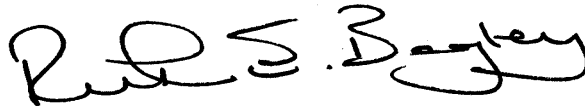


Date of issue: 16th June 2014

MEETING	EMPLOYMENT & APPEALS COMMITTEE (Councillors Brooker (Chair), Chohan, Coad, A S Dhaliwal, N Holledge, Plenty, Sandhu, Sharif and Zarait)
DATE AND TIME:	TUESDAY, 24TH JUNE, 2014 AT 6.30 PM
VENUE:	MEETING ROOM 2, CHALVEY COMMUNITY CENTRE, THE GREEN, CHALVEY, SLOUGH, SL1 2SP
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	GREG O'BRIEN 01753 875013

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.



RUTH BAGLEY
Chief Executive

AGENDA

PART 1

AGENDA
ITEM

REPORT TITLE

PAGE

WARD

Apologies for absence.

AGENDA
ITEM

REPORT TITLE

PAGE

WARD

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

1. Declarations of Interest

All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary or other Pecuniary or non pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Section 3 paragraphs 3.25 – 3.27 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 3.28 of the Code.

The Chair will ask Members to confirm that they do not have a declarable interest. All Members making a declaration will be required to complete a Declaration of Interests at Meetings form detailing the nature of their interest.

- | | | | |
|----|---|--------|-----|
| 2. | Minutes of the Meeting held on 7th April 2014 | 1 - 6 | |
| 3. | Appointment of Sub-Committee | 7 - 12 | All |

SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

- | | | | |
|----|---|---------|-----|
| 4. | Introduction to the Role of the Committee and Workforce Issues for the Year Ahead - Presentation by Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director Professional Services. | - | All |
| 5. | Reducing Sickness Absence - Performance Update | 13 - 26 | All |
| 6. | Children Services Recruitment - Verbal Update | - | All |
| 7. | Work Programme 2014/15 | 27 - 28 | |
| 8. | Members' Attendance 2013/14 | 29 - 30 | |
| 9. | Date of Next Meeting – 20 th October 2014 | | |

Press and Public

You are welcome to attend this meeting which is open to the press and public, as an observer. You will however be asked to leave before the Committee considers any items in the Part II agenda. Please contact the Democratic Services Officer shown above for further details.

The Council allows the filming, recording and photographing at its meetings that are open to the public. Anyone proposing to film, record or take photographs of a meeting is requested to advise the Democratic Services Officer before the start of the meeting. Filming or recording must be overt and persons filming should not move around the meeting room whilst filming nor should they obstruct proceedings or the public from viewing the meeting. The use of flash photography, additional lighting or any non hand held devices, including tripods, will not be allowed unless this has been discussed with the Democratic Services Officer.



Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Monday, 7th April, 2014.

Present:- Councillors Rasib (Chair), Plenty (Vice-Chair), Brooker, Chohan, Davis and Sharif (arrived at 6.40pm).

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Coad, A S Dhaliwal and S K Dhaliwal

PART 1

39. Declarations of Interest

None.

40. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23rd January 2014

Resolved - That the minutes of the last meeting held on 23rd January 2014 be approved as a correct record.

41. Reducing Sickness Absence - Performance Update

The Committee considered a report with an update on progress with reducing the Council's sickness absence.

The average full time equivalent (FTE) of days lost over the year from 1st February 2013 to 31st January 2014 was 7.8 days, an improvement over the 10.4 days for same period in the previous year. However, this amounted to an average monthly figure of 0.76 FTE days lost over the last 3 months, slightly above the average of 0.70 FTE for the 4 months from July to October 2013.

A South East Employers survey comparing Unitary, District/Borough and County Council sickness information reported an average of 10.22 days lost per employee in Unitary Authorities compared to 7.54 days in District/Borough Councils and 8.61 days in County Councils. A Labour Market report (covering all sectors) showed the average days lost in 2013 was 4.4 days. The Committee concluded that while Slough sickness days lost has improved, it remained well above the national average but below the Unitary Authority average.

The sickness absence balanced scorecard has continued to be reported at CMT and DMTs, enabling managers to report on absence and the action being taken. The process is kept under review to ensure that data is reported in a timely fashion, that the reporting of sickness is accurate and that the correct reasons for absence are reported. The Committee was pleased to note that employee attendance at Occupational Health appointments was improving, and with virtually no missed appointments in the last six months (save for two missed in December 2013).

Employment & Appeals Committee - 07.04.14

The report set out the three most common reasons given for sickness absence for the period April 2013 to February 2014, broken down to department level. Mental health problems such as stress, depression and anxiety accounted for a significant number of days lost in three of the four directorates. Infections such as coughs, colds and chest infections, although typically a shorter term absence, also contributed to a significant number of days lost. This profile was in line with that reported by many other local authorities.

With reference to previous questions raised by the Committee, it was noted that employees and managers were being encouraged not to accept 'not stated' as an appropriate reason to enter on a sickness form, but the removal of this category was subject to ongoing investigation. With regard to 'hospital or GP appointments' the Council's leave policy allowed for employees to agree to take such time as either annual leave, flexi or sickness.

The Committee noted with satisfaction the continuing success of the sickness policy now operating and was pleased to acknowledge the co-operation of the Trade Unions in achieving this. Having regard to the overall sickness management score, which showed some fluctuations in the monthly scores, it was requested that an exception report be made at the next meeting for any directorate where the score had fallen below 60 – 65. Members also requested for the next report an indication of the breakdown of sickness absence by gender and the performance on training of managers on the sickness policy against the target of 90%.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the report to the next meeting include further information on the matters outlined above.

42. Temporary Agency Staff - Progress on Implementation and Baseline Monitoring

The Committee considered a progress report on the contract with Matrix SCM to supply temporary agency staff for the Council, which had been in operation since January 2013.

The implementation of the new contract had a savings target for 2013/14 of £250,000. Expenditure on agency staff from March 2013 to February 2014 amounted to £7,434,205, giving a saving of £504,780 against the previous contract.

There were currently 112 agency workers (not employed on a sessional basis) which continued to remain fairly stable and below the baseline of 123 set under the previous contract. 77% of agency workers were travelling less than 20 miles to their place of work (slightly up from the 74% reported at the last meeting). The number of staff travelling from within SL1-SL6 post codes continued to remain around 58%.

