

Title: Barnsley Council's employee sickness absence and performance management for 2021 - 2022

Report of: Service Director – Business Improvement, Human Resources and Communications

Purpose of report

- To provide an update on our sickness absence and performance management for the financial year 2021 - 2022.
- To provide a comparison to the financial year 2020 - 2021.
- To provide assurance to the committee that our mitigating actions and improvements are either in place or being developed to support the health and wellbeing of our employees, reduce sickness absence levels and support effective performance management.

Council Plan priority: Enabling Barnsley – We're a modern, inclusive, efficient, productive and high-performing council.

1. Background

- 1.1. Our performance target for 2021- 2022 was an average of no more than 7.5 days sickness absence per employee, per year.
- 1.2. Our performance target for 2021 – 2022 for performance and development reviews (PDR) completion was 95%.

2. Our position for 2021 – 2022

- 2.1. In the financial year 2021-2022, the average total days lost per employee was 10.24 days. This is an increase of 2.74 days lost per employee from 2020 – 2021 (7.77). This figure includes absence due to Covid-19 which along with Mental Health were the two main reasons for absence in 2021-2022.
- 2.2. These tables provide the average data for the financial year 2020 - 2021 and 2021- 2022.

Average days lost per employee for the financial year 2020 - 2021

Directorate	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals for 2020- 2021
Adults and Communities	2.24	2.17	2.54	2.02	8.97
Children's	1.98	1.78	1.81	2.84	8.41
Place	2.01	2.01	2.33	2.60	8.95
Public Health	1.81	1.29	2.29	3.42	8.81
Core *	1.20	1.08	1.12	1.42	4.82
Total average days lost per employee	1.82	1.71	1.94	2.30	7.77

* Includes Customer Information and Digital Services, Finance including Catering, Business Improvement, HR and Communications, Corporate Health and Safety and Emergency Resilience, Legal Services and Elections, Governance, Members Services and Business Support.

Average days lost per employee for the financial year 2021 – 2022

Directorate	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals for 2021- 2022
Adults and Communities	1.80	2.59	2.86	3.04	10.29
Children's	2.84	3.63	3.71	4.36	14.54
Place**	1.59	2.41	3.34	2.87	10.21
Public Health	2.68	2.21	2.78	3.36	11.03
Core *	1.45	1.84	1.58	1.75	6.62
Total average days lost per employee	1.90	2.52	2.87	2.95	10.24

* Includes Customer Information and Digital Services, Finance including Catering, Business Improvement, HR and Communications, Corporate Health and Safety and Emergency Resilience, Legal Services and Elections, Governance, Members Services and Business Support ** NPS TUPE transferred into Place 1 April 2021.

2.3 Our total number of days of absence in 2021 - 2022 was 33,117 days, at a cost of £3,289,547.

In 2020 – 2021, the total number of days of absence was 23,964 days, at a cost of £2,361,141.

2.4 The main reason for absence during 2021 - 2022 was mental health including stress, anxiety and depression. These absences amounted to 12,112 days, at a cost of £1,277,215.

In 2020 – 2021, the number of days of absence for mental health including stress, anxiety and depression was 9,278 days, at a cost of £931,659.

2.5 The second highest reason for absence during 2021 - 2022 was an infectious disease, mainly COVID-19. These absences amounted to 4,460 days at a cost of £449,016.

In 2020 – 2021, the number of days of absence for infectious diseases was 2,764 days at a cost of £287,990.

- 2.6 Other reasons for absence in 2021 - 2022 were gastrointestinal (2,407 days), heart and circulatory (1,735 days), back issues (1,716 days), musculoskeletal (1,707 days), cancer (1,576 days), injury or fracture (1,455 days), chest and respiratory (1,102 days) and cough, colds and flu (995 days).

These figures have all increased since 2020 - 2021, apart from injury/fracture which has remained the same.

