

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	12 September 2023
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.	
Impact on Children and Young People: No	
Climate Emergency Implications:	
The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	No
Have a neutral impact	Yes
Have a negative impact	No
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Yes

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.7337/23) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5537/23) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

N/A

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee.

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

Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report.

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 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.

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

3. Suspensions

- 3.1 In the period April – July 2023, 5 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. Disciplinary

- 4.1 During the period April – July 2023, there have been 11 disciplinary investigations as per the table below:

Department	No. of Investigations	Outcome
Adult Social Care	1	Case on-going
Children's Social Care	1	Moved to medical suspension
Communities - (Leisure)	6	1 Case did not proceed 5 Resignations
Operational In House Services – Cemeteries	1	Employee Resigned
Operational In House Services – Cleansing	2	Cases on-going

5. Grievances

- 5.1 During the period April – August 2023, there have been 2 Grievances as follows:

Department	Outcome
Children's Social Care	Resolved
Operational In-House Services – Sefton Arc	On-going

6. Dignity at Work Complaints (DAW)

- 6.1 During the period April - August 2023, there has been 1 DAW complaint as follows:-

Department	Outcome
Operational In-House Services – Sefton Arc	On-going

7 Council Sickness Absence – Q4 and year end 2022/23

- 7.1 This report contains statistical data for Q4 and year end of 2022/23. The information details 'Short Term', 'Long Term' and 'All Absence' along with previous year's figures for comparison purposes. Sickness percentages are calculated as

a proportion of the total FTE days available. Figures are in bold if the percentage is above the Council's Preferred target.

7.2 Assistant Directors are presented with their own service area information each quarter. The information presented is dependent on all service areas maintaining and updating sickness absence records on the Absence Feeder in an accurate and timely manner.

7.3 Service Area Analysis – Quarter 4 (January to March 2023)

Short Term Sickness Absence

Short term sickness absence is defined as absence lasting less than 4 weeks for any single episode. The Council's long-standing target for short term absence is 2.2%.

SERVICE AREA	COMPARISON Q4 2020 %	COMPARISON Q4 2021 %	COMPARISON Q4 2022 %	SHORT TERM SICKNESS Q4 2023 %
Adult Social Care	2.47	1.99	3.31	2.59
Children's Social Care	2.45	1.41	2.41	1.51
Communities	2.38	2.18	2.89	2.55
Corporate Resources & Customer Services	1.85	1.51	2.03	1.30
Economic Growth & Housing	2.02	1.41	2.33	1.36
Education Excellence	2.38	0.67	2.07	1.73
Highways & Public Protection	1.97	1.43	1.13	0.66
Operational In-House Services	2.75	1.91	4.56	3.15
Public Health & Wellbeing	0.16	2.65	3.13	0.41
Strategic Support	2.76	2.14	2.03	0.96

All, except 3 service areas, (based on recordings input into the system) remain under the Council target of 2.2% for short term sickness absence for Q4 for the year 2023. This is an improvement on the previous year's Q4. The year 2021 was the Covid pandemic year.

Long Term Sickness Absence

Long term sickness absence is defined as absence lasting more than 4 weeks for any single episode. The Council's long-standing target for long term absence is 1.8%.

SERVICE AREA	COMPARISON Q4 2020 %	COMPARISON Q4 2021 %	COMPARISON Q4 2022 %	LONG TERM SICKNESS Q4 2023 %
Adult Social Care	4.00	5.27	3.51	3.94
Children's Social Care	7.56	5.74	5.00	3.31
Communities	4.52	3.67	3.88	3.63
Corporate Resources & Customer Services	3.13	3.12	2.74	1.61
Economic Growth & Housing	2.70	1.04	1.84	0.53
Education Excellence	4.53	2.53	2.36	4.62
Highways & Public Protection	4.39	3.55	2.02	1.56
Operational In-House Services	3.66	4.74	4.19	3.46
Public Health & Wellbeing	0.00	0.00	4.67	0.00
Strategic Support	8.54	5.58	5.68	0.00

5 service areas have a long-term sickness percentage over the Councils target of 1.8% for the Q4 of 2023. However, this is an improvement on the previous three year's Q4 figures.

