

Title: Barnsley Council's employee sickness absence and performance management for 2022 - 2023

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

Purpose of report

- To provide an update on our sickness absence and performance management for the financial year 2022 - 2023.
- To provide a comparison to the financial year 2021 - 2022.
- 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 2022 - 2023 was an average of no more than 7.5 days sickness absence per employee, per year.
- 1.2. Our performance target for 2022 – 2023 for performance and development reviews (PDR) completion was 95%.

2. Our position for 2022 – 2023

- 2.1. In the financial year 2022 - 2023, the average total days lost per employee was 11.09 days. This is an increase of 0.85 days lost per employee from 2021 – 2022. This figure includes absence due to infectious diseases such as COVID-19, which along with mental health were the two main reasons for absence in 2022 - 2023.
- 2.2. The tables below provide the average data for the financial years 2021 - 2022 and 2022 - 2023.

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.

Average days lost per employee for the financial year 2022 – 2023

Directorate	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals for 2022- 2023
Adults and Communities	2.41	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.41
Place, Health & Social Care wef 1-7-23	N/A	3.70	3.53	3.65	10.88
Children's	3.84	2.93	3.83	3.55	14.15
Place (Growth & Sustainability wef 1-7-23)	2.47	2.64	2.41	3.10	10.62
Public Health	4.01	N/A	N/A	N/A	4.01
Public Health & Communities wef 1-7-23	N/A	2.66	3.27	2.20	8.13
Core *	1.80	2.24	2.43	1.78	8.25
Total average days lost per employee	2.66	2.72	2.92	2.79	11.09

On 1 July 2023 changes were made to some directorates following a restructure: Communities moved from Adults and Communities to Public Health. Adults became Place, Health & Social Care and Place changed its name to Growth & Sustainability.

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

2.3. Our total number of days of absence in 2022 - 2023 was 35,366 days.

2.4. In 2021 – 2022 the total number of days of absence was 33,117 days.

- 2.5. The main reason for absence during 2022 - 2023 was mental health including stress, anxiety and depression. These absences amounted to 15,056 days.
- 2.6. In 2021 – 2022, the number of days of absence for mental health including stress, anxiety and depression was 12,112 days.
- 2.7. The second highest reason for absence during 2022 - 2023 was infectious disease, mainly due COVID-19. These absences amounted to 2,502 days.
- 2.8. Within this figure, 778 days was lost to Long COVID which affected 12 employees.
- 2.9. In 2021 – 2022, the number of days of absence for infectious diseases was 4,460 days. In 2022 - 2023 there was a steady decline of COVID cases from its peak at the end of 2021 - 2022.
- 2.10. Other reasons for absence in 2022 - 2023 were musculoskeletal (2,270 days), cancer (2,192 days), gastrointestinal (2,101 days), injury or fracture (2,036 days), heart and circulatory (1,902 days), cough, colds and flu (1,445 days), chest and respiratory (1,358 days) and back issues (1,270 days).

These figures have all increased since 2021 - 2022, with the exception of gastrointestinal and back issues that have seen a decrease in numbers.

- 2.11. In terms of PDR reviews at the end of the 2022 – 2023 year the completion rate was 75.6%. A decrease of 9.1% compared to the previous year 2021 - 2022 that had a completion rate of 84.7%.