Employment & Appeals Committee - 07.04.14

Data for the length of tenure of temporary staff, the directorate they were engaged by and the job titles held by those temporary staff were reported. The Committee was pleased that the contract with Matrix was continuing to save the Council money but at the same time expressed concern that overall expenditure was not coming down and the total number temporary staff had reduced only a little.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That in order to keep downward pressure on the number of temporary staff engaged, a RECOMMENDATION be made to CMT to re-instate the monitoring process of reasons why a temporary agency staff member was being used.
- (c) That a progress report be provided for the next meeting.

43. Workforce Issues Arising out of Ofsted Inspection

Consideration was given to a report produced in response to a request for an update on recruitment and retention issues that were detailed in the final Ofsted report published in February 2013.

The Committee was reminded that the recent Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers highlighted that there was a need for priority and immediate action to 'develop and put into operation a comprehensive workforce strategy to attract and keep high quality, experienced permanent staff in Slough'. Officers had reacted by drafting an action plan (attached to the report as an appendix) and setting up a working party of key personnel from across the Council to ensure that the recruitment and retention of permanent staff is co-ordinated and acted upon as a matter of urgency.

The Committee acknowledged that there were a number of reasons why Slough had experienced difficulties in attracting good quality permanent staff in the past, including:

- The national shortage of Child and Family Social Workers.
- The geographical location of Slough, with fierce competition from surrounding authorities for a finite pool of workers.
- Poor reputation and profile stemming from previous Ofsted reports deeming the Authority as 'inadequate'.
- Poor market profile compared to competitors.

The Committee noted the broad range of initiatives either underway or planned to attract new workers and retain existing staff. It was clear there was no easy, 'quick fix' solution to the recruitment and retention problem but rather it was necessary to build an attractive, comprehensive package that could be offered to potential applicants and staff.

Members were very pleased to see the progress on developing an ongoing annual Newly Qualified Social Work scheme that ensures a regular stream of social workers for the future. There were currently five newly qualified staff in

Employment & Appeals Committee - 07.04.14

their Assessed and Supported Year Employment (ASYE) and a practice mentor was to be recruited to develop this year on year and manage an academy for new workers. Links with local Universities had been established to improve channels for recruitment. When further progress had been made on improving the overall package, it was planned to hold sessions with the locum staff so they could explore individually the benefits of becoming a permanent member of staff.

The Committee considered that access to housing for new staff was a significant benefit and further efforts should be made to make this happen.

Resolved –

- (a) That the report be noted.
- (b) That the Cabinet be RECOMMENDED to explore the offer of key worker housing as part of the package offered to assist recruitment of Child and Family Social Workers.
- (c) That this work should be completed as soon as practicably possible.

44. Approach to Business Change - Future Role of Employment & Appeals Committee

The Committee considered a report proposing changes to the current process whereby staff appeals against dismissal are heard by a Member Panel.

As part of the Council's 'Fit for the Future' Organisational Development Strategy, a review of the policy framework for performance management of staff including matters around capability, disciplinary and grievance procedures had been undertaken. Staff had a right of appeal against dismissal under disciplinary, redundancy and sickness policies and at present the Constitution provided for that appeal to be heard by the Employment & Appeals Sub-Committee.

At a previous meeting the Committee had nominated Cllr Brooker to work with HR staff to examine proposals arising from the review. A specific proposal had now been made that the Sub-Committee should be replaced with an officer panel to hear appeals against dismissal. This was in line with the current guidance from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) which envisaged appeals being heard by senior manager(s). Members accepted that an appellant had the right to a fair hearing by competent Panel Members who had been trained for the purpose. Given the infrequency of appeal hearings, it was difficult for Members to bring the necessary degree of professionalism required.

An appendix to the report set out details for the necessary changes to the Constitution and the introduction of arrangements for appeals against dismissal to be heard by a Panel of three comprising a minimum of one Strategic Director/Chief Executive and one/two Assistant Director(s). It was noted that an appeal by a Strategic Director or one of the three statutory officer appointments would be heard under separate arrangements governed by Regulation.

Employment & Appeals Committee - 07.04.14

The Committee noted also that HR were also examining the process for formal warnings in line with ACAS recommended guidance for managing employee misconduct.

Resolved - Subject to the concurrence of the Member Panel on the Constitution, to accept the proposal for a Strategic Director/Chief Executive and Assistant Director Panel as the final appeal against dismissal, and to RECOMMEND the Council to amend the Constitution accordingly.

45. Attendance Record

The Committee received a report setting out Members' attendance over the past year.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

46. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 24th June 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.45 pm)

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SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Employment & Appeals Committee **DATE:** 24th June 2014

CONTACT OFFICER: Catherine Meek (Head of Democratic Services)
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 875011

WARD(S): All

PART I
FOR DECISION

EMPLOYMENT & APPEALS COMMITTEE: APPOINTMENT OF SUB-COMMITTEES

1. **Purpose of Report**

This report recommends, in accordance with the Constitution, the establishment of two Sub-Committees and appointment of Members to serve on them.

2. **Recommendations**

The Committee is requested to resolve:-

- a) That the Appeals Sub-Committee be appointed for the 2014/2015 Municipal Year
- b) That the Employment Appeals Sub-Committee be appointed to deal with a one outstanding Appeal Hearing
- c) That the terms of reference of the Sub Committees be as set out in Appendix A
- d) That seats be allocated to the Sub-Committees as shown in paragraph 5.1.
- e) That Members be appointed to serve on each of the Sub-Committees in accordance with the wishes expressed by Political Groups in respect of seats allocated to them as set out in paragraph 5.1.(To Follow)

3. **Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

There are no implications for the Council's Wellbeing Strategy priorities as this report is administrative in nature.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

There are no financial implications of proposed action.

(b) **Human Rights Act and other Legal Implications**

The recommendations meet the requirements of political proportionality as set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and associated Regulations. The Appointments Sub-Committee must include at least one Executive Member.

5 **Supporting Information**

Sub-Committees

- 5.1 The Constitution (as revised from 1st June 2014) provides for the Employment and Appeals Committee to appoint an Appeals Sub-Committee. Prior to revision of the Constitution the Committee would ordinarily have appointed an Employment Appeals Sub-Committee to deal with appeals against dismissal. As an appeal against dismissal was submitted on 28th May 2014, during the currency of the previous Constitution, the appellant has a right that appeal to be heard by a member Sub-Committee. Accordingly, the Sub-Committees and seat allocations have been calculated to reflect group membership and statutory proportionality entitlements as follows:

Sub-Committee	Seats	Labour	Conservative
Appeals S/C	5 (+ 5 deputies)	4 (+4)	1 (+1)
Employment Appeals S/C *	3 (+ 6 deputies)	2 (+4)	1(+2)

* Employment Appeals Sub-Committee required to deal with the one appeal submitted, and thereafter to disband.

