

SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING – 2023/24

Presented by the Head of Human Resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises employee sickness absence levels during 2023/24 and compares them to the target approved by Members. It also recommends a target for 2024/25.

At the Executive Committee in July 2023 (Paper E/813/23) Members approved an annual sickness absence target of 3 days per full time equivalent (FTE) employee for short term sickness only.

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. Then, in April 2022, following commencement of the new Leisure Services Contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), the FTE in the Authority decreased from 231 to 121. The FTE in 2023/24 was 127. The increase in FTE from 84 in April 2020 to 121 in April 2022 was, in the main, due to the Authority retaining the Campsites and Marinas in-house.

The Authority's average total number of days for short term sickness absence per FTE in 2023/24 equated to 3.02 days, which is just on target with the Authority's target of 3 days per FTE. The only comparative data found split into short term and long term sickness is from the Civil Service who reported an average of 3.7 days lost per FTE to short term sickness in 2023/24.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) report an average of 10.6 days per FTE in the public sector and 5.8 days per FTE in the private sector, which is for both long term and short term sickness together. The Civil Service report a total average of 8.1 days sickness lost per FTE. The Authority's overall average for both long term and short term sickness in 2023/24 was 6.90 days per FTE, so lower than both the public sector average and Civil Service average.

In terms of a target for 2024/25, based on the Authority's sickness absence performance over previous years, it is proposed that a target of 3 days for short term sickness absence per FTE be continued.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Members Approve: (2) a 2024/25 sickness absence target of 3 days per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for short term sickness.

BACKGROUND

- 1 The Authority's sickness absence target (average short-term sickness per FTE employee) was agreed at the Executive Committee meeting in July 2023 (Paper E/813/23). A target of 3 days was set, based on the Authority's performance to date and public/private sector comparators.
- 2 Previously the Authority's sickness absence target related to all sickness absence (long term and short term). However, from 2022/23, it was changed to only relate to short term sickness absence, so the figures have been split out in this report.
- 3 The Authority historically uses comparative national, public and 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 XperHR Absence Rates and Costs Survey. However, no comparative information is available for national, public and private sector performance split into short term and long term absence (which is how we now report sickness absence) via the CIPD report, the XperHR report or ONS data. However, the Civil Service do breakdown their sickness into long term and short term so these comparisons have been reported.

SHORT TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 4 Short term sickness absence is defined as any period of sickness absence of less than four weeks.
- 5 The table below compares the Authority's short term sickness absence performance for 2023/24 to the Civil Service performance.

	CIVIL SERVICE	LVRPA
Average days lost per FTE per year	3.7 days	3.02 days

- 6 In 2023/24 short term sickness absence equated to 44% of the Authority's total sickness absence and the average sickness days per FTE was 3.02 days. Short term sickness ranged from 0.5 days to 15 days in an occurrence.
- 7 The number of days attributed to short term sickness has slightly decreased when compared to last year, but is still higher than it has been in previous years. However, the CIPD report, states that the average absence levels increased across all sectors in 2023, and as in previous years were considerably higher in the public sector.
- 8 The Authority's recorded top five reasons for short term sickness absence in 2023/24 were coughs/colds/influenza, stomach upset, headache/migraine, Covid-19 and non-work related stress. In comparison, the CIPD's top five reasons were minor illnesses, musculoskeletal injuries, mental ill health (e.g. depression or anxiety), Covid 19 and stress.
- 9 25% of short term sickness absence in 2023/24 related to office based staff and 75% to field based / venue based staff.
- 10 The table below shows a comparison of the Authority's short term sickness absence

over the last five financial years.

LVRPA - SHORT TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE					
Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Days	204	123.5	355	392	383
% of Total Sickness	48%	24%	30%	30%	44%
Average sickness absence per FTE (short term sickness only)	2.3 days	0.49 days	1.86 days	3.22 days	3.02 days

- 11 Human Resources will continue to closely monitor short term intermittent sickness in 2024/25 to ensure proactive management.

LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 12 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.
- 13 The table below compares the Authority's long term sickness absence performance for 2023/24 to the Civil Service performance.

	CIVIL SERVICE	LVRPA
Average days lost per FTE per year	4.4 days	3.89 days

- 14 The table below shows a comparison of the Authority's long term sickness absence over the last five financial years.

LVRPA - LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE					
Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Days	221	397	827	897	494
% of Total Sickness	52%	76%	70%	70%	56%

- 15 Long term sickness absence in the 2023/24 period was 494 days, consisting of 8 employees.
- 16 These 8 employees represent 6% of the workforce.
- 17 These 8 cases were due to mental health issues, such as anxiety and stress, operations and injuries. 5 employees have returned to work, with 1 of those still on a phased return. 3 employees no longer work for the Authority. In comparison, the CIPD reported mental ill health (e.g. depression or anxiety), musculoskeletal injuries, stress, acute medical conditions and recurring medical conditions as the main causes of long term absence.
- 18 The Authority will continue to closely manage long term sickness in 2024/25 in order to ensure proactive management.

MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 19 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.
- 20 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.
- 21 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.
- 22 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

- 23 According to the CIPD report, stress continues to be one of the main causes of short and long term absence. 76% of respondents reported some stress-related sickness in their organisation in the last year. Non-work factors, such as financial issues, relationships/family issues are among the most common causes of stress related sickness. At the Authority non-work related stress was one of the top five reasons for short term absence in 2023/24 and stress and anxiety were some of causes of long term sickness as well.
- 24 The Authority promotes a preventative approach to health and well-being, encouraging and supporting employees using a number of tools including:
- providing an 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 OH service and active care referrals;
 - offering flexible/hybrid working arrangements;

- offering self-funded health cash plans and dental plans;
 - providing annual health assessments for its employees; and
 - mental health awareness training for all staff and managers.
- 25 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.
- 26 A workplace health programme is now in place at the Authority, which includes staff health and wellbeing challenges, such as steps challenges, baking competitions, cycling challenges, group walks and yoga sessions. There is also a wellbeing group which is made up of staff from across the Authority, who meet regularly to organise these challenges and discuss feedback received from staff on future ideas.
- 27 There is also a business plan target to develop a health and wellbeing strategy in the next 2-3 years.

CONCLUSIONS AND TARGETS

- 28 The Authority's short term sickness absence performance for 2023/24 was on target for the year.
- 29 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 on a regular basis.
- 30 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 and then decreased again in 2022/23 with the transfer of the LSC venues to GLL. Therefore, along with the Covid-19 Pandemic and the furlough scheme the sickness data and comparisons during these three financial years are somewhat skewed compared to previous years. However, we now have two years of data with the new short term sickness target with a stable FTE.
- 31 Based on the Authority's performance in 2023/24 it is proposed that the target for sickness absence in 2024/25 remains at 3 days per FTE for short term sickness absence.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 33 The financial impact of sickness absence has been managed within the approved employees' budget for 2023/24.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 36 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

- 37 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

Executive Committee	E/771/22	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2021/22	23 June 2022
Executive Committee	E/813/23	Sickness Absence Monitoring 2022/23	20 July 2023

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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