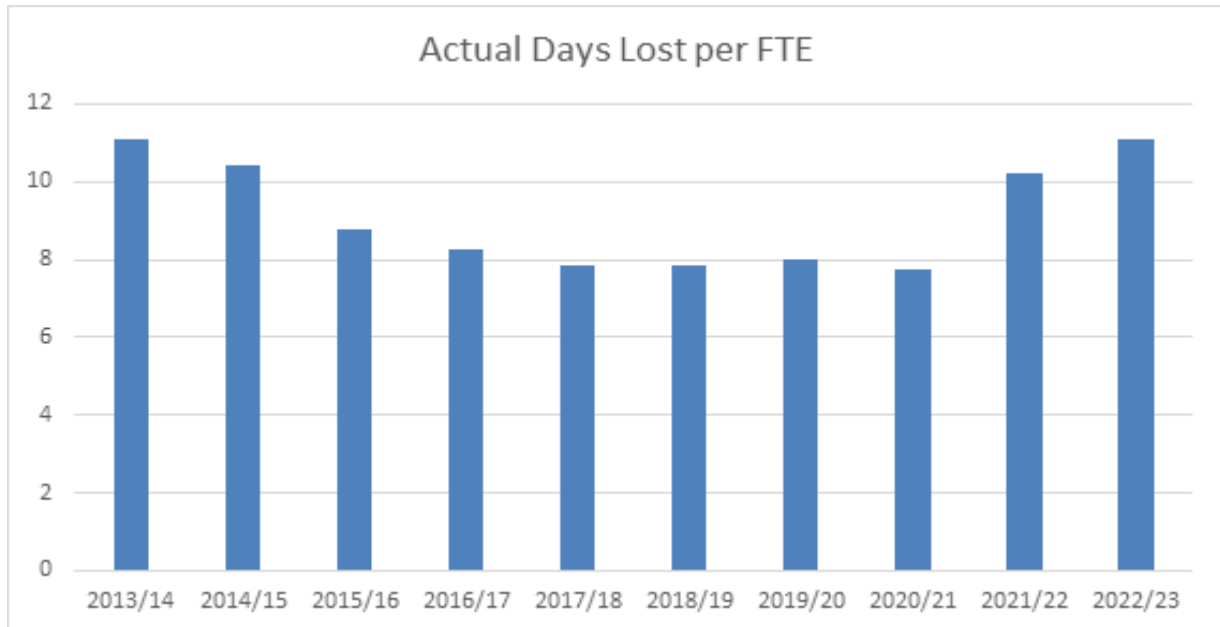
PDR completions per quarter for the financial year 2022 – 2023

Directorate	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Adult Social Care	69.4%	71.7%	68.9%	90.4%
Children's Services	71.6%	69.8%	59.8%	62.2%
Growth & Sustainability	76.9%	59.5%	56.0%	77.4%
Core Services	77.7%	81.0%	65.9%	72.8%
Public Health & Communities	81.5%	73.5%	68.1%	82.8%
Total % of reported PDR completions per quarter	77.47%	69.4%	63%	75.6%

On 1 July 2023 changes were made to some directorates following a restructure. The PDR system has reverted the previous data to the new structure, as shown above.

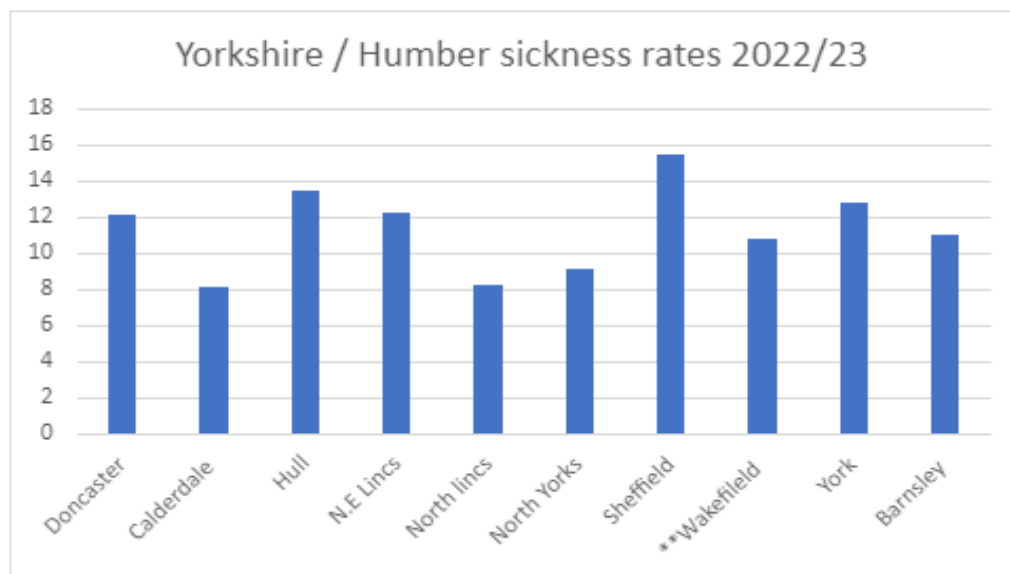
3. How do we compare?