- 5.2 The Constitution also provides for the Committee to establish an Investigating Sub-Committee and Appointments Sub-Committee as required, in accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules. These Sub-Committees will be appointed if the need should arise.
- 5.3 Nominations have been sought from Political Groups and will be reported to the meeting.
- 5.4 **Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference of the Sub-Committees are set out at Appendix A for consideration and agreement by the Committee. The terms of reference of the Appeals Sub-Committee will need to be reviewed following changes in the Council's Housing Allocations Policy. In the meantime, the Committee is requested to agree the terms of reference as attached in order that any existing transport appeal can be progressed.

6 **Appendix**

A - Terms of reference of the Sub-Committees

7 **Background Papers**

'1' - Constitution

Employment and Appeals Committee: Sub-Committees Terms of Reference

Appeals Sub-Committee

1. To determine appeals against refusal by the Local Education Authority of applications for home to school transport which do not fall within the LEA's policy for the provision of such transport.
2. To consider complaints about the school curriculum and collective worship in accordance with Section 23 of the Education Reform Act 1988.
3. To deal with requests for the allocation of accommodation outside the Council's approved policies on referral by the Officers or by three Members of the Council.
 - a) Decisions on Appeals:- To deal with requests:
 - i) against exclusion from various schemes on matters of interpretation or value judgement;
 - ii) against cancellation of applications for false or incomplete information;
 - iii) against rent arrears recovery action and proceedings for possession;
 - iv) in respect of any discretionary housing service provided from time to time not within the established criteria, where special circumstances apply and the Assistant Director Housing and Environment has refused the application;
 - v) against assessments made under the Amenity Points Scheme for housing rents or any other method of rent assessment;
 - vi) against an Officer decision concerning the re-housing of applicants on urgent medical grounds, where in the view of Members the applicant(s) should be dealt with as a priority in the light of the facts of the case, taking into account the agreed definition of guidelines;
 - vii) against determination of improvement grants.
 - b) To deal with unusual matters of day to day management referred by the Director of Resources, Housing and Regeneration or Service Heads for guidance.
4. To hear representations and determine appeals under the statutory provisions relating to nurseries, playgroups, child minders and residential homes.
5. To consider and determine appeals against refusal by the Authority of application for Local Council Tax Discount.
6. To consider and determine appeals in accordance with Section 17(3) of the Health & Social Services and Social Security Adjudication Act 1983.

Employment Appeals Sub-Committee

To consider and determine appeals against dismissal arising from the Council's Disciplinary Policy & Procedure, Severance Policy and Procedure Guidance and Management of Absence Procedure.

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SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Employment & Appeals Committee **DATE:** 24th June 2014
CONTACT OFFICER: Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director Professional Services
WARD(S): All

PART 1
FOR INFORMATION

REDUCING SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE UPDATE

1 Purpose of Report

To provide members with an update on progress of reducing the Council's Sickness absence, and includes appendices with the latest performance figures and the Council's Overall Sickness Absence Balanced Scorecard. A report to CMT was presented which gave a summary of action taken to date to improve employee wellbeing and sickness absence with some recommendations – Attached as Appendix 3.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The report is submitted to the Employment and Appeals Committee for information only.

3 Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - graph showing sickness absence rates per month (expressed as Full Time Equivalent Days lost FTE) up to April 2014.

Appendix 1 shows that since our last report to Committee in April there has been an increase in the data for the months of February, March and April which increased by 0.3 days (February 14) and 0.2 days (March 14) and 0.1 days (April 14). Although this shows an increase it should be noted that sickness absence monitoring and recording for 2012 / 2013 was not as stringent and may have led to low reporting figures. For the period February – April 2014, the average of 0.66 fte absence is being reported, a reduction from the previous report.

The sick days per fte from 1st May 2013 to 30th April 2014 report **8.4 days** lost per fte in comparison with the same period for the previous year of 8.9 days per fte. This figure is still showing an improvement in our sickness days lost however is above our target of 6.8 days by September 2014. It has been recognised that due to the nature of the work within the Wellbeing Directorate the sickness absence rate will be higher than the other directorates. Therefore the target for this directorate is being re-profiled in conjunction with the Strategic Director and the Assistant Directors of Wellbeing.

In addition the previous committee report in April gave a comparison against Local Authority and National Statistics data that was available and is given below.

Unitary Authorities	10.22 days lost
District / Borough	7.54 days lost
County Council	8.61 days lost
Labour Market	4.4 days lost

From the data analysed above, Slough's sickness days lost per fte has improved and is better than its comparators. However, it is still above the National average.

The sickness absence balanced scorecard has continued to be reported at CMT and DMT's to monitor the progress of sickness absence in service areas. It also enables managers to report on absence and ensure relevant action is being taken, in accordance with the absence policy.

Appendix 2 provides a summary of the balanced scorecards by Directorate over the last year up to March 2014.

For the period of reporting, none of the directorates have fallen below the 60 management score however 3 out of the 4 directorates have fallen below the 65 management score. RHR are performing well with a management score for March 2014 reporting at 81.7 however they have less staff than the other directorates (with the exception of CE). The overall management score for the Council is 68.1 therefore this indicates that as a Council we are managing sickness absence.

All managers and supervisors who manage staff are required to attend the Sickness Absence Training. Whilst the majority of managers are now trained across all directorates there is still a constant need to run training as new managers join the organisation, and further training courses have been scheduled into the summer. From the data shown on the Balanced Scorecard, 2 out of the 4 directorates are below the 90% target for attendance on the Sickness Training although this only relates to a handful of managers (below 10). Human Resources are making direct contact with these managers to ensure that they are booked on the next available training, subject to operational pressures. The overall percentage of attendance for the Council is currently 90.7% therefore we have achieved our target.

In order to support managers with absence management, Occupational Health is a vital component to ensure that relevant medical advice is sought. The data below identifies the number of staff that did not attend their appointments which unfortunately has shown an increase.

