

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Staff Governance
<b>DATE</b>	3 November 2025
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CORS/25/198
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Andy MacDonald – Executive Director – Corporate Services
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Isla Newcombe – Chief Officer People and Citizen Services
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Sharon Robb – Employee Relations Casework Lead
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	2.5

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This purpose of this report is to seek approval for a revised Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy to replace the current Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy, which was last approved in 2018.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION

That Committee

- 2.1 Approves the updated Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy in the Appendix to replace the current version of the policy, which was approved in 2018, with an implementation date of 1 February 2026 to allow for necessary training to be arranged, communications to be undertaken and other administrative arrangements to be completed.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

#### **Background**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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; recognises 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 ensure employees are supported through a range of resources and interventions to remain in work whenever possible where that is beneficial to them; and allow support to be targeted to the areas of highest need

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

- 3.3 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 applying to all employees of the Council.
- 3.4 An Absence Improvement Project, reporting to the Performance Board, used a targeted approach to managing absence cases within a specific test area. The main impact on sickness absence levels is long term absence, where there is opportunity with early intervention to support employees back to work at the earliest possible stage. The project aimed 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 (initially at 2235 days, 25% reduction would be 1676 days). A 20% reduction was achieved by December 2024 and therefore this progress has showed that a targeted approach to long term sickness can reduce the number of people off long term sick and also the length of individual absences.

## Data

- 3.5 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, 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 2025 ([EAS Annual Progress Update – Occupational Health and Absence Annual Update January– December 2024](#)) showed a steady increase after the pandemic, peaking in the 3rd quarter of 2023 (Figure 1). Since this time, the Council's overall absence rate has shown a steady decrease throughout 2024, levelling off in 2025 (Figure 2), which has been a result of the targeted approach from the Absence Improvement Project being implemented more widely, work undertaken to cleanse absence data, and also mirrors National absence trends in the post-covid climate. The reasons for absence remain largely the same. (Figure 3).

