

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

26th September 2024

Report by Director of Business Operations and Partnerships

ANNUAL SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT 23/24

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the annual sickness and performance indicator (PI) data for 2023/24.

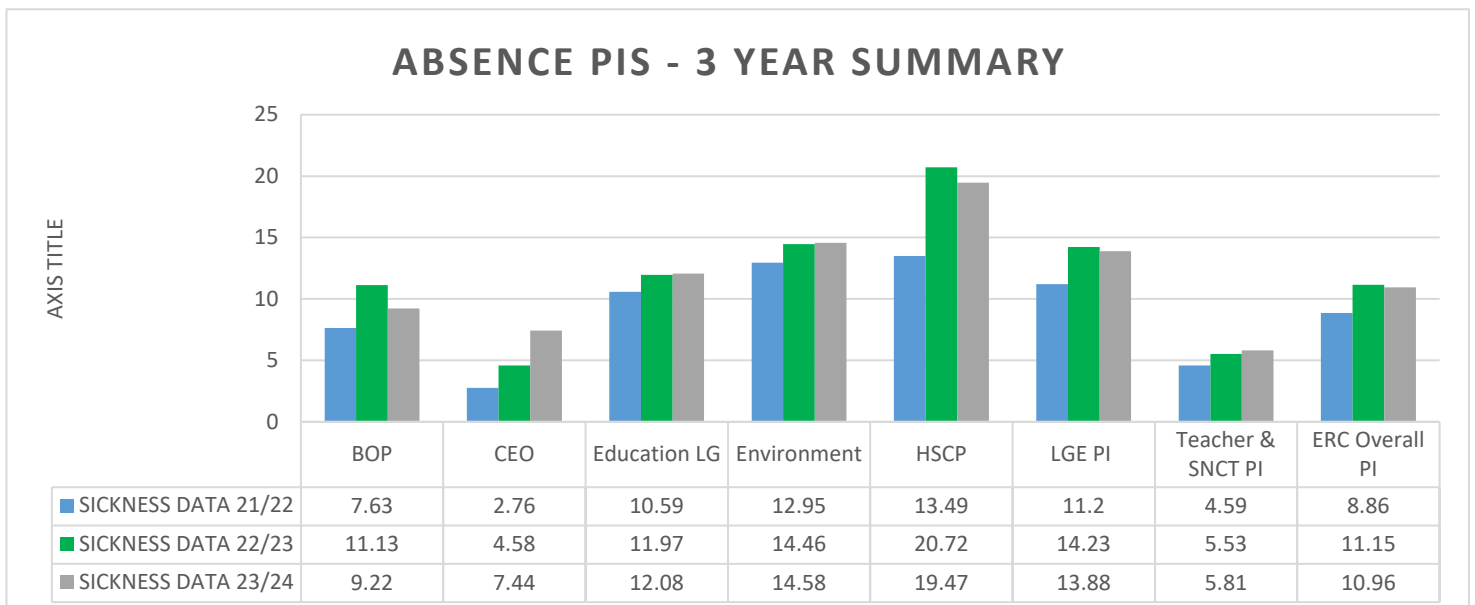
RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee:
- Note the contents of the report

KEY DATA

3. The Council’s performance indicator figures for 23/24 based on average FTE (Full Time Equivalent) days lost per employee, shown in Figure 1, are as follows:
- Council wide 10.96 days per FTE which is a reduction when compared with 11.15 days the year before.
 - Local Government 13.88 days per FTE, which is a reduction when compared with 14.2 days the year before.
 - Teachers/SNCT 5.81 days per FTE which is a minimal increase when compared with 5.5 days the year before.