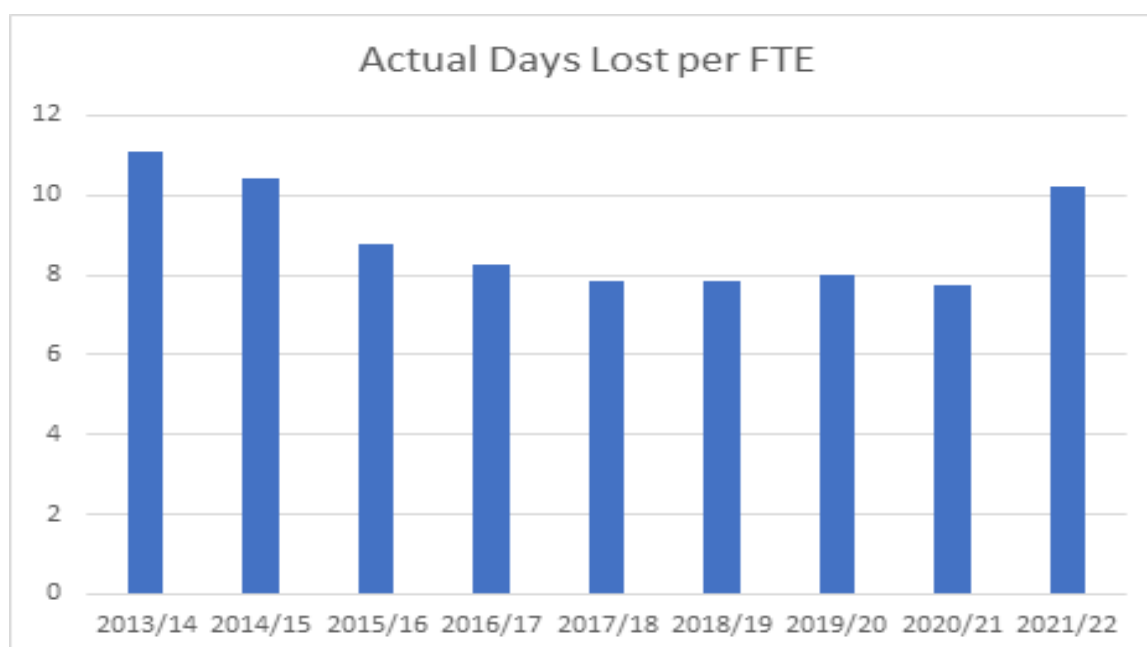
- 2.7 In terms of PDR reviews at the end of the 2021 – 2022 year the completion rate was 84.7%, an increase of 2.2% compared to the previous year (82.5%).

PDR completions per quarter for the financial year 2021 – 2022

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total for 2021- 2022
Total % of reported PDR completions per quarter	79%	58%	64%	84.7%	84.7%

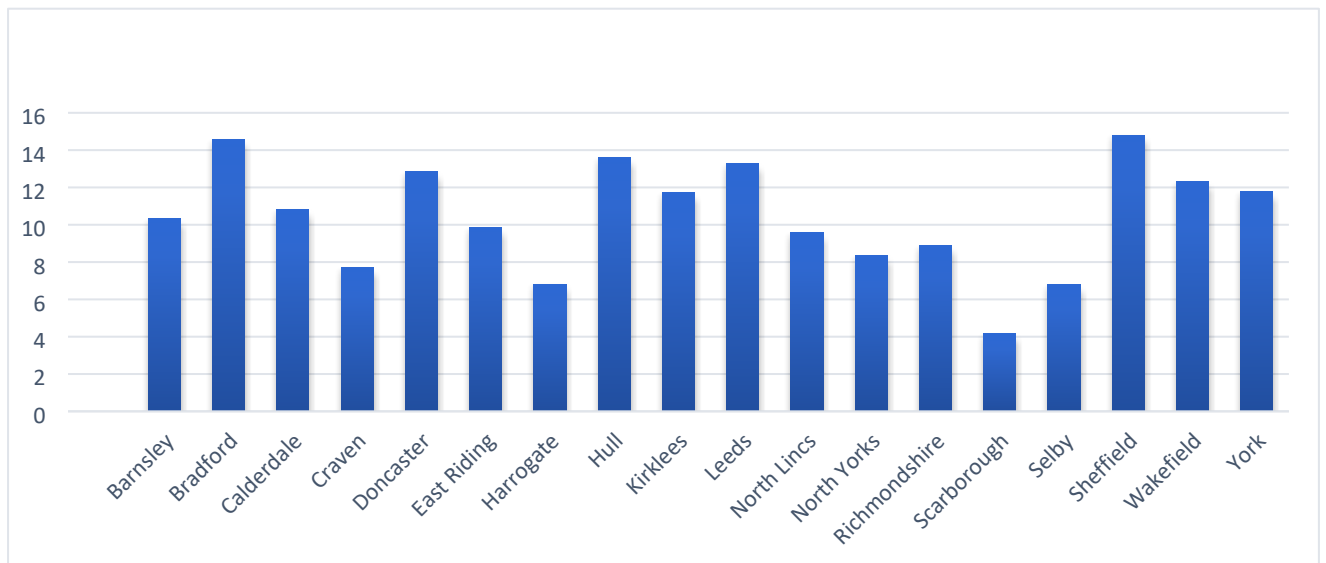
3. How do we compare?

