

BARNSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Sickness Absence – 2020/21

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To advise of BMBCs position in relation to sickness absence for the financial year 2020/21.
- 1.2. The report also provides a comparison and summary for the financial year 2019/20
- 1.3. To provide assurance to the committee of the mitigating actions and improvements that are in place or are being developed to reduce sickness absence levels and to support the health and wellbeing of our employees.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Councils performance target for 2020/21 was 6 days per employees per year.

3. Overall Position for 2020/21

- 3.1. The following tables provide data for the financial year 2019/20 and 2020/21

2019/20

Directorate	DAYS LOST Q1	DAYS LOST Q2	DAYS LOST Q3	DAYS LOST Q4	TOTALS FOR 2019/20
Adults & Communities	2.31	1.86	2.44	2.57	9.18
People	1.88	2.20	2.60	1.91	8.59
Place	1.66	1.89	2.09	1.83	7.47
Public Health	2.62	3.08	2.45	2.5	10.65
Core *	1.17	0.90	2.19	1.06	5.32
Total days lost per employee	1.85	1.84	2.25	2.04**	7.98

*Business Improvement, HR & Communications, Corporate Health & Safety and Emergency Resilience, Finance, Legal Services & Elections, Governance, Members Services & Business Support, (Customer Information & Digital Services from Jan 20)

** Q4 figure doesn't include sickness due to COVID-19, revised total figure including COVID absence is 2.24.

2020/21

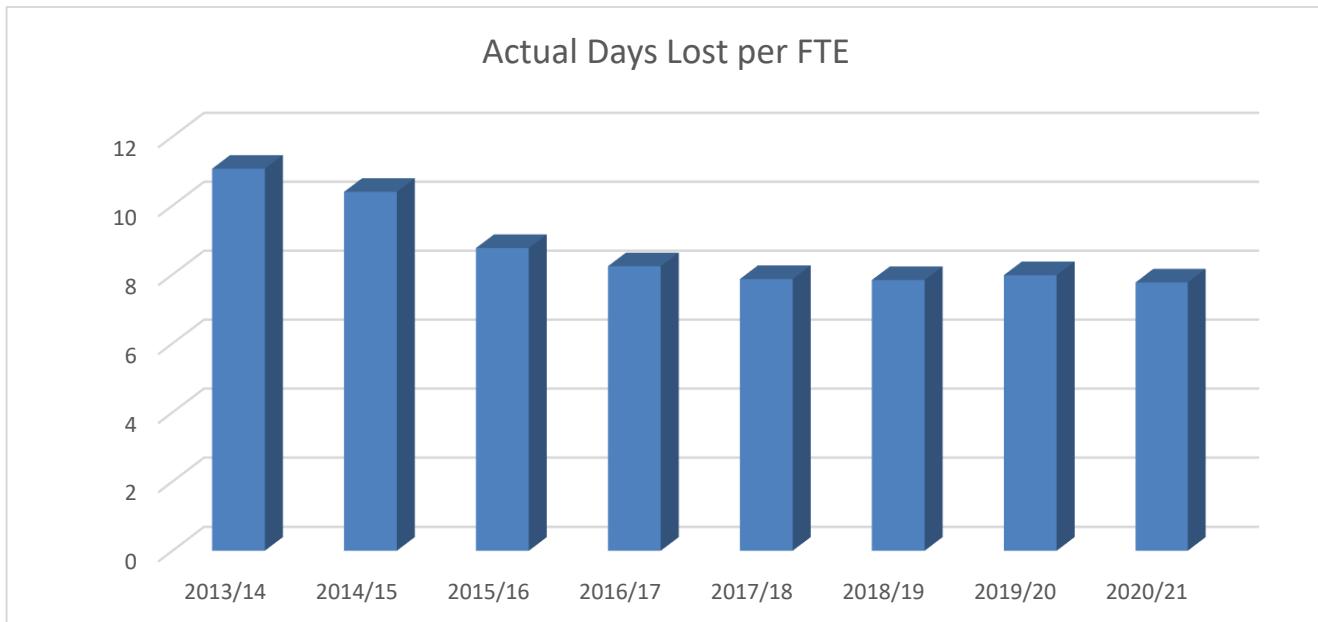
The following provides an update in relation to the days lost per employee for the year:

Directorate	DAYS LOST Q1	DAYS LOST Q2	DAYS LOST Q3	DAYS LOST Q4	TOTALS FOR 2020/21
Adults & 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 days lost per employee	1.82	1.71	1.94	2.30	7.77