Figure 1. Council’s Absence Summary

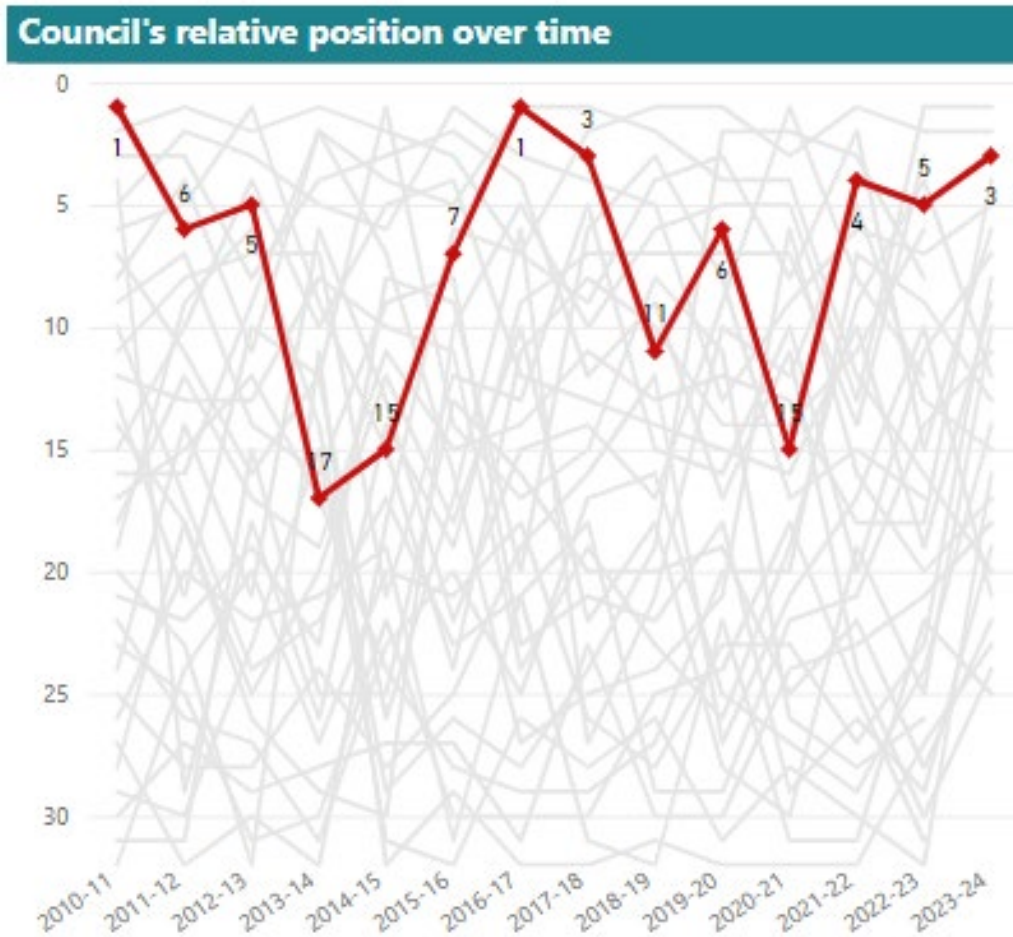


LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK DATA 23/24

CORP06A – Sickness absence days for teachers

4. East Renfrewshire Council has been placed the 3rd best performing Council for Teacher’s absence in 23/24. This is an improvement compared to last year where the placing was 5th place. Figure 2 shows East Renfrewshire Council’s overall position compared to other local authorities since 2010.