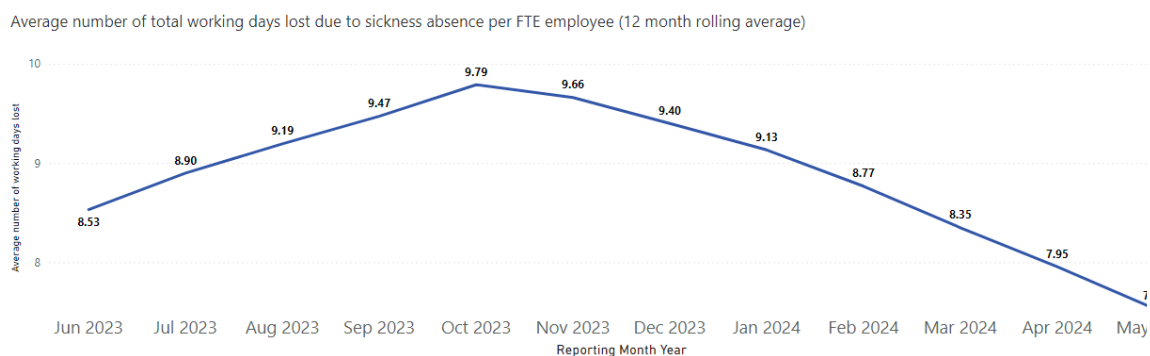


Figure 1

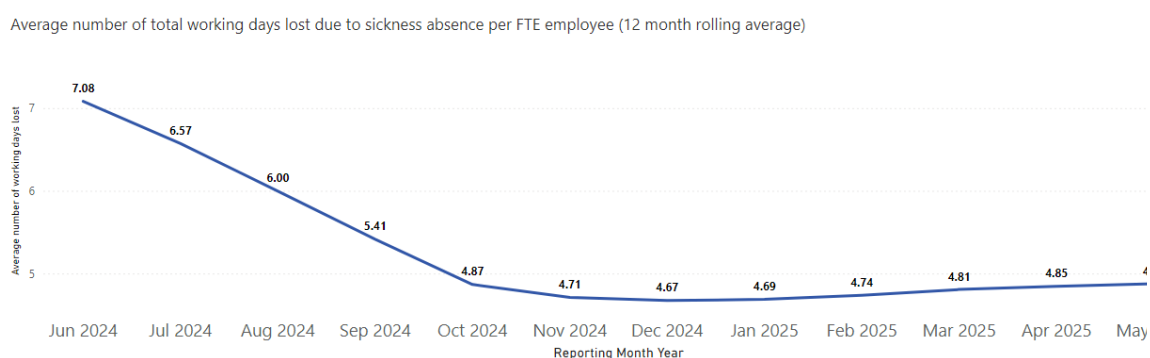


Figure 2

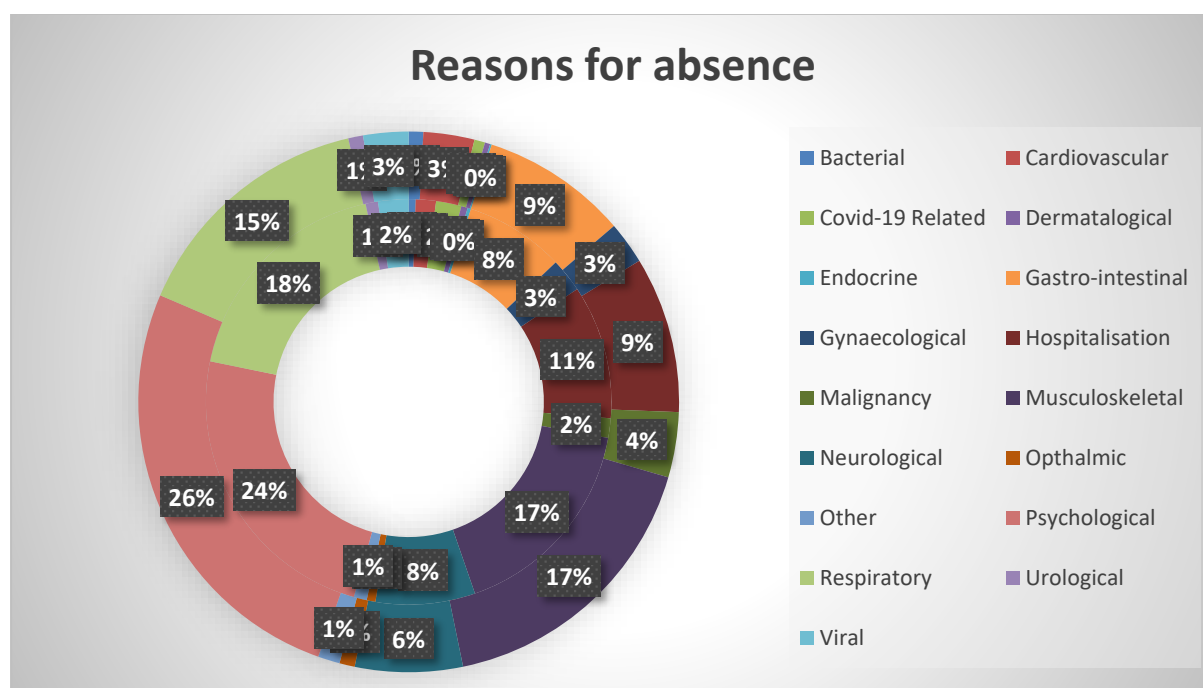
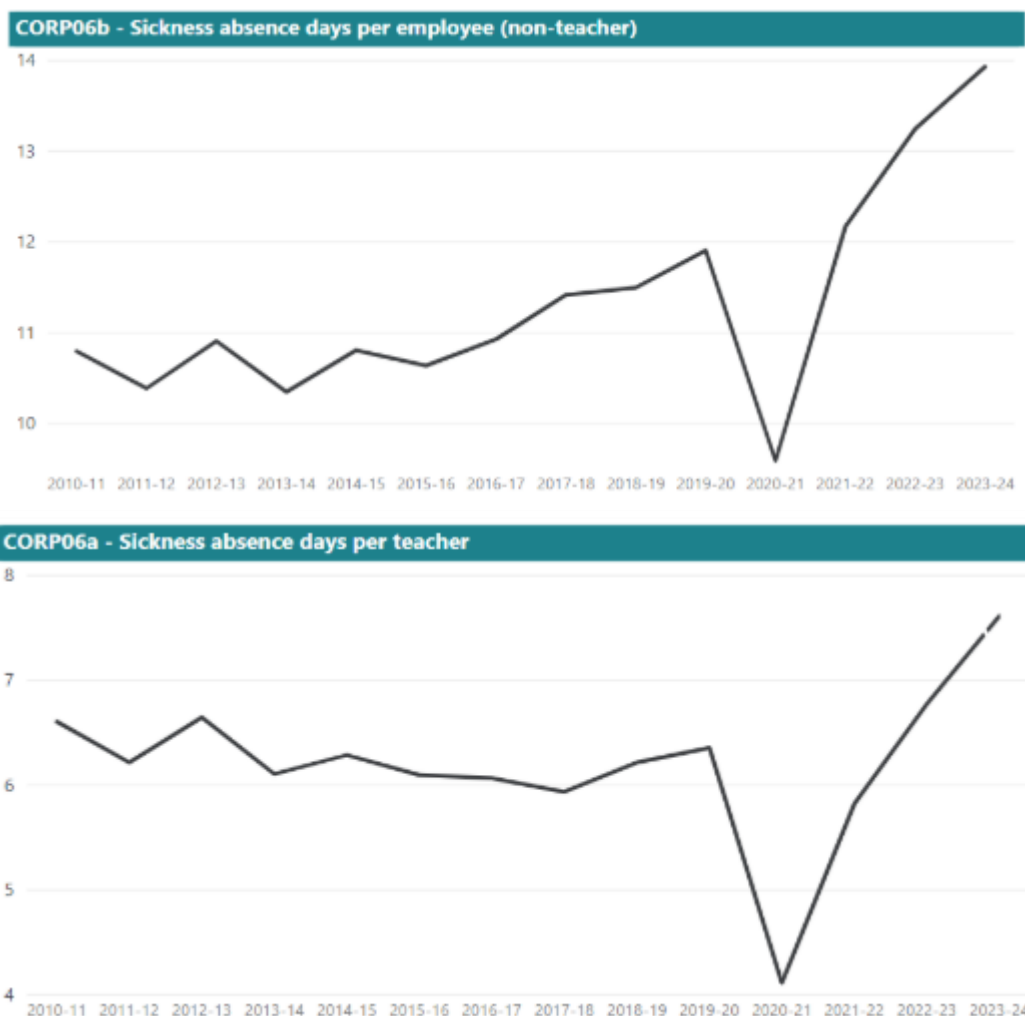


