

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

ITEM FOR STAFFING COMMITTEE

15 August 2016

1. ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Submitted by: Executive Management Team

Portfolio: Policy, People and Partnerships

Purpose of the Report

To obtain the Committee's approval to adopt the new Attendance Management Policy and Procedure.

Recommendation

That the Policy detailed at Appendix A be approved.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is widely recognised that attendance has a significant impact on the Council's ability to deliver efficient and effective delivery of services. Sickness absence can increase stress among staff that are left to cover for absent colleagues and can also increase employment costs.
- 1.2 We are likely to see an increase in sickness absence rates over time due to the changes affecting working in local government and increased pressures on services with less available resources.
- 1.3 In order to facilitate a reduction in sickness absence costs the Council proposes to make a number of changes to its current Attendance Management (appendix B) and Capability Policies and Procedures.
- 1.4 One of the key aspects is to introduce the Bradford Factor Score, this tool gives a clear measurement and employees will be aware when they have met a trigger point and at which stage of the procedure their attendance will be managed.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's Human Resources policies and procedures are subject to an ongoing review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, legally compliant and provide a valuable and workable resource for employees and managers on employment related issues in the workplace.
- 2.2 Absence data from West Midlands Employers Association shows the average number of sickness days is 9.13. This demonstrates that absence is an issue for Councils.

2.3 The Council's absence performance has been regularly reported to the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee and is as follows:

Average number of days per employee lost to sickness	Result	Target
2013-14	7.63 days	7.5 days
2014-15	7.17 days	7.5 days
2015-16	9.84 days	7.5 days

2.4 The current procedure does not include any clear measurements that the employee is required to achieve during a review period nor of the next stage if they reach a certain target point, this is currently left to the discretion of the manager. It also does not easily pick up intermittent absences, which can be quite disruptive for service areas that have to back fill.

2.5 There is clearly significant time delays through using two policies to manage sickness absence, its only when the current Attendance Procedure has been exhausted the employee's attendance is transferred onto the Capability Procedure, which starts at stage 1 and may continue to dismissal, by this time the employee may be absent from work for a significant time. It is also confusing for both managers and employees to transfer from one policy to another. The process within the current Attendance Procedure is difficult to follow and needed clearer guidance.

2.6 The introduction of one policy to manage attendance (Appendix A) will clearly inform all employees, managers and trade unions of their responsibilities to improve attendance rates and provides management with more in depth advice and support, giving clear guidance at each stage of the procedure and also clearly defines the expectations which should improve attendance rates.

2.7 The new policy should encourage employees to attend work regularly and will assist managers to reduce levels of sickness absence in their teams in a fair and consistent way while maintaining a caring and a sympathetic approach towards the health and welfare of employees. The procedure may be varied depending on the nature of the sickness through discussion with Human Resources. Flexibility covers disability/pregnancy related illnesses.

2.8 The Bradford Factor Score in the past has mainly been used in the private sector, however more public sector organisations are using this measurement to help reduce their sickness absence rates. Staffordshire County Council, Lancaster City Council, Corby BC, Coventry City Council, various universities, schools and the NHS, have introduced the Bradford Score because it provides formal trigger points for management intervention and also their HR systems are able to generate the Bradford calculation and run sickness absence reports.

2.9 It was reported back in 2011 that Bradford Council saved more than £1m when they introduced this measurement that reduced their sickness rates.

2.10 By introducing the Bradford Factor scoring system for managing sickness absence that takes into account the occurrences of sickness absence and the duration of the absence to ensure a fair and consistent approach is adopted across the organisation and will be addressed as soon as an employee hits a trigger point which will be a fairer a clearer process to follow.

- 2.11 Current monitoring triggers would change from 8 days, or 4 weeks, within 12 months to a Bradford Factor Score based system. Scores of at least 150 points would trigger a stage 1 meeting, whereas points of at least 500 would trigger a stage 2 meeting.

The Bradford score considers the occurrences and the duration of sickness absence:

Scores of 150 points would trigger a stage 1

4 absences totalling 10 days = 60 (4 x 10 x 4 = 160)

Scores of 500 points would trigger a stage 2

5 absences totalling to 20 days = (5 x 20 x 5 = 500)

- 2.12 The Council's Time and Attendance system - Mitrefinch can provide short term and long term sickness reports based on the Bradford score for each service area and will indicate to managers when the employee has hit a certain trigger point. Therefore it is important that managers update the system when the employee rings in sick, the system enables to make a note of the conversation they have had with the employee and record the date of the RTW interview. By capturing this information on the system will save time and resources as the upgraded system will automatically generate reports and email these to the manager.

- 2.13 Benefits of the revised policy include:

- Improved perception on the fairness in how the current scheme is applied;
- Ensures a consistent approach;
- Improved support for long term sickness;
- Improved guidance for employees and managers;
- Transparency of the Attendance Management process;
- Ensures managers are responsible for reviewing sickness absence levels in their service areas and also to ensure they take the appropriate action; and
- Improved clear processes throughout the procedure, to ensure managers take greater ownership and responsibility for managing attendance in their service areas.

- 2.14 It is proposed that, if the policy is adopted, the Bradford Factor Scores would be calculated under the new scheme rules to give everyone a 'Bradford Score'. Action under the policy would be suspended upon implementation and will only be activated upon the first period of absence after implementation. Historical sickness data, valid at that time (including any transferred data still applicable in the 'rolling year' calculation), will be taken into account. However, it has been agreed with the Joint Trade Unions that employees that are currently at stage 3 of the current Capability Policy and Procedure should be considered as Stage 3 of the revised Attendance Management Policy and Procedure.

- 2.15 All managers and trade union representatives will be trained in the new policy and procedure.

3. Aims of the Policy

- 3.1 This policy and procedure aims to encourage a high level of attendance that is crucial in enabling the Council to meet its objectives. It encourages employees to attend work regularly and will assist managers to reduce levels of sickness absence in their teams in a fair and consistent way while maintaining a caring and sympathetic approach towards the health and wellbeing of employees.

4. Issues

- 4.1 At its meeting on 11 July 2016, the Employees Consultative Committee recommended that the new Policy be adopted in principle and the Bradford Factor score used for a six month trial period commencing from 1 October 2016 in order to train managers and trade unions on the new policy and procedure. It was proposed that after this period it should be reviewed and if the trade unions and officers were not in agreement for its continued use, other means of measuring attendance would be sought and brought back to the committee.

5. Legal and Statutory Requirements

- 5.1 It is important that the council's is important that the council's policy and procedure on Attendance Management reflects current best practice and ensures the council fulfils its obligations in accordance with the statutory legislation.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 Implementation of the policy will help to ensure the Borough Council fulfil its responsibilities as an equal opportunities employer.

7. Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 None

8. Major Risks

- 8.1 None identified.

9. List of Appendices

Appendix A – New Attendance Management Policy and Procedure
Appendix B – Current Attendance Management Policy and Procedure

10. Earlier Committee Resolutions

Employees Consultative Committee – 11 July 2016