

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Chief Executive
to Service and Partnerships Performance Panel
of 19 September 2023**

Subject: Employee Absence 2022/23

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 2022 to 31 March 2023.

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 A report entitled 'Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2014/15' was considered by the Service and Performance Panel on 23 February 2016, and Panel requested that more detailed absence data be made available at future meetings to allow more meaningful scrutiny. Reports have been submitted annually since then.
- 3.2 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').
- 3.3 The revised Framework for Maximising Attendance was introduced in 2014 for Local Government Employees, whilst Teachers continued to operate under the previous policy framework. A review of the LGE Framework is currently being undertaken alongside representatives from the Services and Trade Unions to further maximise our employees' attendance. As part of this review discussions are taking place with the Teachers Unions to align their policy with the LGE Framework.
- 3.4 As part of the ongoing implementation and refinement of the Oracle HR system, considerable work has been undertaken to improve absence recording arrangements and refine analysis and reporting capacity. With the implementation of Oracle Fusion, further developments in this area are currently being considered.

4. Proposals

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Panel scrutinises the analysis below and in the Appendices. It should be noted that the arrangement for processing Covid absences as 'special leave' ended on 1 July 2022 and therefore, any Covid-related absences occurred

after this date were recorded in Oracle EBS as 'Infectious Disease' and are now recorded in Oracle Fusion as 'Covid Related'.

4.1.1 Overall Absence Levels

- (i) [Appendix 1](#) provides a summary of the days lost by service area and directorate and the average days lost per employee for each.
- (ii) [Appendix 1a](#) provides the same summary as [Appendix 1](#) but showing a split of Teaching and LGE within the People department.
- (ii) [Appendix 2](#) shows the number of days lost per employee for each of the years between 2010/11 and 2022/23, split by LGE and Teachers and showing a comparison with the overall national position across Local Government.

4.1.2 Breakdown of Absence - All Employees

- (i) A total of 41,569 days has been lost because of sickness absence for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 which comprises 27,859.09 days (67%) long term absence and 13,709.71 days (33%) short term absence.
- (ii) Across Directorates the position is as follows:

Directorate	Number of Days Lost 2022/23	Number of Days Lost 2021/22	Absence as % of Council's total absence	Workforce as a % of total Council Workforce	Average Days lost per employee (2022/23)	Average Days lost per employee (2021/22)
CEO	2,165	2,131	5%	7.5%	5.06 ¹	5.86
EDU - Teachers	5,566	6,557	13%	17.5%	4.19	5.46
EDU - LGE	7,850	11,053 ² (People)	19%	23%	7.9	8.49 (People)
SCC	2,832		8%	10%	4.75	
HOD	10,885	14,586	26%	23%	8.31	12.77
HSCP	12,271	11,360	29%	19%	11.35 ³	15.02
Total	41,569	45,687	100%	100%	7.25	9.59

- (iii) The average days lost per employee for the year is 7.25. This is a 28% decrease on 2021/22 (9.59 days).
- (iv) The main reasons for absence are:

¹ The number of days lost has slightly increased in CEX for 2022/23; however, the Average Days lost is lower than previous years due to an increase in headcount within the Directorate.

² To note that due to the restructure undertaken in 2022, Local Government Employees working within the People Directorate are now split between Education and Strategic Change and Communities.

³ Similarly to CEX, due to an increase in overall headcount within the HSCP, the average days lost is lower than previous year though the Number of Days lost has increased.

- Psychological (30%)
 - Musculoskeletal (17%)
 - Respiratory (11.6%)
- (v) Psychological and Musculoskeletal were also the main reasons for absence in 2021/22. Respiratory has replaced the third main reason which in 2021/22 was Gastrointestinal.

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

- (i) The total days lost for LGE for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2023 is 36,002.95, comprising 11,558.5 days (32%) short term absence and 24,444.45 days (68%) long term absence. These figures equate to an annual level of 8.17 days lost per employee, which represents a 38% decrease from 2021/22 (10.98 days lost).

LGE	Annual Level	Short Term %	Long Term %
2019/20	9.3	32%	68%
2020/21	8.86	17%	83%
2021/22	10.98	21%	79%
2022/23	8.17	32%	68%

- (ii) LGE account for 86.6% of the total days lost due to absence and 76.5% of the Council's workforce.
- (iii) The main reasons for absence are:
- Psychological (30%)
 - Musculoskeletal (19%)
 - Respiratory (11%)
- (iv) The direct 'cost of absence' in 2022/23 is £3,543,770 (8% less than 2021/22 when the cost of absence was £3,851,547).
- (v) 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.
- (vi) This direct cost does not consider any costs in providing cover, i.e. - overtime or temporary staffing.