Figure 3 – The outer circle represents February 2025, whilst the inner circle represents February 2024

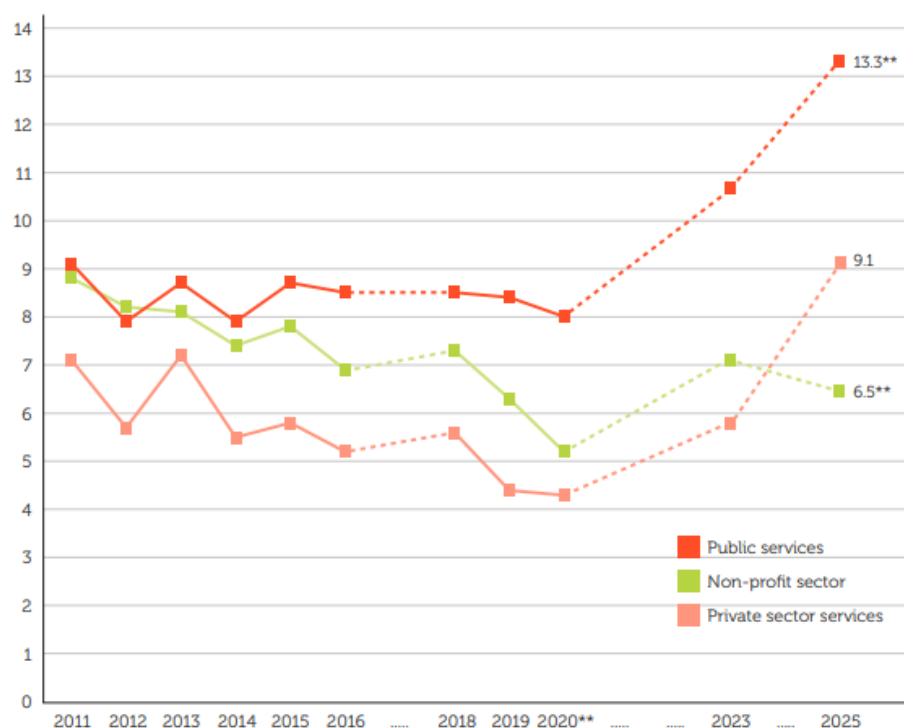
3.6 The Council's overall absence trend has mirrored national trends which have also shown an increase in absence rates up to 2023. Data from the Local

