

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Chief Executive
to Service and Partnerships Performance Panel
of 17 September 2024**

Subject: Employee Absence 2023/24

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Panel with detailed information and analysis of sickness absence across Council services for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Panel scrutinises this information in the context of the Local Government Benchmarking Information previously reported.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The National Statutory Performance Indicators require Councils to provide statistics for employee absence based on the 'total number of workdays lost' together with the 'average number of days lost per employee' categorised separately for Teachers and Local Government Employees ('LGE').

- 3.2 The following should be noted in conjunction with this report:

- The Framework for Maximising Attendance is currently under review and the new policy will be submitted to Cabinet following consultation. The review takes into account the feedback received from managers and employees via the surveys released earlier in the year and consultation with our Trade Union colleagues. The aim of the review is to launch a policy which focuses on supporting the wellbeing of our employees as well as effectively managing levels of absence. It is proposed that there will be one Council policy which will apply to both local government employees and teachers, thus removing the complexity of applying two different policies within the same establishments.
- Work has been undertaken in Oracle Fusion to improve absence recording arrangements and refine analysis and reporting capacity.
- The re-tender for the Occupational Health contract is now concluded, and the contract has been awarded to People Asset Management (PAM). We are currently in transition from our previous provider Optima Health to PAM.

- HR are in the process of negotiating an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) through Vivup, which is the supply of our Home and Electronics employee benefits. The EAP will provide a range of services to all employees, some examples include but not limited to:
 - *24/7 Confidential Telephone Support* offering unlimited and in-the-moment support calls and up to six structured counselling sessions.
 - *Support for Managers* in dealing with difficult and sensitive situations.
 - A range of *self-help tools and techniques* on a number of topics including anxiety, bereavement and PTSD.
 - 24/7 Debt Advice.
 - *Your Care* which is a preventative proactive approach to healthier lifestyle as well as other features.

It should also be noted that, to help combat absence and to support a mentally healthy workplace, The Be Well Live Well project led by our Trauma Informed Officer has supported the development of a mental health first aid network. Recent training has seen the network capacity increase from 15 to 37 and can be accessed via the [Be Well Live Well](#) page on the Core. The network regularly attends managers meetings to raise awareness of this service. A staff wellbeing assistant has now been recruited and they will act as the trained facilitator to cascade this learning across the organisation.

4. Proposals

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Panel scrutinises the analysis below and in the [Appendices](#). It should be noted that Covid Absences have been reported as normal sickness absence since July 2022.
- 4.2 Whilst preparing this report it has come to light that the absence statistics provided for 2022/23 were incorrect due to a system error in Oracle Fusion. It should be noted that the following report compares 2023/24 information with the revised statistics for 2022/23.

4.2.1 **Overall Absence Levels**

[Appendix 1](#) provides a summary of the days lost by service area and directorate and the average days lost per employee for each.

[Appendix 1a](#) provides the same summary as [Appendix 1](#) but showing a split of Teaching and LGE within the Education directorate.

[Appendix 2](#) shows the number of days lost per employee for each of the years between 2020/21 and 2023/24, split by LGE and Teachers, and showing a comparison with the overall family group position as per guidance from then Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

4.2.2 **Breakdown of Absence - All Employees**

A total of 55,664 days has been lost because of sickness absence for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 which comprises 41,722 days (75%) long term absence and 13,942 days (25%) short term absence.

The position across Directorates is detailed below. It should be noted that the difference in FTE for Chief Executive's and Communities and Transformation for 2023/24 is due to ICT moving from Chief Executive's to Communities and Transformation. The difference in FTE for the HSCP is due to a number of new positions being created, particularly for Care at Home provision.

Directorate	2023/24			2022/23		
	FTE	Total Days Lost	Average Work Day Lost per Employee	FTE	Total Days Lost	Average Work Day Lost per Employee
Chief Executive Department	342.66	2,559	7.47	428.16	2,424	5.66
Communities and Transformation	660.69	5,431	8.22	596.12	3,906	6.55
EDU - LGE	1,156.40	10,115	8.75	993.63	9,887	9.95
EDU - Teachers	1,476.00	7,414	5.02	1,327.4	6,550	4.93
HSCP	1,214.82	14,451	11.90	1,080.93	1,5318	14.17
Housing, Operations & Dev	1,329.65	15,692	11.80	1,309.91	16,607.47	12.68
Council Total	6,180.95	55,664	9.01	5,736.14	54,692.29	9.53

The average days lost per employee for the year is 9.01. This is a 5% decrease on 2022/23 (9.53 days).

The main reasons for absence are:

- Psychological 18,852 days (34%);
- Musculoskeletal 8,569 days (15%); and
- Hospitalisation 7,363 days (13%).