7.4 'All' Sickness Absence Q4 – Short and Long Combined

The Council's long-standing target for 'all' sickness is 4%

SERVICE AREA	COMPARISON Q4 2020 %	COMPARISON Q4 2021 %	COMPARISON Q4 2022 %	ALL SICKNESS Q4 2023 %
Adult Social Care	6.47%	7.26	6.82	6.53
Children's Social Care	10.00%	7.15	7.41	4.82
Communities	6.90%	5.85	6.77	6.18
Corporate Resources & Customer Services	4.98%	4.63	4.78	2.91
Economic Growth & Housing	4.72%	2.46	4.17	1.89
Education Excellence	6.90%	3.20	4.43	6.36
Highways & Public Protection	6.36%	4.98	3.15	2.23
Operational In-House Services	6.41%	6.65	8.75	6.61
Public Health & Wellbeing	0.16%	2.65	7.81	0.41
Strategic Support	11.30%	7.72	7.72	0.96

For Q4 there were 5 service areas with a percentage above the 4% Council target. The remaining 5 areas being under the 4%. All but 1 area have an improved Q4 figure compared to previous Q4 figures. The comparison over years demonstrates the fluctuating nature of long-term (and short term) sickness absence.

7.5 Year End Data for 2022/23

The year end position for individual service areas for 2022/23;

SERVICE AREA	YEAR END 2022/23
Adult Social Care	7.17%
Children's Social Care	4.86%
Communities	5.69%
Corporate Resources & Customer Services	3.39%
Economic Growth & Housing	2.74%
Education Excellence	5.06%
Highways & Public Protection	2.61%

Operational In-House Services	6.78%
Public Health & Wellbeing	1.85%
Strategic Support	3.89%

The 2022/23 year end position for Sefton as a whole, excluding schools, with comparisons to previous years is as follows;

Council All Service Areas Combined (exc schools)	Short Term Sickness %	Long Term Sickness %	Overall %
22/23	2.08	3.21	5.29
21/22	2.08	3.85	5.93
20/21	1.25	4.06	5.31
19/20	1.82	4.47	6.29
18/19	1.92	4.34	6.26
17/18	1.88	3.87	5.75
16/17	1.89	3.86	5.75
15/16	1.92	4.19	6.11

It should be noted that any omissions to recording system will impact these figures. In addition, the increase in agency workers will impact on the figures provided for the departments concerned as agency workers sickness absence is NOT recorded on the Councils Sickness Absence figures. The year end figure of 5.29% is an improvement on previous years bearing in mind the above comments.

Assistant Directors are provided with the figures for their service area on a quarterly bases and are asked to ensure that:

- sickness absence records are maintained in a timely manner using all the reporting data available to them within the system fully and accurately.
- managers keep their skills refreshed with online sickness absence training and effectively manage employee absences.
- health and wellbeing is discussed on a regular basis during one-to-one sessions
- managing absence is prioritised seeking appropriate advice from Corporate Personnel or the Health Unit as required.

8 Initiatives undertaken by the Council

- The Strategic Leadership Board continues to monitor and encourage the reduction of levels of both short and long-term absence.
- Sickness reports are provided to Assistant Directors on a quarterly basis and on an ad hoc basis on request.

- 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, following the results of online testing.
- Targeted support continues within departments to help with the management of sickness absence.
- 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 complex and formal levels of sickness absence management.
- The Personnel team continue to monitor sickness absence and report to the Chief Personnel Officer any issues or trends that are cause for concern.
- The Occupational Health Unit provide Counselling and CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) on a face-to-face basis. In addition, a specific type of CBT known as Eye Movement Desensitisation, is also available if declared appropriate by the OH physicians. Telephone and video call appointments can be arranged if that is preferred method for individual.
- Physiotherapy appointments are also arranged through the OH Unit as are pension assessments for ill health, ill health pension appeals and deferred pension cases.

9 Managing Absence

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.

- 9.1** 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.