Government Benchmarking Forum below shows an increase in absence rates across Councils between 2020 and 2024 for both teaching and non-teaching staff.



- 3.7 A review of the CIPD's [Health and wellbeing at work \(cipd.org\) report](https://www.cipd.org/uk/research-and-insight/articles-and-reports/2025/09/health-and-wellbeing-at-work), published in September 2025, reported an increase in sickness absence across all sectors from 2023 and in fact they reported the highest level of absence in more than 15 years and noted that the causes of absence more widely remain largely unchanged (see figures below).

Figure 2: Average number of days lost per employee per year, by sector\*

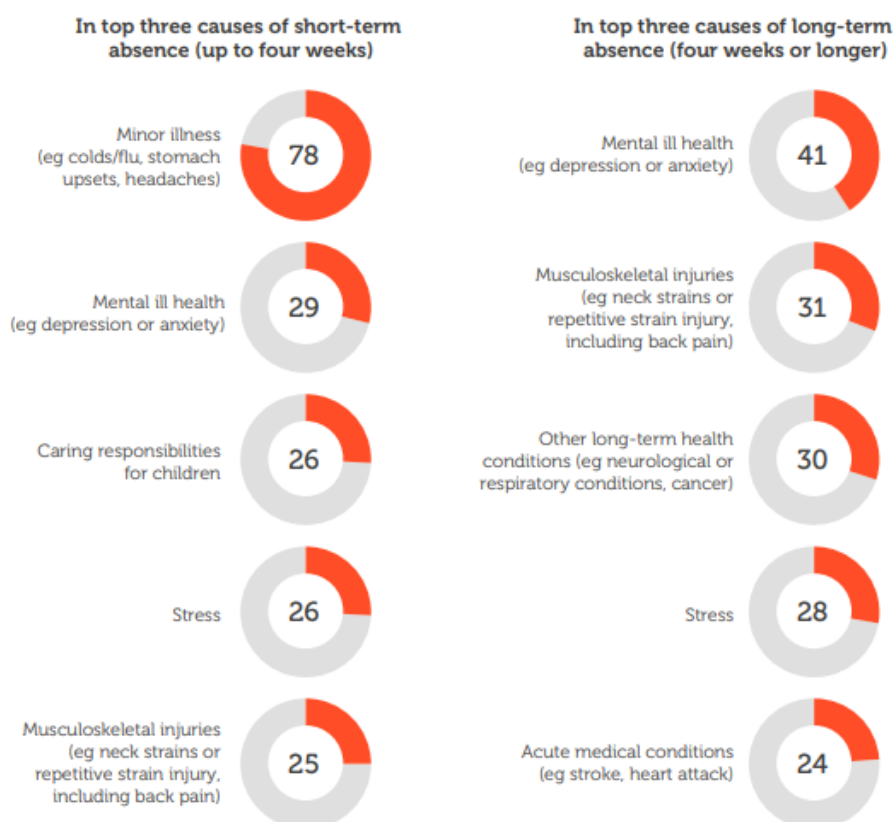


\*5% trimmed mean

\*\*small sample sizes so should be treated with caution

Base: private sector: n=247; public services: n=33; non-profit: n=25.

