

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL
REPORT**

To: HOUSING AND SOCIAL WORK SERVICES COMMITTEE	Subject: INITIATIVES TO HELP REDUCE ABSENCE LEVELS WITHIN HOUSING AND SOCIAL WORK SERVICES	
From: HEAD OF HOUSING AND SOCIAL WORK RESOURCES		
Date: 20 AUGUST 2008	Ref: RP/CG	

1. Purpose of Report /Introduction

The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of progress to date in improving attendance at work and to seek approval for the implementation of various initiatives within Housing and Social Work Service, with the view to increasing general health and wellbeing of staff and ultimately further reduce absence levels.

2. Background

- 2.1 Historically the Social Work Service has had a high absence level, whilst the Housing Service has not.
- 2.2 In order to help reduce the absence levels, within the Social Work Service, three main studies were undertaken into absence levels: Scottish Local Authority Management Centre 2003, RP&M Associates 2005 and Scottish Executive – Improvement Service 2006.
- 2.3 The main findings from these studies highlighted the following problems:
- In the United Kingdom, Social Work Departments consistently have a higher level of absence than other departments or services within local authorities.
 - Absence levels in Social Work Departments reflect the nature of the tasks, covering personal services to individuals and often at times of crisis.
 - 46% of staff have no absence.
 - Short term absence is well controlled, however long term absence is high.
 - The highest absence levels are in the section of the workforce aged 50 years plus.
 - APT&C staff suffer more from stress related illnesses.
 - Home Support staff suffer more from muscular skeletal problems.
 - The absence management system is indiscriminate.
 - There is a need for increased focus on long term absence.
- 2.4 The Social Work Department has made continuous progress in driving down absence levels over the last 3 years as the month by like month comparison shows. (appendix A).
- 2.5 Appendix B shows joint Housing and Social Work Services absence statistics for both 2007/08 and 2008/09.

- 2.6 Targeted work has been undertaken, in house, to reduce absence levels, this includes:
- Raising awareness by including absence information at the induction stage, ensuring it is a standing item on team meeting agendas, production of newsletters and recognising good attendance awards.
 - Training all managers in line with the new policy, providing Attendance Management Training Packs and production of a Return to Work Video.
 - Ensuring documentation is consistent and appropriate by revising our capability letters, discipline letters, absence pro formas and the production of a process flowchart.
- 2.7 In addition, a temporary attendance project team has been established since May 2007 to help address high absence levels within some teams.
- 2.8 Part of the remit of this team, as well as conducting attendance audits, was to investigate initiatives that could be put in place to help promote health and wellbeing.
- 2.9 Consultation took place with managers in various locations in order to identify potential options that could be piloted or implemented.
- 2.10 From an extensive list of proposals, the following were identified as being applicable to a range of staff across the Service:
- Coreless flexi time system.
 - Buy and bank leave scheme.
 - £5 monthly contribution to Access NL leisure facilities.
 - Access to podiatry services.
 - Access to alternative therapies.
 - Self referral to physiotherapy services.
- 2.11 It has been evident from our absence audits and feedback from managers that they feel flexibility, particularly in working arrangements, will play a significant part in reducing absence levels.
- 2.12 Within the Service the top two reasons for absence, on a continuous basis, are stress related conditions and bone/muscle/joint conditions. These initiatives will help address these two reasons for absence.

3 Proposals / Considerations

It is proposed that Housing and Social Work Services implement the following initiatives as a pilot and evaluate their impact on attendance. The results will be fed back to the Here and Healthy Corporate Working Group for consideration as to whether these initiatives should be rolled out across the Council and adopted as Council policy.

- 3.1 Coreless flexi time system – all office based staff
- This involves removing designated core times of between 10am to 12 noon, and 2pm to 4pm allowing staff, with their manager's approval, greater flexibility in the use of flexible working hours.
 - The re-introduction of the ability to apply for up to two days flexi leave in any one leave period, would also allow further flexibility.

