
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

15 November 2022

Audit & Scrutiny

Title: Workforce Absence 2019-2022

Purpose: This report provides a year end summary of sickness absence for the period 2019/20 to 2021/22.

Recommendation: That the committee notes the absence levels over the last three-years and the support provided to the workforce.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the sickness absence levels and productivity associated with this for the 3-year period from 2019-2020 to 2021-2022. The report highlights the policies, procedures, and proactive interventions to support the Council's workforce.

2. Background

- 2.1 It is imperative that the Council effectively manages absence levels to ensure a healthy and productive workforce. To do so each Section, Service and Directorate sets an annual absence target. Absence targets are based on analysis of the absence levels in previous years, FTE and external factors which may influence health and wellbeing. All targets are approved by the Chief Executive.
- 2.2 Absence levels are monitored throughout the year, with a 6 monthly report being provided to the Executive Leadership Team. Where required actions plans have been developed and updates on progress are provided to the Chief Executive.
- 2.3 The Wellbeing@Work (Supporting Attendance) Policy was implemented in 2021. The policy aims to ensure our employees are supported to maintain high levels of attendance, thereby minimising the detrimental effects of sickness absence on service provision, our service users, and colleagues. The policy will ensure a fair, consistent, and compassionate approach to supporting employee attendance, considering individual circumstances, whilst ensuring compliance with all associated legislation.

3. Overview

- 3.1 The table below provides the number of days lost per FTE for the whole Council against the respective annual attendance target for the last 3 years. Employee numbers increased in 2019/2020 to enable the Council to respond to the COVID19 pandemic, meeting increased demand on services, whilst also delivering additional services to support the most vulnerable within the community.

Days Lost per FTE NAC					
Year	FTE	Actual	Target	Variance	Change from Previous Year
2019/2020	6574	10.15	7.91	2.24	0.53
2020/2021	6038	6.79	8.70	-1.91	-3.36
2021/2022	6225	9.87	8.70	1.17	3.08

3.2 Mental Health and Musculo Skeletal have been the primary reasons for absence over the last three years. There are multiple initiatives in place to support the workforce specifically targeting these areas, these are summarised at the support section of this report.

3.3 The Council is required to provide statistics for employee absence levels as part of the National Statutory Performance indicators. The stats are based on the average days lost per employee and are categorised separately for Teachers and Non-Teaching employees. The tables below provide a 3-year summary for each category. Scottish Local Authority (SLA) ranking indicates the ranking of North Ayrshire Council's absence levels in relation to the other Councils in Scotland with 1 being the best performing and 32 the worst.

The benchmarking table for absence rates in 2021/22 will not be published until early 2023 at which point the ranking for that year will become available. Policies for managing absence with Councils are determined locally. This may result in different approaches and length of time given to manage an absence. As a result, the SLA ranking gives an indication of performance against other Councils however it is not based on a like for like comparison.

Average Days Lost per FTE per Teachers							
Year	FTE	Actual	Target	Variance	No of Days Lost	Change from Previous Year	SLA Ranking
2019/2020	1416	5.53	6.00	-0.47	7,834	1.83	11
2020/2021	1444	4.78	5.72	-0.94	6,907	-0.75	25
2021/2022	1494	7.20	5.72	1.48	10,764	2.42	-
Average Days Lost per FTE per Employee Non-Teaching							
Year	FTE	Actual	Target	Variance	No of Days Lost	Change from Previous Year	SLA Ranking
2019/2020	5158	8.94	7.91	1.03	46,104	-0.28	1
2020/2021	4594	9.24	9.62	-0.38	42,468	0.30	15
2021/2022	4731	12.90	9.62	3.28	60,828	3.66	-

Directorate

- 3.4 The table below provides details at a directorate level of average days lost and attendance levels. The attendance level percentage is a measure of the number of employees who had no absence. In April 2020 the Finance and Corporate Support Directorate was consolidated within the Chief Executive's Directorate.

