

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Head of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services
to Service and Performance Panel
of 20 September 2022**

Subject: Employee Absence 2021/2022

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Panel with detailed information and analysis of sickness absence across Council services for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Panel scrutinises this information in the context of the Local Government Benchmarking Information previously reported.**

3. Background

- 3.1 A report entitled 'Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2014/15' was considered by the Service and Performance Panel on 23 February 2016, and Panel requested that more detailed absence data be made available at future meetings to allow more meaningful scrutiny. Reports have been submitted annually since then.
- 3.2 The National Statutory Performance Indicators require Councils to provide statistics for employee absence based on the 'total number of workdays lost' together with the 'average number of days lost per employee' categorised separately for Teachers and Local Government Employees ('LGE').
- 3.3 The Framework for Maximising Attendance was introduced in July 2010 but, as the expected overall improvements were not realised, a revised Framework was developed and approved on 21 January 2014 which applies to all LGE; It does not apply to Teachers, who continue to operate under the 2010 policy framework.
- 3.4 As part of the ongoing implementation and refinement of the Oracle HR system, considerable work has been undertaken to improve absence recording arrangements and refine analysis and reporting capacity. Further developments in this area are currently being considered as part of the Oracle Fusion project.

4. Proposals

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Panel scrutinises the analysis below and in the Appendices. It should be noted that rules for absence reporting have changed since the start of the pandemic. All absences due to Covid-19 and Self-Isolation have been recorded on Oracle as 'special leave' and indicating the appropriate category (this depends

on whether employees are displaying symptoms, they are self-isolating because they have been contacted by Track and Trace or they live with someone displaying symptoms). The only Covid related absences which are recorded on Oracle as 'sickness absence' are those classed as long Covid and only if the absence extends further than the 10 days isolation period. These rules were put in place at the start of the pandemic to ensure employees' sick pay was not affected by Covid related absences. A report on 'special leave' absences is issued every Wednesday so officers can properly monitor covid related absences. For the purpose of this annual report, only sickness absences have been considered so that it can be used as a fair comparison with previous 'pre-pandemic' reporting. The arrangement for processing Covid absences as 'special leave' ended on 1st July 2022.

4.1.1 Overall Absence Levels

- (i) [Appendix 1](#) provides a summary of the days lost by service area and directorate and the average days lost per employee for each.
- (ii) [Appendix 1a](#) provides the same summary as Appendix 1 but showing a split of Teaching and LGE within the People department.
- (ii) [Appendix 2](#) shows the number of days lost per employee for each of the years between 2010/11 and 2020/21, split by LGE and Teachers and showing a comparison with the overall national position across Local Government.

4.1.2 Breakdown of Absence - All Employees

- (i) A total of 45687 days has been lost because of sickness absence for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 which comprises 35707 days (78%) long term absence and 9980 days (22%) short term absence.
- (ii) Across Directorates the position is as follows:

<i>Directorate</i>	<i>Number of Days Lost 2021/22</i>	<i>Number of Days Lost 2020/21</i>	<i>Absence as % of Council's total absence</i>	<i>Workforce as a % of total Council Workforce</i>	<i>Average Days lost per employee (2021/22)</i>	<i>Average Days lost per employee (2020/21)</i>
CEO	2,131	1,633	5%	7.6%	5.86	4.68
People - Teachers	6,557	3,670	14%	25.2%	5.46	3.19
People - LGE	11,053	6,800	24%	27.3%	8.49	5.22
Place	14,586	11,633	32%	24%	12.77	10.31
H&SC P	11,360	10,511	25%	15.9%	15.02	15.24
Total	45,687	34,247	100%	100%	9.59	7.41

- (iii) The average days lost per employee for the year is 9.59. This is a 13% increase on 2020/21 (7.41 days).

- (iv) The main reasons for absence are:
- Psychological (33%)
 - Musculoskeletal (21.7%)
 - Gastrointestinal (6.2%)
- (v) Psychological and Musculoskeletal were also the main reasons for absence in 2020/21. Gastrointestinal has replaced the third main reason which in 2020/21 was Hospitalisation.

