

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	27 th February 2024
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.7529/24.) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5629/24) 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.

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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 August - December 2023, 10 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 September – December 2023, there have been 13 disciplinary investigations as per the table below:

Department	No. of Investigations	Outcome
Children's Social Care	4	2 – No case to answer; 1 – Verbal Warning 1 – case on-going
Communities - (Housing Options)	1	1 – on-going
Corporate Resources – (Property Services)	2	Cases on-going
Economic Growth & Dev – (Sefton @Work)	1	Case on-going
Operational In House Services : Cleansing (3) Green Sefton (1) Sefton Arc (1)	5	1 – Final Written Warning 4 – cases ongoing

5. Grievances

5.1 During the period October – December 2023, there have been 4 Grievances as follows:

Department	Outcome
Adult Social Care	Not upheld
Economic Growth & Dev.	Not upheld
Highways & Public Protection	Not upheld
Operational In-House Services	Resolved

6. Dignity at Work Complaints (DAW)

6.1 During the period September – December 2023, there have been 7 DAW complaints as follows:-

Department	Outcome
Communities	1 - upheld; 3 - not upheld
Children's Social Care	1 – not upheld
Operational In-House Services	2 – on-going

7 Council Sickness Absence – Q1 & Q2 – 2023/2024

7.1 This report contains statistical data for Q1 and Q2 2023/2024 (01.04.23 – 30.06.23 and 01.07.23 - 30.09.23). The information details 'Short Term', 'Long Term' and 'All Absence' data along with previous year's figures for comparison purposes. Sickness percentages are calculated as a proportion of the total FTE days available. The current year's figures are shown 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 Short Term Sickness Absence Q1 & Q2

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 Q1 2021/22	COMPARISON Q1 2022/23	SHORT TERM SICKNESS Q1 2023/24
Adult Social Care	1.30%	2.85%	2.09%
Children's Social Care	1.21%	1.10%	1.91%
Communities	1.16%	2.26%	2.28%
Corporate Resources & Customer Services	0.77%	1.41%	1.30%
Economic Growth & Housing	0.83%	1.20%	1.13%
Education Excellence	1.03%	1.92%	1.49%
Highways & Public Protection	0.88%	1.19%	0.90%
Operational In-House Services	2.12%	3.66%	2.79%
Public Health & Wellbeing	0.74%	3.00%	0.84%
Strategic Support	1.59%	1.84%	0.79%

All except two service areas (based on recordings input into the system) remain under the Council target of 2.2% for short term sickness absence for Q1 in the current year 2023/2024.

SERVICE AREA	COMPARISON Q2 2021/22	COMPARISON Q2 2022/23	SHORT TERM SICKNESS Q2 2023/24
Adult Social Care	2.18%	2.37%	2.50%
Children's Social Care	1.37%	1.47%	2.51%
Communities	1.68%	2.46%	2.42%
Corporate Resources & Customer	1.36%	1.60%	1.30%
Economic Growth & Housing	1.05%	1.87%	1.34%
Education Excellence	2.18%	1.32%	0.91%
Highways & Public Protection	1.92%	1.17%	1.04%
Operational In-House Services	3.40%	2.94%	2.69%
Public Health & Wellbeing	3.44%	0.52%	0.14%
Strategic Support	2.29%	1.44%	0.61%

Four service areas (based on recordings input into the system) exceed the Council target of 2.2%, whilst six service areas remain under the target for short term sickness absence for Q2 in the current year 23/24.

7.4 Long Term Sickness Absence Q1 & Q2

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 Q1 2021/22	COMPARISON Q1 2022/23	LONG TERM SICKNESS Q1 2023/24
Adult Social Care	6.23%	5.01%	4.13%
Children's Social Care	3.59%	3.68%	5.09%
Communities	2.97%	2.95%	2.49%
Corporate Resources & Customer Services	1.90%	2.11%	1.66%
Economic Growth & Housing	1.77%	2.05%	2.57%
Education Excellence	3.15%	2.54%	3.35%
Highways & Public Protection	3.91%	1.25%	1.98%
Operational In-House Services	5.43%	4.31%	2.80%
Public Health & Wellbeing	0.00%	1.26%	0.00%
Strategic Support	2.46%	3.38%	1.70%

All service areas except three have a long-term sickness percentage exceeding the Councils target of 1.8% for the current year.

SERVICE AREA	COMPARISON Q2 2021/22	COMPARISON Q2 2022/23	LONG TERM SICKNESS Q2 2023/24
Adult Social Care	4.57%	5.13%	4.29%
Children's Social Care	5.39%	4.47%	5.41%
Communities	4.73%	4.00%	2.11%
Corporate Resources & Customer	1.39%	2.22%	2.67%
Economic Growth & Housing	1.50%	1.65%	1.24%
Education Excellence	1.20%	2.78%	1.56%
Highways & Public Protection	4.14%	0.78%	2.57%
Operational In-House Services	2.97%	3.44%	3.33%
Public Health & Wellbeing	3.33%	0.00%	0.00%
Strategic Support	0.00%	3.94%	2.28%

Q2 shows that with just 3 service areas fall below the council's long term sickness target of 1.8%, all other services exceed the Councils target for the current year.

7.5 All' Sickness Absence Q1 & Q2 – Short and Long Combined

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

SERVICE AREA	COMPARISON Q1 2021/22	COMPARISON Q1 2022/23	"ALL SICKNESS" Q1 2023/24
Adult Social Care	7.53%	7.86%	6.23%
Children's Social Care	4.80%	4.77%	7.00%
Communities	4.13%	5.21%	4.77%
Corporate Resources & Customer	2.67%	3.52%	2.96%
Economic Growth & Housing	2.60%	3.24%	3.70%
Education Excellence	4.18%	4.46%	4.84%
Highways & Public Protection	4.79%	2.44%	2.88%
Operational In-House Services	7.55%	7.97%	5.59%
Public Health & Wellbeing	0.74%	4.26%	0.84%
Strategic Support	4.05%	5.22%	2.49%

The 5 service areas with a percentage above the 4% Council target are indicated in bold, with the remaining 5 areas being under the 4% demonstrating the fluctuating nature of sickness absence.

SERVICE AREA	COMPARISON Q2 2021/22	COMPARISON Q2 2022/23	"ALL SICKNESS" Q2 2023/24
Adult Social Care	6.75%	7.50%	6.79%
Children's Social Care	6.76%	5.94%	7.92%
Communities	6.41%	6.46%	4.53%
Corporate Resources & Customer	2.75%	3.82%	3.97%
Economic Growth & Housing	2.55%	3.52%	2.58%
Education Excellence	3.38%	4.10%	2.47%
Highways & Public Protection	6.06%	1.94%	3.61%
Operational In-House Services	6.37%	6.38%	6.02%
Public Health & Wellbeing	6.77%	0.52%	0.14%
Strategic Support	2.29%	5.38%	2.90%

For Q2 the 4 service areas with a percentage above the 4% Council target are indicated in bold, with the remaining 6 areas being under the 4%. The comparison of figures demonstrates the fluctuating nature of long-term (and short term) sickness absence.

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.