Directorate	2019/2020				2020/21				2021/2022			
	Days Lost	Target	Variance	Attendance	Days Lost	Target	Variance	Attendance	Days Lost	Target	Variance	Attendance
Chief Executives	3.95	5	1.05	55%	3.92	5.69	1.77	77%	6.29	5.62	0.67	70%
Communities & Education	7.54	6	1.54	57%	4.53	6.51	1.98	72%	7.52	6.5	1.02	55%
Finance & Corporate Support	6.06	6	0.06	53%	N/A							
HSCP	14.43	11	3.43	45%	11.47	12.42	0.95	57%	15.29	12.5	2.79	49%
Place	11.75	7.91	3.84	54%	6.95	9.8	2.85	75%	9.54	9.84	0.3	61%

- 3.5 2020/21 and 2021/22 absence rates were impacted by COVID19, as absences due to COVID19 were treated as special leave and not sickness absence. The pandemic has also resulted in longer than usual waiting times for treatment. During this time the Council has continued to support employees on long term absence through individual case management. 2019/20 was the last 'normal' year in relation to measuring sickness absence and it is hoped that absence in 2022/23 will also return to a 'normal' year that will allow a more relevant comparison.

Productivity

- 3.6 The table below outlines the loss of productivity in the last 3 years. The loss equates to 3% of the paybill in 2019/2020 and 2021/22 and 2% in 2020/21. This reflects pay due to employees for the days they were absent and does not include replacement cover for critical posts such as teachers and care workers. It should be noted that the significant increase within the Chief Executives Directorate can be attributed to the consolidation of the Finance and Corporate Support directorate in April 2020.

Directorate	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Chief Executives	£47,810	£240,491	£379,679
Communities & Education	£2,879,874	£1,903,832	£3,592,952
Finance & Corporate Support	£279,334	N/A	N/A
HSCP	£2,374,393	£2,137,681	£3,263,909
Place	£1,919,167	£1,290,981	£2,022,175
NAC	£7,500,578	£5,572,985	£9,258,715

COVID-19

- 3.7 During the height of the COVID19 pandemic the Council was required to stand down some services resulting in an element of the workforce being inactive, where appropriate, some employees were redeployed to alternative roles primarily supporting the community.
- 3.8 In addition, employees with significant health conditions were instructed by the Scottish Government to shield from March 2020 until August 2020. The table below outlines the impact shielding had on the Council.

Directorate	Inactive - Shielding		
	Occurrences	Working Days Lost	Impact on Productivity
Chief Executive			
Communities & Education	72	6,483	£503,204
HSCP	60	5,180	£357,231
Place	60	5,145	£330,153
Grand Total	192	16,808	£1,190,589

3.9 During this time a further 107 of the employees who were advised to shield due to health conditions continued to work either undertaking alternate duties or by working from home. Had these options not been available the loss in productivity to the Council resulting from inactivity due to shielding would have been £1.9m.

3.10 Employees who had COVID19 symptoms, tested positive or were required to self-isolate were granted special leave paid for up to 12 weeks and were exempt from the Council's Wellbeing@Work absence triggers. This arrangement was reduced to 10 days in April 2022 and then ceased in June 2022. The number of employees who were absent in this instance, working days lost and loss in productivity to the Council is detailed in the table below. The loss in productivity does not include replacement cover. In addition to inactivity the table below also includes the details where employees were able to continue to work whilst impacted by COVID19 either by working from home or by undertaking alternate duties.

Directorate	Inactive - Loss in Productivity				Working From Home		Alternate Duties	
	Occurrences	Working Days Lost	Loss in Productivity		Occurrences	Working Days	Occurrences	Working Days
Chief Executive	13	152	£17,000		31	374		
Communities & Education	398	4,000	£387,001		745	7,984	41	3,987
HSCP	230	2,782	£205,807		82	2,560	6	1,496
Place	319	2,473	£174,792		50	380	4	92
Total	960	9,407	£784,600		908	11,298	51	5,575

Support

3.11 Wellbeing@Work continues to be high on the Council's agenda with several policies, procedures, and initiatives in place to support employees back to work and while at work.