4.1.3 **Breakdown of Absence - Local Government Employees**

- (i) The total days lost for LGE for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 is 39129.81, comprising 8110.53 days (21%) short term absence and 31019.28 days (79%) long term absence. These figures equate to an annual level of 10.98 days lost per employee, which represents a 24% increase from 2020/21 (8.86 days lost).

LGE	Annual Level	Short Term %	Long Term %
2019/20	9.3	32%	68%
2020/21	8.86	17%	83%
2021/22	10.98	21%	79%

- (ii) LGE account for 85.65% of the total days lost due to absence and 74.79% of the Council's workforce.
- (iii) The main reasons for absence are:
- Psychological (28.5%)
 - Musculoskeletal (20.3%)
 - Cardiovascular (6.2%)
- (iv) The direct 'cost of absence' in 2021/22 is £3,851,547 (50% more than 2020/21 when the cost of absence was £2,550,800).
- (v) This figure reflects the payroll costs paid to the employees as part of their contractual salary payments. It is not an additional cost, but the proportion of the payroll which is being paid to employees not at work due to sickness absence.
- (vi) This direct cost does not take into account any costs in providing cover, i.e. - overtime or temporary staffing.

4.1.4 **Breakdown of Absence - Teachers**

- (i) The total days lost for Teachers for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 is 6557.31, comprising 1869.94 days (28%) short term absence and 4687.37 days (72%) long term absence. These figures equate to an annual level of 5.46 days lost per employee which represents 71% increase from 2020/2021 (3.19 days lost).

Teachers	Annual Level	Short Term %	Long Term %
2019/20	5.1	44%	56%
2020/21	3.1	24%	76%
2021/22	5.46	28%	72%

Teachers account for 14.35% of the total Council absence and 25.21% of the Council's workforce.

- (ii) The main reasons for absence are:
- Respiratory (28.7%)
 - Gastrointestinal (23%)
 - Psychological (11.5%)
- (iii) The direct 'cost of absence' in 2020/21 is £1,224,774 (71% more than 2021/22 when absence cost was £714,310).
- (iv) This figure reflects the payroll costs paid to the employees as part of their contractual salary payments. It is not an additional cost, but the proportion of the payroll which is being paid to employees not at work due to sickness absence.
- (v) This direct cost does not take into account any costs in providing cover i.e. overtime or temporary staffing.

4.1.5 **National Comparison of Absence**

- (i) Appendix 2 provides the comparison between the Council's sickness absence levels and the national average for each complete year between April 2010 and March 2022. These tables show a gradual and consistent improvement in the council's performance, both overall and relative to other Councils.
- (ii) In 2020/21 the Council was ranked 5 for Teachers and 12 for LGE.

4.2 **Framework for Maximising Attendance**

4.2.1 **Discretion**

A key aspect of managing absence is the ability of managers to apply discretion when an employee reaches a particular absence level, so that the action which is otherwise required by the terms of the Framework, is not applied. Such discretion should only be applied where the employee:

- has a good attendance record over a number of years i.e. at least 3 years, and whose attendance has not previously been a cause of concern to management; or
- is absent due to a chronic illness/disease; or
- has to undergo a surgical procedure/requires hospitalisation which has a specified/expected date of recovery; or

- has a disability or an underlying medical condition which affects their attendance intermittently over a set period of time. For short term absence, this may include varying the attendance targets; or
- has been absent for pregnancy related reasons; or
- has been absent due to bereavement; or
- has been absent due to an accident or injury at work.

Details of the use of Discretion are as follows:

Applications	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number	98	128	252	263	323	247	153	180
Approved	93	122	247	260	318	245	152	172
Percentage	95%	95%	98%	99%	98%	99%	99%	95.5%

4.2.2 Monitoring Attendance

- (i) Members will recall that, prior to the 2014 revision of the Maximising Attendance Framework, in situations where an employee's absence was at an unacceptable level, the matter was dealt with through the Council's Disciplinary Policy. The revised Framework recognises that, while an employer can, and should, monitor absence; establish required levels of attendance; and take action where absence levels fall below the standards which can be sustained by the business, unacceptable levels of authorised sickness absence (i.e. covered by a self or medical certificate) is not an issue of conduct (which are dealt with through the disciplinary process) and, therefore, issuing disciplinary warnings is not necessarily the most appropriate action. Instead, the revised Framework introduced a separate stream of escalating actions (stages), which advises the employee that his or her attendance level is unsatisfactory and warns that if the necessary improvement is not achieved, further action will be applied, including, ultimately, dismissal.

