

# **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **TO THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE 1 FEBRUARY 2011**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ABSENCE MANAGEMENT</b>
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**Agenda Status: PUBLIC**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To present to General Purposes Committee for consideration, the comments and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the findings of the Review – Absence Management.
- 1.2 The Executive Summary to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's report is attached at Appendix 1. Members of Cabinet have been issued with a copy of the full report. All Overview and Scrutiny Review reports are published on the Overview and Scrutiny page on the Council's Webpage and a copy of the this report can be located: [www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny) - Previous Scrutiny Reviews.
- 1.3 A copy of this report has been presented to Cabinet for consideration. The recommendations contained within this Overview and Scrutiny report have been directed to Cabinet; however, it is felt that this report should also be presented to the General Purposes Committee.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that:
  - 2.1.1 Cabinet is informed that the Scrutiny Panel welcomes the newly implemented Nurse Led System of absence reporting, particularly as it assists both the employer and employee.
  - 2.1.2 All Health and Wellbeing Policies are consistently considered across all Service areas within the Council and an annual review of the implementation and consistency will be reported on through the Annual Equality Report.
  - 2.1.3 All Managers and Team Leaders receive adequate and appropriate training and support on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures and that refresher training is provided on a bi-annual basis.

2.1.4. Training on the Council's Absence Management Policies and Procedures be included in the Induction Programme for new Managers and Team Leaders.

### **3. Background and Issues**

3.1 The purpose of the Review was: -

- To evaluate the impact that staff absence has upon service delivery;
- To review the effectiveness of the Council's Health and Well Being Policies in reducing sickness absence; and
- To ensure absence management systems are robust and applied consistently in all departments.

3.2 This Review has been part of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for some time and it was agreed that it was timely for the Review to commence in 2010. The Review took place between June 2010 and December 2010.

3.3 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Councillor Jane Hollis (Chair); Councillors Ifty Choudary, Kevin Reeve and Pam Varnsberry, together with non-Executive Councillors Jamie Lane and Sadik Chaudhury.

3.4 Information obtained from the following sources formed the main body of evidence gathered by the Scrutiny Panel:

- A synopsis of all information available;  
Various Policies, including Absence Management Policy;  
Health and Well Being Policy;  
Flexible Working Policies;  
Dependency and Emergency Leave Policy;
- Sickness absence trends, department by department;
- Details of the impact sickness absence has on colleagues;
- Accident at work data;
- Management Plans to tackle sickness absence;
- Best practice Councils;
- Details of Absence Management Training and take up statistics;
- Examples of other organisation's Absence Management Policies, for example Northampton PCT;
- Witness Evidence;  
Trade Unions; and  
Heads of Service from Leisure and Neighbourhood Environment.

3.5 In considering the evidence the following conclusions were made: -

3.6 The Scrutiny Panel supported the introduction of the Nurse Led System of absence reporting. It felt that it assisted both the employer and employee.

3.7 It was recognised that the introduction of the Nurse Led system of absence reporting, could in time reduce the number of employees referred to Occupational Health. Within Neighbourhood Environment, the Nurse Led System has helped to tackle short-term illness and the associated culture. Sickness Absence data is now accurately reported.

- 3.8 From the evidence received the Scrutiny Panel noted the Nurse Led System needed time to embed before absence data could be analysed but it was informed that this system of absence reporting had begun to reduce short term absences, example as detailed in paragraph 3.7 above.
- 3.9 Some of the Policies that Northampton Borough Council has in place, which are recognised elsewhere as examples of best practice include: -
- Nurse-Led Absence Reporting Call Centre;
  - Flexible Working Policy; and
  - Special Leave Policy, including dependency leave and emergency leave.
- 3.10 Within its Absence Management Policy, the Authority has in place all of the measures that are recognised by SART as best practice. The Authority has also recognised the six key elements of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance.
- 3.11 The Scrutiny Panel felt that there should be a move to frameworks to allow Managers to utilise their common sense, within clear boundaries, that would allow them the discretion with regard to their management of staff during exceptional times. The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there would be the need to look at different solutions, such as working at home/split shifts/moving to weekend working, and other such alternatives to help solve any unique problems.
- 3.12 The Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that there was a need for certain Service Areas to be fully staffed at all times, for example, Neighbourhood Environment and Leisure and Culture, and that it is difficult to operate flexible working due to the nature of the work.
- 3.13 After hearing the evidence from the expert witness, the Scrutiny Panel realised that here is a need for all Health and Wellbeing Policies to be consistently considered across all Service areas, and the need for training is recognised.
- 3.14 It was acknowledged by the Scrutiny Panel that targets for employees returning to work after long-term sickness absence are set appropriately for individual employees, but they need to be achievable and common sense must prevail.
- 3.15 From the evidence received the Scrutiny Panel noted that if an employee was a victim of domestic violence that such incidences would fall within the Council's Special Leave Policy. The Council's Community Safety Unit is working on an initiative to raise awareness in respect of domestic violence.

#### **4. Options**

- 4.1 Cabinet and the General Purposes Committee will need to consider the possible options as part of its response to the recommendations.

#### **5. Implications (including financial implications)**

##### **5.1 Policy**

- 5.1.1 The work of Overview and Scrutiny plays a major part in the development of the Council's policy framework through its work programme.

5.1.2 The report and its recommendations have policy implications in relation to Absence Management. Cabinet's and the General Purposes Committee's response will need to consider these issues in detail.

## **5.2 Resources and Risk**

5.2.1 Cabinet and the General Purposes Committee will need to consider the resourcing issues for the recommendations made.

## **5.3 Legal**

5.3.1 Legal issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's and the General Purposes Committee's response to the recommendations

## **5.4 Equality**

5.4.1 Equality issues will need to be considered as part of Cabinet's and the General Purposes Committee's response to the recommendations.

## **5.5 Consultees (Internal and External)**

5.5.2 The Committee consulted and took evidence from a variety of sources as detailed in paragraph 3.4 of this report.

## **6. Background Papers**

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report – Absence Management
- (December 2010)
- Minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
  - 20<sup>th</sup> December 2010
- Report to Cabinet – 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011 – Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Absence Management

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