3.12 HR provide support through individual case management, policies, and guides such as Work Life Balance, Menopause, working with Cancer, Carers leave and Agile Working (Workstyles).

3.13 A suite of Occupational Health interventions are available such as Counselling, CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), Physiotherapy, and online resources. The table below details Occupational health usage during the last 3 years and between April 2022 to September 2022.

Year	Referrals
2019/2020	7,004
2020/2021	3,473
2021/2022	3,624
April 2022 – Sept 2022	2,608

During 2020/21 the provision was initially paused and then a reduced service was provided by telephone and virtual methods. 2021/22 continued to be a limited offering in line with COVID workplace guidance with the provision returning to a pre-pandemic provision in the last quarter of 2021/22.

- 3.14 Livewell is an employee led healthy working lives programme that hosts a variety of initiatives such as Yoga, Walking clubs, Mindfulness and Paddleboarding. The calendar of activities focusses on physical activity, healthy eating, weight management, general health, mental health, and financial wellbeing. Wellbeing Warriors were introduced in 2020 to support, listen and signpost individuals to internal and external support. These 30 employees undertook a qualification in mental health first aid to provide them with the skills and knowledge to provide compassionate support.
- 3.15 A variety of development supports are in place throughout the council to ensure the workforce is supported in the skills and knowledge required in relation to their role. These opportunities range from policy and leadership courses such as managing stress which equips managers in the skills required to define and support employees to practical health & safety interventions, such as manual handling to reduce the risk of Musculo skeletal injuries and risk assessment
- 3.16 In addition to the variety of support outlined above, Directorates also provide complimentary wellbeing interventions and a flavour of this is provided below.
- 3.17 Within Communities & Education, a whole school/community approach is being taken to wellbeing. This is built on an ethos and culture that supports inclusion, welcomes employees and their views, builds relationships, and encourages listening. Regular staff briefings were introduced during COVID to promote and support employee wellbeing, due to the success these continue to be a key tool. There is a specific team that support mental health and wellbeing of young people which is now being extended to support the workforce. Information is available online and is supplemented with information provided through professional learning. Collaboration within the Head Teacher network and localised initiatives allow for best practice to be shared and identify next steps to support wellbeing.
- 3.18 The Health and Social Care Partnership have taken a targeted approach to wellbeing, focusing themes such as on Physical Activity, Mental Health Support, Leisure and Recreation Activities, Staff Wellbeing hubs and management support. These themes harness and enhance the support interventions already available within the Council through the Livewell Programme and Occupational Health.
- 3.19 The Place Directorate, takes an inclusive approach to wellbeing, engaging employees, trade unions and managers to discuss absence and recognise attendance. There is also, a focus on increasing employee satisfaction levels and morale through training and further education opportunities. In addition to utilising Occupational Health and corporate initiatives, the Directorate has worked in partnership with Ayrshire College to develop and deliver a bespoke “Customer Service & Resilience” training course, this has supported employees to build resilience and better equip them to deal with challenging situations.

4. Proposals

- 4.1 The Committee note the content of the report and the interventions in place to support

the workforce.

5. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

5.1. The loss of productivity associated with absence are outlined within this report.

Human Resources

5.2 Council's approach supports the health and wellbeing of its workforce.

Legal

5.3 None

Equality/Socio-economic

5.4 None

Climate Change and Carbon

5.5 None

Key Priorities

5.6 None

Community Wealth Building

5.7 None

6. Consultation

6.1 The Chief Executive and Executive Directors have been consulted in the creation of this report.

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For further information please contact **Jackie Hamilton, Senior Manager Employee Services** on **01294 324694**.

Background Papers

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