- This has been successfully piloted within one Social Work Locality and has contributed to a reduction in absence levels and positively promoted work/life balance.
- No financial implication to the Council.

3.2 Buy and bank leave scheme – all staff

- This initiative will give staff the opportunity, with their manager's approval, the option of purchasing additional leave in any one leave year, or alternatively banking unused leave and utilising it the following year.
- This scheme will allow more flexibility in the use of annual leave and would be a possible benefit to all staff in the Service.
- This would only be available to staff whose attendance level is 97% and above.
- No financial implication to the Council.

3.3 £5 monthly contribution to Access NL leisure facilities – all staff

- Currently all North Lanarkshire Council staff receive a subsidised rate of £7 towards membership of Access NL leisure facilities, meaning staff pay £26.50 per month.
- NHS staff, working together with Social Work staff as part of integrated working, receive an additional £5 monthly reduction in their Access NL membership, creating an inequity between staff. NHS staff pay £21.50 per month.
- NHS has reported an excellent response to this initiative and it is anticipated that if there is a high uptake within Housing and Social Work Services, this will have a positive impact on absence levels as well as promoting health and wellbeing.
- The Service would also promote already existing discounts for staff that are over 60 years of age or in receipt of certain benefits e.g. working family tax credit, housing benefit etc. This benefit is not widely promoted by Access NL, however, could be of benefit to a number of staff who fall within the prescribed categories. These staff members would pay £17.00 per month.
- Approximate cost to the Council will be £60,000 per annum, if 1,000 staff receive a £5 discount which will be paid to North Lanarkshire Leisure.

3.4 Access to podiatry services – all staff

- Podiatry services would be beneficial to staff who work primarily in residential units, day care units and home support. These staff suffer most from problems connected with their feet.
- If this was introduced in line with the coreless flexi time system staff would use their own time to access these sessions.

- Staff would receive these sessions at a reduced rate because the Service would negotiate a corporate rate.
- No financial implication for the Council

3.5 Access to alternative therapies – all staff

- Alternative therapies, on the whole, target stress conditions and it is anticipated that easy access to these therapies could assist with stress related illnesses.
- Head, neck, back and shoulder massage, hand and foot reflexology would be some of the therapies we would attempt to offer. These all target our top two reasons for absence.
- If this was introduced in line with the coreless flexi time system staff would use their own time to access these sessions.
- Staff would receive these sessions at a reduced rate because the Service would negotiate a corporate rate.
- No financial implication for the Council.

3.6 Self referral to physiotherapy services

- The direct referral to physiotherapy services has been a success in the Council and particularly within this Service. 216 staff from this Service have been referred since the start of the pilot, with a cost of £34,445. As muscular skeletal problems are consistently either the top or second top reason for absence in both long and short term absences it would accelerate the process if the employee was allowed to self refer.
- No additional financial implication for the Council.

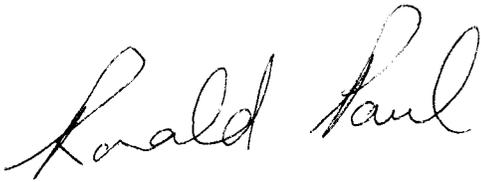
4 Financial / Personnel / Legal / Policy Implications

- Coreless flexi time system - no financial implication for the Council.
- Buy and bank leave scheme - no financial implication for the Council.
- £5 monthly contribution to Access NL leisure facilities – as a guide, if there is an uptake of 1,000 staff; the cost will be £60,000 per year.
- Access to podiatry services – no financial implication for the Council.
- Access to alternative therapies –no financial implication for the Council.
- Self referral for physiotherapy - no additional financial implication for the Council.

