

Sickness Absence 2018-2019

The HR team supports managers to manage sickness absence in line with the Council's Attendance Management policy. The policy was revised in 2017/18 and introduced a more robust approach to managing sickness, including interventions such as mandatory return to work discussions and the requirement for employees to attend formal meetings where their absence meets a trigger point.

The Attendance Management policy defines the following triggers where employees are invited to a formal meeting:

- 3 occasions within 6 months
- 5 occasions within 12 months
- 10 consecutive days

Over the last 3 years, sickness absence has increased as detailed in the table below:

Year	FTE Days Lost per Employee
2016 - 17	8.2
2017 - 18	10.6
2018 - 19	10.3

The table below details the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) days lost by the Council due to sickness absence over the past 3 years:

Year	Total Number of FTE Days Lost	Long-Term Sickness	Short-Term Sickness
2016 - 17	2377	1721	656
2017 - 18	2868	2062	806
2018 - 19	2853	2229	624

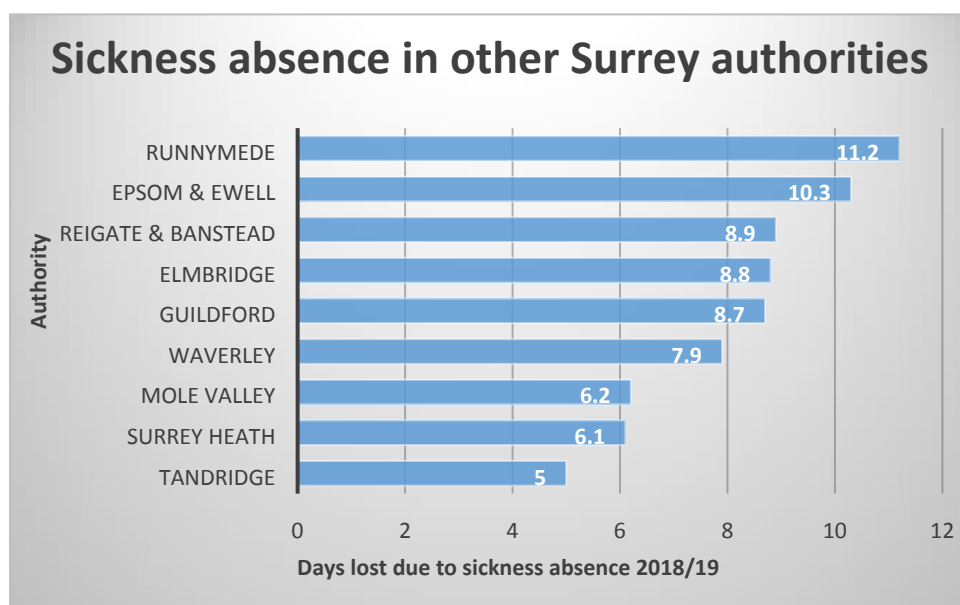
The increase in sickness absence is mainly attributable to long-term absence.

The level of absence recorded by EEBC in 2018/19 exceeds the CIPD's national average for public sector organisations, which is currently 8.4 days and is broadly in line with the trends identified by the CIPD Health & Wellbeing at Work Report 2019, which reports that "there has been little change in public sector absence over the last few years"

Sickness Absence by Division

Division (FTE employees)	% of Total FTE Employees	% of Total Sickness Absence
Chief Executive (4.0)	1.5%	0.1%
Corporate Governance (6.9)	2.5%	0.9%
Digital & Service Transformation (54.6)	19.9%	25.0%
Financial Services (11.9)	4.3%	0.8%
Housing & Community (27.2)	9.9%	12.8%
HR&OD (8.6)	3.2%	0.5%
Legal & Democratic Services (14.1)	5.2%	4.7%
Operational Services (106.8)	39.0%	49.1%
Planning (16.1)	5.9%	1.5%
Property & Regeneration (23.7)	8.7%	4.6%

It should be noted that, although the Council's sickness absence for 2018/19 is above the CIPD rate, it is not the highest recorded across the Surrey Authorities.



Over the past few months the HR team has worked with managers to implement the revised and more robust Attendance Management policy and to proactively manage a number of long term sickness cases to conclusion. These have included 3 ill health retirements, 1 dismissal on the grounds of ill health capability and a number of resignations.