Psychological and Musculoskeletal were also the main reasons for absence in 2022/23. Hospitalisation has replaced the third main reason which in 2022/23 was Respiratory.

4.2.3 **Breakdown of Absence - Local Government Employees**

The total days lost for LGE for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 are 48,248 days, comprising 11,694 days (24%) short term absence and 36,555 days (76%) long term absence. The average work days lost per employee for LGE is 10.25 which represents a 6% decrease from 2022/23 (10.92 days lost).

LGE account for 81% of the total days lost due to absence and 80% of the Council's workforce.

The main reasons for absence are:

- Psychological: 15,768 Days (32%);
- Musculoskeletal: 8032.49 Days (17%); and
- Respiratory: 3253 Days (7%).

The direct 'cost of absence' in 2023/24 is £5,210,784.00 (this is a 9% increase from 2022/23 when the cost of absence was £4,738,617.06).

This figure reflects the payroll costs paid to the employees as part of their contractual salary payments. It is not an additional cost, but the proportion of the payroll which is being paid to employees not at work due to sickness absence.

This direct cost does not consider any costs in providing cover – ie overtime or temporary staffing.

4.2.4 ***Breakdown of Absence – Teachers***

The total days lost for Teachers for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 are 7414, comprising 2247 days (30%) short term absence and 5167 days (70%) long term absence. The average work days lost per employee for Teachers is 5 which represents a 2% increase from 2022/23 (4.93 days lost).

Teachers account for 19% of the total Council absence and 20% of the Council's workforce.

The main reasons for absence are:

- Psychological: 3084 days (41%);
- Hospitalisation: 661 days (9%); and
- Gastrointestinal: 562 days (8%).

The direct 'cost of absence' in 2023/24 is £1,838,672.00 (16% more than 2022/23 when the cost of absence was £1,572,000.00).

This figure reflects the payroll costs paid to the employees as part of their contractual salary payments. It is not an additional cost, but the proportion of the payroll which is being paid to employees not at work due to sickness absence.

This direct cost does not consider any costs in providing cover – ie overtime or temporary staffing.

4.2.5 ***Local Government Benchmarking Comparison of Absence***

[Appendix 2](#) provides the comparison between the Council's sickness absence levels and the Council's family group of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework. The group includes the following Councils: East Ayrshire, East Lothian, Fife, Moray, North Ayrshire, Perth and Kinross, and Stirling. The family groups have been established by the LGBF to ensure appropriate comparison and ranking.

4.3 **Framework for Maximising Attendance**

4.3.1 **Discretion**

A key aspect of managing absence is the ability of managers to apply discretion when an employee reaches a particular absence level, so that the action which is otherwise required by the terms of the Framework, is not applied. Such discretion should only be applied where the employee:

- has a good attendance record over a number of years i.e. at least 3 years, and whose attendance has not previously been a cause of concern to management.
- is absent due to a chronic illness/disease.
- has to undergo a surgical procedure/requires hospitalisation which has a specified/expected date of recovery.
- has a disability or an underlying medical condition which affects their attendance intermittently over a set period of time. For short term absence, this may include varying the attendance targets.
- has been absent for pregnancy related reasons.
- has been absent due to bereavement.
- has been absent due to an accident or injury at work.

Below is a breakdown of the use of Discretion in the past 5 years:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number	247	153	180	195	242
Approved	245	152	172	186	239
Percentage	99%	99%	95.5%	95%	99%

4.3.2 **Monitoring Attendance**

Members will recall that the Framework launched in 2014 introduced a separate stream of escalating actions (stages), which advises the employee that his or her attendance level is unsatisfactory and warns that if the necessary improvement is not achieved, further action will be applied, including, ultimately, dismissal.

Below is a breakdown of the formal meetings in the past 5 years:

Stage	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Stage 1 Meeting	392	280	211	323	261
Stage 2 Meeting	98	67	60	79	98
Stage 3 Meeting	23	12	8	12	21
Dismissals	13	7	1	6	9

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Not applicable.

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 Not applicable.

8. Risk

8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations.

8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

8.2.1 There are no risks associated with rejecting the recommendations.

9. Equalities

9.1 The proposals in this report allow scrutiny of performance. The report does not involve proposals for policies, strategies, procedures, processes, financial decisions and activities (including service delivery), both new and at review, that affect the Council's communities and employees, therefore an equality impact assessment is not required.

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** - This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

11. Options Appraisal

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

12. Link to Council Plan

12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to Commitment 1 of the Council Plan: Fair and Effective Leadership/ Leadership that promotes fairness.

13. Results of Consultation

13.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.