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



- 3.1. Our figures follow similar local and national trends in terms of showing the highest absence rates reported since 2013 - 2014.
- 3.2. How the council compares in Yorkshire/Humber can be seen below:

This graph shows **Yorkshire / Humber FTE days lost per employee 2022/23**



- 3.3. Whilst COVID absences have dramatically reduced in the period, all the above authorities report that mental health is the highest absence reason in 2022 - 2023.
- 3.4. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) records the percentage of working hours lost in the UK. Their sickness absence rate for 2022 increased by 0.4% to 2.6%, which is the highest rate recorded since 2004, when it was 2.7%. It was also an 0.7 increase on the 2019 pre-pandemic level.
- 3.5. The average sick days in the UK in 2022 was 5.7 days (ONS).
- 3.6. Public sector sickness is generally higher than in the private sector. This has been the case since 1995. An ONS report in 2022 found the days lost per worker in the private sector was 5.0 days, versus 7.1 days in local government and 10.7 days in healthcare.
- 3.7. The CIPD report entitled, 'Good Work Index 2023: North of England'ⁱ states in its key findings that public sector workers are more likely to feel the negative effects of work on their mental health and are more likely to feel excessive pressure and exhaustion at work.
- 3.8. The report states that the effect of work on both mental and physical health is relatively negative and has worsened in 2023 compared with previous years. This finding applies to public and non-public workers alike.
- 3.9. The report indicates that workers are also showing signs of a decline in engagement with work in 2023 compared with previous years.
- 3.10. On a more positive note, the report found that most people can take advantage of both formal and informal flexibility in their jobs.
- 3.11. The ONS¹ state that in 2023, the most prevalent health condition reported by the working-age population was depression, bad nerves or anxiety (5 million people, 12% of population). This was also the largest health condition for those who are economically inactive because of long-term sickness, with 53% (1.35 million people in 2023) reporting it as a health condition, higher than the 48% who reported it in January to March 2019.
- 3.12. The ONS states that more working-age people are self-reporting long-term health conditions, with 36% saying that they had at least one long-term health condition in (Jan to Mar) 2023, up from 31% in the same period in 2019 and 29% in 2016.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/economicinactivity/articles/risingillhealthandeconomicinactivitybecauseoflongtermsicknessuk/2019to2023>

4. How we're managing:

Sickness absence

- 4.1. Managers use the absence reporting dashboard to help them 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.
- 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. We have reviewed and updated our Managing Attendance Policy to make sure the guidance is supportive of employees and robust in helping managers to manage sickness absences. Team briefings have been held outlining the changes, with all line managers attending mandatory training.
- 4.7. Data from the case management dashboard shows that a high percentage of sickness cases across the council (approximately 75%) have no further action taken. The revised policy and associated training are seeking to reverse this trend, with HR Business Partners working with managers to ensure that appropriate action is taken and offering training, advice and support where needed.

Performance management (PDR completions)

- 4.8. All managers can view the PDR completion status for employees in their team through a dashboard.
- 4.9. Regular updates on PDR completions are provided to directorate management teams throughout the year to encourage completions.
- 4.10. HR Business Partners provide advice and support to managers and employees where needed to ensure effective conversations are held and the PDR process is followed.

- 4.11. To ensure PDRs for 2022 - 2023 were completed by 31 March 2023, targeted reminders were sent before the PDR was due to close for both employees and managers. At the beginning of March 2023, reminders were also issued in communications such as Let's Talk and via the intranet.

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.

- 5.2. During 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, our employees logged onto the app 432 times, accessed the portal 145 times, and made 70 calls including 9 live chats to Health Assured.

- 5.3. The breakdown of employees accessing the EAP app in 2022 – 2023 is 78% female and 18% male.

- 5.4. We know that the service appeals to all age groups. The age group that has accessed the App the most in 2022 – 2023 has been the 40-59 demographic.

The breakdown of ages is as follows: 40-49-year-old (32%), 50-59-year-olds (32%), 30–39-year-old, (18%), 21-29- year-olds (14%), and 60+ (4.3%).

- 5.5. The EAP is continually promoted in our internal communications and as part of our support for national mental health campaigns.

6. Culture of the organisation

- 6.1 The council was awarded the Silver South Yorkshire BeWell@work Award in May 2021. This is a continuous assessment and subsequently the Gold South Yorkshire BeWell@work Award has been achieved in May 2023.

The award provides a framework for businesses to work towards and build good practice in workplace health and wellbeing.

- 6.2 Employee survey results from 2022 - 2023 provided employee views on four areas of working life: change, wellbeing, work life balance and communication.
- 6.3 One response to the survey results has been to form a council Employee

Experience Group. This is a working group made up of volunteers from across the organisation. The group is overseen by the Head of HR and OD.