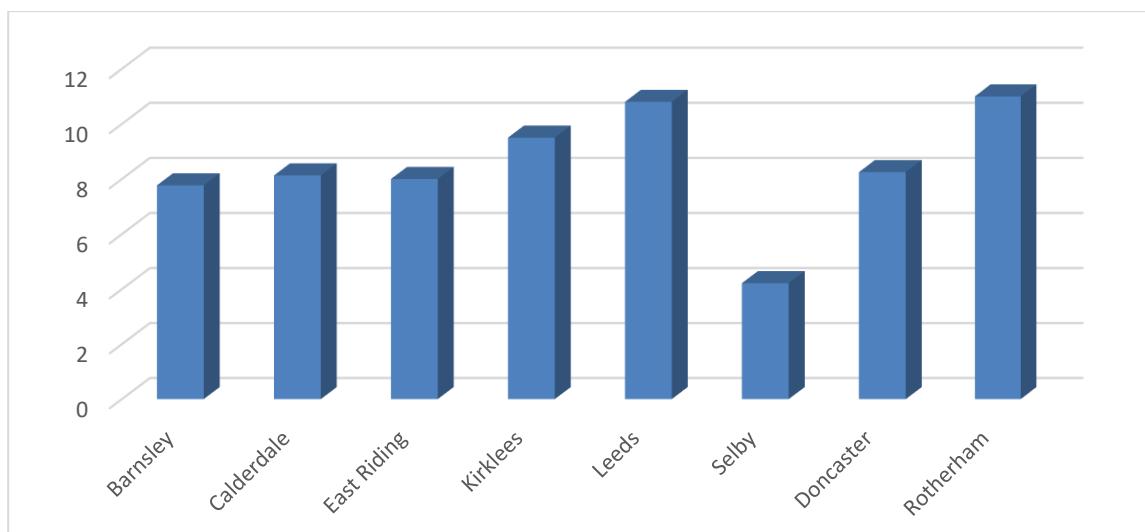
* Customer Information & Digital Services, Finance including Catering, Business Improvement, HR & Communications, Corporate Health & Safety and Emergency Resilience, Legal Services & Elections, Governance, Members Services & Business Support,

** Children's was renamed from People 1-4-2021

- 3.2. The absence levels identified above show total days lost per employee of 7.77 days for 2020/21 this is a decrease in the overall days lost for 2019/20 (7.98).



- 3.3. The CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work Report 2021 reports the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have shown COVID-19 accounted for 14% of all sickness absence since April 2020. While the pandemic may have led to additional sickness absence, measures such as furloughing, social distancing, shielding and increased homeworking appear to have helped reduce other causes of absence, allowing the general downward trend to continue.
- 3.4. CIPD also reports that the disruption caused by the pandemic to businesses in terms of working time has been incalculable in many ways. The impact, coupled with differences between organisations in which aspects of COVID-19-related absence, if any, they include in their absence rate (such as suspected or confirmed cases, self-isolation, quarantine, shielding), mean they were unable to provide a valid average sickness absence rate in the 2021 Health and Wellbeing at Work survey report. The benchmark absence rate for Public Sector therefore remains as reported by CIPD in 2019/21 at 8 days which we are slightly below.
- 3.5. Across the region most Councils have also reported a reduction in absence for 2020/21. These are shown below.



Days lost Yorkshire & Humber for 2020/21

- 3.6. The Council's current absence level for 2020/21 is 7.77 days lost per FTE. The Council's performance indicator target is currently 6 days per employee however this is under review.
- 3.7. Across the Council the total number of days lost in 2020/21 was 23,964 costing £2,361,141, a reduction from 2019/20 (25,119 actual days lost).
- 3.8. The main reason for absence during 2020/21 was due to mental health including stress, anxiety and depression with 9,278 actual days lost, at a cost of £931,659. An increase from 7233.5 days lost in 2019/20.
- 3.9. Other key absence reasons include infectious disease which has risen from previous years due to COVID 19. 2,408 days at a cost of £246,926 and musculoskeletal including back pain and injuries 4,406.5 days lost at a cost of £395,818 however a reduction from 19/20 4,880 days lost).
- 3.10. Days lost within the Council from minor ailments including cough, cold and influenza, headache, gastro has seen a dramatic reduction to 1,784 at a cost of £187,198 from 5,231 days lost in 2019/20. This is likely to be due to a number of factors including the majority of employees working from home, children having periods of home schooling during lockdown, and the extra cleaning regimes put in place to reduce the spread of Covid.

4. Managing Sickness Absence.

- 4.1. The Absence Reporting Dashboard was launched on the 1 August 2020 which includes:
 - Breakdown of sickness absence measures to directorate and business unit level.
 - New visuals for analysing absence patterns, by time, type, directorate and business unit.
 - A manager-level view of all recorded absence in the team, including sickness, leave and other absence types.
 - Individual employee absence summaries.
 - A new 'absence trigger' process to replace the current 'monthly trigger report' which auto generates email notifications to managers when an absence trigger occurs to enable more timely absence discussions to take place
- 4.2. Employees who hit a trigger are also entered onto the case management tracker and discussions held at Directorate Management Teams with the HR Business Partners.
- 4.3. Managers can access training for the dashboard via POD the Council's learning platform.