- (ii) The number of formal meetings in each of the last 7 years is as follows:

Stage	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Stage 1 Meeting	126	356	235	438	388	392	280	211
Stage 2 Meeting	44	108	49	109	141	98	67	60
Stage 3 Meeting	10	16	26	32	31	23	12	8

- (iii) The 10 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2014/15 comprised 9 long term absentees and 1 short term. All employees were dismissed.

- (iv) The 16 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2015/16 comprised 15 long term absentees and 1 short term. All employees were dismissed.
- (v) The 26 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2016/17 comprised 12 long term absentees and 14 short term. Of these 10 were dismissed.
- (vi) The 32 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2017/18 comprised 13 long term absentees and 19 short term. Of these 8 were dismissed.
- (vii) The 31 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2018/19 comprised 17 long term absentees and 14 short term. Of these 11 were dismissed.
- (viii) The 23 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2019/20 comprised 19 long term absentees and 4 short term. Of these 13 were dismissed.
- (ix) The 12 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2020/21 comprised 9 long term absentees and 3 short term. Of these 7 were dismissed.
- (x) The 8 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2021/22 comprised 3 long term absentees and 5 short term. Of these 1 was dismissed.

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Not applicable.

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 Not applicable.

8. Risk

8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations.

8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

8.2.1 There are no risks associated with rejecting the recommendations.

9. Equalities

9.1 The proposals in this report allow scrutiny of performance. The report does not involve proposals for policies, strategies, procedures, processes, financial decisions and activities (including service delivery), both new and at review, that affect the Council's communities and employees, therefore an equality impact assessment is not required.

10. Sustainable Development Implications

- 10.1 **Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** - This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

11. Options Appraisal

- 11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

12. Link to Council Plan

- 12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to Commitment 1 of the Council Plan: Fair and Effective Leadership/ Leadership that promotes fairness.

13. Results of Consultation

- 13.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.
- 13.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Ian Davis, Portfolio Holder for Finance, HR and ICT, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

Background Papers **None**

Person to Contact **Wendy Wesson, Service Lead – HR and Payroll**
County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr, KA7 1DR
Phone 01292 612696
E-mail wendy.wesson@south-ayrshire.gov.uk

Date: 28 July 2022

Days Lost Per Employee

	Service	FTE	Total Days Lost	Annual Day Lost per Employee
Chief Executives	Directorate Support	6.00	3	0.57
	Finance and ICT	210.12	1400	6.66
	Legal, HR and Regulatory Services	147.34	728	4.94
Sub Total		363.46	2131	5.86
People	Children's Services, Planning and Child Poverty	2.60	0	0.00
	Community Services and Facilities	188.56	1292	6.85
	Early Years Centres	114.52	1941	16.95
	Education - Early Years	51.78	343	6.62
	Education - Primary and Additional Support	63.70	109	1.71
	Education - Secondary	74.24	816	10.99
	Education Support Services	53.38	165	3.09
	Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud	5.00	91	18.20
	OD and Customer Service	69.04	718	10.40
	Performance Policy and Community Planning	26.86	70	2.61
	Primary Schools	1013.59	6305	6.22
	Secondary Schools	636.36	4358	6.85
	Special Schools	70.34	834	11.86
	Thriving Communities	129.34	568	4.39
	Directorate Support	4.00	0	0.00
Sub Total		2503.31	17610	7.03
HSCP	Children's' Health, Care and Criminal Justice	185.63	2411	12.99
	Community Health and Care Services	463.69	8476	18.28
	Directorate Support	107.01	473	4.42
Sub Total		756.33	11360	15.02
Place	Asset Management and Community Asset Transfer	24.61	161	6.53
	Economy and Regeneration	25.18	385	15.27
	Facilities Management (ADD .7 FTE)	379.84	3274	8.62
	Housing Services	164.98	2404	14.57
	Neighbourhood Services (Add 1 FTE)	317.22	5853	18.45
	Planning and Building Standards	39.11	260	6.64
	Procurement	18.63	61	3.27
	Professional Design Services	16.97	0	0.00
	Property Maintenance	145.00	2176	15.01
	Special Property Projects	5.00	0	0.00
	Directorate Support	6.00	13	2.17
Sub Total		1142.54	14586	12.77

