

HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

MEETING, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2007

Present – Councillors White (Chairman), R. Allen, Hayes, Rushton (as deputy for Ashcroft), Mrs Thomas (as deputy for Zaman) and A. Wilkinson.

Also in attendance

Mr. D. Winstanley	-	Assistant Chief Executive
Mr. F. O'Malley	-	Head of Employee Relations and HR Services
Ms. C. Ashton	-	Head of Occupational Health and Safety
Ms. L. Clarkson	-	Principal Personnel Advisor
Mr. J. Kerambrum	-	Trainee Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ashcroft, Clare, Dennis, J.Silvester and Zaman.

Councillor White in the Chair.

9. MINUTES

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Policy Development Group held on 15th August, 2007 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

10. THE MANAGEMENT OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

Mr. F. O'Malley, Head of Employee Relations and HR Services submitted a report that reviewed the current position on sickness absence and compared corporate and departmental trends over the past two years. The report identified the initiatives and actions that had been implemented over the past two years to improve levels of absence and also proposed a number of initiatives and actions for the future.

By way of background information members were advised that reducing levels of sickness absence within the Council had been a key objective for a number of years, during which time a significant number of initiatives and procedures had been put in place with varying degrees of success and whilst it was recognised that managing sickness absence was notoriously difficult, ensuring a healthy, motivated and productive workforce was key to delivering high quality services which helped to keep the Council amongst the top performing Local Authorities.

The report outlined some of the key initiatives and outcomes which had been put in place over the past two years under the following headings:-

- Managing Sickness Absence Framework;
- E-Learning Package;
- Attendance Advisor;
- Sickness Absence Information; and
- Occupational Health and Safety Initiatives.

The report went on to make comparisons between the Corporate and Departmental Trends in 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 and reported that overall sickness levels had reduced. These figures showed that the majority of employess had very few absences as approximately 78% had two or less days absence in the year and 37.49% had no absences at all.

Further statistics within the report highlighted that although short term absence had decreased, long term sickness had increased in 2006/2007 and now accounted for 53.54% of all absence within the Council. Further statistics showed that depression and musculo skeletal disorders remained the principal cause of absence and the report informed the Group of the research and initiatives that the Council had already undertaken to target stress and musculoskeletal disorders.

Ms. C. Ashton, Head of Occupational Health and Safety then gave a presentation which informed members of the role the Occupational Safety and Health Shared Service had in managing sickness absence caused by stress and musculoskeletal disorders. The presentation detailed the key initiatives and outcomes for 2006/2007 and also listed a number of proposals for 2007/2008 including the launch of the Psychological Well-Being Service.

The report went on to set out a number of proposals, the outcomes of which should collectively drive sickness levels down. Members discussed these proposals and agreed on the following proposed actions for the coming 12 months:-

- that the trigger points in relation to sickness absence be tightened so that three absences in any period of six months or four separate absences in a twelve month period would mean action under the Management of Sickness Absence Framework Policy would commence;
- to learn from best practice in other local authorities and private sector organisations of a similar size within the region who had significantly lower levels of sickness absence. That a further

report that outlined comparisons between the sickness records of Bolton Council, a number of other local authorities and private sector organisations of a similar size come back to a future meeting of this Policy Development Group;

- that the Employment Framework Sub-Set Group would pro-actively work with HR Managers and the Head of Occupational Safety and Health to ensure that the momentum is maintained;
- that Line Managers be given further clarification as to their role in the management of sickness absence and that their accountability to Departmental Management Teams be strengthened further;
- to continue to keep sickness absence management high on the agenda for members, with the Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance and Diversity to act as a high profile champion;
- that regular reports on sickness absence go to the Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance and Diversity in order to raise the level of management accountability; and
- to continue to examine the more long term issue of changing the culture of the Organisation in relation to sickness absence, through a top-down approach, accountability, effective communication and a high profile champion.

Members discussed the possibility of setting up a reward scheme for employees who have achieved exceptionally low levels of absence. Members were informed this idea had already been mentioned as a possibility and would be investigated further and reported back to a future meeting of this Policy Development Group.

Members also discussed the need to target those employees who clearly abuse sickness absence arrangements.

It was agreed that the report be noted and that the discussed proposals go forward to the Executive Member for Human Resources, Performance and Diversity for approval.

(The meeting started at 2.30 p.m and finished at 4.10 p.m)