- 6.4 The Employee Experience Group's aim is to help improve employee engagement across the council, helping us shape the culture of our workforce so that it is empowered, engaged, skilled, innovative, happy and healthy.
- 6.5 The Employee Experience Group will help drive completion of Business Unit action plans and the corporate plan, with plans identifying areas of improvement and key priorities. HR Business Partners are also heavily involved in encouraging progress of these actions within their directorates.
- 6.6 We continue to promote our wellbeing agenda through weekly bulletins, our intranet news pages and the Well@Work intranet page. The Well@Work services include options around mental and physical health, lifestyle, working from home advice, Occupation Health and other health related signposting links.
- 6.7 The Employee survey carried out in 2022 had a 59% completion rate and found that:
 - 53.5% of respondents believe the council does enough to support health and wellbeing at work.
 - 43% of respondents know how to access the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).
 - 64.4% of respondents believe that employee Health and Safety is given a high priority.

7. Other support for employees

- 7.1 'Let's Talk' employee sessions are held quarterly and provide updates around the Enabling Barnsley Programme, our financial position, people strategy and other important council issues. The sessions are a good opportunity for employees to ask questions, share thoughts and provide improvement ideas. All employees can book on to these sessions via POD.
- 7.2 A menopause awareness course is available on our internal learning platform (POD) for all employees. 64 employees completed this during 2022 – 2023. In 2021 – 2022, 134 employees completed the course, providing positive feedback on its impact. We encourage all managers to complete this too as this topic can affect everyone.
- 7.3 Following a successful pilot menopause café session in April 2022. Further café sessions were held, offering support to employees going through

menopause. This was an opportunity for people to talk to others and share experiences, stories, tips and offer support in a relaxed setting.

- 7.4 A 'Supporting Good Mental Health' policy was launched in 2022 - 2023. This new policy encourages employees to look after and talk about their mental wellbeing through the relevant council communication channels.

The policy promotes the flexible working policy and other policies to eradicate harassment, bullying or victimisation. It also sets out employee, management, and Human Resources' responsibility to support mental health in the workplace.

- 7.5 Workplace counselling is available and can be accessed through Occupational Health.

During 2022 – 2023, 274 employees accessed counselling support (excluding schools).

In 2021 – 2022, 252 employees accessed counselling support (excluding schools).

- 7.6 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 2022-2023, 61 completed the course; Mental health Awareness BMBC – for all employees. 44 completed the e-learning course, 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.

- 7.7 We offer 'Know your Numbers' assessments (core health checks) and blood pressure checks to employees. Sessions have been held in Westgate and at the Smithies Depot during 2022 -2023.

- 7.8 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.

- 7.9 We have a group of trained Mental Health First Aiders (31 in total) in the workplace. The take-up of this support offer has been lower than expected, this may be due to many people undertaking hybrid working as part of their working week. Our Public Health services help promote the roles and the support that they can provide.

7.10 Online exercise classes for Pilates and yoga continue to be promoted.

7.11 A new Occupational Health Services provider has been commissioned and will come into effect in October 2023. A full range of occupational health services will be offered including an online referral portal for managers.

Additional services will include:

- pre-employment assessments to enable any adjustments or support to be put in place as soon as possible.
- assessments following manager referral e.g., relating to sickness absence or where advice is needed to help manage/support an employee that has a health condition and,
- undertaking health surveillance for those employees exposed to noise, vibration or fumes/dust where early identification of problems can minimise the risk of long-term health conditions developing.

8. Our future plans

8.1. 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:

- work with ICB to achieve Menopause Friendly Employer accreditation.
- encouraging discussions around mental health to continue to reduce any associated stigma.
- working with our EAP provider to support employees' mental health by providing emotional support, as well as financial and legal advice.
- promote Mental Health First Aiders across the organisation.
- continue to maintain 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.
- encouraging employees to remain active.
- introduce the new Occupational Health provider.
- continue our promotion of the PDR process.
- revise our council induction process including emphasis on health and wellbeing and PDRs.
- continue to talk about mental health and PDRs in one-to-one discussions.
- promote the access to work mental health support service to support employees who have a mental health condition that is affecting them at work.

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ⁱ <https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2023-pdfs/2023-cipd-good-work-index-north-england-report-8407.pdf>