

SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING – 2022/23

Presented by the Head of Human Resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises employee sickness absence levels during 2022/23 and compares them to the target approved by Members. It also recommends a target for 2023/24.

At the Executive Committee in June 2022 (Paper E/771/22) 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 (LSC) venues back to the Authority, the FTE in the Authority increased from 84 to 251. Then, in April 2022, following the commencement of the new LSC with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), the FTE in the Authority decreased from 231 to 121.

The Authority's average total number of days for short term sickness absence per FTE in 2022/23 equated to 3.22 days. This is above the Authority's target of 3 days per FTE but is still lower than the national average for short term sickness, which is 3.4 days.

In terms of a target for 2023/24, 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 2023/24 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 June 2022 (Paper E/771/22). 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, for 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 XpertHR Absence Rates and Costs Survey. Unfortunately, this year, no comparative information was available for public and private sector performance split into short term and long term absence and the CIPD are not publishing their usual Health and Wellbeing at Work survey report until September 2023.

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 2022/23 to the national performance.

	TOTAL NATIONAL	LVRPA
Average days lost per FTE per year	3.4 days	3.22 days
Average working time lost per year (%)	1.7%	1.5%

- 6 In 2022/23 short term sickness absence equated to 30% of the Authority's total sickness absence and the average sickness days per FTE was 3.22 days. Short term sickness ranged from 0.5 days to 14 days in an occurrence.
- 7 The number of days attributed to short term sickness has increased when compared to the previous years. However, the XpertHR Absence Rates and Costs Survey 2023, states that nearly half of the respondents reported that short term sickness absence had increased in the last 12 months with the reasons for this being that Covid-19 continued to play a role. As we saw the end of lockdowns, there was the effect of reduced immunity as people began to socialise more.
- 8 The Authority's recorded top five reasons for short term sickness absence in 2022/23 were Covid-19, coughs/colds/influenza, headache/migraine, chest infection, stomach upset. In comparison, the CIPD's top five reasons were Covid-19, colds/flu, stomach upset, headaches/migraines and musculoskeletal injuries, so very similar.
- 9 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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Days	228	204	123.5	355	392
% of Total Sickness	60%	48%	24%	30%	30%
Average sickness absence per FTE (short term sickness only)	2.7 days	2.3 days	0.49 days	1.86 days	3.22 days

- 10 Human Resources will continue to closely monitor short term intermittent sickness in 2023/24 to ensure proactive management.

LONG TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 11 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	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Days	156	221	397	827	897
% of Total Sickness	40%	52%	76%	70%	70%

- 12 Long term sickness absence in the 2022/23 period was 897 days, consisting of 13 employees.

These 13 employees have had an average of 14 weeks off sick in 2022/23 and represent 10% of the workforce.

These 13 cases were due to mental health issues, such as anxiety, operations, injuries and cancer. 9 employees have returned to work, with 3 of those still on a phased return. 3 employees no longer work for the Authority and 1 employee is currently still off sick. 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.

- 13 The Authority will continue to closely manage long term sickness in 2023/24 in order to ensure proactive management.

MANAGING SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 14 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.

- 15 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.

- 16 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

- 17 Mental ill health has been a significant and growing concern for organisations over the past few years and is one of the most common causes of long term absence nationally. The pandemic and the cost of living crisis has exacerbated rates of stress and anxiety for many.

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.

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.

A workplace health programme is being developed, which includes staff health and wellbeing challenges, such as a steps challenge in teams across the Authority and group walks. Focus groups will be held with staff during 2023/24 for their feedback and suggestions on the future programme.

CONCLUSIONS AND TARGETS

- 18 The Authority's short term sickness absence performance for 2022/23 was slightly above the target set for the year but was lower than the national average.
- 19 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.
- 20 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.

- 21 Based on the Authority's performance in 2022/23 it is proposed that the target for sickness absence in 2023/24 remains at 3 days per FTE for short term sickness absence.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 23 The financial impact of sickness absence has been managed within the approved employees' budget for 2022/23.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 26 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

- 27 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

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)