Month	%	Number	Management Action
Feb	7.3%	3 DNAs *	1 MI and 1 SSP (person on SSP dna'd twice so remained on SSP)
March	1.96%	1 DNA *	SSP
April	7.4%	4 DNAs *	3 MI's and 1 SSP

** NB: DNA's are calculated based on the number of booked appointments.*

To address the fluctuating nature of DNA's, managers are being advised to ensure their staff understand the implications of not attending an OH appointment in accordance with the Absence Policy. This is also being reflected in the training and is also being reaffirmed in communications to the management teams.

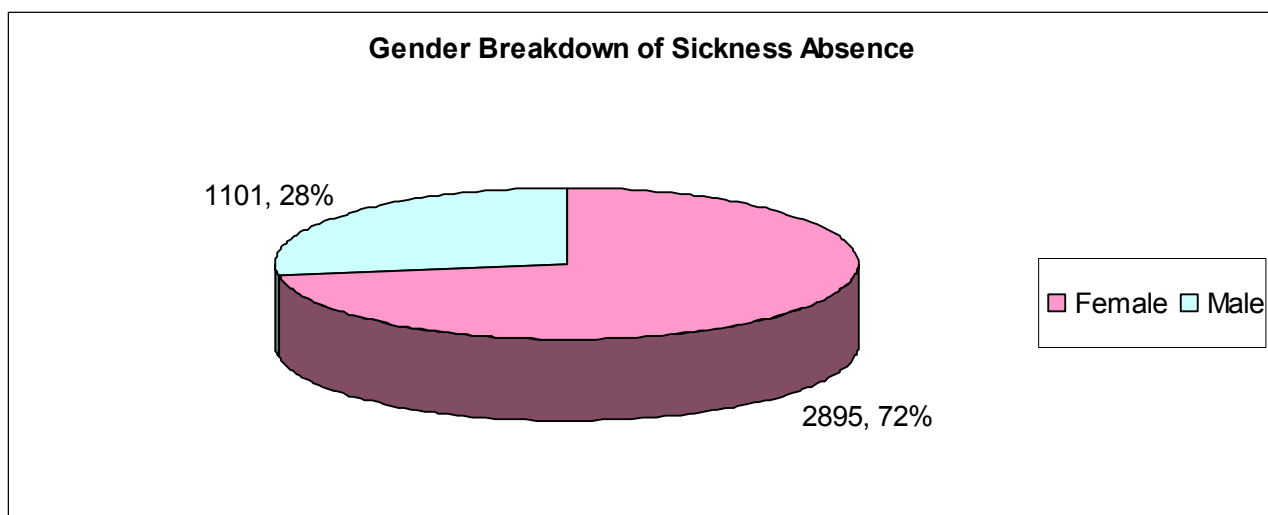
Appendix 3 is a report that was presented to CMT in May to provide a further breakdown about the causes of absence. Neil Fraser was asked to undertake a review on this subject as part of his professional study to set into context Slough Borough Council's absence incidences in comparison to the National absence statistics, in conjunction with Slough Borough Council's absence and wellbeing policies, so that conclusions can be reached and recommendations for further improvements can be made.

Since the last report in April, members have asked for an indication of the breakdown of sickness absence by gender. As you will read from Appendix 3, on average, women have more sickness absence than men and the public sector employs a higher proportion of female workers. Of the current Slough Borough council employees, circa 70% are women.

A breakdown is as follows:

Gender	Actual Days Sick*
Female	2895
Male	1101
TOTAL	3996

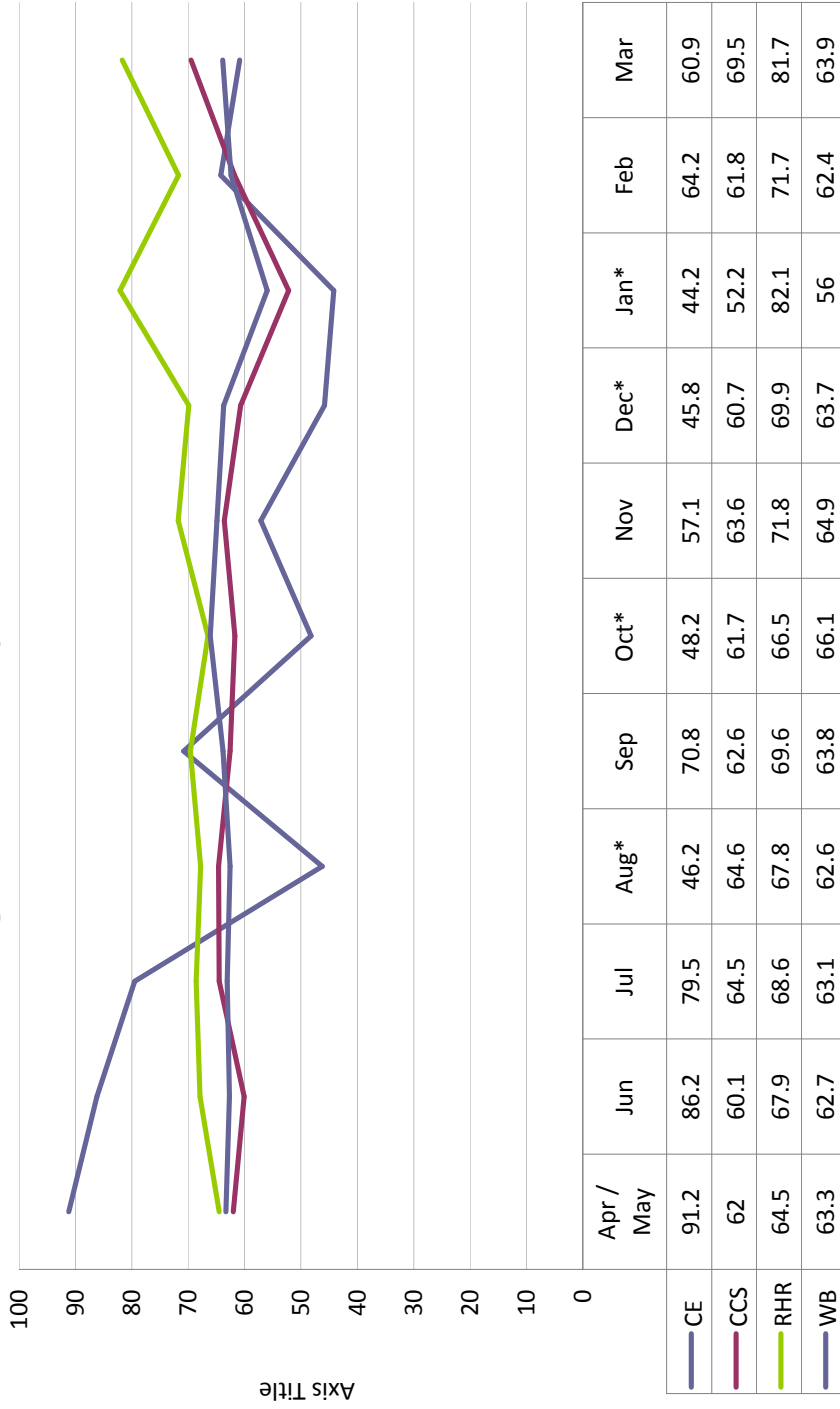
*Data excludes Business Admin Apprentices, Leavers and School based staff.