13.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Ian Davis, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Human Resources and ICT, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

Background Papers **None**

Person to Contact **Wendy Wesson, Chief HR Officer**
County Buildings, Wellington Square, Ayr, KA7 1DR
Phone: 01292 612186
E-mail: wendy.wesson@south-ayrshire.gov.uk

Date: 10 September 2024

Days Lost Per Employee

	Service	FTE	Total Days Lost	Annual Day Lost per Employee
Chief Executives	Directorate Support	9.50	14	1.44
	Finance and Procurement	158.14	1,524	9.64
	HR and Payroll	52.58	200	3.81
	Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud	5.64	1	0.24
	Legal and Regulatory Services	116.80	820	7.02
Sub Total		342.66	2,559	7.47
Communities and Transformation	Communities	463.04	4,343	9.38
	Transformation	197.65	1,088	5.50
Sub Total		660.69	5,431	8.22
Education	Corporate Policy, Strategy and Performance	3.90	1	0.37
	Early Years Centres	183.75	1,461	7.95
	Education	8.57	0	0.00
	Education Support Services	32.50	196	6.04
	LT Early Years	79.42	524	6.59
	LT Primary and Special	33.77	19	0.57
	LT Secondary	113.49	1,203	10.60
	Performance Policy and Community Planning	22.00	182	8.28
	Primary Schools	1,297.94	7,894	6.08
	Secondary Schools	764.46	4,564	5.97
	Special Schools	93.33	1,485	15.91
Sub Total		2,633.13	17,530	6.66
HSCP	Children's Health, Care and Social Work Justice Services	233.62	3,154	13.50
	Community Health and Care Services	819.78	10,282	12.54
	Health and Social Care	13.64	27	2.01
	HSCP Planning and Performance	147.78	988	6.68
Sub Total		1,214.82	14,451	11.90
Housing, Operations & Dev	Housing and Operations	1,233.24	14,966	12.14
	Planning and Development	96.41	727	7.54
Sub Total		1,329.65	15,692	11.80
Council		6,180.95	55,664	9.01

Appendix 1A

	Service	FTE	Total Days Lost	Average Day Lost per Employee
Chief Executives	Directorate Support	9.50	14	1.44
	Finance and Procurement	158.14	1,524	9.64
	HR and Payroll	52.58	200	3.81
	Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud	5.64	1	0.24
	Legal and Regulatory Services	116.80	820	7.02
Sub Total		342.66	2,559	7.47
Communities and Transformation	Communities	463.04	4,343	9.38
	Transformation	197.65	1,088	5.50
	Sub Total		660.69	5,431
Education	Education - Teaching	1,476.00	7,414	5.02
	Education - LGE	1,156.40	10,116	8.75
	Sub Total		2,632.40	17,530
HSCP	Children's Health, Care and Social Work Justice Services	233.62	3,154	13.50
	Community Health and Care Services	819.78	10,282	12.54
	Health and Social Care	13.64	27	2.01
	HSCP Planning and Performance	147.78	988	6.68
	Sub Total		1,214.82	14,451
Housing, Operations & Dev	Housing and Operations	1,233.24	14,966	12.14
	Planning and Development	96.41	727	7.54
	Sub Total		1,329.65	15,692
Council		6,180.22	55,664	9.01

Days Lost per Employee (Family Group Comparison)

	Average Work Days Lost (Teachers)			Ranking (Teachers)		
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
East Ayrshire	2.9	5.1	6.8	2	2	3
East Lothian	2.8	4.5	5.8	1	1	2
Fife	5.2	7.0	8.2	8	7	5
Moray	4.5	6.0	7.9	6	4	4
North Ayrshire	4.8	7.2	9.0	7	8	8
Perth & Kinross	4.2	7.0	8.9	5	6	7
South Ayrshire	3.2	5.3	4.4	3	3	1
Stirling	3.7	6.5	8.7	4	5	6
Group Average	3.9	6.1	7.5			
Scotland	4.1	5.8	6.8			

	Average Work Days Lost (LGE)			Ranking (LGE)		
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
East Ayrshire	7.1	13.3	15.5	1	6	6
East Lothian	7.2	9.5	10.9	2	1	2
Fife	11.8	15.3	15.8	8	8	7
Moray	8.7	11.1	12.8	4	4	3
North Ayrshire	9.2	12.9	14.1	6	5	5
Perth & Kinross	8.3	10.9	13.0	3	3	4
South Ayrshire	8.8	10.8	10.2	5	2	1
Stirling	9.5	13.4	17.1	7	7	8
Group Average	8.8	12.1	13.7			
Scotland	9.6	12.2	13.2			