

# EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 23 NOVEMBER 2006

### MANAGING ABSENCE – PILOT PROJECT FOR EMPLOYEE REFERRAL

#### Report by Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Corporate Support

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is:-

- (i) to inform the Corporate Governance Committee about a service relating to the management of absence; and
- (ii) to advise of the development of a pilot project.

## 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Managing absence continues to be a priority issue for the Council and this priority is reinforced by external focus from the Scottish Executive and Audit Scotland. In particular, Managing Absence forms one of the five work streams under the Scottish Executive's Efficient Government Plan. The work stream expects that all public sector organisations have in place effective strategies for the management of sickness and absence and assistance and support for staff to return to work

2.2 The Council's current targets for sick absence are 5% for former manual workers and 4% for former APT&C employees. Absence levels across the Council at 30 June 2006 were:-

APT&C	4.73%
Manual & Craft	5.96%
Teachers	2.87%

2.3 However, within the above improving figures, which showed a reduction in all categories from 2004/2005, there are some areas within the workforce where absence levels are still relatively high;

Home Care	5.50%
Onsite	6.74%

2.4 In order to continue to reduce levels of absence within certain work areas certain specific actions have been taken. These have included the appointment of a Managing Absence Co-ordinator within Social Work; enhancement of the physiotherapy service; alterations to the referral arrangements under the Managing Absence Policy; refresher toolbox talks for managers and supervisors and bringing in-house the provision of moving and handling training for personal carers.

### **3. PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 To attempt to achieve more significant reductions in absence levels in those areas where reductions have been limited it is proposed to undertake an alternative method of managing the recording and management of employees who report as absent.
- 3.2 The Scheme which has been identified for a pilot is provided by Active Health Partners who provide their service through a 24 hour Contact Centre staffed by qualified nurses.
- 3.3 The proposed scheme involves four steps:-

#### **Step 1**

The employee calls a designated 24 hour contact centre where the call will be taken by a fully qualified nurse offering a range of experience from Primary Health Care, Midwifery and Mental Health to Gynaecology, Accident and Emergency and Coronary Care.

#### **Step 2**

The nurse will offer confidential medical advice over the telephone and record the details of the absence. They will also schedule a follow-up call to support the employee through the absence.

#### **Step 3**

The employee's manager is automatically notified by e-mail and/or SMS text message/pager and is given an estimated date of return.

#### **Step 4**

The employee must call the contact centre to confirm the date on which they will be returning to work.

- 3.4 Key benefits of the proposed scheme is the provision of early medical advice to get employees back to health and back to work as quickly as possible; minimises non-genuine cases and assists in the early identification of individual or departmental absence trends.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the service be piloted initially for a twelve month period within Onsite Services. Onsite will provide a suitable pilot as it can be grouped into a standalone groupings of 500 employees based on a Learning Partnership cluster. An advantage of this is that it will allow a direct comparison with another control group within the same operating environment.
- 3.6 The pilot will be in place for a period of twelve months which will provide a suitable period for evaluation. During the period of the pilot, quarterly reports will be submitted to the Corporate Management Team.

3.7 Following the evaluation of the pilot project, a decision will be made to determine whether the service could be introduced in all Council departments.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The cost of this pilot will be £28,000 and can be met from existing resources within the Department of Corporate Support.

#### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This proposal, which has been considered and approved by the Corporate Management Team, will allow the Council to refine its approach to managing absence to allow achievement of its absence targets. There are no Community Plan implications.

#### **6. TRADE UNIONS**

6.1 The Trade Unions have been consulted on the proposals and it is intended that they will be involved in the ongoing evaluation of the pilot.

#### **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 The Corporate Governance Committee is asked to note the proposal outlined above and to agree that a report be submitted to the Committee on the conclusion of the pilot.

**Elizabeth Morton**  
**Depute Chief Executive/  
Executive Director of Corporate Support**

**MHR/CH**  
**30 October 2006**

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Nil

Anyone wishing further information should contact Martin Rose, Head of Personnel on 01563 576092