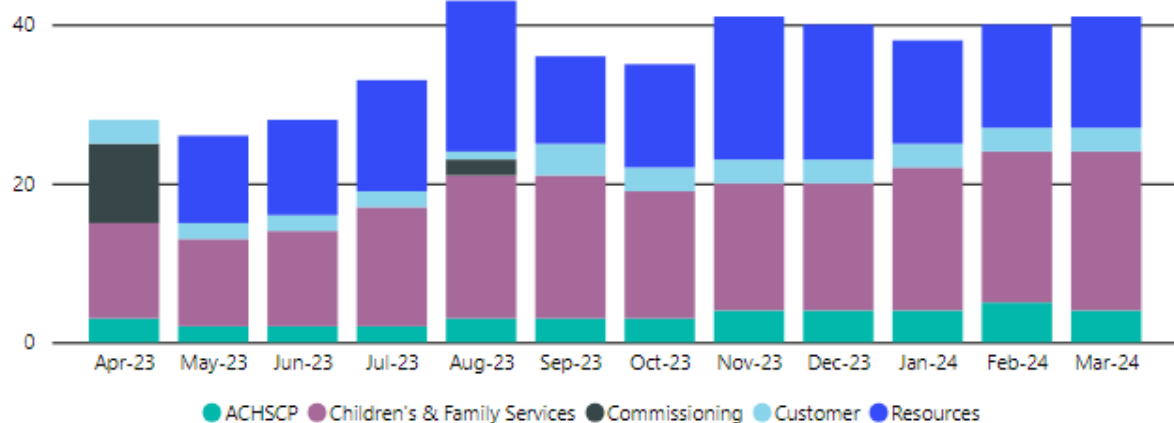
Figure 4: The most common causes of absence (% of respondents who include in their top three causes)



Base: n=1,101 (all respondents).

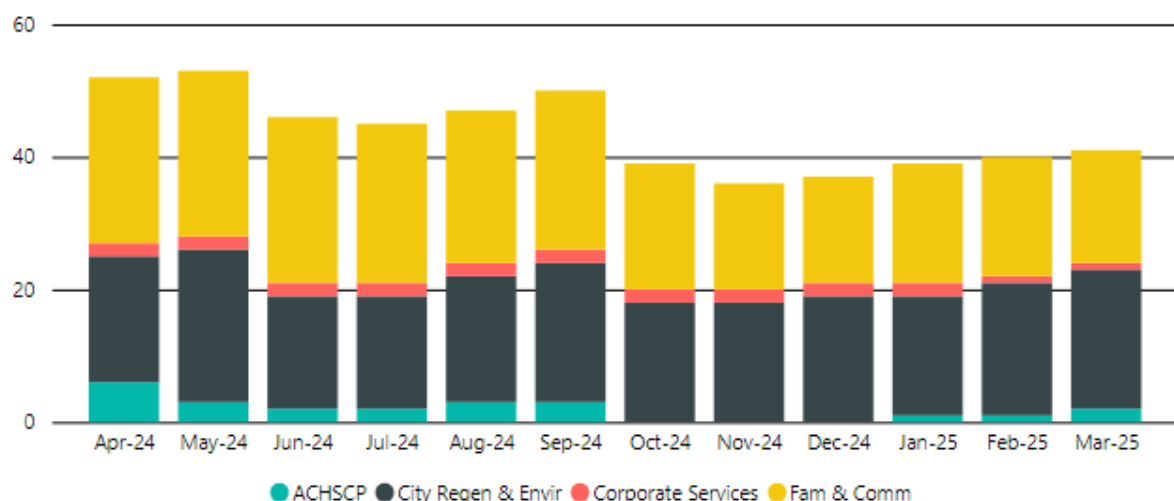
- 3.8 The number of Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing cases across the last 2 financial years is shown below. The data is not truly reflective of the fuller usage of the policy as earlier stages of the policy (Return to Work meetings, Stage 1 and Stage 2 attendance meetings) do not require the involvement of People Services, and so are not recorded on our HR system.

