

## SERVICE UPDATE

<b><u>Name of Cluster:</u></b>	People and Citizen Services
<b><u>Date:</u></b>	4 November 2024
<b><u>Title of Update:</u></b>	Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy Update
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### **UPDATE:**

The purpose of this Service Update is to share the ongoing approach to improving the management of absence and update members of the Staff Governance Committee on work to review the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy, with a view to presenting a refreshed policy for approval by June 2025.

### **Background**

Aberdeen City Council's vision is for Aberdeen as a place where all people can prosper. This means all people being able to access our services, regardless of their background and circumstances, so that we help all people, families, businesses and communities to do well, succeed and flourish in every aspect.

The Council's Workforce strategy and Delivery Plan aims to:

- enable employees to thrive personally and professionally with a key strategic objective which states that Aberdeen City Council is a supportive, caring employer that provides a range of mental health and wellbeing interventions and support; supports staff through the cost of living crisis; recognizes and supports work/life balance and enables individuals to remain in work or return to work effectively.
- provide support to managers and employees, to reduce absence levels across the organisation and to ensure employees are supported through a range of resources and interventions to remain in work whenever possible and that are beneficial to them; and allow support to be targeted to the areas of highest need.

The Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing policy links as a component which seeks to enable these objectives.

The existing Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy was approved at Staff Governance Committee in November 2018 ([Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing policy.pdf \(acc.gov.uk\)](#)) and implemented from 1 January 2019 and applies to all employees of the Council.

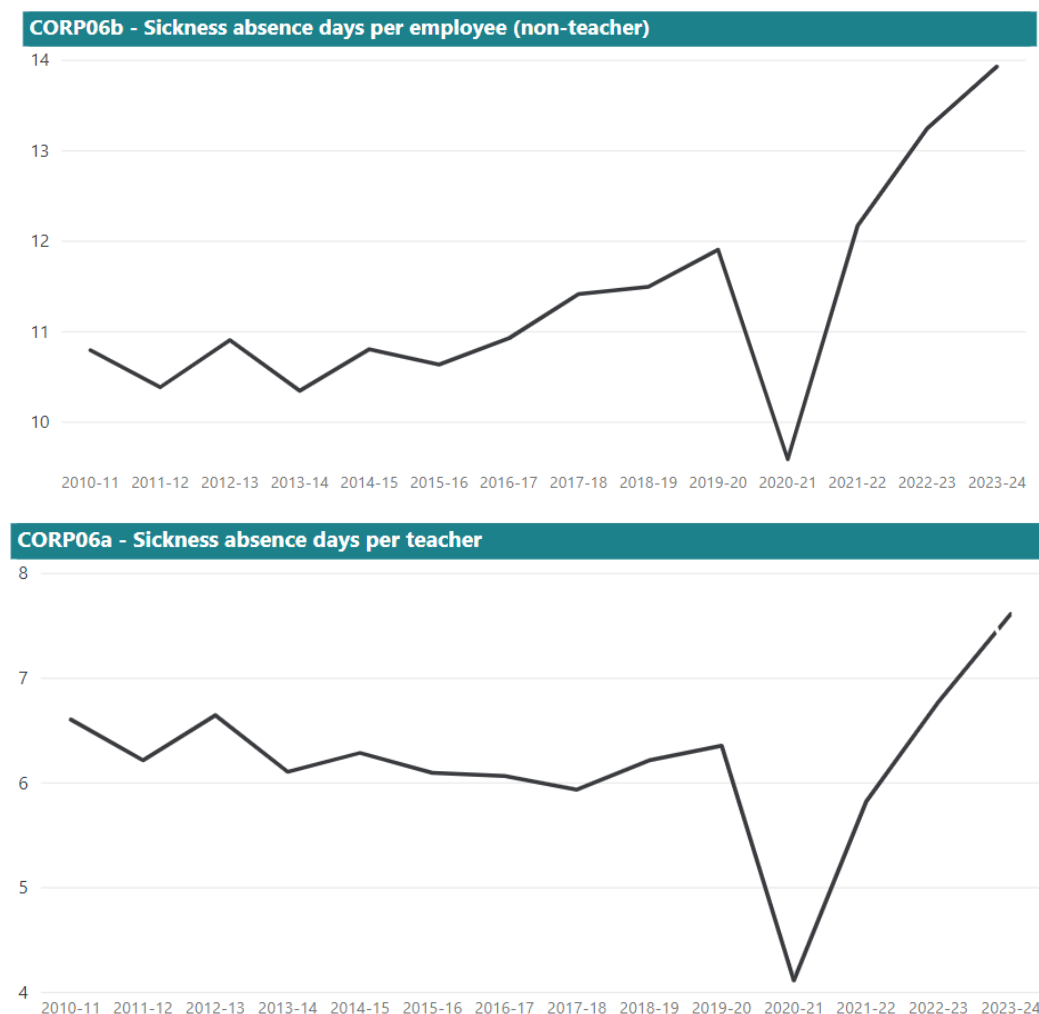
An Absence Improvement Project, reporting to the Performance Board, is currently underway as a mechanism to provide a targeted approach to managing absence cases within a specific test area, and with a view to identifying scalable actions which can support absence reduction across the wider organisation. The projects initial test area aims to reduce the total number of days lost as a result of long term absence (over 30 calendar days) within Building Services in the Operations cluster by 20% by August 2025 (currently at 2235 days, 25% reduction would be 1676

