



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Year- end Absence Rates 2009/2010
Date:	4 th August, 2010
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Purpose of report

This report:

- Provides sickness absence data for the Health and Environmental Services Department for the financial year 2009/10.
- Compares this year's performance to the same period last year.
- Proposes targets for the reduction in sickness absence for the financial year 2010/2011.

Relevant Background Information

- In May 2009, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed a new two-year Council target to reduce sickness absence to 10.85 days by March 2010 and 10.50 days by March 2011.
- This two-year reduction target cascaded through departments and sections based on their performance at March 2009. The target agreed for Health and Environmental Services was to reduce to 10.87 days by March 2010 and was set taking into account the reduction of 2.69 days per full time employee achieved by the department during 2008/09 which more than met the reduction target of 1.96 days for 2008/09.

Key Issues

Key Findings

- At the end of the financial year 2009/10 the average number of day's sickness absence per full time employee in Health and Environmental Services was 12.22 days (this figure excludes swine flu; if swine flu is included the figure was 12.32 days) which was 1.35 days above the target for the year.

- There was an increase in the number of staff who had sickness absence during the year as compared to the same time last year. (58.66% in 2009/10, 56.56% 2008/09), although this still meant that 41.34% of staff within the department had no days absence during 2009/10 as opposed to 43.44% in 2008/09.
- This year 65.39% (7,002 days) of absence was classified as long term compared to 65.27% (6,021 days) last year.
- Therefore, the main reason for the increase in absence is long-term sickness.

Dealing with long-term and intermittent sickness

- The department worked closely with corporate Human Resources during the year to continue to improve the management of absence including the consistent application of the absence policy and the clear definition of roles and responsibilities. In addition to the monthly departmental management reports on absence levels and compliance, fortnightly meetings were established with Human Resources as part of the corporate “hot spot” approach. These meetings also assisted in considering complex employee relations cases which included significant absence.
- Directorate closely monitored compliance with the sickness absence policy and reported compliance / non compliance to the Departmental Management Team (DMT) on a regular basis.
- Directorate and Services met on weekly/monthly basis to review priority cases.
- Across the department there were a number of cases of serious illness which required external medical consultations before management could take a decision. Rigorous follow ups on occupational health/medical consultant reports, and case reviews of difficult or long term absence cases has assisted in the management of such cases.

Performance against target information

- The table below provides performance against target rates at service level for this year and last year (swine flu excluded)

	Target for March 2010	Actual days absence per fte at March 2010	Variance	Days absence per fte same time last year March 2009
Health & Environmental Services	10.87	12.22	-1.35	11.21
Environmental Health Service	9.65	9.45	0.20	9.65
Building Control	5.74	7.44	-1.70	5.74
Cleansing Waste Management Directorate	12.09	13.55	-1.46	12.59
Support	12.11	15.42	-3.31	12.61
	4.87	6.30	-1.43	4.87

Actions taken to improve absence rates:

- A new Attendance Policy was introduced in January, 2010.
- Transfer arrangements to move employees from the old to the new policy were agreed with Trade Unions and HR has undertaken monthly compliance checks in relation to the transfer of employees from the old to the new policy.
- All relevant officers and Trade Unions were trained on the new policy.
- An extensive communication exercise was undertaken to ensure staff awareness of new policy.
- A new system of fortnightly meetings between HR and the departments to ensure compliance with the policy and to advise on difficult cases.
- Standard agenda item on the monthly Departmental Management Team meetings considering absence levels and compliance.
- Case reviews to progress difficult cases appropriately.
- Action learning/discussion forums between HR and departments to agree a corporate approach to difficult attendance management issues.
- Additional occupational health clinics to assist with the increased referrals resulting from the implementation of the new Attendance Policy
- Monthly meetings with Occupational Health and HR to discuss Occupational Health aspects of attendance management.
- Absence improvement plans in place for all services within the department.
- Directorate and Services meet on a weekly/monthly basis to review priority cases.

These actions are in full compliance with the new attendance policy and HR advice.

Target for reduction 2010/11

- In May 2010, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed a new two year target to reduce to 11.0 days per full time equivalent by March 2011 and 10.75 days by March 2012 per full-time equivalent.
- The target agreed for Health and Environmental Services is to reduce sickness absence to 11.44 days per full time equivalent for the department (Cleansing to reduce to 12.55 days and Waste Management to reduce to 13.74 days).

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the year end performance figures and agree the above approach to the target for 2010/2011.