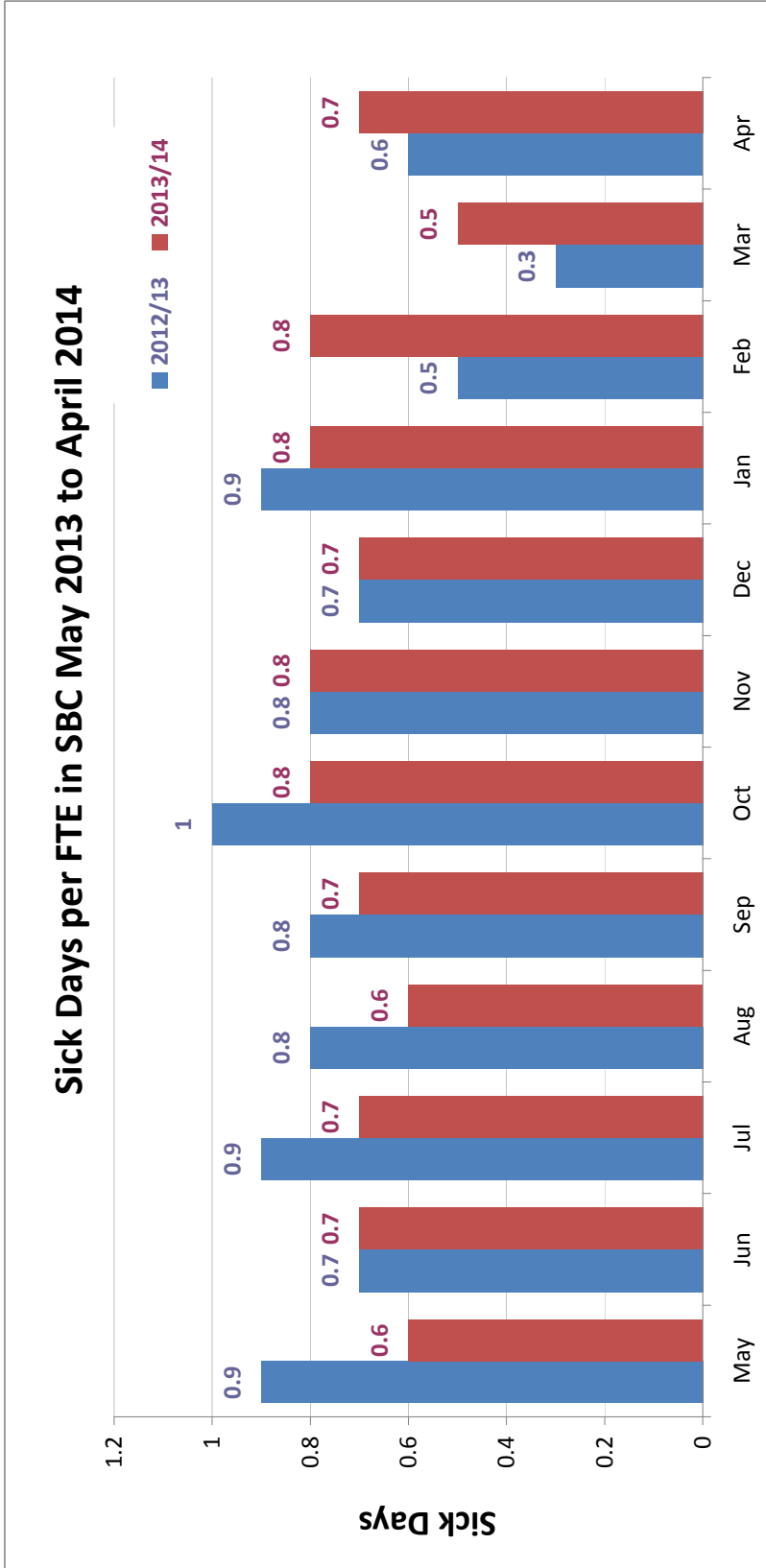
The workforce profile as at 30th April, 2014 shows a 69.9% Female/30.1 Male gender split. Sickness therefore mirrors this trend in terms of percentage share.

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Overall Management Score April 2013 to March 2014



APPENDIX B



Report to: CMT
From: Kevin Gordon, Assistant Director
Author: Neil Fraser, Democratic Services Officer
Date: 28th May 2014

APPENDIX 3

Improving Slough Borough Council's Work Absences & Staff Wellbeing

Purpose of report:

CMT have asked for a further breakdown about the causes of absence therefore Neil Fraser was asked to undertake a review on this subject as part of his professional study to set into context Slough Borough Council's absence incidences in comparison to the National absence statistics, in conjunction with Slough Borough Council's absence and wellbeing policies, so that conclusions can be reached and recommendations for further improvements can be made.

Foreward

There are several key premises it is important to acknowledge when discussing health, wellbeing and absences from the workplace. Firstly, it is understood that for most people of working age, work – the right work – is good for their health and well-being. Secondly, for most people worklessness is harmful. Third, much sickness absence and inactivity follows common health conditions which, given the right support, are compatible with work.¹

Poor attendance saps employee morale, costs employers overtime expenses, and reduces employee engagement. Poor attendance takes supervisory time and attention and could result in dismissal.

It is therefore important to foster an environment in which people are happy and enthused to come to work, while solutions to absences are tailored to that individual or absence reason, to further minimise absences and their impact to Slough Borough Council.