days). (see Appendix 11.4).

## Data

Since the policy was last reviewed, the Council's overall absence record has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic climate, which, as most recently presented as part of the [Sickness Absence for Environmental, Roads and Waste Services \(acc.gov.uk\)](#) report at Staff Governance Committee in June 2024, and as part of regular absence reporting to Committee (the most recent update in April 2024 – [EAS Annual Progress Update – Occupational Health and Absence Annual Update January 2023 – December 2023](#)), showed a steady increase after the pandemic, peaking in the 3rd quarter of 2023. Since this time, the Council's overall absence rate has shown a steady decrease (see Appendix 11.1), but the reasons for absence remain largely the same. (see Appendix 11.2).

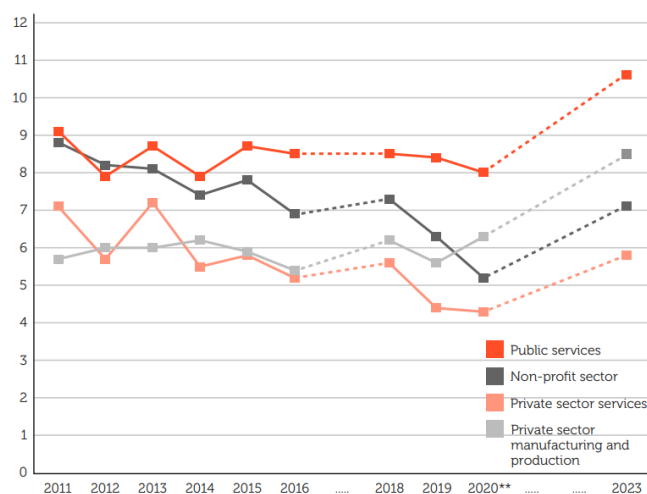
The Council's overall absence trend has mirrored national trends which have also shown an increase in absence rates up to 2023. Data from the Local Government Benchmarking Forum below shows an increase in absence rates across Councils between 2020 and 2024 for both teaching and non-teaching staff.



A review of the Chartered Institute of Professional Development's (CIPD) annual [Health and wellbeing at work \(cipd.org\)](#) report, published in September 2023, reported an increase in sickness absence across all sectors in 2023 when compared

to previous years and notes that the causes of absence more widely remain largely unchanged (see figures below).

Figure 25: Average number of days lost per employee per year, by sector (5% trimmed mean)

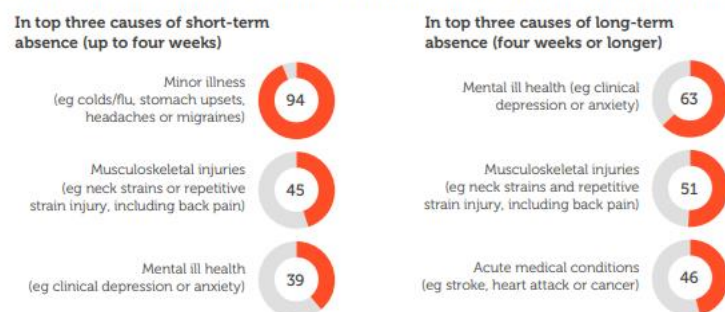


\* 5% trimmed mean.

\*\* Data collected in October/November 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK.

Base: 290 (2023); 365 (2020); 446 (2019); 443 (2018); 736 (2016); 396 (2015); 342 (2014); 393 (2013); 498 (2012); 403 (2011).

Figure 27: The most common causes of absence (% of respondents who include in their top three causes)



Given the period of time since the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy was last reviewed, and the changing landscape which has affected absent rates both locally and nationally, it is considered prudent to conduct a full review of the policy to ensure it is fit for purpose and meeting the needs of the Council in a changed and modern operating environment.