4.1.4 **Breakdown of Absence - Teachers**

- (i) The total days lost for Teachers for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 is 5565.84, comprising 2151.2 days (39%) short term absence and 3414.64 days (61%) long term absence. These figures equate to an annual level of 4.19 days lost per employee which represents 26% decrease from 2021/2022 (5.46 days lost).

Teachers	Annual Level	Short Term %	Long Term %
2019/20	5.1	44%	56%
2020/21	3.1	24%	76%
2021/22	5.46	28%	72%
2022/23	4.19	39%	61%

Teachers account for 13.4% of the total Council absence and 23.5% of the Council's workforce.

- (ii) The main reasons for absence are:
- Psychological (31%)
 - Respiratory (16.5%)
 - Covid Related (12%)
- (iii) The direct 'cost of absence' in 2022/23 is £1,039,587.59 (16% less than 2021/22 when absence cost was £1,224,774).
- (iv) 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.
- (v) This direct cost does not consider any costs in providing cover i.e. overtime or temporary staffing.

4.1.5 **National Comparison of Absence**

- (i) [Appendix 2](#) provides the comparison between the Council's sickness absence levels and the national average for each complete year between April 2010 and March 2022. These tables show a gradual and consistent improvement in the council's performance, both overall and relative to other Councils.
- (ii) In 2021/22 the Council was ranked 14 for Teachers and 8 for LGE. It should be noted that at the point of issuing this report the latest available data for national comparison and ranking is related to 2021/22. Data for 2022/23 will not be available until May 2024.

4.2 **Framework for Maximising Attendance**

4.2.1 **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; or
- is absent due to a chronic illness/disease; or
- has to undergo a surgical procedure/requires hospitalisation which has a specified/expected date of recovery; or
- 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; or
- has been absent for pregnancy related reasons; or
- has been absent due to bereavement; or
- has been absent due to an accident or injury at work.

Details of the use of Discretion are as follows:

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number	98	128	252	263	323	247	153	180	195
Approved	93	122	247	260	318	245	152	172	186
Percentage	95%	95%	98%	99%	98%	99%	99%	95.5%	95%

4.2.2 Monitoring Attendance

- (i) Members will recall that, prior to the 2014 revision of the Maximising Attendance Framework, in situations where an employee's absence was at an unacceptable level, the matter was dealt with through the Council's Disciplinary Policy. The revised Framework recognises that, while an employer can, and should, monitor absence; establish required levels of attendance; and take action where absence levels fall below the standards which can be sustained by the business, unacceptable levels of authorised sickness absence (i.e. covered by a self or medical certificate) is not an issue of conduct (which are dealt with through the disciplinary process) and, therefore, issuing disciplinary warnings is not necessarily the most appropriate action. Instead, the revised Framework 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.
- (ii) The number of formal meetings since 2014 is as follows:

Stage	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Stage 1 Meeting	126	356	235	438	388	392	280	211	323
Stage 2 Meeting	44	108	49	109	141	98	67	60	79
Stage 3 Meeting	10	16	26	32	31	23	12	8	12

- (iii) The 10 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2014/15 comprised 9 long term absentees and 1 short term. All employees were dismissed.
- (iv) The 16 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2015/16 comprised 15 long term absentees and 1 short term. All employees were dismissed.
- (v) The 26 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2016/17 comprised 12 long term absentees and 14 short term. Of these 10 were dismissed.
- (vi) The 32 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2017/18 comprised 13 long term absentees and 19 short term. Of these 8 were dismissed.
- (vii) The 31 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2018/19 comprised 17 long term absentees and 14 short term. Of these 11 were dismissed.
- (viii) The 23 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2019/20 comprised 19 long term absentees and 4 short term. Of these 13 were dismissed.
- (ix) The 12 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2020/21 comprised 9 long term absentees and 3 short term. Of these 7 were dismissed.
- (x) The 8 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2021/22 comprised 3 long term absentees and 5 short term. Of these 1 was dismissed.
- (xi) The 12 cases dealt with at Stage 3 in 2022/23 comprised 12 short term absences. Of these 6 were dismissed.

