

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

SUMMARY

1. This report gives an update to members on the progress against the previously agreed absence management plan. The Action Plan, with a RAG rating is included at Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That Members note the content of the Report and the updated Action Plan and take assurance from the actions taken and planned in the HR Directorate to improve the management of absence and the support offered to staff who are unwell.

ABSENCE MANAGEMENT ACROSS THE SERVICE

3. Case Review Board meetings have been established, led by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer/Executive Director of Service Delivery and the Director of HR. The focus of these meetings, which involve Line Managers, HR and OH as appropriate, is to ensure absence is being managed efficiently, effectively and consistently across the Service and to provide challenge where there are inconsistencies, blockages or lack of action and to offer support where needed. These meetings have already proved successful in maintaining focus and responsibility and providing appropriate support.
4. The Absence Management Policy and underpinning documentation have been outsourced to Capsticks Advisory for a full review following their input in redesigning our approach to the management of absence.
5. Coupled with the above policy review, the HR team continues to coach line managers through the Absence Management Policy and process to ensure correct application and consistency of approach. Timely information is provided to Line Managers so that they can proactively manage absence at the earliest opportunity.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPATIBILITY

6. It is crucial to the success of the Service's Strategic Plan that sickness absence is managed fairly, consistently and appropriately, ensuring that as far as possible, staff are able to attend work regularly and reliably.
7. Specifically, the effective management of sickness absence will support the delivery of the strategic objective of "Value our People", with specific reference to "Support the Health and Wellbeing of Our People".

FINANCIAL/RESOURCES/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

8. The development of effective and fair processes and accurate data will better enable the Service to manage both the finances and the staffing resources, which will result in better value for money and increased personnel available for deployment.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9. Improved processes in relation to fair and consistent management of absence will reduce the risk to the Service of Employment Tribunal claims that are difficult to defend and any claims made are more likely to be unsuccessful. Where a return to work isn't possible and an appropriate and fair exit from the Service is more favourable, this can be enacted quickly with the least pain for all concerned and with significantly less litigation risk.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/HR IMPLICATIONS

10. Fair processes which support staff to return to work wherever possible, in the shortest possible timeframe, will improve morale and facilitate a culture where staff can feel able to share their difficulties and health concerns earlier. Improved awareness of mental health will have a positive effect on the support available to staff with mental health difficulties and reduce stigma.

CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

11. No direct issues arising.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12. Increased focus on Absence Management and the role of Human Resources, Occupational Health and Managers, with a clear process, accurate data and better developed skill sets will decrease the risk of reportable incidents occurring which are due to the individual health needs of staff.

COMMUNICATION ACTIONS ARISING

13. A full briefing for all staff will be issued and a management development programme is being developed to increase the skills and knowledge of all managers in the Service.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION AND/OR COLLABORATION

No direct issues arising.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AVAILABLE FOR ACCESS

14. Absence Management Policy and Capsticks Absence Management Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESTATED

15. That Members note the content of the Report and the updated Action Plan and take assurance from the actions taken and planned in the HR Directorate to improve the management of absence and the support offered to staff who are unwell.

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