In addition, a full review of the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy at this time will allow the accompanying guidance to take account of any new or amended processes, for example, the use of Reasonable Adjustment passports; learning from the Absence Improvement Project; and align with processes for the Council's new Occupational Health contract, which took effect from September 2024.

## Next Steps

A project team has been formed and a project plan developed which will fully review and develop the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing policy, accompanying guidance and any required templates to:

- ensure employees are appropriately supported during any periods of absence and enabled to return to work at the earliest opportunity.
- provide clarity for managers in applying the guidance to support employees accordingly.

- ensure they are reflective of ACAS guidelines and any current or upcoming legislation.
- Consider any learning obtained from the Absence Improvement Project and look to replicate any successes into the development of the new policy.

Benchmarking and research will be undertaken with other local authorities, partner organisations as well as with other private and third-sector organisations to identify best-practice examples of sickness absence policies and provisions.

Further data on sickness absence and usage of the current policy will be gathered and analysed to understand the current usage and highlight any gaps in current practice.

Trade Unions, managers and other groups will be engaged throughout so that they are co-designing improvements to the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing policy, guidance documents and working practices.

Job Families will be considered so that information is accessible in a way that suits the needs of different employee groups.

The policy will be cross-reviewed against other policies, including those which are currently being reviewed in line with the Workforce Delivery Plan, such as Flexible Working, and Family Friendly, to ensure these provide consistency and clarity.

Support provisions, such as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), physiotherapy and use of Reasonable Adjustment Passports, will be clearly signposted so that employees will have easy access to support.

A communications and engagement plan will be developed to increase understanding and awareness of the policy and ensure consistent usage.

Improved communications and training for managers will be developed to accompany the policy so that managers are able to provide consistent and appropriate support and be empowered in making decisions.

The Chief Officer – People and Citizen Services will report to Staff Governance Committee by June 2025 with the revised Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing policy, along with an update on any other changes and improvements to procedures and guidance documentation.

Ongoing feedback and data analysis will be considered to measure the impact of any improvements.

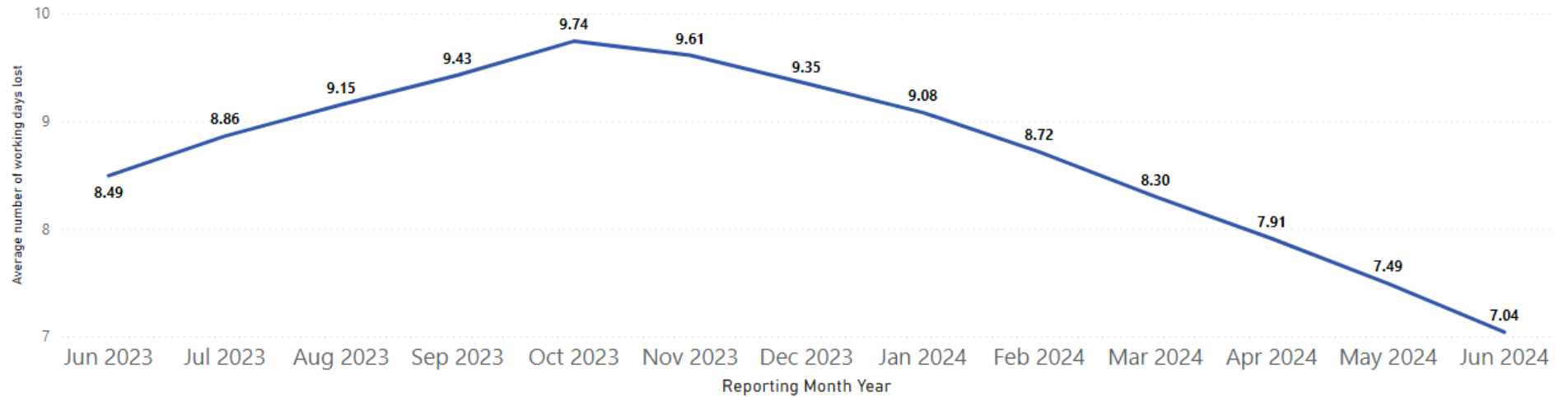
## **APPENDICES**

12 month rolling average between June 2023 and June 2024 of the average number of working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE employee.

Comparison of the reasons for absence between June 2023 and June 2024.

## Appendix 1 – 12 month rolling average between June 2023 and June 2024

Average number of total working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE employee (12 month rolling average)



## Appendix 3 - Absence Improvement Charter