Slough's Absence Statistics

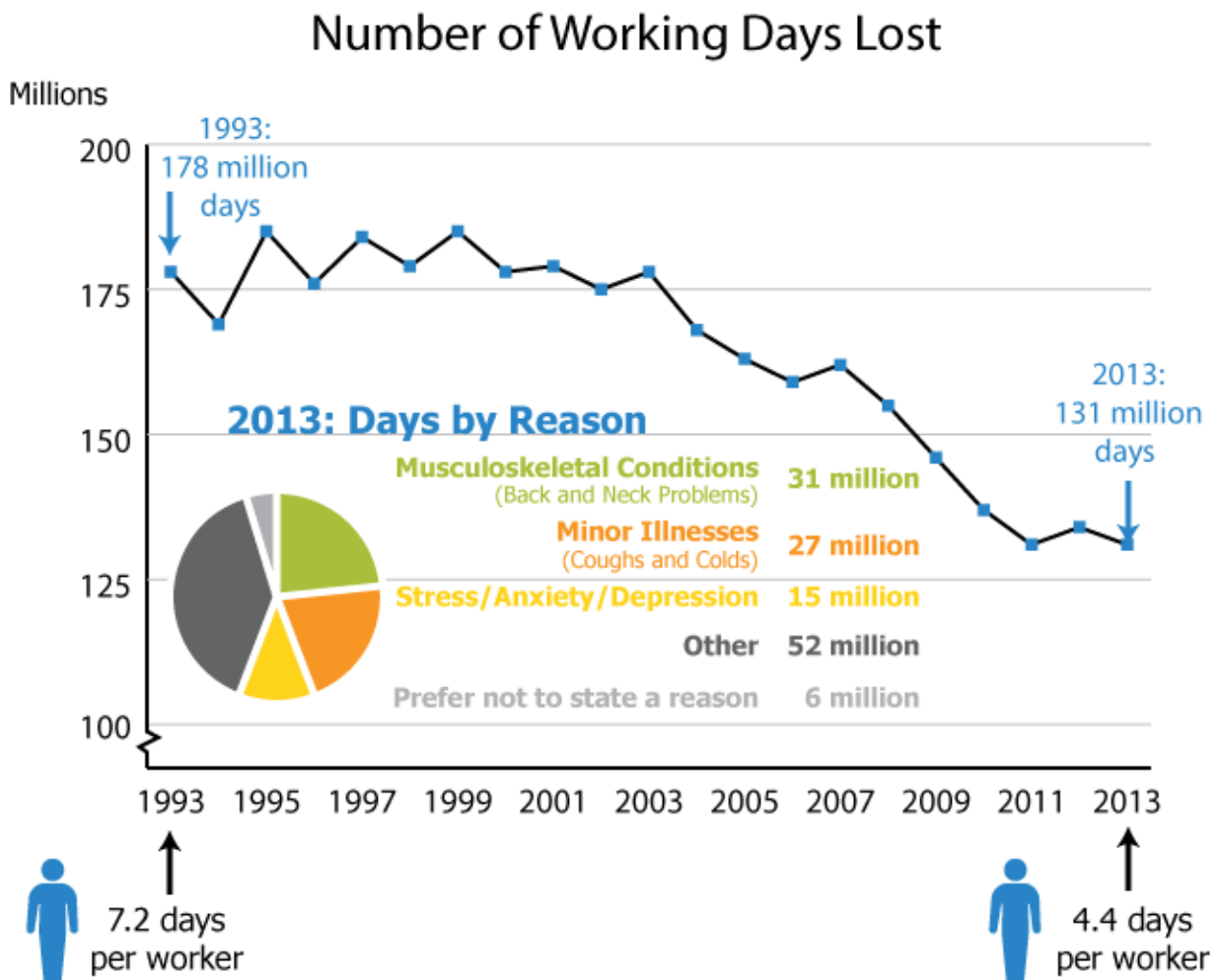
Firstly, it is important to recognise the work already done by Slough Borough Council in reducing instances of sickness over the last 18 months.

Sick days from 1 December 2012 to 30 November 2013 equated to an average of 7.5 days lost per employee, in comparison to 10.2 days within the same period for the previous year, a marked decrease. This is likely an effect of the implementation of a new policy in December 2012 which changed the trigger days from 10 days within 12 months, to 6 days within 6 months. This highlighted awareness of sickness absence among employees and Managers and promoted a more proactive attitude to employee absence that is further explored later in this report. The reduced average of 7.5 days is also broadly commensurate to other unitary authorities, for example RBWM, who average 7.22 days lost per employee.

1

Health at work – an independent review of sickness absence.
Dame Carol Black and David Frost CBE, 2011

7.5 days lost per employee is in comparison to the 2013 National Average of 4.4 days absence per employee.²



However, it is worth noting that this National figure includes data pertaining to the private sector and self-employed workers which statistically have, on average, lower instances and length of absences in comparison to the public sector.

Reasons for such a discrepancy include, but are not limited to:

- There are differences in the types of jobs between the two sectors and some sectors have higher likelihoods of sickness than others.
- SBC currently employs 1182 members of staff (headcount as of 31st December 2013). National statistics show that organisations with over 500 employees have the highest percentage of working hours lost though absence. It may be that sickness absences in small workplaces may be less common as workers do not feel able to take time off due to work commitments and not having colleagues to cover their work.

² Sickness Absence in the Labour Market, February 2014: Office of National Statistics: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

- The analysis only counts someone as sick if they work fewer hours than contracted for. It would exclude someone who is sick and makes up for the lost hours at a later point in the week. It is possible that individuals in smaller workforces are under more pressure to make up any lost hours and these workforces are more prominent in the private sector.
- Individuals within the private sector are also more likely to not be paid for a spell of sickness than individuals within the public sector.
- On average, women have more sickness absence than men and the public sector employs a higher proportion of female workers. Of the current Slough Borough council employees, circa 70% are women, a figure that has remained broadly constant from 2012 to 2013.³

Overall, Slough Borough Council has reduced working days lost due to absence from a total of 13736 in 2012, to 10752 in 2013, a reduction of 21.7%. However, this is somewhat to be expected, being broadly in line with an 18.3% reduction in employees during the same period (from 1446 to 1182). More pertinently, the average occasions of absence per employee have fallen, from 3.2 instances in 2012 to 3 instances in 2013.

The top 3 reasons for those absences have also changed, to an extent, for the period 2012 - 2013:

2012 Days Lost SBC		2013 Days Lost SBC		2013 Days Lost Nationally	
Infections	1915	Skeletal, breaks/sprains	1670	Skeletal, breaks/sprains	31 million
Stress	1863	Stress	1583	Infections	27 million
Stomach/liver/kidney/digestive	1643	Infections	1450	Stress	15 million

From the above, we can see that stomach/liver/kidney/digestive issues are no longer one of the top 3 reasons for absence within SBC, though this has been replaced by infections, which account for the majority of short term absences.