#### Supporting Attendance & Wellbeing (Ongoing) - 2023/24



*Please note that supporting attendance cases are recorded against the function at the start of the case so may not fully take into account any restructuring in that period.*

#### Supporting Attendance & Wellbeing (Ongoing) - 2024/25



*Please also note that the colour coding for each graph is unique to that year; the same colour may represent different functions in different years.*

- 3.9 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, a fuller review of the policy was conducted to ensure it is fit for purpose and meeting the needs of the Council in a changed and modern operating environment.
- 3.10 In addition, a full review of the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy has allowed 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 aligning with processes for the Council's new Occupational Health contract, which took effect from September 2024.
- 3.11 The policy is applicable to all employees, including teachers. The policy was presented at the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) for consideration and approval on 30 September 2025 and was ratified on xx.

#### How the review was conducted

- 3.12 A project team was formed and a project plan developed to 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, CIPD best practice guidance, 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.
- 3.13 Benchmarking and research was 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.
- 3.14 Data on sickness absence and usage of the current policy (as shown above) was gathered and analysed to understand the current usage and highlight any gaps in current practice. This showed a steady increase in formal Supporting Attendance cases since 2023, which highlighted the need for a policy review to ensure that the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy remains effective, relevant, and adequately addresses the underlying issues contributing to sickness absence.
- 3.15 Trade Unions, managers and other groups have been engaged throughout to establish what has worked well and not worked so well, to capture any concerns and so that they are co-designing improvements to the Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing policy, guidance documents and working practices.
- 3.16 Job Families have been considered so that information is accessible in a way that suits the needs of different employee groups.

3.17 The policy has been cross-reviewed against other policies, including those which are currently being reviewed in line with the Workforce Delivery Plan, such as the Flexible Working Policy, to ensure these provide consistency and clarity and also to align with the current [Mental Health Action Plan](#).

### Policy Changes

3.18 Taking all the feedback into account, a revised Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy has been developed. The table below sets out a summary of the areas where there are proposed changes.

Area	Current Policy	Revised Policy	Rationale
Overall approach	Single Policy, procedure and guidance document	A separate policy, with accompanying procedure/guidance document.	<p>Alignment with corporate template and governance arrangements.</p> <p>Aligns with our approach for other key people policies such as Managing Discipline, Managing Grievances, Dignity and Respect at Work and Flexible Working</p> <p>Feedback from managers and Trade Unions that support options in the current policy were not clear and further guidance on these would be welcome</p>
Short term Absences	No distinction between how short and long term absence is managed.	<p>Short term procedure remains the same for managing absences of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 occasions, or</li> <li>• 10 days</li> </ul>	<p>Benchmarking showed that all other local authorities distinguish between short and long term absence. The Council's current 'triggers' for initiating the policy were in line with other benchmarked local authorities.</p> <p>Feedback from managers is that the policy is effective for managing short term absence.</p>
Long term absences	No distinction between how short and long term absence is managed.	Introduction of a long term procedure as part of the policy for managing absences for durations of 28 or more calendar days.	<p>Benchmarking showed that all other local authorities distinguish between short and long term absence.</p> <p>Feedback from managers and trade unions supported this. The introduction of a long term procedure allows for more structured, tailored and dedicated support; clarity for managers with less ambiguity in decision making; fair and consistent application of the policy; increased confidence in</p>