- 3.1. This graph shows BMBC actual days lost per FTE each year since 2013 – 2014.



- 3.2. Our figures are following the same national and local trends in terms of showing the highest absence rates reported since 2014 - 2015. The CIPD reported in December 2022 that sickness absence in 2021 – 2022 had gone “through the roof” following the pandemic.

Graph: 2021 - 22 Yorkshire and Humber average FTE days lost due to sickness



To note: Craven, Kirklees, Scarborough have reported figures that do not include Covid absence.

- 3.3. According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) the UK sickness absence rate for 2021 increased to 2.2% from the record low of 1.8% recorded in 2020.

The UK sickness absence rate for 2021 is the highest recorded since 2010 when it was also 2.2%.

Sickness absence rates for public sector workers have been consistently higher than those for private-sector workers for every year on record. In 2021, sickness absence rates for public sector workers were 3% and for private-sector workers were 1.9%. Both of these rates were an 0.3% increase from the 2020 rates.

- 3.4. The latest benchmark absence rate for the public sector reported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) was 8 days in 2020 - 2021.
- 3.5. The CIPD [Health and Wellbeing at Work Report 2022](#) states that working from home allowed companies to navigate many of the problems caused by the pandemic and resulted in previously unthinkable flexibility in the workplace. Many welcomed the opportunity to swap the daily commute with more time to exercise or eat more healthily.
- 3.6. However, more than one in five people still report poor work-life balance due to working from home as a result of COVID-19. Working from home may have brought a new set of issues for some employees. Isolation can have a profound effect on a person's state of mind, on their self-esteem and on their overall lifestyle. While 72% of HR respondents say they're providing new or better support for people working from home, it's challenging to recognise

potential issues in remote work settings, and it requires good communication through well-trained managers.

4. How we're managing:

Sickness absence

- 4.1. Managers use the absence reporting dashboard to manage sickness absences within their areas supported by HR Business Partners. Training on the dashboard is available via our learning platform, POD.
- 4.2. Managers automatically receive an email to tell them that an employee has hit a sickness absence trigger. This is entered onto the case management dashboard and managers tell HR when the case has been dealt with. HR Business Partners chase any outstanding cases on a regular basis.
- 4.3. Managers can refer employees to our Occupational Health Unit for support if they're absent due to mental health reasons from day one of their absence rather than waiting for four weeks. Managers can also now request a meeting with the occupational health professional before an employee's occupational health assessment to support the process.
- 4.4. The Head of HR and Organisation Development reports on sickness management to Senior Management Team (SMT) on a quarterly basis.
- 4.5. HR Business Partners attend Directorate Management Team meetings to talk about the number of outstanding sickness absence cases, providing advice and support to address any concerns.
- 4.6. HR colleagues are reviewing our Managing Attendance Policy to make sure the guidance is supportive of employees and robust in helping managers to manage sickness absences.
- 4.7. Data from the case management dashboard shows that there is a high percentage of sickness cases across the Council, where no action is taken. HR Business Partners are working with managers to ensure that appropriate action is taken and offering training, advice and support to managers where needed.

Performance management (PDR completions)

- 4.8. Regular updates on PDR completions have been provided to directorate management teams throughout the year to encourage completions.
- 4.9. HR Business Partners provide advice and support to managers and employees where needed to ensure effective conversations are held and PDR process is followed.
- 4.10. Reminders to ensure PDRs for 2021/22 were completed by 31 March 2022 were provided regularly in the employee and Heads of Service bulletins, along with reminders via directorate management meetings.

- 4.11. Targeted contact was also made with employees and managers who had PDRs awaiting formal sign off. This resulted in an increase in completions during the last two weeks of March.
- 4.12. It should be noted that 2.2% of employees did not receive a PDR within the reporting period due to reasons such as maternity leave and long-term sickness.

5. Supporting our employees' wellbeing

Employee Assistance Programme

- 5.1. We continue to promote the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from Health Assured which includes a 24/7 helpline, App and a portal.

The EAP offers employees wellbeing information, mini health checks, weekly plans and an online chat facility.

During 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, our employees logged onto the app 420 times, accessed the portal 176 times and made 49 calls to Health Assured.

- 5.2. The breakdown of employees accessing the EAP app is 81.3% female and 16.8 % male.