Figure 2. ERCs Teacher absence position over time



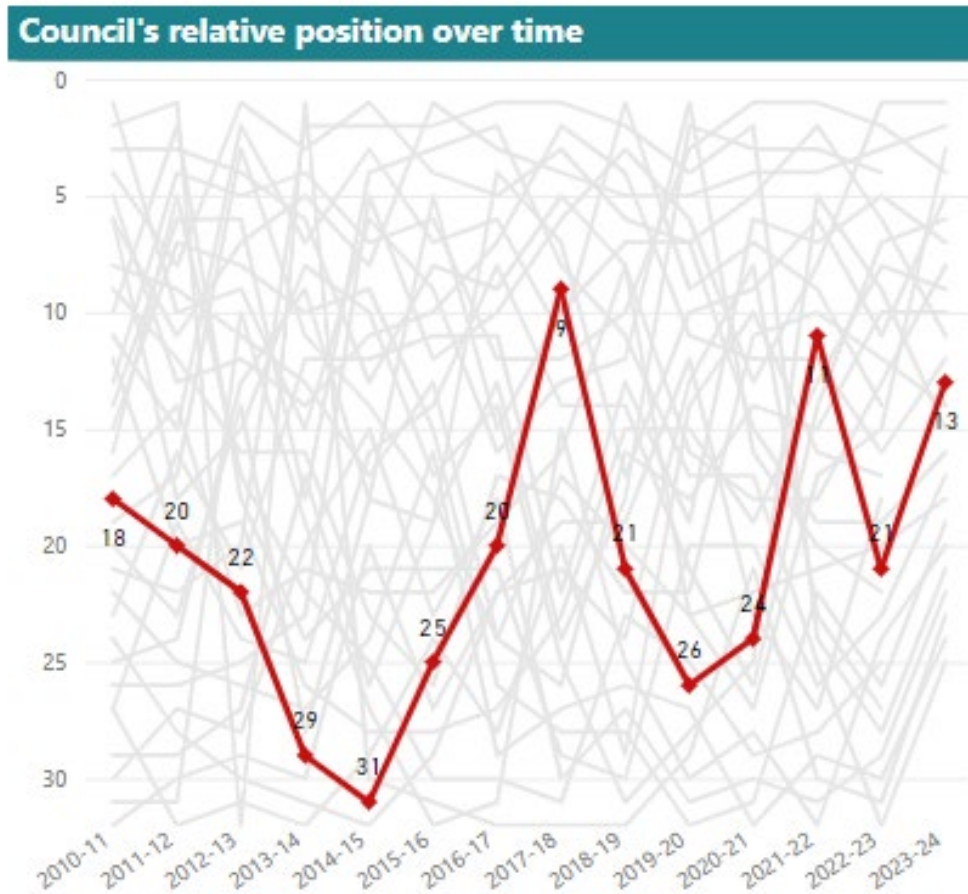
5. Teacher sickness absence of 5.8 average days lost per FTE is significantly under the Scottish Average of 7.6 days per FTE. The table below shows the LGBF performance data of how many average days sickness per FTE were reported and the comparison over the past 5 years.

	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
ERC days lost	5.2	4.0	4.6	5.5	5.8
Scotland days lost	6.4	4.1	5.8	6.8	7.6

Corp06b – Sickness absence days per Local Government employee

6. East Renfrewshire Council has been placed the 13th best performing Council for Local Government absence in 23/24. This is a significant improvement compared to last year where the placing was 21st place. Figure 3 shows East Renfrewshire Council's position when compared to other local authorities since 2010.

Figure 3. ERCs Local Government absence position over time



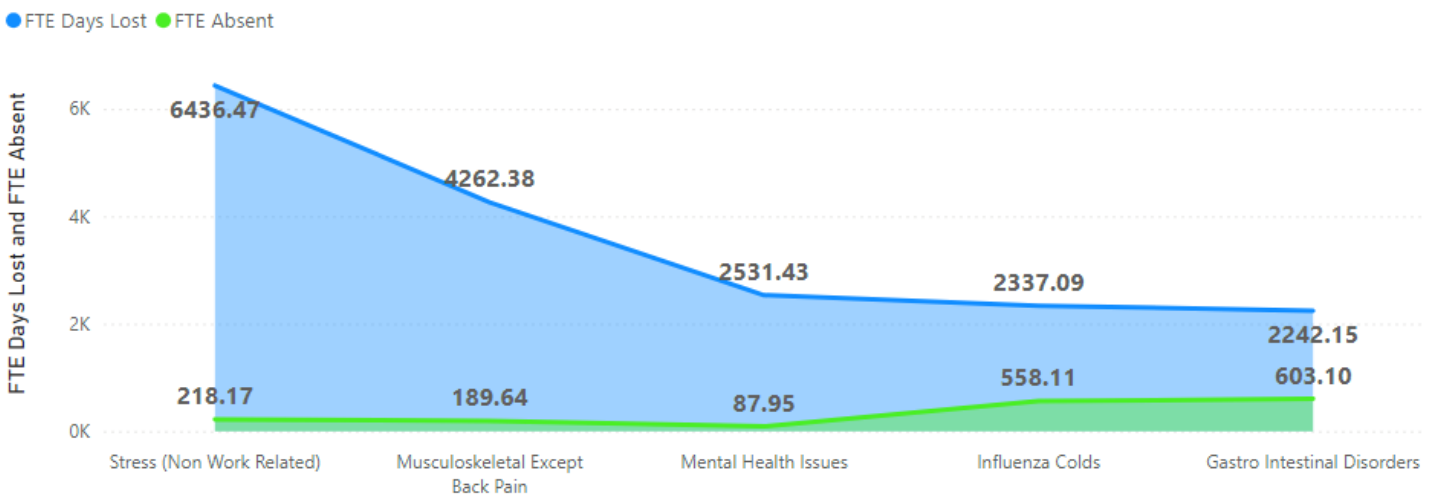
7. Our Local Government sickness absence of 13.9 average days per FTE is slightly above the Scottish average of 13.7 days per FTE. The table below shows our LGBF performance data of how many average days sickness per FTE we have had and the comparison over the past 5 year. Based on this data, we have closed the gap and are now in line with the national average for sickness absence which while positive it is accepted that much more work is required to address absence levels.

