

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Review was to:

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

This Review has been part of the Committee's Work Programme for some time and it was agreed that it was timely for the Review to commence in 2010 and a Scrutiny Panel was established.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report.

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

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

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.

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 above.

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
- Special Leave Policy, including dependency leave and emergency leave

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.

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.

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.

After hearing the evidence from the expert witness, the Scrutiny Panel realised that there is a need for all Health and Wellbeing Policies to be consistently considered across all Service areas, and the need for training is recognised.

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.

From the evidence received the Scrutiny Panel noted that if an employee was a victim of domestic violence that such incidents 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations.

Scrutiny Panel R&P – Absence Management therefore recommends to Cabinet that:

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.

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.

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.

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