

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL  
AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 January 2024

Report by Director of Business Operations and Partnerships

SICKNESS 2022/23 REPORT

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the audited absence Performance Indicator (PI) data for 2022/23 and an update on absence trends.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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

### SICKNESS PERFORMANCE INDICATOR DATA

3. The table below shows an overall increase in the number of sickness days per FTE compared with the previous year. The Council has seen an overall increase from 8.86 days per FTE in 21/22 to 11.15 days per FTE in 2022/23 with this increase being driven mainly by Local Government Employee (LGE) absence.

	SICKNESS DATA	
	21/22	22/23
<b>Service</b>		
Business Operations and Partnerships	7.63	11.13
Chief Executive's Office	2.76	4.58
Education	10.59	11.97
Environment	12.95	14.46
Health & Social Care Partnership	13.49	20.72
<b>LGE PI</b>	<b>11.20</b>	<b>14.23</b>
<b>Teacher PI</b>	<b>4.59</b>	<b>5.53</b>
<b>ERC Overall PI</b>	<b>8.86</b>	<b>11.15</b>

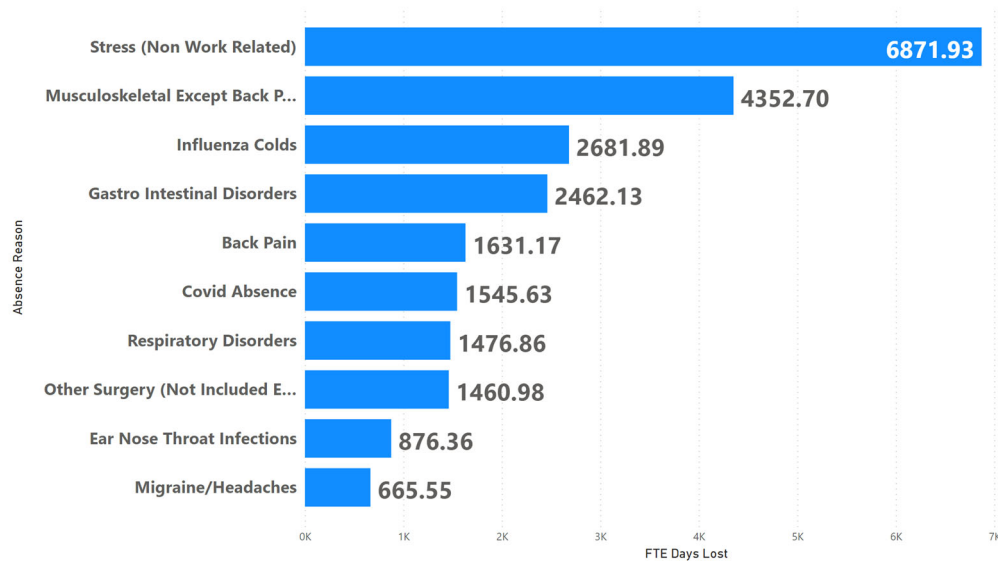
4. The HSCP had extreme operational pressures in 22/23 caused by high levels of sickness and the impact of covid pressures on this service area. A lot of work has been undertaken to set up weekly absence panels to target absence and support absence management processes including the HSCP funding a temporary HR resource. Recent data has indicated a significant improvement which is attributed to the use of management led absence panels, early intervention discussions with staff, and weekly absence management training sessions with managers.

5. In the LGBF framework for sickness absence East Renfrewshire Council has been placed 5th equal for teaching and 11th equal for LG which demonstrates that whilst our absence has increased we are in the 1st quartile for teacher absence and the 2nd quartile for LGE absence.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ABSENCE REASONS**

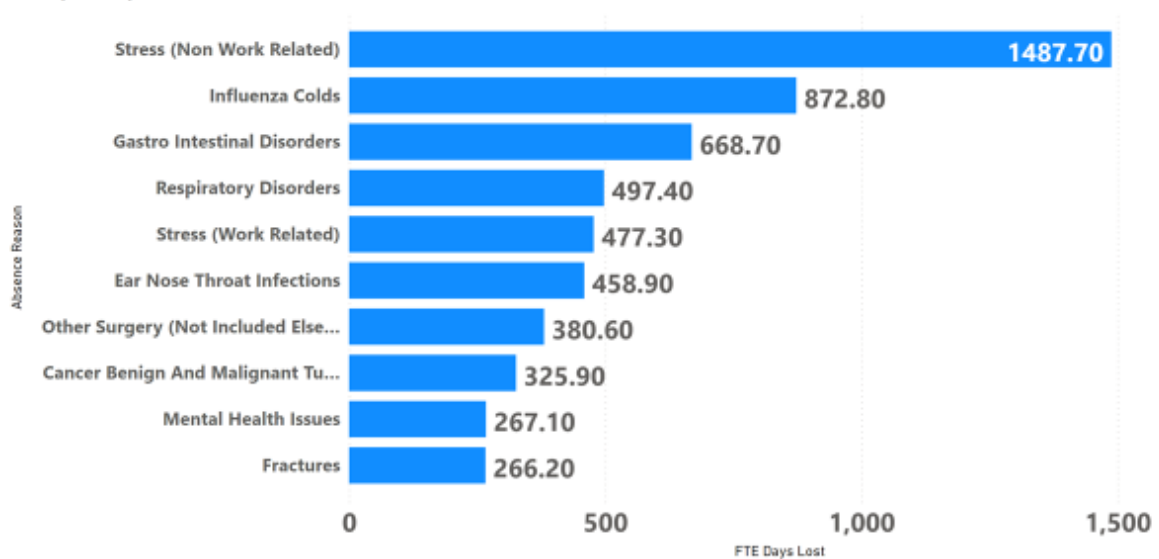
6. For LGE absence reasons remain consistent with previous years with Stress Non Work related remaining the number one reason for absence, followed by Musculoskeletal and Colds. Covid absence also features as this is now classed as an absence reason.