5 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee:

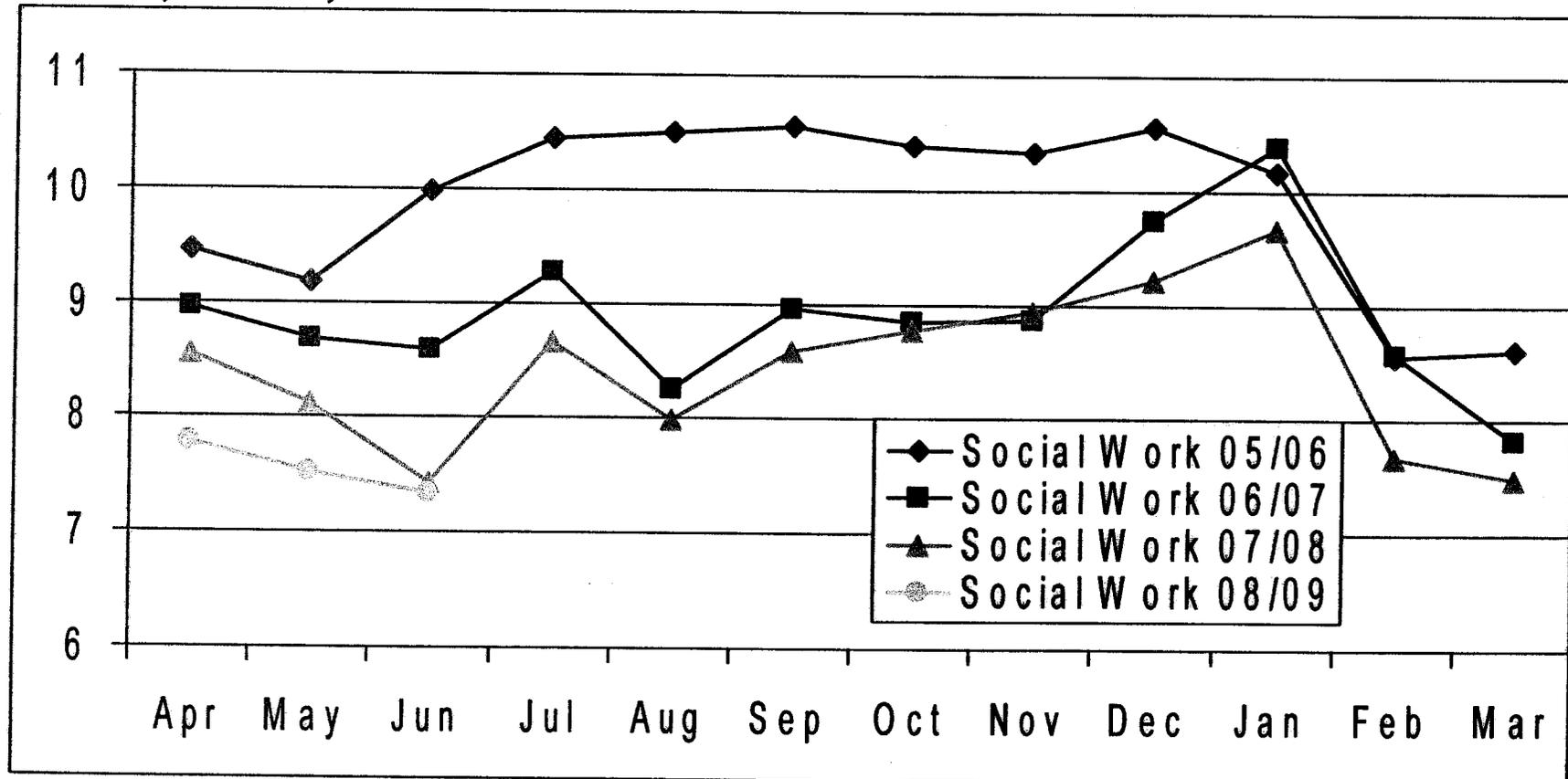
- (i) note the progress to date in improving attendance
- (ii) approve the proposals contained within this report
- (iii) remit this report to Policy and Resources (Human Resources Sub Committee) for approval and;
- (iv) note the content of this report.