	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
ERC days lost	13.0	10.4	11.2	14.2	13.9
Scotland days lost	11.9	9.6	12.2	13.2	13.7

COUNCIL LOCAL GOVERNMENT ABSENCE DATA

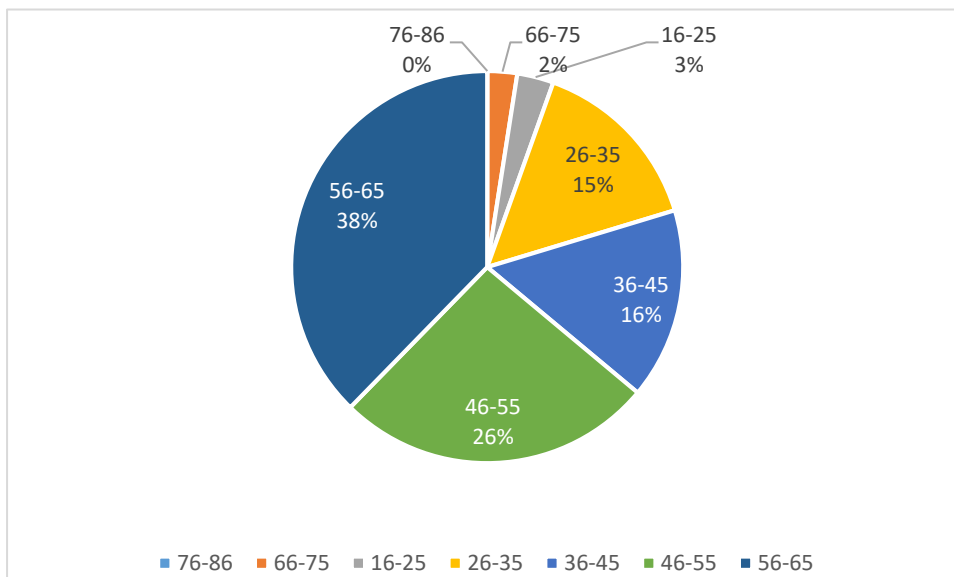
- 8. Local government absence has reduced in 23/24, and a breakdown by Department/HSCP is shown in figure 1 above.
- 9. The top 5 LG absence reasons are shown in Figure 4 below. As with previous years stress non-work related remains the highest absence reason, followed by musculoskeletal.
- 10. The number of FTE days lost are in blue, and the FTE who were absent with the absence reasons are in green. For stress non-work related there were 6436.47 FTE days lost to this absence which was attributed to 218.17 FTE.

