

To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

On: 22nd August 2022

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

Heading: Absence Statistics – Annual report 21/22 and Quarter 1 of 22/23.

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board with the absence information for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. The report also provides absence performance by all services during quarter 1 covering the period 1st April to 30th June 2022.
- 1.2 The council has continued to follow Government guidance throughout the pandemic, and this has contributed to a reduction in short term absence with fewer people circulating socially and within workplaces. During the period 21/22, working from home continued to reduce the opportunity for transmission, particularly as a result of not having to commute. Longer term absences have exasperated due to lengthier treatment and medical intervention waiting times.
- 1.3 The report details the absence statistics by service and by category of staff. The report provides information in relation to absence targets and how services have performed against them. An analysis of the reasons for absence has also been compiled and details are included within the report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes the content of this report.
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3. Background

3.1 The Scrutiny Board agreed that absence levels will be reported on a quarterly basis. It was agreed that the report will include the following information relating to supporting attendance: -

- Absence statistics broken down by service and category of staff.
- Reasons for absence broken down by service and category of staff.
- Progress made by services in relation to their supporting attendance action plans.

4. Sickness absence statistics for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 overview.

4.1 Under challenging working arrangements and the response required from the council to respond to the continued restrictions, short term absences reduced. This may be due to 'working from home arrangements' allowing people to continue more easily to work when they may have been feeling slightly unwell.

4.2 Covid-19 restrictions are likely to have further contributed to the reduction in short term absence because less people have been circulating and interacting due to non-essential workplace activities being closed down. This significantly reduced the opportunity for transmission of short-term ailments when working or commuting.

4.3 Additionally, there was a strong sense of community and commitment reflected in the workforce ethos to continue to deliver essential services during such an unprecedented time, which undoubtedly has reduced short term absence to some degree.

4.4 The main presenting issues over the year were:

- Psychological
- Muscoskeletal
- Stomach/bowel/blood and metabolic disorders

4.5 A comparison of the council overall absence performance for the years 20/21 and 21/22 is detailed in table 1 on the following page. In line with the reporting requirements for Scottish Councils, absence is expressed as a number of work days lost per full time equivalent (FTE) employee and has covid absence removed.

Table 1: council absence data:

Employee Group	20/21	21/22	Variance +/- year on year
Local Government	11.89	13.89	+ 2.0 
Teachers	5.7	5.9	+0.2 
Council Overall	10.32	11.29	+0.97 

5. Sickness absence statistics for quarter 1 - 1st April 2022 to 30 June 2022.

5.1 A comparison of the council overall absence performance for the quarter (Q1) is detailed in table 2. Table 3 on the following page details services performance. In line with the reporting requirements for Scottish Councils, absence is expressed as a number of work days lost per full time equivalent (FTE) employee and has covid absence removed.

Table 2 Council performance – Q1 (without covid)

Employee Group	Quarter Ending June 21	Quarter Ending June 22	Variance +/- year on year
Local Government	3.28	3.46	+0.18 
Teachers	1.35	1.77	+0.42 
Council Overall	2.78	3.02	+0.24 

5.2 Service performance for Q1 (without covid) is detailed in table 3 below.

Table 3

Service	Quarter Ending June 2021	Quarter Ending June 2022	Variance +/- year on year
Chief Executives	0.96	1.50	+0.54 
Childrens Services	2.32	2.69	+0.37 
Communities and Housing Services	2.45	3.55	+1.10 
Environment and Infrastructure	4.01	3.52	-0.49 
Finance & Resource Services	1.52	1.76	+0.24 
Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership	4.66	5.04	+0.38 
Council Overall	2.78	3.02	+0.24 
Council Overall Target	2.60	2.60	n/a

6. Sickness absence targets analysis for quarter 1- 1st April 2022 to 30 June 2022.

- 6.1 The local government employee absence level of 3.46 days lost per FTE employee is **0.86 days above** the council target of 2.60 days.
- 6.2 In addition, the teacher absence level of 1.77 days lost per FTE employee is **0.23 days above** the council target of 1.54 days.
- 6.3 The council has recorded an overall absence rate of 3.02 days lost per FTE employee, which is **0.42 days above** the council target of 2.60 days.

7. Sickness absence reasons and related support measures during quarter 1 - 1st April 2022 to 30th June 2022.

- 7.1 The main sickness absence reasons across the council presented in this quarter were:
- Psychological
 - Muscoskeletal
 - Respiratory
 - Stomach/bowel/blood and metabolic disorders
- 7.2 To support employees with psychological absences, the council provides a range of support services that employees can be referred to at an early stage for assistance, such as the council's Occupational Health Service and the Time for Talking employee counselling service.

- 7.3 The Time for Talking (TFT) counselling service provides 24-hour confidential support to employees with a range of personal health and well-being issues. It operates a flexible approach to appointments offering telephone consultations in the early mornings or evenings as well as throughout the day.
- 7.4 **56** referrals were made to TFT during quarter 1 which resulted in 238 sessions being offered. The main presenting issues are detailed below:



Personal

Stress/anxiety/depression
Family Relationships
Change



Work & Personal

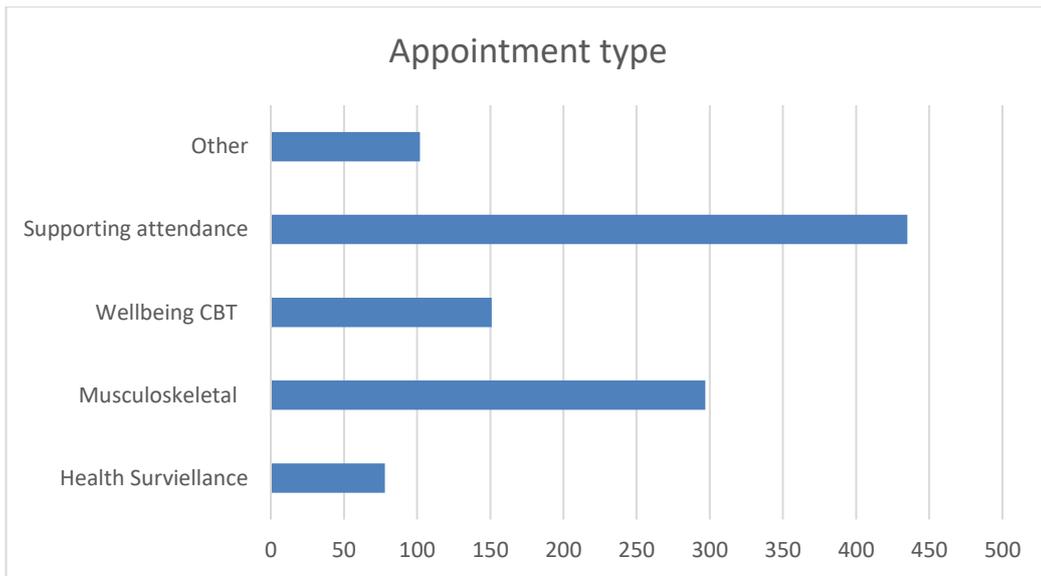
Stress/anxiety



Work related

Role (the understanding of)
Change
Demands

- 7.5 Stress risk assessments are undertaken to support employees who have identified stress as having an impact on their wellbeing. An action plan is agreed and undertaken at a local level with the specialist support from HR and OD.
- 7.6 HR and OD work in collaboration with NHS colleagues, to offer safeTalk and ASIST courses on suicide awareness and prevention as well as anxiety awareness courses. We also promote the “Doing Well” service which supports employees with depression and low moods.
- 7.7 The Physiotherapy service supports employees with Muscoskeletal and Joint Disorder conditions through the council’s Occupational Health Service. The service has continued to be provided throughout the quarter using secure face to face appointments, video conferencing and telephone consultations.
- 7.8 The council’s usage of the Occupational Health Service (OHS) for quarter 1 was **1063** appointments, which is fully utilising the service availability. OHS provides advice and guidance on the impact of ill health on work and what steps the council and/or the employee may make in order to secure a return to work. The main appointment types are detailed in the graphic on the following page:



8. Measures to support attendance at work

8.1 A number of measures being progressed to support attendance at work, include the following: -

- A dedicated absence review group, chaired by the Head of People and OD is reviewing the current supporting attendance policies and processes, covering all employees, including teachers. The key actions are to check the thinking on our policies, examine our engagement strategies, our leadership and our supportive actions. As part of this process, we will be looking at other councils and organisations for benchmarking and best practice.
- HR and OD and the Business World Team are working to improve the absence information available to managers, and to streamline supporting attendance related processes that will facilitate a singular, prompt absence reporting and recording across the council. This is also being supported by colleagues from the project management team.
- Develop, with support of the Business World Team, a suite of appropriate reports to enable managers to analyse their absence data. This will also provide an opportunity to increase the frequency of reporting sickness absence information to the Corporate Management Team.
- In collaboration with the communications and marketing service, regular information and guidance continues to be issued, particularly around well-being issues.
- We will redesign the current supporting absence training courses, ensuring managers are fully equipped to manage staff absence and take accountability for their absence status.

- We will closely manage our OH providers in the new contract provision. We will ensure that we continue to fully utilise all the available resource to support our staff who are off sick as well as those who are returning back to the workplace either with an ongoing condition or are in recovery. We will also be looking to introduce some new and innovative ways to support attendance.
- We will link all the supporting attendance measures to our Health and Wellbeing Strategy development.
- As part of the council's health and safety management system, occupations which include manual handling activities as part of the role, require task risk assessments. These risk assessments are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that safe working practices are maintained.
- We are currently reviewing all our statutory and mandatory training courses. Included in the review is the suitability of the moving and handling training courses for people movement and manual handling training for objects.

Implications of this Report

- 1 **Financial Implications** - Improvement in attendance impacts on the financial costs of absence.
- 2 **HR and Organisational Development Implications** - HR and Organisational Development Practitioners will continue to work with service managers and consult with the Trade Unions, on the implementation of the Supporting Attendance at Work Policy and Guidance and initiatives detailed in this report.
- 3 **Community Planning**

Children and Young People - none.

Jobs and the Economy - none.

Community care, health, and wellbeing - provides for continuous improvement in health and attendance.

Safer and Stronger - provides for improved service performance across the Council.

Greener - none.

Empowering our communities - none.
- 4 **Legal Implications** - none.
- 5 **Property/Asset Implications** - none.
- 6 **Information Technology Implications** - none.

- 7 **Equality and Human Rights Implications** - none.
- 8 **Health and Safety Implications** - it is integral to the Council's aim of securing the health and well-being of employees.
- 9 **Procurement Implications** - none.
- 10 **Risk Implications** - Without continued effective supporting attendance focus, there is a risk that sickness absence levels will adversely impact on the Council both financially and in terms of service delivery. Consequently, supporting attendance activities are monitored via the Corporate Risk Register.
- 11 **Privacy Impact Implications** - none.
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – none
13. **Climate Risk** - none

List of Background Papers - none.

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