We know that the service appeals to all age groups. The age group who has accessed the App the most has been between 40-49: 40-49-year-old (34.4%), 50-59-year-olds (31%), 30–39-year-old, (22.5%), 21-29- year-olds (9.6%), and 60+ (2.6%)

- 5.3. The EAP is continually promoted in our internal communications and as part of our support for national mental health campaigns. We've also delivered two direct mail campaigns to employees' home addresses in July 2021 and March 2022 signposting to advice and support through the EAP.

Culture of the organisation

- 5.4 In April 2021, we created a task and finish group to look at the changing culture of the organisation following people's working practices and the impacts of working from home during the pandemic. The group has developed a commitment to culture change document which promotes ways of helping employees to manage their workload and time, making sure they have adequate breaks, better use of emails, structuring meeting times and focusing on development time to help reduce burnout.
- 5.5 In July and August 2021, we conducted an internal communications campaign encouraging employees to look after their own health and wellbeing by taking time out through annual leave, regular breaks from work, holding outdoor meetings, promoting good working practices from the commitment to culture change and promoting self-care tips such as free massages, use of volunteering days and encouraging people to be more

active to improve their physical health.

We continue to promote wellbeing through weekly bulletins, our intranet news pages and the Well@Work intranet page.

- 5.6 We're pleased that we were awarded a silver South Yorkshire BeWell@work Award in May 2021. The award provides a framework for businesses to work towards and build good practice in workplace health and wellbeing. We're now working towards getting the gold award.

Support for employees

- 5.7 Feedback from employee pulse surveys in 2020, told us that people were feeling isolated and found it challenging to juggle caring responsibilities with work.

To support this, we set up an informal online carers forum over Microsoft Teams where people could share ideas and support each other. This has gained momentum and is now called the Employee Support Forum. We currently have 100 people offering help, support, and information to each other.

- 5.8 We've created a menopause working group, and in October 2021 we held a virtual menopause awareness session for employees who wanted to know more about the menopause and the support available to them. 48 employees attended this session and we received positive feedback. Two employees told their real-life stories and experiences which brought this topic to life.

- 5.9 A menopause awareness course is now available on our internal learning platform (POD) for all employees. 134 employees have completed this and we've received positive feedback about its impact. We encourage male managers to complete this too as this topic can affect everyone.

- 5.10 We have a group of trained Mental Health First Aiders (48 in total) in the workplace. Take up of this support offer has been lower than expected, but this may be due to so many people working from home during the pandemic. With the return to the Barnsley is our office hybrid way of working the uptake of this support may increase. Our Public Health help promote the roles and the support they can provide.

- 5.11 Workplace counselling is available and can be accessed through Occupational Health. During 2021 – 2022, 252 employees accessed counselling support (excluding schools).

In 2020 – 2021, 226 employees accessed counselling support (excluding schools).

- 5.12 Our e-learning mental health courses are available on our internal learning platform (POD). These include courses on mental health awareness, emotional intelligence, email stress, personal resilience, suicide prevention,

and managing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

In 2021 – 2022, 255 employees completed these courses. There was a rise in completions of these courses between August and October 2021. COVID-19 Lockdown restrictions started to be lifted from June 2021.

- 5.13 During the COVID-19 restrictions, exercise classes for Pilates, were held via Zoom rather than in Gateway and Westgate.
- 5.14 We offer 'Know Your Numbers' assessments to employees (core health checks), holding sessions in Westgate and at the Smithies Depot.
- 5.15 We also offer POD training and face to face briefing sessions to help colleagues understand and conduct effective PDRs. An introduction to our PDR process is also included as part of induction training for all employees.

6. Our future plans

- 6.1. We value our employees and want to demonstrate that we are committed to supporting them to lead healthy and fulfilling lives both inside and outside of work.

Our Wellbeing Stakeholder Group continue to identify and implement actions that support employee health and wellbeing which include:

- development of a Mental Health Policy
- review the current Managing Attendance Policy to ensure the guidance is supportive of employees and robust in helping managers to manage sickness absences
- encouraging discussions around mental health to reduce any associated stigma
- encouraging employees to remain active
- working with our EAP provider to support employees' mental health.
- promote Mental Health First Aiders across the organisation
- work towards the gold standard of the BeWell@work award
- monitor employee mental health and wellbeing via surveys, focus groups etc.
- offer more 'Know Your Numbers' clinics in the workplace as a preventative measure
- tender for a new Occupational Health provider
- continue our promotion of the PDR process
- revise our council induction process including emphasis on health and wellbeing and PDRs.

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Date: December 2022