FTE Days Lost by Absence Reason



**TEACHER ABSENCE REASONS**

FTE Days Lost by Absence Reason



7. The chart above shows the top 10 absence reasons for teachers. The absence reasons remain consistent with the previous year with stress non work related remaining the highest reason.

## **ABSENCE TRENDS**

8. The CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) reported that sickness absence rates have soared to a 10-year high in 2023 with days lost to sickness at the highest rate since 2004. Average absence levels remain considerably higher in the public sector (10.6 days per employee) than in other sectors, particularly private sector services (5.8 days), although the upsurge in average levels of absence is observed across all sectors. This correlates with the increase in the Council's overall absence levels.

9. The ONS (Office for National Statistics) reported in 2023 that sickness absence rates are consistently higher for public sector workers than private sector workers. They state there are several contributing factors when examining the differences between the public and private sectors, including:

- Differences in the types of jobs between the sectors, some of which have higher likelihoods of sickness than others, in particular workers in caring occupations had the highest rate of sickness absence in 2022.
- Workers in the private sector are less likely to be paid Company sick pay for sickness absence than those in the public sector, and where they are it is for a significantly shorter period.

10. The CIPD have also reported that there is further evidence that where staff are off on long term absence there has been a sharp rise in staff being off with multiple conditions. Currently our absence reporting doesn't allow multiple selections of absence reasons however some analysis of information gathered through meetings with staff would suggest a proportion of our employees are dealing with multiple medical conditions at the same time.

## **ABSENCE MANAGEMENT**

11. The management of sickness absence is an important role of all line managers within the Council. The 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, they highlight 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. We have formal sickness absence training available for managers through the Corporate Training Calendar, and further sickness absence training is being developed.

12. Council managers are provided with support from HR where they have sickness absence within their teams. At informal stages HR provide advice and refer staff to occupational health. Then at formal stages of absence management HR will support managers at meetings.

13. 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. These are saved in employee files and referred to during any formal absence meetings.

14. HR have run a number of lunch and learn sickness absence training sessions open to managers from across the Council to attend, and these are continuing to be run on an adhoc basis. The team are creating simple videos for managers on absence management and there is already one available for how to log sickness on iTrent. For more formal training there is a Maximising Attendance training course on the corporate training calendar which is run by HR staff twice a year.

### **TARGETED ABSENCE IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS**

15. The CMT have recently agreed some areas to support the improvement of sickness absence management across the Council. These areas are as follows:

- Promotion of sickness data available to managers through iTrent HR system self-service and through the development of a new PowerBI absence dashboard
- Simplifying our sickness absence policy so that the steps can be easily followed by managers and employees. Then providing training and videos to support managers to understand the new policy.
- Reduce the number of sickness absence categories from 28 to around 14 so that areas such as back pain and muscular skeletal are combined rather than separate categories which will make it easier to understand the causes of sickness
- Promote the use of manager led absence management panels.

### **HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

16. A Health and Wellbeing Officer was appointed in April 2023 on a temporary basis to support staff and help achieve actions from our wellbeing plan. During their first 6 months they have attended team meetings across Council areas in order to gather staff feedback of what they would find helpful.

17. All wellbeing activities offered to staff have been based on employee feedback gathered through speaking with staff or from their responses in the Health and Wellbeing survey.

On the back of this feedback the Health and Wellbeing Officer has implemented the following actions:

- Developed and delivered two training courses, which assist understanding and building of resilience and spotting and managing mental health.
- Developed bespoke training for teams with specific needs.
- Organised a wide range of Health Checks for ERC staff including targeting the hot spot areas for absence. 175 staff members were tested for a range of conditions including high blood pressure and diabetes, with many of these staff being advised to liaise with their own GPs for further testing due to abnormal results. We have received data for 165 of these employees. 5.4% of these employees required urgent referrals to their doctor, 25.7% required referrals to their doctors for further investigation and 13.7% were given advice to tailor their lifestyle. Staff feedback has been extremely positive.

- Organised physical exercise activities for staff including weekly walks at the 3 main office buildings, and also piloting a Pilates lunchtime class that has been fully booked during the pilot period.
- Providing one to one wellbeing conversations to staff that are in need of informal confidential support.
- Organised wellbeing taster sessions that can also be organised on a team basis to encourage team building.

18. In addition to the above, employees continue to be referred to occupational health and the employee assistance programme. Both these services provide staff and managers with specialist advice to support them at work or to return to work.

19. Financial wellbeing courses have been scheduled for the New Year which will cover a range of money management topics. This is particularly important as research demonstrates that a proportion of stress absence is linked to financial insecurity.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

20. Sickness absence levels increased in 22/23.

21. It is important to maintain a focus on absence, absence improvement actions and health and wellbeing therefore these actions will continue to be supported.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

- Note the contents of the report

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