Figure 4. Top 5 LG Absence Reasons



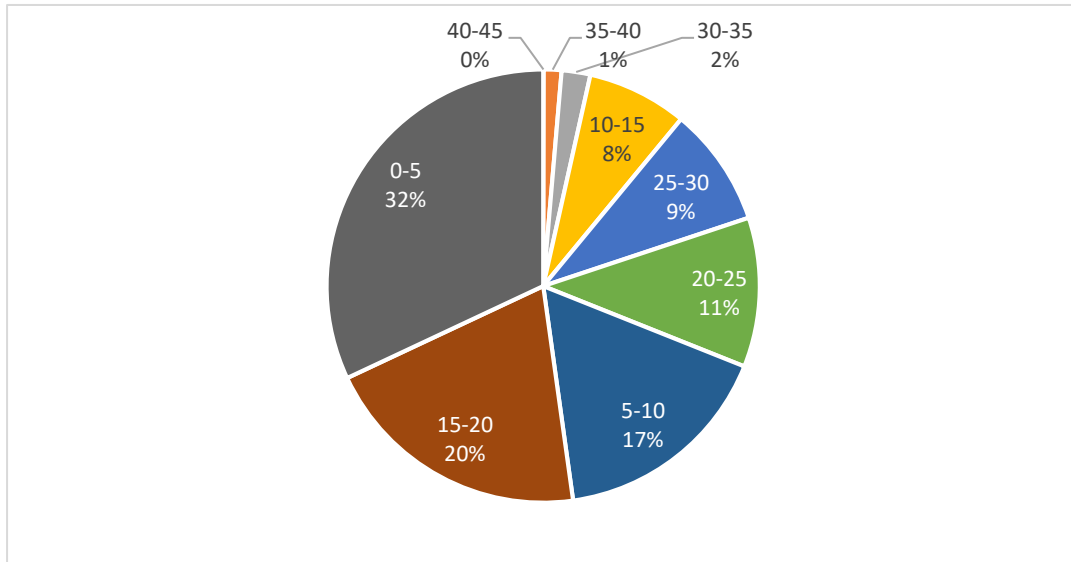
- 11. Figure 5 shows LG employees between the ages of 56-65 have the highest number of sickness days lost at 38%. This is higher than the proportion of this age group in the LG workforce, which is 27%, which means absence levels are a concern. 46-55 year olds have 26% of LG absence, which is lower than the proportion of this age group in the LG workforce which is 30%. The 26-35 year band has the same proportion of absence to their workforce at 15%.

Figure 5. Sum of FTE Days Lost for Local Government by Age



12. Figure 6 shows 32% of LG absence is attributed to employees who have between 0-5 years' of service. Employees build up their entitlement to sick pay during these years therefore it might have been expected that absence would be lower during this period.

Figure 6. Absence by years' of continuous service



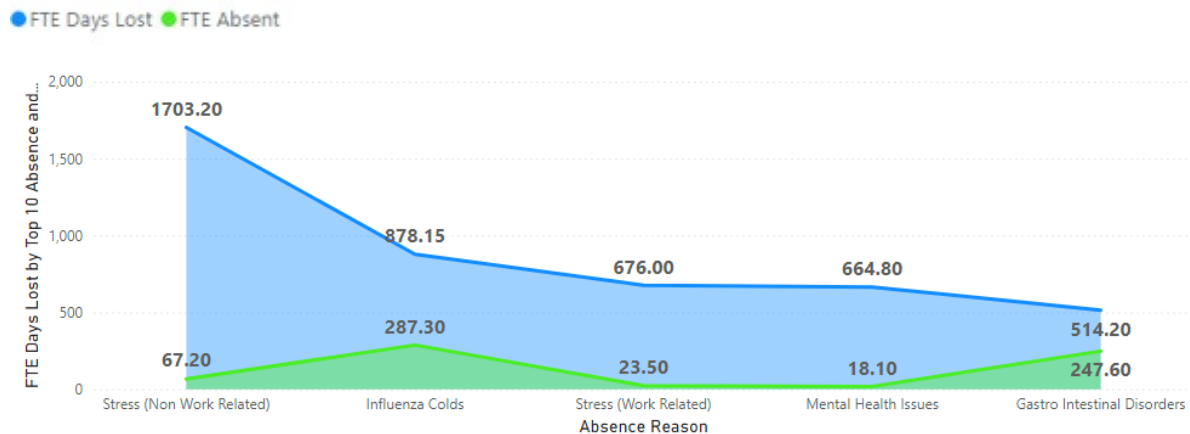
COUNCIL TEACHER & SNCT ABSENCE DATA

13. In 23/24 there were 8,439.65 FTE days of sickness which, based on an average FTE headcount of 1,452.34, equates to a performance indicator of 5.81 days per FTE.

14. Stress Non Work Related continues to be the predominant reason for sickness in the SNCT workforce. Figure 7 shows 1703.20 FTE days were lost to this absence reason which was attributed to 67.20 full time equivalent employees.

