate an investigation into matters which could result in dismissal for gross misconduct. Some investigations will also include a potential referral to a professional body such as the Health Care and Professionals Council. Personnel continue to press departments to resource investigations appropriately.
- 3.3 Whether a suspension is appropriate will be a decision taken by a Senior Manager with the advice of the Personnel Department.

4. Sickness Absence - 6 Month Period 1st April 2020 to 30th Sept 2021

- 4.1 During the current year the Council has changed its HR/Payroll system. The information below covers the first 2 quarters to provide 6 months' worth of the most recent data based on the new system. Going forward this report will resume to providing data for a full 12 months as previously reported.

FTE Available Days	Total Days Sickness Absence Long & Short Term	Percentage Sickness Absence	Council Set Target Percentage
356,593	18,370	5.15% (1.72% Short Term Sickness Absence 3.43% Long Term Sickness Absence)	4.0% (2.2% ST target 1.8% LT Target)
Figures Exclude Schools			

- 4.2 For comparison the data covering the same 6 month period for the previous year was 5.66% overall.
- 4.3 Support is provided across all service areas.

Reasons for Referral to Health Unit 1st April 2021 to 30th September 2021

Reason for Referral to Health Unit	% Referrals (excludes school referrals)
Mental Health	47.30%
Musculoskeletal	19.50%
Medical Illness	19.00%
Bereavement	4.80%

Reproductive	2.90%
Infections	2.40%
Post Operative Recovery	2.40%

Service Area Referrals to Health Unit	% Referrals
Adult Social Care	19.50%
Children's Social Care	12.50%
Communities	21.90%
Corporate Resources & Customer Services	11.20%
Economic Growth & Housing	4.80%
Education Excellence (non schools)	1.70%
Public Health & Wellbeing	1.70%
Highways & Public Protection	4.80%
Operational In House Services	20.70%
Strategic Support	1.20%

- 4.4 The above figures clearly demonstrate that mental health related issues are continuing to require support through the Health Unit, including for employees who are not absent from work.
- 4.5 Communities, Operational In-House Services and Adult Social Care remain the three departments (with the exception of schools) with the highest number of referrals to the Health Unit.

Initiatives

- 4.6 Strategic Leadership Board continues to monitor and encourage the reduction of levels of both short and long-term absence.
- 4.7 Sickness reports are provided to Heads of Service on a quarterly basis and on an ad hoc basis on request.
- 4.8 Managers are encouraged to manage absence in accordance with Council policy and procedures and to use the online testing package to fill any knowledge gaps. Briefing sessions and targeted training is arranged as required from the results of the online testing.
- 4.9 Targeted support will continue within departments to help with sickness absence. Since March 2020, support has been primarily in respect of advice and guidance regarding the coronavirus pandemic and this is continuing. Support through the Occupational Health Unit continues to be provided through telephone consultations, including mental health support and there is a FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) page on the Council's intranet on Covid-19 Health and Well-being.
- 4.10 The Personnel Team work closely with departments providing information and advice and appropriate levels of support, advising managers on informal

processes and assisting managers with the more formal and complex levels of sickness absence management. The Personnel team continue to monitor sickness absence and will report to the Chief Personnel Officer any issues or trends that are cause for concern.

Managing Absence

- 4.11 The Council has a Sickness Absence Policy which operates in a partnership with trade unions. Long term absence is being dealt with in accordance with overall business need and short-term absence is operated in accordance with recognised and agreed trigger points. All policies, where applicable, are subject to modification in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.12 Trade unions and management recognise the need for correct management of sickness absence to provide appropriate support to lessen the demands on employees who remain at work.

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ANNEX 2

Sick Absence by Service Area for Q1&Q2 01/04/2021 to 30/09/2021 (6 month period)

Sefton Council Sickness Absence 01/04/2021 - 30/09/2021