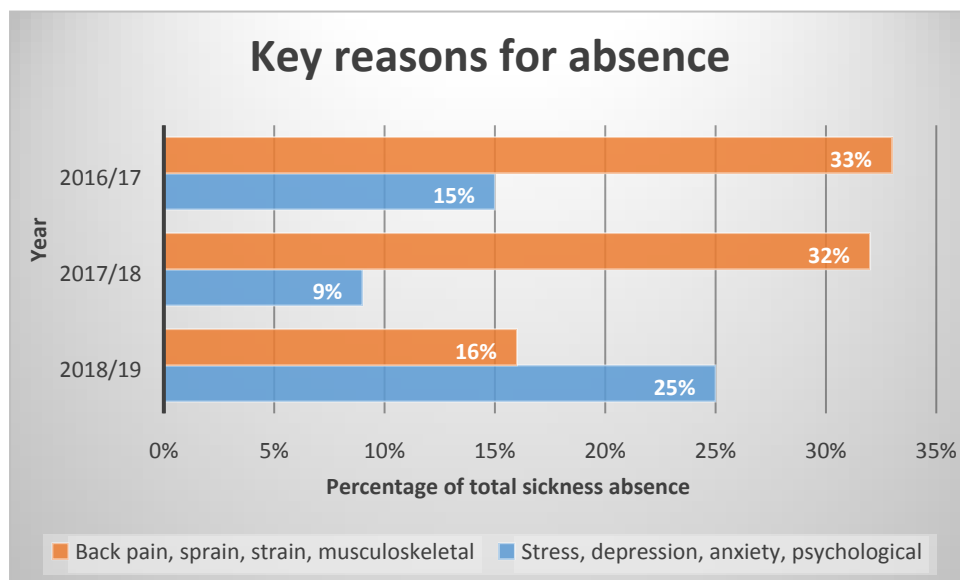
EABC continues to work with the Occupational Health provider Medwyn, who provide advice relating to the management of employees' medical conditions in a work context. 24 sickness cases were referred to Occupational Health during the year.

It is worth noting that there has been a 42.9% reduction in days lost due to sickness absence in March 2019 compared with April 2018; this is primarily due to the proactive management of our long-term sickness cases.

	Long Term Sickness Absence (FTE days)	Short term Sickness Absence (FTE days)	Total Sickness Absence (FTE days)
April 2018	279	55	334
March 2019	80	63.3	143.3

Of the 2853 days lost during 2018/19, 1387 days are attributable to employees who have now left the organisation.

For the past three years, sickness absence has remained consistently high in two key categories, these being Back Pain/Sprain/Strain/Musculoskeletal and Stress/Depression/Anxiety/Psychological. The graph below shows the percentage of absence attributable to these categories as a percentage of overall absence.



The level of absence relating to musculoskeletal issues is primarily attributable to the Council's manual workforce.

The context in which Local Government operates is one of increasing financial constraints, with ongoing pressures placed on services. With a buoyant employment market and increasing turnover rates, the pressure to deliver stable services may impact on staff wellbeing.

According to the CIPD Health and Wellbeing Report 2019 nearly three quarters of organisations in the public sector (72%) have experienced an increase in reported common mental health conditions over the past year, with social and financial challenges contributing to the wellbeing of employees.

Budgetary constraints continue to have an influence over the Council's ability to provide wellbeing benefits and initiatives. However, the Council is taking a proactive approach to employee wellbeing and managing sickness absence effectively. Managers play a key role in this and, to ensure that they are equipped and skilled in dealing with areas of wellbeing and sickness the HR team are working on a number of initiatives as follows:

- Clarifications and amendments to the Attendance Management policy and review of Capability and Disciplinary processes as part of the HR policy review.
- Management development interventions, including coaching managers to improve the quality of return to work discussions and the effectiveness of rehabilitation and return to work programmes.
- Revisions to the categories used to record sickness absence in line with Institute of Medicine/HSE guidelines to facilitate a better understanding of underlying trends and to enable more meaningful reporting of sickness absence.
- Quarterly reporting of sickness absence to Leadership Team to ensure effective monitoring, early identification of trends and Leadership Team support for interventions.
- Focus on stress awareness, including Stress Management Workshops and the promotion of stress risk assessments as an early intervention.
- Increased openness about mental health, including mental health awareness training, training of 4 mental health first aiders across the Council (further 6 to be trained).
- Investigating the provision of building resilience workshops for staff and incorporating measures such as Thomas International DISC profiling within our recruitment processes.
- Continuing to facilitate holistic therapy sessions (Reiki, Crystal Therapy, Indian Head Massage and Neck and Shoulder Massage) as well as Pilates sessions for staff.
- Working with a new Employee Assistance Programme provider to promote the support available to staff.