			handling more complex or sensitive cases
Support Plan	N/A	Introduction of a structured 'support plan' for employees with long term absences, with review dates (which can also be used for those with short term absences which are due to an underlying medical condition).	<p>Feedback from Trade Unions was that support should be improved for those with underlying conditions – both TUs and managers were positive about the concept of using a support plan.</p> <p>Learning from the Absence Improvement Project was that a clearer, structured process for managing long term absence would be beneficial.</p>
Trigger levels	Current policy uses the terminology 'Trigger Levels' for the number of days/occasions of absence that result in an employee's absence levels being managed under the policy.	Terminology has been changed to 'review levels'.	Feedback from Trade Unions, employee groups and managers was that the terminology was not supportive and felt punitive, negative, and was unhelpful in managing absences under the policy
Support and Wellbeing	Policy contains minimal and outdated signposting and guidance on support options	<p>More comprehensive section around areas of support will be included in the guidance.</p> <p>Signposting and descriptions of available support including to EAP (Employee Assistance Programme), Occupational Health, Reasonable Adjustment Passports, Wellbeing action plans, stress risk assessments will be detailed in the guidance.</p>	Feedback from both managers and Trade Unions was that support options in the current policy were not clear and further guidance on these would be welcome

Other absence related considerations	Policy contains minimal and outdated signposting and guidance on support options	More comprehensive section with areas which require special consideration will be included in the guidance. Examples include pregnancy absence, industrial injury, disability, stress, menopause, mental health	Feedback from both managers and Trade Unions was that support options in the current policy were not clear and further guidance on these would be welcome
Review of the Policy	Every 3 years (noting the last review was in 2018)	Biennially	In line with corporate policy governance.

## Next Steps

3.19 To ensure the successful implementation of the revised Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy by 1 February 2026, should the policy be approved, the following actions will be taken:

- Comprehensive training will be developed and rolled out for all line managers, which will include:
  - An online managers' mandatory training module on ACC Learn
  - Practical guidance on applying the new short and long-term absence procedures.
  - Practical guidance on the use of support plans and options, such as reasonable adjustment passports, stress risk assessments and Wellness Action Plans.
  - Signposting to linked training around managing difficult conversations, and guidance on making referrals to Occupational Health.
  - Training will be delivered through a mix of e-learning modules, and recorded webinars to ensure accessibility across job families and shift patterns.
  - Further support will be provided through in-person support sessions.
- A central SharePoint hub on People Anytime will be launched to host:
  - The full policy and accompanying guidance.
  - Templates, FAQs, and flowcharts for quick reference.
  - Links to related guidance (e.g. Phased Return, Ill Health retirement).
  - Links to further detail on useful support options such as Reasonable Adjustment Passports, Wellness Action Plans and tools for supporting Mental Health
  - Contact details for further support, such as from People Services or Occupational Health.

- The hub will be regularly updated and promoted through internal communications.
  - A wide-reaching internal communication campaign will be launched to raise awareness of the policy changes and support available. This will include:
    - Briefings for senior leaders and service managers to cascade key messages.
    - Targeted communications for frontline staff using posters and toolbox talks.
    - Updates via the Leadership Forum.
    - Trade Unions and employee networks will be engaged to support messaging and encourage feedback.
  - A feedback mechanism will be built into the SharePoint page to capture questions and suggestions from employees and managers.
  - Usage and impact of the policy will be monitored through Employee Relations case data, absence trends, and feedback from training.
- 3.20 Building on the improvement lessons learned from the Absence Improvement Project, a further iteration is being planned, focussing on improvement options around Return to Work meetings, specifically ensuring these are completed and recorded. It is hoped that improvement in this area will lead to increased reassurance and support for employees and increased compliance with the policy, which may in turn further improve sickness absence levels within the Council.

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

- 4.1 Financial implications of sickness absence rates include costs incurred for salary or sick pay for absent employees and additional costs incurred for temporary cover. Financial impact will reduce as a result of decreasing long term sickness cases.
- 4.2 Failure to comply with legislation in ensuring a safe and healthy workplace has the potential to result in enforcement action by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Changes in the Sentencing and Fines Guidance for health and safety non-compliances are resulting in increased financial penalties.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Failure to comply with legislation in ensuring a safe and healthy workplace has the potential to result in enforcement action by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Such intervention can result in potential prosecution (criminal), equally, employees (civil claims) are more likely to succeed following a successful HSE prosecution. Changes in the Sentencing and Fines Guidance for health and safety non-compliances are resulting in increased financial penalties. Fine starting points are based on an organisation's turnover. As Local Authorities do not have turnover; Annual Revenue Budget is deemed to be the equivalent. This amount is then altered depending on the culpability of the organisation and harm factors to employees and members of the public.