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, HR and ICT, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

Background Papers **Report to Service and Performance Panel of 23 February 2016**
– [Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2014/15](#)

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Date: 7 September 2023

Days Lost Per Employee

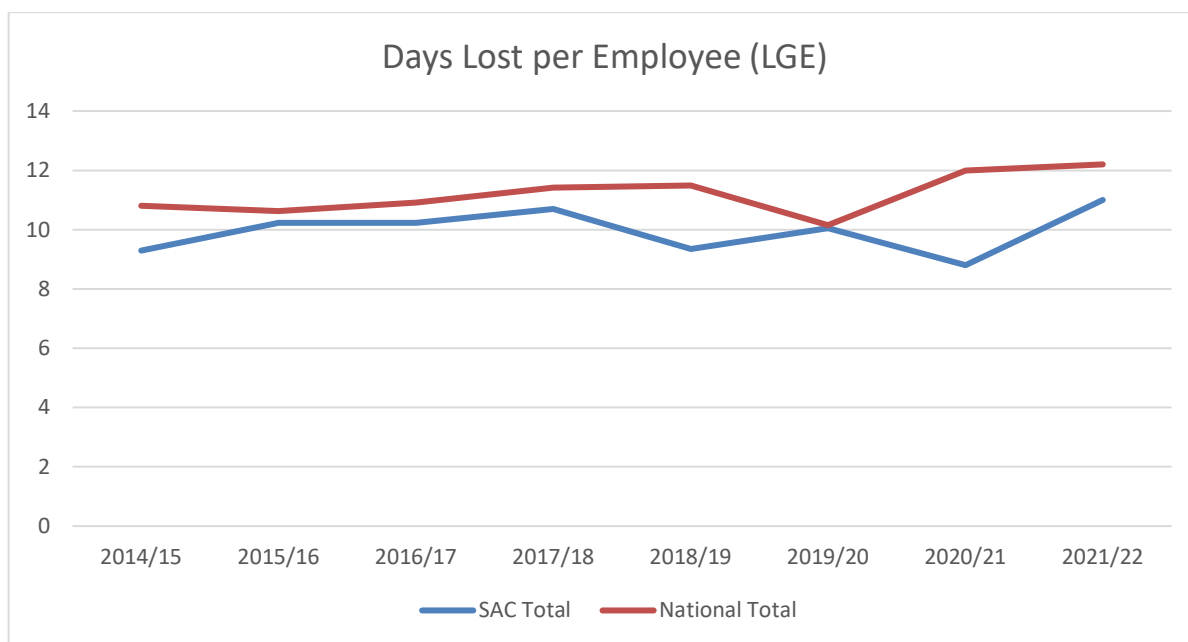
	Service	FTE	Total Days Lost	Annual Day Lost per Employee
Chief Executives	Directorate Support	8.50	10	1.13
	Finance, ICT and Procurement	249.84	1128	4.51
	HR and Payroll	45.84	455	9.92
	Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud	6.28	2	0.39
	Legal and Regulatory Services	117.70	570	4.84
Sub Total		428.16	2165	5.06
Education	Early Years Centres	147.87	1827	12.35
	Education	7.00	68	9.76
	Education Support Services	40.90	61	1.49
	LT Early Years	68.04	144	2.12
	LT Primary and Special	17.40	76	4.37
	LT Secondary	100.62	1331	13.23
	Primary Schools	1146.81	5888	5.13
	Secondary Schools	716.85	3017	4.21
	Special Schools	75.54	1004	13.29
Sub Total		2321.03	13416	5.78
HSCP	Childrens Health, Care and Social Work Justice Services	221.76	3353	15.12
	Community Health and Care Services	705.85	7847	11.12
	Health and Social Care	11.40	12	1.08
	HSCP Planning and Performance	141.92	1058	7.46
Sub Total		1080.93	12271	11.35
Housing, Operations and Development	Housing and Operations	1215.35	10579	8.70
	Housing, Operations and Development	1.00	0	0.00
	Planning and Development	93.56	306	3.27
Sub Total		1309.91	10885	8.31
Strategic Change and Communities	Communities	456.64	2176	4.77
	Strategic Change	137.48	635	4.62
	Strategic Change and Communities	2.00	21	10.62
Sub Total		596.12	2832	4.75
Council		5736.14	41569	7.25

Days Lost Per Employee (with Teaching and Non-Teaching split within Education)