5. Wellbeing Initiatives

- 5.1. The South Yorkshire BeWell@work Award gives a framework for a business to work towards and build good practice in workplace health and wellbeing. There are 3 levels of award, Bronze, Silver and Gold. We have provided evidence to show what support we have in place in relation to Wellbeing for employees across the Council. There are 4 compulsory elements to the award: - Human Resources, Health & Safety, Absence Management & Health Campaigns of which we have achieved Gold standard in all categories. In addition, there are 9 optional core themes which we have provided evidence for and met 5 at Gold level :- Consultation & Communication, Training and Development, Drugs and Alcohol, Smoking and supporting an Aging workforce and have met the remaining 5 core themes at Silver level :- Mental Health, Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, Health Campaigns and Long Term Health Conditions / MSK. Therefore, overall we have been awarded the Silver level of accreditation.

- 5.2. Following the initial Health & Wellbeing Survey, carried out across the Council, which closed on 6 March 2020 further pulse surveys were undertaken, due to COVID 19, in May 2020 and October 2020. The results of these surveys in relation to Mental Health were as follows: -
- In October overall wellbeing remains similar to that reported in May, with 78% of employees stating that they are in good/very good health
 - 27% of employees report feeling more anxious, a reduction of 13% compared to the May survey.
 - 17% of employees report feeling more depressed compared to 19% in the May survey
- 5.3. As a result of the surveys a Mental Health Support Programme was developed which includes: -
- Purchase of an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from Health Assured which includes a 24/7 helpline, App /portal with a plethora of wellbeing information, mini health checks, weekly plans and an online chat facility.
 - Mental Health Training for both employees and Managers through Mental Health England
 - Training employees to take on the role of Mental Health First Aider (45 in total) including a train the trainer model for sustainability.
- 5.4. The EAP was launched to all employees (including school-based employees) on 27 November 2020. Up to and including 31 March 2021, 214 users have registered for the App and Health Assured have received 11 calls. 78% of users have been female and 21% male. The age group who have accessed the App the most has been between 40-49-year-old (38%), 50-59-year olds (29%), 30-39 year old, (25%) and 10% between 21-29 year olds, therefore appealing to all age groups.
- 5.5. Workplace counselling is also available which can be accessed by employees through the Occupational Health Unit. Counselling support was accessed by 226 employees during 20/21 (Excluding Schools) an increase from 207 in 2019/20.
- 5.6. Additional Mental Health Awareness training provided by Mental Health England was made available to all employees between January 2021 and March 2021. In total 613 employees booked onto this training, 19% of the workforce.
- 5.7. The Managers training will be available for Managers to complete until 8 December 2021. As at 31 March 2021, 56% of Managers have completed module 1 and 10% had completed the whole course.
- 5.8. The following E-learning mental health courses have continued to be available on POD during 2020/21: - Suicide Prevention, Mental Health awareness, Emotional Intelligence, Email Stress and Personal Resilience. A new e-learning course was also made available for Managers, Managing Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace from September 2020. In total 694 employees completed these courses in 2020/21. There was a rise in completions of all of these courses in April and May 2020.
- 5.9. A remote workers toolkit was developed on POD for staff and managers who are remote working.
- 5.10. A one to one checklist has been developed for Managers which encourages managers to discuss wellbeing and workloads along with employee's case work in their 1-2-1 / supervision meetings.
- 5.11. Exercise classes for Pilates, Zumba have continued to be held via Zoom due to Covid restrictions rather than on site (Gateway, Westgate, Town Hall).
- 5.12. Self-help information was included in the daily then weekly Keeping Barnsley Moving bulletin for staff and was also made available via the Well@Work website.
- 5.13. Due to COVID restrictions we have not been able to carry out any Know your numbers Assessment across the Council this year.

6. Moving forward

- 6.1. The absence dashboard is continuing to be developed and will provide: -
 - A breakdown of sickness absence measures to directorate and business unit level.
 - New visuals for analysing absence patterns, by time, type, directorate and business unit.
 - A manager-level view of all recorded absence in the team, including sickness, leave and other absence types.
 - Individual employee absence summaries.
- 6.2. The Wellbeing Stakeholder Group will continue to identify and implement actions that support employee health and wellbeing which include:
 - Developing a Health and Wellbeing Plan as part of the new People and OD Strategy
 - Develop a Mental Health Policy
 - Encourage discussions around Mental Health to reduce the stigma
 - Encouraging employees to remain active
 - Working to change workplace culture by addressing use of emails and meetings
 - Support employees with caring responsibilities.
 - Work with the EAP provider to support employees Mental Health.
 - Work towards the Gold standard of the BeWell@work award
 - Continue to monitor employee mental health and wellbeing via surveys, focus groups etc
- 6.3. We value our employees and want to show that we are committed to supporting them to lead healthy and fulfilling lives both inside and outside of work

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Date: May 2021