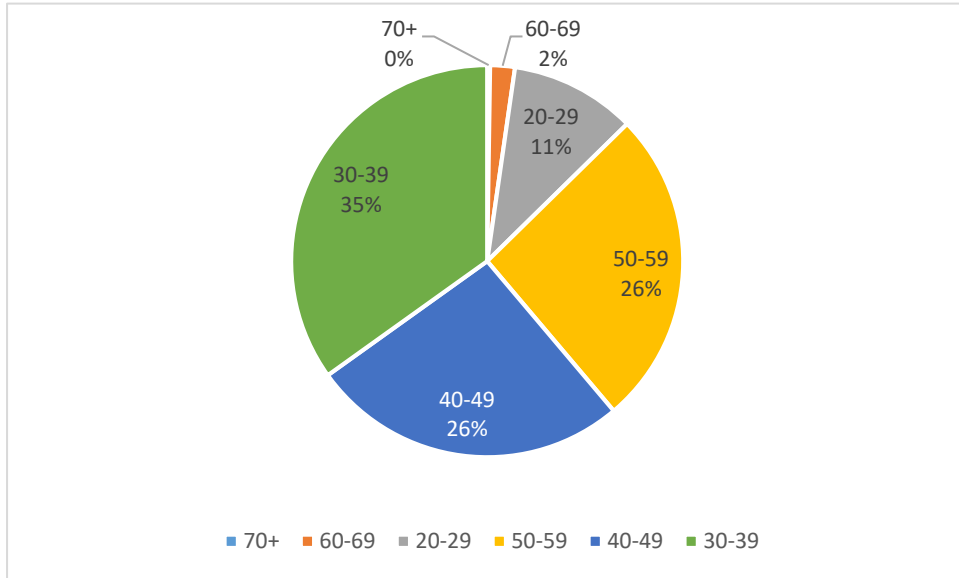
15. Influenza and Colds affected more employees, however, the total number of days taken was lower than Stress, which is expected due to the short term nature of colds.

Figure 7. Top 5 SNCT absence reasons



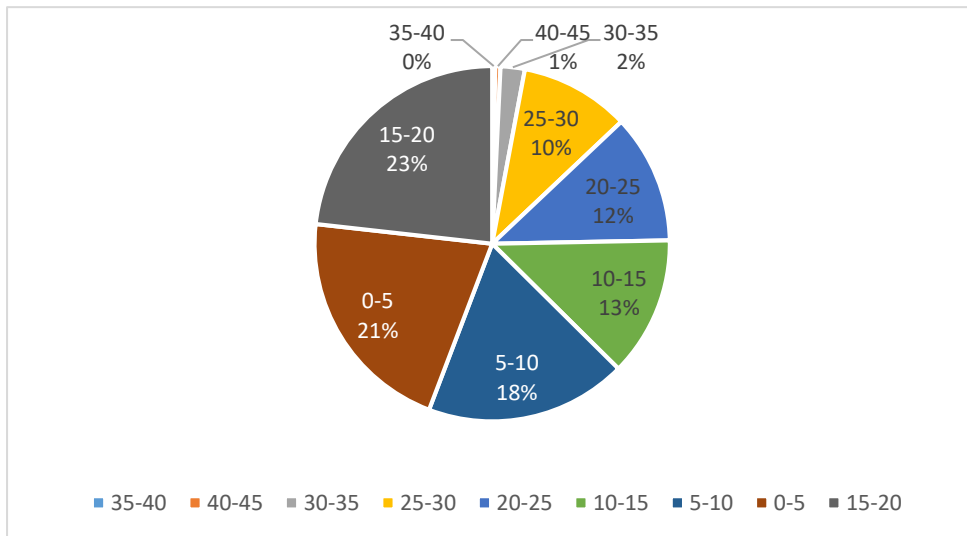
16. Figure 8 shows the highest absence is within the 30-39 year old age band with 35% of all absence attributed to this age group. This is the same percentage of the ageband in the employee group. Those aged 40-49 years have 26% of all absence, and make up 25% of the workforce. The 50-59 year age groups have 26% of all absence too, however they make up 15% of the workforce, so this is where absence levels are a cause for concern.

