SCRUTINY: RECRUITMENT & RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS TASK & FINISH GROUP	AGENDA ITEM 8

DATE OF MEETING:	18TH OCTOBER 2016
REPORT OF:	SERVICE DIRECTOR (HR) & MONITORING OFFICER
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SUBJECT:	**SICKNESS ABSENCE LEVELS IN SOCIAL WORK**

PURPOSE

1.   At this Task & Finish Group's meeting of 21 September 2016, the group requested a report advising of levels of sickness absence within the social care workforce, specifically addressing absence relating to mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2.   The Task & Finish Group:

   i)   note the contents of the report.
   ii)   advise officers to undertake a focused communication campaign sign-posting staff to the employee wellbeing resources available.

REPORT

3.   The table below provides a breakdown by percentage of the top five reasons for absence across a) the Council, b) the People directorate c) those with a SW qualification over the last year:

Reason for absence	Council wide	People Directorate	Social Workers
Musculo-skeletal	27.45%	25.84%	6.8%
Mental Health *	13.68%	12.39%	14.51%
Respiratory Conditions	11.24%	11.1%	13.54%
Medical Procedure	9.95%	13.11%	20.21%
Gastro-intestinal	8.59%	9.02%	4.08%

The current Council workforce is 2915 employees of which 1328 are within the People Directorate.

* the definition of absence due to mental health includes anxiety, stress, depression and "other" mental health. It relates to work, domestic or a combination of both.

4.   The Council's Occupational Health Team currently has seven referrals for employees across the Council absent due to mental health. Of this seven, two are cited as workplace related, the other five are a mixture of domestic and work.

5.   Sickness absence across the Council continues to be of concern and is above the national average for the public sector. Elected Members have separately requested the creation of an informal Task & Finish Group to review levels of absence across the Council. Acknowledging that social work is a stressful occupation and levels of absence for a variety of reasons remain a concern; the sickness absence statistics do not highlight absence due to mental health to be significantly greater than in other occupations across the Council. The current workplace risk assessment for the post of Social Worker is within an acceptable level.

6.   Annually the Local Government Association carry out a survey of levels, reasons and support mechanism in place across local authorities in the eastern region. In their most recent report "Managing Sickness Absence in the East of England (2014-15)" they identify mental health issues as contributing to 26.8% of all long term absences. It is encouraging that the Council remains significantly below this figure.

7.   The Council has a range of mechanisms in place to support staff:

- In-house Occupational Health Team providing intervention work and supporting
  employees referrals.
- Employee Assistance Programme provided through AXA ICAS which offers a range of employee wellbeing activities including counselling. Counselling is also available from the Luton Town Centre Chaplains.
- Coaching.
- Stress Policy and stress assessments.
- SW supervision, 1:1s and annual appraisals.
- Other HR policies such as flexible working.
- Range of learning activities aimed at both individuals such as managing their own mental health and line managers supporting their staff who are suffering the effects of stress.
- In conjunction with Public Health colleagues, the Council signed up to the Mental Health Responsibility Deal and Time to Change pledge – demonstrating the Council's commitment to how the Council thinks and responds to mental health in the workplace.

- Employee Wellbeing Programme – this programme includes a range of preventative measures and seeks to boost employee wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle.
- Signposting to support systems and resources available locally such as the Active Luton and the Luton Wellbeing Service.
- Grievance Resolution Procedure and a Sickness Absence Procedure - both procedures provide employees with opportunities to raise concerns, informally and formally. If there was a widespread view amongst our employees in the social work setting that there are organisational problems (workloads too high, management support ineffective, etc.) you might expect these concerns to emerge.
- Recognised trade unions, including The British Association of Social Workers BASW]), and the capacity for their members to raise their concerns through the employee relations machinery, or informally.

PROPOSAL/OPTION

8. The Council undertakes an internal communication campaign to advise employees of all the support mechanisms in place.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D

Managing Sickness Absence in the East of England (2014-15) – LGA.