5.2 Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 there is a legal requirement to ensure the health safety and welfare at work of our employees. This includes minimising the risk of stress-related illness or injury to employees.

5.3 Attendance issues may be due to underlying health conditions which are considered a disability under the Equalities Act 2010. The existence of a policy framework under which attendance can be managed and support provided to the employee is a key component in the Council complying with legislation and discharging its duty of care.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	Failure of the Council to achieve its strategic goals if absence levels are high.	Management of absences using the Supporting Attendance Policy and supporting health and wellbeing of staff. Data capture and reporting to monitor trends and improvements.	L	Yes
<b>Compliance</b>	Failure to meet statutory duties if absence levels are high. Failure to comply with H&S legislation can lead to enforcement by HSE.	Management of absences using the Supporting Attendance Policy and supporting health and wellbeing of staff. Data capture and reporting to monitor trends and improvements.	M	Yes
<b>Operational</b>	Service disruption or failure if	Management of absences using the Supporting Attendance Policy and supporting	L	Yes

	absence levels are high.	health and wellbeing of staff. Data capture and reporting to monitor trends and improvements.		
<b>Financial</b>	Costs incurred for salary or sick pay for absent workers and additional costs for temporary cover. Failure to comply with H&S legislation can lead to enforcement by HSE.	Management of absences using the Supporting Attendance Policy and supporting health and wellbeing of staff. Data capture and reporting to monitor trends and improvements.	M	Yes
<b>Reputational</b>	Failure to deliver service standards.	Management of absences using the Supporting Attendance Policy and supporting health and wellbeing of staff. Data capture and reporting to monitor trends and improvements.	L	Yes
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	Failure of the Council to achieve its strategic aims if absence levels are high.	Management of absences using the Supporting Attendance Policy and supporting health and wellbeing of staff. Data capture and reporting to monitor trends and improvements.	L	Yes

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u></b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>  <a href="#"><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></a>	The provisions within this report support the delivery of the Policy Statement through ensuring that sufficient resources are available to deliver the Council services which will achieve the policy priorities.

<a href="#">Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</a>			
Prosperous People Outcomes	Stretch	The Prosperous People theme in the LOIP indicates that all people in the City are entitled to live within our community in a manner in which they feel empowered, resilient and safe, which would include employees of the Council. Adopting the approach outlined in the report will support the workforce.	
Prosperous Economy Outcomes	Stretch	The Prosperous Economy theme in the LOIP recognises the link between a healthy economy and a healthy population and aims for everyone in Aberdeen to benefit from a healthy economy and to have equal opportunities to be economically active. This would include the Council. Ensuring that people policies are in place and applied appropriately and consistently should assist with employee relations in the organisation and with the retention of trained and valued employees. This would mean that they can continue in post and contribute to delivering effective services to citizens and businesses, indirectly contributing to the City's economy.	
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>		<p>This report links directly with the Council's <a href="#">Workforce Delivery Plan</a> - setting up our council in a way that supports our aspirations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy review principles are in place that embed early intervention and prevention</li> <li>• Governance systems are in place that mean people are not impeded by hierarchy and are empowered within our structures to take decisions at the lowest appropriate level</li> </ul>	

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	An integrated impact assessment has been completed for this policy.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not Required.
<b>Other</b>	Not required

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 [Report to Staff Governance Committee 1 November 2018 – Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy](#)

- 10.2 [Report to Staff Governance Committee 24 June 2024 - Sickness Absence for Environmental, Roads and Waste Services \(acc.gov.uk\)](#)
- 10.3 [Report to Staff Governance Committee 21 April 2025 - EAS Annual Progress Update – Occupational Health and Absence Annual Update January–December 2024](#)
- 10.4 Report to Staff Governance Committee 16 June 2025 – [Mental Health Action Plan Annual Progress Update](#)
- 10.4 [Health and wellbeing at work \(cipd.org\) report](#)

## **11. APPENDICES**

- 11.1 Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Policy
- 11.2 Supporting Attendance and Wellbeing Guidance

## **12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS**

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