

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Chief Executive
to Service and Performance Panel
of 10 January 2023**

Subject: Employee Absence - Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Panel with a mid-term update (1 April to 30 September 2022) of detailed information and analysis of sickness absence across Council services.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Panel:

- 2.1.1 scrutinises this information and notes the work in setting up the absence review group; and**
- 2.1.2 notes that the six-month comparison shows LGE absence costs have slightly increased by 1.7% (£33,968) and Teachers costs have decreased by 28% (£177,377).**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Employee Absence annual report was presented to Panel on 20 September 2022. This report highlighted that a total of 45,687 days were lost because of sickness absence for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 which comprised 35,707 days (78%) long term absence and 9,980 days (22%) short term absence. The Chief HR Adviser was asked to provide a future update to Panel.
- 3.2 During the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 the average days lost per employee was 9.59. This is a 13% increase on 2020/21 (7.41 days).
- 3.3 The main reasons cited for absence were – Psychological (33%), Musculoskeletal (21.7%) and Gastrointestinal (6.2%). Psychological and Musculoskeletal were the main reasons for absence in 2020/21. Gastrointestinal has replaced the third main reason which in 2020/21 was Hospitalisation.

4. Proposals

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Panel scrutinises the analysis below. It should be noted that rules for absence reporting have changed since the start of the pandemic and the arrangements for processing Covid absences as 'special leave' ended on 1 July 2022.

4.1.1 **Breakdown of Absence - All Employees**

A total of 22,238.67 days has been lost because of sickness absence for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 which comprises 16,697.34 days (75%) long term absence and 5,541.33 days (25%) short term absence. These percentages are in line with the proportion of long and short-term absence reported for the period April 2021/March 2022 (78% long term and 22% short term).

Across Directorates the position is as follows:

Directorate	Number of Days Lost 2021/22	Absence % total absence 2021/22	Number of Days Lost Apr/Sept 2022	Absence % total absence Apr/Sept 2022	Average Days lost per employee 2021/22	Average Days lost per employee Apr/Sept 2022
CEO	2,131	5%	1170	5%	5.86	3.29
People - Teachers	6,557	14%	2329	11%	5.46	1.91
People - LGE	11,053	24%	4709	21%	8.49	3.71
Place	14,586	32%	7085	32%	12.77	6.26
H&SC P	11,360	25%	6945	31%	15.02	9
Total	45,687	100%	22,239	100%	9.59	4.68

The average days lost per employee for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 is 4.68.

The main reasons for absence during the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 are:

- Psychological – 30.5% (33% in the period 2021/22);
- Musculoskeletal – 21% (21.7% in the period 2021/22); and
- Gastrointestinal – 7.2% (6.2% in the period 2021/22).

Psychological and Musculoskeletal were also the main reasons for absence reported in the previous two years (2020/21 and 2021/22). Gastrointestinal has replaced the third main reason which in 2020/21 was Hospitalisation.

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

The total days lost for LGE for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 is 19,910.

Local Government Employees, who are 75% of the Council's workforce, account for 89.6% of the total days lost due to absence (85.65% for the period April 2021/March 2022).

The main reasons for absence during the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 are:

- Psychological – 30% (28.5% in the period 2021/22);
- Musculoskeletal – 22 % (20.3% in the period 2021/22); and
- Gastrointestinal – 7% (previously cardiovascular with 6.2%).

The direct cost of absence for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 is £1,959,741. For the period April 2021/March 2022 the cost was £3,851,547. If this is pro-rata for a six-month period the cost is £1,925,773, meaning there is a slight increase of 1.7% in 2022. However, this percentage difference may change and overall cost decrease at the end of the reporting period (March 2023). The difference will therefore be reviewed when the full report is issued next year.

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. This direct cost does not consider any costs in providing cover, i.e. - overtime or temporary staffing.

4.1.3 ***Breakdown of Absence - Teachers***

The total days lost for Teachers for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 is 2,329.

Teachers, who are 25.21% of the Council's workforce, account for 11% of the total Council absence.

The main reasons for absence are:

- Psychological – 33% (11.5% in the period 2021/22);
- Respiratory – 17% (28.7% in the period 2021/22); and
- Musculoskeletal – 8.2% (previously Gastrointestinal with 23%).

The direct cost of absence for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 is £435,010. For the period April 2021/March 2022 the cost was £1,224,774. If this is pro-rata for a six-month period the cost is £612,387, meaning there is currently a decrease of 28%. This is an anticipated reduction which is a return to pre-Covid related absence rates. However, this percentage difference may change and overall cost increase (or decrease further) at the end of the reporting period (March 2023). The difference will therefore be reviewed when the full report is issued next year.

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. This direct cost does not consider any costs in providing cover i.e. overtime or temporary staffing.

- 4.2 A short-term working group has been set-up comprising service representatives and HR. Trade Union colleagues agreed for consultation through the TU Liaison Group. The purpose of the working group is to review the Local Government and Teaching Maximising Attendance Frameworks and streamline administrative processes.

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 **Report to Service and Performance Panel of 20 September 2022 - [Employee Absence 2021/22](#)**

Person to Contact **Wendy Wesson, Chief HR Adviser
County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr, KA7 1DR
Phone 01292 612186
E-mail wendy.wesson@south-ayrshire.gov.uk**

Date: **20 December 2022**