Council		4765.64	45687	9.59
----------------	--	----------------	--------------	-------------

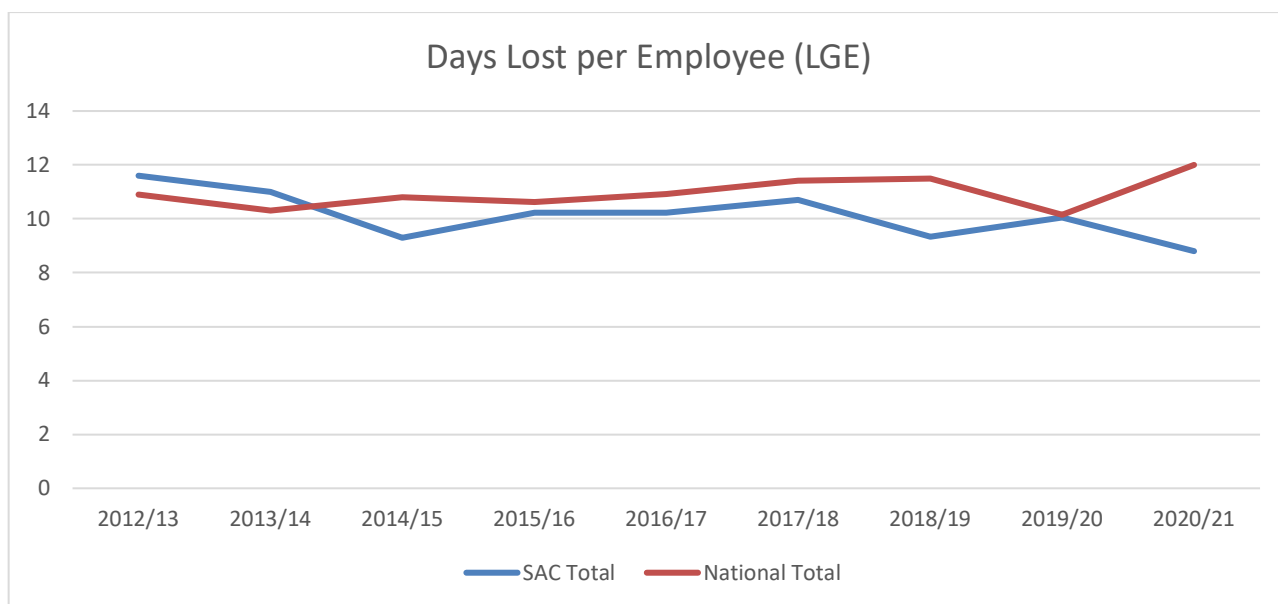
Appendix 1a

Days Lost Per Employee (with Teaching and Non-Teaching split within People)