	Service	FTE	Total Days Lost	Annual Day Lost per Employee
Chief Executives	Directorate Support	8.50	10	1.13
	Finance, ICT and Procurement	249.84	1128	4.51
	HR and Payroll	45.84	455	9.92
	Internal Audit and Corporate Fraud	6.28	2	0.39
	Legal and Regulatory Services	117.70	570	4.84
Sub Total		428.16	2165	5.06
Education	LGE/Non-Teaching Staff	993.63	7850	7.90
	Teachers	1327.40	5566	4.19
Sub Total		2321.03	13416	5.78
HSCP	Childrens Health, Care and Social Work Justice Services	221.76	3353	15.12
	Community Health and Care Services	705.85	7847	11.12
	Health and Social Care	11.40	12	1.08
	HSCP Planning and Performance	141.92	1058	7.46
Sub Total		1080.93	12271	11.35
Housing, Operations and Development	Housing and Operations	1215.35	10579	8.70
	Housing, Operations and Development	1.00	0	0.00
	Planning and Development	93.56	306	3.27
Sub Total		1309.91	10885	8.31
Strategic Change and Communities	Communities	456.64	2176	4.77
	Strategic Change	137.48	635	4.62
	Strategic Change and Communities	2.00	21	10.62
Sub Total		596.12	2832	4.75
Council		5736.14	41569	7.25

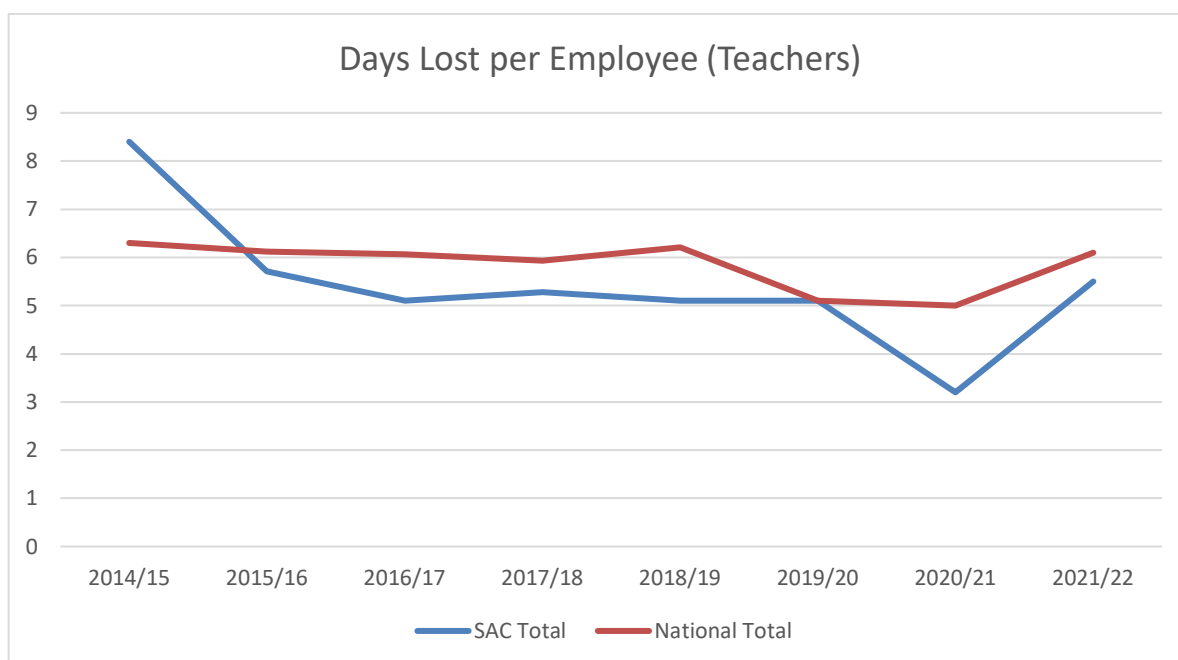
Days Lost per Employee (National Comparison)

1) LGE



	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
SAC Total	9.3	10.23	10.23	10.7	9.34	10.05	8.8	11
National Total	10.8	10.63	10.92	11.41	11.49	10.1	12	12.2

2) Teachers



	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
SAC Total	8.4	5.71	5.1	5.28	5.1	5.1	3.2	5.5
National Total	6.3	6.12	6.06	5.93	6.21	5.1	5	6.1