The top 3 reasons for absence 2013 also directly correspond to the National top 3, though conversely, infections are a more common reason for absence nationally than stress. Infections remain high nationally, and it would appear that SBC do not have a particular issue with regards to these types of absences.

We can therefore conclude that the number of individual absences, and the length of those absences, has fallen over the last 12 months, though Slough Borough Council's absences do remain above the National average, potentially for the reasons listed above.

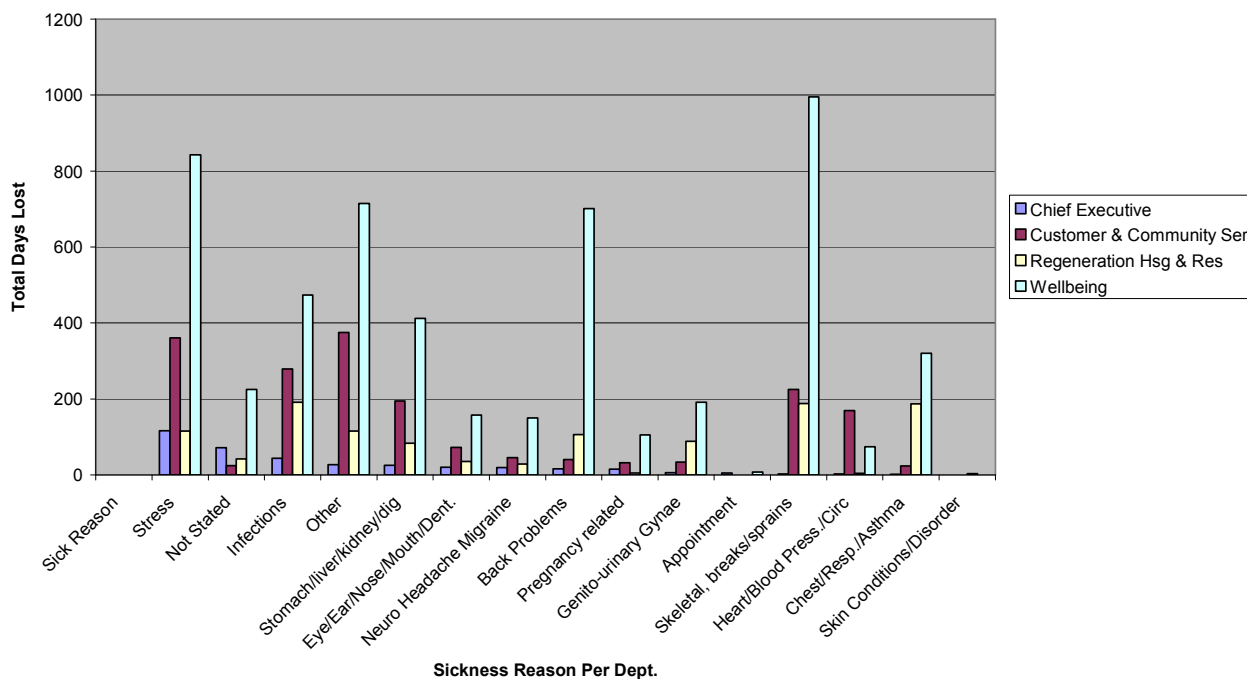
Below is a table showing the total reasons for sickness absence, per department, for the period 01/04/2013 – 28/02/2014:

We can see that that top reasons given for workplace absence do vary based on department. For example, the Wellbeing department's top 3 reasons for absence include infections, which is uniformly high across all departments, but also back problems and skeletal breaks/sprains. This is likely borne out by the type of work they do, which includes a greater amount of physically demanding work, particularly within social care.

³ Sickness Absence in the Labour Market, April 2012. Office for National Statistics.

This is in comparison to the Customer & Community Services department wherein the top 3 reasons for workplace absence given included stress, infections and Other (which can include such reasons as Allergy or allergic reaction, Cosmetic surgery and Poisoning (chemical)).

Total Days Lost 01/04/2013 – 28/02/2014



As stated previously, there has been a marked decrease in average days lost per employee over the last 12 months. There are several actions Slough Borough Council has undertaken in order to effect these changes, such as:

Staff Wellbeing Project Board

Slough Borough Council’s Staff Wellbeing Project Board has recently been re-launched.

The Project Board aims to promote good health through:

- Increased access to exercise and fitness
- Promotion of healthy eating choices
- Advice on giving up smoking
- Effective support during periods of ill health.

This has been borne out with such events as:

- Stoptober – SBC’s support for the National Stoptober campaign encouraging staff to give up smoking for the whole of October.
- The Pedometer challenge, a month-long event aimed at encouraging people to get up out of their chairs and do more walking
- HSF Health Plan Drop In – sessions to promote a simple and affordable way to help employees spread the cost of health care not covered by the NHS.
- Cycle Scheme – wherein employees are encouraged to commute to work via bicycle. In order to help facilitate this, the cost of a new bike is heavily reduced, with payment is via monthly payments.

As part of the re-launch, the Project Board will also include a staff wellbeing calendar, which will include theme days, some of which could tie into National directives such as 'National No Smoking day'.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

In addition to the above, the Employee Assistance Program provides counseling over the phone for issues such as stress, bereavement, coping with pressure etc. A designated Quiet Room has also been made available should employees feel the need to get away from their desk/office environment. As stress is the only top-3 reason for absence constant throughout both 2012 and 2013, it is important that employees are provided the support and tools in order to help them manage such issues.

At this point, it is worth recognising that Slough Council has been tasked with making significant savings over a 5 year period. As such, various actions to ensure such savings have taken place, and included consultations, redundancies, and outsourcing to organisations such as Arvato. Notwithstanding the stress that comes from uncertainty around whether their jobs will be safe, a reducing workforce can result in putting additional pressure on the remaining staff, which is an additional source of stress and potentially absence.

There is also a key difference between stress caused by work, i.e. professional stress, and stress brought about by personal circumstances away from work.

Occupational Health

The Council has also commissioned the services of OhWorks Limited to supply an occupational health service. Their approach is focused on helping employees to stay in work through ensuring early access to advice and rehabilitation. Both OHWorks and the council are committed to delivering a service that benefits the organisation and its staff.

This will include specialist advice e.g. physiotherapy for musco-skeletal problems, access to mental health specialists where required, closer working relationships with our current Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and the mediation service to ensure joined up solutions for staff.

How to reduce absences?