Figure 8. Absence by Age Bands



17. The highest volume of absence is attributed to employees with between 15-20 years of continuous service, as shown in figure 9, with the lowest being 35-40 years service.

Figure 9. Absence by Years Service



SICKNESS ABSENCE RESEARCH

18. The management of sickness absence is an important function of all line managers within East Renfrewshire Council. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) have highlighted in their 2023 Health and Wellbeing at Work Report that line managers play a key role in supporting people's health and wellbeing including taking primary responsibility for managing short-term and long-term absence. However, lack of line manager skills and confidence is the most common challenge for employee wellbeing and 'management style' remains among the top causes of stress related absence. To address this the CIPD recommend line managers need more training and support to manage sickness absence.
19. The Office of National Statistics has identified that sickness absence in local government is typically higher than in other sectors for the following reasons:
- **Nature of the Work:** Local government employees often engage in physically demanding roles, such as waste collection, social care, and maintenance, which can lead to higher rates of musculoskeletal injuries. These types of roles are also prone to workplace accidents, contributing to higher sickness absence rates.
 - **Workforce Demographics:** The local government workforce tends to be older, on average, compared to other sectors. Older employees are generally more susceptible to health issues, including chronic conditions, which can lead to longer or more frequent absences.
 - **Job-Related Stress and Mental Health:** Local government workers, particularly those in social services and public-facing roles, often deal with high levels of stress due to the nature of their work. This can lead to burnout, mental health issues, and subsequently higher sickness absence rates. The pressure of dealing with budget cuts, increased demand for services, and public scrutiny further exacerbates stress levels.
 - **Presenteeism and Workplace Culture:** While presenteeism (working while unwell) is a significant issue across all sectors, it is particularly pronounced in the public sector. This culture can lead to longer-term sickness absence as employees eventually take time off when their health issues become more severe.
 - **Economic and Organisational Factors:** Budget constraints in local governments can lead to reduced staffing levels, which increases the workload on remaining employees. This can contribute to both physical and mental health problems, resulting in higher absence rates. Additionally, local government may have less flexibility in offering remote or flexible working arrangements compared to private sector employers, which can help reduce sickness absence.
 - **Long-Term Conditions and Chronic Illnesses:** Due to the nature of their employment contracts, local government employees may have better job security, which could result in more frequent reporting of long-term conditions that require time off. This contrasts with the private sector, where employees might underreport illness due to fear of job loss.

NEW SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

20. A new Sickness Absence Policy has been created in consultation with our trade union colleagues, managers across the Council and the Corporate Management Team. The aim of the policy is to simplify absence management by reducing the 4 separate policy/guidance documents into 1 policy.
21. The Corporate Management Team requested that as part of the new Sickness Absence Policy launch in October that in person training must be rolled out across all managers to demonstrate the importance given to this. Training sessions will be prioritised to those managers with high levels of sickness absence levels in the first instance.

CONTINUED FOCUS ON SICKNESS

22. Managers continue to be provided with support from HR where they have sickness absence within their teams. This includes support at meetings or over the phone depending on the risk/complexity of the matter. HR Business Partners continue to be available to attend senior management teams to discuss absence as required.
23. An important aspect of sickness absence management is that managers conduct a return-to-work interview with staff after every single absence, so that they are monitoring levels and tackling reasons for absence early on. The implementation of the new Sickness Absence Policy ensures we speak to all managers and remind them of their responsibilities around absence management.
24. Sickness absence levels in LG remain high, and HR are taking steps to address some of the complexities of the sickness policy, and access to data which should help to make absence management more straightforward for managers.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

25. We continue to refer staff to occupational health and the update to the Sickness Absence Policy will ensure we engage occupational health services at the appropriate time based on an employee's medical condition.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REFERRALS

26. Managers are reminded that the Employee Assistance Programme can provide employees with support and counselling for a range of both psychological and non-psychological matters such as financial wellbeing.

CONCLUSIONS

27. Although sickness absence levels remain high, with the the introduction of a revised Sickness Absence Policy we aim to address some of the complexities of the current processes.
28. Access to detailed absence data is allowing more targeted reviews of the issues within the workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

29. It is recommended that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee:

- Note the contents of the report

Director Business Operations and Partnerships

Report author: - Kath McCormack, HR Manager kath.mccormack@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk