

SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING – 2021/22

Presented by the Head of Human Resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises employee sickness absence levels during 2021/22 and compares them to the target approved by Members. It also recommends a target for 2022/23.

At the Executive Committee in May 2020 (Paper E/672/20) Members approved an annual sickness absence target of 3 days per full time equivalent (FTE) employee. This target was a stretch target based on the Authority's previous performance and above public/private sector comparators.

In April 2020 following transfer of the Leisure Services Contract venues back to the Authority, the FTE in the Authority increased from 84 to 251.

The Authority's average total number of days for sickness absence per FTE in 2021/22 equated to 5.62 days. This is above the Authority's stretch target of 3 days per FTE but is still lower than the national average of 7.3 days, the public sector average of 10.0 days and the private sector average of 6.7 days. Short term sickness averaged at 1.86 days per FTE and long term sickness averaged at 3.76 days per FTE.

The average cost of sickness absence in 2021/22 equated to £320 per employee.

In terms of a target for 2022/23, based on the Authority's sickness absence performance over previous years, it is proposed that a stretch target of 3 days average sickness absence per FTE be continued.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members Note: (1) the contents of this report; and

Members Approve: (2) a 2022/23 sickness absence target of 3 days per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for short term sickness.

BACKGROUND

- 1 The Authority's sickness absence target (average sickness per FTE employee) was agreed at the Executive Committee meeting in May 2020 (Paper E/672/20). A

stretch target of 3 days was set, based on the Authority's performance to date and public/private sector comparators.

- The Authority uses comparative public/private sector data from the most recent Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) national survey of Health and Wellbeing at Work in partnership with Simply Health and the annual XpertHR Absence Rates and Costs Survey.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE 2021/22

- The table below compares the Authority's sickness absence performance for 2021/22 to the national, public and private sector performance.

	TOTAL NATIONAL	PUBLIC SECTOR	PRIVATE SECTOR	LVRPA
Average days lost per FTE per year	7.3 days	10.0 days	6.7 days	5.62 days
Average working time lost per year (%)	3.2%	4.4%	3.0%	4.5%

- This table shows that the Authority's sickness performance for 2021/22 is lower than the public sector, private sector and national averages.
- The table below compares the Authority's sickness absence performance over the past five years.

	TARGET 2021/22	ACTUAL 2017/18	ACTUAL 2018/19	ACTUAL 2019/20	ACTUAL 2020/21	ACTUAL 2021/22
Average sickness absence per FTE	3 days	8.3 days	4.5 days	4.8 days	2.07 days	5.62 days
% time lost to sickness absence	N/A	2.49%	1.48%	1.63%	2.0%	4.5%
Average cost of sickness per employee, per year	N/A	£856	£494	£515	£186	£320

- The Authority's average sickness absence per FTE of 5.62 days for 2021/22 is above the stretch target of 3 days. The total FTE in the Authority for 2021/22 was 220 and in 2020/21 it was 251, whereas in 2019/20 it was 84.
- If long term and short term sickness is separated, the average short-term sickness absence per FTE for 2021/22 is 1.86 days, which is below the target of 3 days per FTE.
- The percentage of time lost due to sickness absence in 2021/22 was 4.5%.

- 9 The average cost of sickness absence was £320 per employee for the financial year 2021/22, which is higher than the 2020/21 average cost of £186 due to the higher number of sick days overall.

SHORT-TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 10 Short-term sickness absence is defined as any period of sickness absence of less than four weeks.
- 11 In 2021/22 short-term sickness absence equated to 30% of the Authority's total sickness absence and the average sickness days per FTE was 1.86 days.
- 12 The table below shows a comparison of the Authority's short-term sickness absence over the last five financial years.
- 13 The number of days attributed to short term sickness has increased when compared to the previous years, however the total FTE has also increased since April 2020.
- 14 Human Resources will continue to closely monitor short-term intermittent sickness in 2022/23 to ensure proactive management.

LVRPA - SHORT TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE					
Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Days	228.5	228	204	123.5	355
% of Total Sickness	35%	60%	48%	24%	30%
Average sickness absence per FTE (short term sickness only)	2.9 days	2.7 days	2.3 days	0.49 days	1.86 days

- 15 The Authority's recorded top five reasons for short-term sickness absence in 2021/22 were Covid-19, headache/migraine, colds/flu, operation and musculoskeletal problems. In comparison, the CIPD's 2022 Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey Report reported the top five reasons as Covid-19, colds/flu, stomach upset, headaches/migraines and musculoskeletal injuries.

LONG-TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 16 Long-term sickness, in accordance with the Authority's Sickness Absence Procedure, is defined as any continuous period of sickness absence in excess of four weeks. The table below shows long-term sickness levels for the last five financial years.

LVRPA - LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE					
Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Days	419	156	221	397	827
% of Total Sickness	65%	40%	52%	76%	70%

- 17 Long-term sickness absence in the 2021/22 period was 827 days, consisting of 10

employees.

These 10 cases were mainly due to operations and injuries, but also mental health and cancer. 5 employees have returned to work, with 2 of those still on a phased return. 3 employees resigned and no longer work for the Authority and 2 employees were still off sick when they transferred to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) on 1 April 2022. In comparison, the CIPD reported mental ill health, musculoskeletal injuries, stress, acute medical conditions and long Covid as the main causes of long term absence.

- 18 The Authority will continue to closely manage long-term sickness in 2022/23 in order to ensure proactive management.

