

**TO: EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE – 21ST SEPTEMBER 2004**

**SUBJECT: SICKNESS ABSENCE MONITORING**

**FROM: CORPORATE PERSONNEL SERVICES**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to Members the findings of the annual monitoring of sickness absence levels throughout the Council.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 This report summarises the key findings from an analysis of sickness absence during the year 1st April 2003 - 31st March 2004.
- 2.2 Appendix A breaks down by service areas the total number of working days lost due to sickness absence and shows the average number of working days lost per employee both with and without long-term sickness included in the calculations. It also shows a comparison with previous years.
- 2.3 Appendix B provides details of long-term sickness absence only.
- 2.4 Appendix C shows the reasons for sickness absence and compares this with the results of the West Midlands Local Government Association's regional survey for 2002/3.
- 2.5 Appendix D shows the size of each Service Area/Directorate as a percentage of the whole of WDC compared with the percentage of the total sickness absence for the year attributable to each unit.
- 2.6 Appendix E gives a five year comparison of both short and long-term sickness absence and a five year comparison of the number of long-term sickness cases.
- 2.7 Appendix F shows the national average sickness absence for the whole of the public and private sectors and presents the findings of the WMLGA regional survey for the year 2002/2003 (these figures are published one year in arrears).
- 2.8 Appendix G show the trend over time compared with the top quartile.

**3. MAIN POINTS FROM THE DATA**

- 3.1 The total number of working days lost due to sickness absence from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 was 5,303 which is an average of 9.38 days per employee (4.1% of working time) or 4.73 days if long-term sickness (20 days or more) is taken out of the calculation.
- 3.2 The average number of days lost per employee increased by 2.05 over the previous year and increased by 0.41 days when short-term only sickness absence is examined.
- 3.3 In 2003/2004 there were 44 cases of long-term sickness (7.8% of total staff) which accounted for a total of 2,630.5 days or 49.6% of all the absence for the year. On average, employees taking long-term sickness were absent for 59.78 days. The number of long-term cases increased by 6 (+15.79%) over the previous year and the number of days lost due to long-term absence increased by 46.9%.

- 3.4 Four of the individuals who took long-term sickness absence during the year have now left the Council's employment.
- 3.5 The reason attributed to 37.3 % of all long-term sickness (25.3% of total sickness absence) was back, neck and other musculo-skeletal problems, which was recorded in 14 of the 44 cases. The WMLGA's National Survey recorded that this was the reason for 22% of all sickness absence in the district councils during 2002/03.
- 3.6 The other major cause of long-term sickness absence was stress, depression, mental health & fatigue (19.7% of all long-term or 14% of all absence). WMLGA reports that this reason was responsible for 18% of all sickness absence in district councils during 2002/2003.
- 3.7 When short-term only absence is examined the main recorded cause was infections (27% of all short-term absence).
- 3.8 24.1% of all sickness was attributed to non-specified reasons.
- 3.9 The CBI reported that the average number of days lost due to sickness absence in 2002/2003 was 8.9 for the whole of the public sector and 6.5 for the whole of the private sector.
- 3.10 The West Midlands Local Government Association's regional survey for 2002/2003 showed that the district council average was 10 days or 4.4%. In this survey, WDC had the second lowest rate out of 10 district councils.

#### 4. **ACTION**

- 4.1 The following actions have been agreed by CMT to improve the sickness absence rate in the coming year:
1. Individual improvement targets for service areas rather than one overall target for the Council. These service targets to be monitored on a quarterly basis within the directorates.
  2. Individual performance targets to be agreed as part of the performance appraisal scheme for those staff responsible for entering data into the Personnel System to ensure that absences are recorded accurately and on time.
  3. Continued involvement of Corporate Personnel Services in long-term absence cases to ensure progress and resolution as soon as possible.
  4. Management of short-term absence with return to work interviews carried out for all absences.
  5. Specific investigation of absences in service areas with high absence rates in order to determine any underlying causes.

#### 5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

**Karen Pearce**  
**Assistant Chief Executive (Personnel)**

**Background papers:** Nil  
**Areas in District affected:** None

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