It would appear that the measures already put in place by Slough Borough Council cover the most commonly used tactics to reduce absences. These include monitoring and measuring absences, instigating an absence reporting procedure, analysing absence records etc. This is borne out in the regular updates comprising part of the Employment and Appeals Committee.

Recommendations for discussion

It is clear that a great deal of work has already been undertaken to reduce absence and improve staff wellbeing however further improvements are still required. Listed below are some actions that the Council is currently undertaking or recommending for action.

- Return to work (RTW) interviews. Although employees are currently required to submit a certificate of absence, which can be less demanding on Management's time, a RTW interview can personally address specific concerns including whether the absence was caused, or exacerbated, due to work. However, it appears that these interviews are not always being undertaken to their fullest extent as managers are not recording appropriately. In addition, measures can be put in place during these interviews to potentially reduce further absence by tailoring a work environment that allows the employee illness to be avoided, or managed as an ongoing matter without the need for absence. A review of previous absences can also be undertaken at this time.
- Terms of Employment and Bonus schemes. Slough Borough Council amended the sickness absence policy. This included reducing the trigger points to 6, within a six month period and early intervention to Occupational Health before an employee is managed through the formal process. However, there remains the option of providing an employee bonus scheme based on attendance. This would incentivise staff towards working through illnesses without being absent, though there would be implications towards budget and ensuring compliance legally, e.g. towards discrimination e.g. the Equalities Act 2010 (DDA).⁴ However, such incentives are not limited to only financial, but could also include additional time off work (e.g. an extra day's leave for an employee with no absences in 12 months).
- Acting on the information. Quickly spotting and addressing issues with appropriate action is key, whether this is meeting with an employee to discuss a pattern of regular absence, or suggesting to an employee who has not taken annual leave that they need to take holiday in line with legal requirements. Arvato and Occupational Health provide data that allows HR to produce the sickness balanced scorecard, which identifies absence trends globally, and by service. Human Resources are now using this information to target potential 'hot spots' which need further improvements. Currently Human Resources are attending management meetings to support managers understand the sickness absence process, provide advice to assist them manage difficult cases and ensure timely action is being taken. Further support is being provided to managers to ensure that employees attend Occupational Health appointments to continue to maintain a zero tolerance on non attendance.
- Increased physiotherapy sessions. OHWorks, our Occupational Health provider supply physiotherapy sessions every other week to those staff that have been referred due to absence. This service could be made more regular, in an effort to manage musco-skeletal injuries and to reduce absence. The cost for each extra day of physiotherapy would be £550. A time limited study will be undertaken in an area of the Council to see if this measure reduces absence of this type so that a wider business case can be made to assess if this is cost effective and valuable for Slough. In addition Slough currently offer staff training to manage posture in terms of Manual Handling, on top of this there is bespoke training for staff who undertake Manual Handling of clients although there is generally equipment to support staff with this task. As part of the above study we will include some sessions with high risk staff to focus on back awareness (e.g. reablement staff) which could include useful leaflets to advise staff on how to manage their own back care.

⁴ <http://www.orbuk.org.uk/article/managing-absence-reducing-and-preventing-absence>

- Public Health Department (PHD). Slough Borough Council is currently involving the PHD in their Staff Wellbeing Project Board to ensure we tap into initiatives that could be rolled out to staff. Slough has planned 'Health Checks' for staff in June 2014 which will assist staff manage their own personal health issues. This employee 'M.O.T.' will review diet, cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes etc, in a personal programme tailored to the individual. Employees can then be referred through to GP for management, where necessary.
- Sickness and Stress Management Training. Although SBC has worked to ensure all Managers are attending Sickness Absence training, it is felt that further training could be implemented to mitigate the potential for conflict which lead to employee stress and absence. It is worth noting that employment tribunals and payouts due to workplace stress are significantly higher in the public sector. Slough Council must ensure that we are actively fulfilling our remit to carry out stress assessments and plans of actions to mitigate the potential for such payouts. How performance is managed and how an individual reacts to that management is frequently a source of stress. Management style/behaviour self assessments could be undertaken by Managers to determine their own management style and better understand how this impacts upon their colleagues and team members. Various tools can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/> . In addition our PHD have confirmed that they will run an employee programme in October to support staff manage stress.

The Sickness Absence training also needs to be reviewed to change the focus which should be more about managing difficult conversations and managing situations rather than on the policy changes.

- Suspensions. When employees are suspended, or absent from work due to stress, SBC currently look at providing the option of moving the employee internally to another area of the organisation whilst any investigation is undertaken. This would ensure that the employee is removed from the environment causing them to feel stressed, but also ensures that the Council continues to make use of the employee. By moving rather than suspending, the employee is also more likely to integrate or reintegrate into the new or existing role once the investigation is concluded, rather than suffering the additional stress and trepidation of having to return to work following an extended absence.

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EMPLOYMENT & APPEALS COMMITTEE
WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

Meeting Date	Final deadline for Reports	Agenda Despatch
<p>20 October 2014</p> <p>Regular progress reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sickness absence • HR Statistics <p>Other Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fit for the Future • Performance Management • Use of compromise agreements 	<p>Wednesday 8 October</p>	<p>Friday 10 October</p>
<p>22 January 2015</p> <p>Regular progress reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sickness absence • Staff Wellbeing programme - update <p>Other Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Strategy update • Recruitment & Retention, including recruitment processes 	<p>Monday 12 January</p>	<p>Wednesday 14 January</p>
<p>8 April 2015</p> <p>Regular progress reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sickness absence • HR Statistics <p>Other Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<p>Thursday 26 March</p>	<p>Monday 31 March</p>

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MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD 2013/2014

EMPLOYMENT AND APPEALS COMMITTEE

COUNCILLOR	MEETING DATE							
	16.05.13	06.06.13	10.07.13	12.09.12	23.01.14	07.04.14		
Brooker	Ap	P	P	P	P	P		P
Chohan	P	P	P	Ap	P	P*		P*
Coad	P	P	P	Ap	P	Ap		Ap
Davis	P	P	P	P	P	P		P
A S Dhaliwal	P	P	P	P*	P	Ap		Ap
S K Dhaliwal	P	P	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap		Ap
Plenty	P	P	P	P	P	P		P
Rasib	P	P	P	Ap	Ap	Ap		P
Sharif	P	P	P*	P	P	P*		P*

P = Present for whole meeting
 Ap = Apologies given

P* = Present for part of meeting
 Ab = Absent, no apologies given

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