COVID-19

- 19 More than two years on from the onset of the pandemic, we hope the immediate health crisis is in retreat, but the health impacts of Covid-19 may well be with us for a long time and the prevalence and impact of long Covid is emerging as a significant concern. The condition is not yet fully understood or defined, but it can have serious debilitating implications for some individuals.
- 20 For any employees suffering with long Covid the Authority is taking steps to support them, mainly through occupational health assessments, tailoring support and adjustments to individual needs and promoting flexible working where necessary.
- 21 The pandemic has continued to have an extensive impact on ways of working and patterns of behaviour, with widespread implications for people's wellbeing, so the Authority has taken additional action through providing more tailored support to address individuals' needs and concerns and an increased focus on employees' mental health.

MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 22 The Authority's Sickness Absence Procedure includes:

- return to work interviews;
- detailed monitoring of both short and long term sickness absence with reports to Senior Management;
- managers maintaining regular contact with employees during their absence;
- referrals to Occupational Health (OH) professionals; and proactively obtaining consent from employees regarding any relevant medical reports.

Following an employee's return to work after a long-term sickness absence, reasonable adjustments are considered in consultation with the employee, manager, HR, Health & Safety and OH professionals to ensure the transition back into the workplace does not put the employee at further risk of sickness absence. The Authority also has a Capability Procedure which includes a framework for effectively managing sickness absence.

- 23 The Authority's Capability and Disciplinary Procedure and the continuing management of sickness absence, as set out in the Authority's Sickness Absence Procedure, enables the Authority to continue to effectively manage short and long term absence. These procedures were reviewed during 2021/22 to ensure they

were fit for purpose.

24 The Authority has an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which is currently provided by Health Assured and offers the following services to all employees and their immediate families:

- 24/7 telephone support;
- legal information;
- structured telephone counselling;
- management support;
- face to face counselling;
- on-line counselling;
- active care – early intervention for stress; and
- on-line health portal.

MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

25 Mental ill health has been a significant and growing concern for organisations over the past few years and is the most common cause of long-term absence nationally. The pandemic has exacerbated rates of stress and anxiety for many, with some groups of people (such as those with a pre-existing mental health condition) particularly affected.

The Authority promotes a preventative approach to health and well-being, encouraging and supporting employees using a number of tools including:

- providing an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) with a 24/7 telephone service for staff, face to face counselling sessions and access to the Health Assured website for advice and signposting;
- providing an Occupational Health (OH) service and active care referrals;
- offering flexible working arrangements;
- offering self funded health cash plans and dental plans;
- providing annual health assessments for its employees; and
- mental health awareness training.

Employees are regularly reminded of the health and wellbeing services provided by the Authority and signposted to other useful sources of information/support via our monthly newsletters, through line managers and HR and regular reminder emails throughout the year.

Over the next five years through the Authority's Business Plan, the Human Resources team will be placing a major focus on health and wellbeing.

CONCLUSIONS AND TARGETS

26 The Authority's overall sickness absence performance for 2021/22 was above the stretch target set for the year but was lower than both public and private sector comparators.

27 The Human Resources section continues to ensure that managers are recording sickness absence accordingly across the board by reviewing the current procedure and providing training and coaching on how to manage sickness absence. The sickness absence procedure is regularly audited as part of the audit plan.

- 28 The Authority's employee numbers significantly increased between 2020/21 and 2021/22 due to the transfer of staff from Lee Valley Leisure Trust Ltd (the Trust) and Vibrant Partnerships to LVRPA. Therefore, along with the Covid-19 Pandemic and the furlough scheme the sickness data and comparisons during these two financial years are somewhat skewed compared to previous years.
- 29 Based on the Authority's performance in 2021/22 and the underlying positive performance for short-term sickness, it is proposed that the stretch target for sickness absence in 2022/23 remains at 3 days per FTE but is for short term sickness only rather than for all sickness absence.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 30 There are no environmental implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 31 The financial impact of sickness absence is set out in the report and has been managed within the approved employees' budget for 2021/22.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 32 The human resource implications are detailed within the body of this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 33 There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 34 In line with the Authority's Strategic Risk Register, there is always a potential risk that insufficient human resources through high sickness levels could mean that certain corporate objectives may not be met. To mitigate this risk senior managers review long-term sickness to ensure adequate cover is in place with the necessary resources to ensure service levels are not adversely impacted. Resources are identified through the monthly budget monitoring process.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 35 There are no equality implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

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PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORTS

Executive Committee	E/58/10	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2009/10	20 May 2010
Executive Committee	E/131/11	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2010/11	26 May 2011

Executive Committee	E/210/12	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2011/12	24 May 2012
Executive Committee	E/278/13	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2012/13	23 May 2013
Executive Committee	E/352/14	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2013/14	15 May 2014
Executive Committee	E/406/15	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2014/15	21 May 2015
Executive Committee	E/449/16	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2015/16	26 May 2016
Executive Committee	E/499/17	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2016/17	26 May 2017
Executive Committee	E/563/18	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2017/18	24 May 2018
Executive Committee	E/621/19	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2018/19	23 May 2019
Executive Committee	E/672/20	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2019/20	21 May 2020

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GLL	Greenwich Leisure Limited
OH	Occupational Health
LVRPA	Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
the Trust	Lee Valley Leisure Trust Ltd (trading as Vibrant Partnerships)

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