Ronnie Paul
Head of Housing and Social Work Services
1 July 2088

For further information on this report please contact Christina Gentles on telephone 01698 332292

Social Work Absence Statistics 05/06, 06/07, 07/08 & 08/09



Housing & Social Work Services

Absence Management 2008 / 2009

Narrative	Qtr 1				Qtr 2				Qtr 3				Qtr 4				Annual
	April	May	June	Total	July	Aug	Sept	Total	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total	
No. of staff (Headcount)	4382	4363	4372	4372	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1093
Total work days available	78964.0	79141.0	78008.0	236113.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	236113.0
Actual Annual Leave Taken	5635.5	5634.0	7550.5	18820.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	18820.0
Work Days Ex Annual Leave	73328.5	73507.0	70457.5	217293.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	217293.0
Lost Days: Short	845	1858	1786	4489	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4489.0
Lost Days: Long	4489	3446	3030	10965	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10965.0
Total Days Lost : Illness (Units)	5334	5304	4816	15454	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15454
%age Illness: Short Term	1.15	2.53	2.53	2.07	#DIV/0!	2.07											
%age Illness: Long Term	6.12	4.69	4.30	5.05	#DIV/0!	5.05											
%age Illness	7.27	7.22	6.84	7.11	#DIV/0!	7.11											
Total Staff contributing to Long Term Abs. During month	224	240	258	0	0	0	0	0	0	234	231	348	0	0	0	326	169
Total Staff contributing to Short Term Abs. During month	452	337	382	0	0	0	0	0	0	539	460	1201	0	0	0	1238	610

Housing & Social Work Services

Absence Management 2007 / 2008

Narrative	Qtr 1				Qtr 2				Qtr 3				Qtr 4				Annual
	April	May	June	Total	July	Aug	Sept	Total	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total	
No. of staff (Headcount)	4387	4379	4376	4381	4373	4381	4339	4364	4365	4371	4323	4353	4362	4360	4370	4364	4366
Total work days available	73641.0	75851.0	77886.0	227378.0	78577.0	81693.0	71684.0	231954.0	80981.0	77571.0	74099.0	232651.0	76223.0	77988.5	77255.0	231466.5	923449.5
Actual Annual Leave Taken	5582.0	5220.5	7019.5	17822.0	11734.0	9974.5	7793.0	29501.5	7634.5	5471.5	8121.0	21227.0	8194.5	2852.0	3953.5	15000.0	83550.5
Work Days Ex Annual Leave	68059.0	70630.5	70866.5	209556.0	66843.0	71718.5	63891.0	202452.5	73346.5	72099.5	65978.0	211424.0	68028.5	75136.5	73301.5	216466.5	839899.0
Lost Days: Short	1841	1830	1867	5538	1918	1782	2110	5810	2297	2257	2071	6625	2272	2392	2141	6805	24778.0
Lost Days: Long	3391	3343	3081	9815	3348	3428	2980	9756	3653	3533	3518	10704	3674	3015	2957	9646	39921.0
Total Days Lost : Illness (Units)	5232	5173	4948	15353	5266	5210	5090	15566	5950	5790	5589	17329	5946	5407	5098	16451	64699
%age Illness: Short Term	2.71	2.59	2.63	2.64	2.87	2.48	3.30	2.87	3.13	3.13	3.14	3.13	3.34	3.18	2.92	3.14	2.95
%age Illness: Long Term	4.98	4.73	4.35	4.68	5.01	4.78	4.66	4.82	4.98	4.90	5.33	5.06	5.40	4.01	4.03	4.46	4.75
%age Illness	7.69	7.32	6.98	7.33	7.88	7.26	7.97	7.69	8.11	8.03	8.47	8.20	8.74	7.20	6.95	7.60	7.70
Total Staff contributing to Long Term Abs. During month	238	217	211	324	213	217	215	338	220	234	231	348	258	217	212	326	334
Total Staff contributing to Short Term Abs. During month	394	406	422	1031	363	394	381	927	498	539	460	1201	692	483	468	1238	1099