	Service	FTE	Total Days Lost	Annual Day Lost per Employee
Chief Executives	Directorate Support	6.00	3	0.57
	Finance and ICT	210.12	1400	6.66
	Legal, HR and Regulatory Services	147.34	728	4.94
Sub Total		363.46	2131	5.86
People	LGE/Non Teaching Staff	1302.04	11053	8.49
	Teacher	1201.27	6557	5.46
Sub Total		2503.31	17610	7.03
HSCP	Children's' Health, Care and Criminal Justice	185.63	2411	12.99
	Community Health and Care Services	463.69	8476	18.28
	Directorate Support	107.01	473	4.42
Sub Total		756.33	11360	15.02
Place	Asset Management and Community Asset Transfer	24.61	161	6.53
	Economy and Regeneration	25.18	385	15.27
	Facilities Management (ADD .7 FTE)	379.84	3274	8.62
	Housing Services	164.98	2404	14.57
	Neighbourhood Services (Add 1 FTE)	317.22	5853	18.45
	Planning and Building Standards	39.11	260	6.64
	Procurement	18.63	61	3.27
	Professional Design Services	16.97	0	0.00
	Property Maintenance	145.00	2176	15.01
	Special Property Projects	5.00	0	0.00
	Directorate Support	6.00	13	2.17
Sub Total		1142.54	14586	12.77
Council		4765.64	45687	9.59

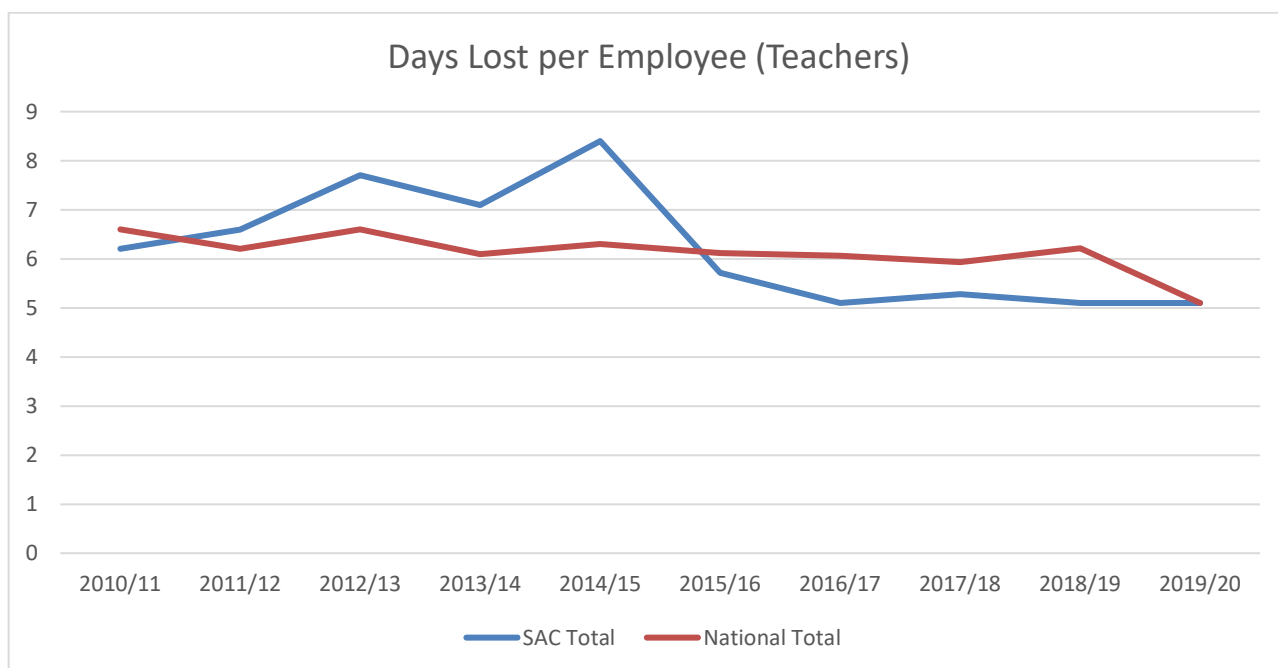
Days Lost per Employee (National Comparison)

1) LGE



	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
SAC Total	11.6	11	9.3	10.23	10.23	10.7	9.34	10.05	8.8
National Total	10.9	10.3	10.8	10.63	10.92	11.41	11.49	10.1	12

2) Teachers



	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
SAC Total	7.7	7.1	8.4	5.71	5.1	5.28	5.1	5.1	3.2
National Total	6.6	6.1	6.3	6.12	6.06	5.93	6.21	5.1	5