

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee
DATE	13 December 2022
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Internal Audit Report AC2216 – Attendance Management
REPORT NUMBER	IA/AC2216
DIRECTOR	N/A
REPORT AUTHOR	Jamie Dale
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the planned Internal Audit report on Attendance Management

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee review, discuss and comment on the issues raised within this report and the attached appendix.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Internal Audit has completed the attached report which relates to an audit of Attendance Management.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

7.1 The Internal Audit process considers risks involved in the areas subject to review. Any risk implications identified through the Internal Audit process are detailed in the resultant Internal Audit reports. Recommendations, consistent with the Council's Risk Appetite Statement, are made to address the identified risks and Internal Audit follows up progress with implementing those that are agreed with management. Those not implemented by their agreed due date are detailed in the attached appendices.

8. OUTCOMES

8.1 The proposals in this report have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.

8.2 However, Internal Audit plays a key role in providing assurance over, and helping to improve, the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control. These arrangements, put in place by the Council, help ensure that the Council achieves its strategic objectives in a well-managed and controlled environment.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	An assessment is not required because the reason for this report is for Committee to review, discuss and comment on the outcome of an internal audit. As a result, there will be no differential impact, as a result of the proposals in this report, on people with protected characteristics.
Privacy Impact Assessment	Not required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 There are no relevant background papers related directly to this report.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Internal Audit Report AC2216 – Attendance Management

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Jamie Dale
Title	Chief Internal Auditor
Email Address	Jamie.Dale@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
Tel	(01467) 530 988



Internal Audit Report

Attendance Management

Issued to:

Andy MacDonald, Director of Customer
Isla Newcombe, Chief Officer – People & Organisational Development
Kirsten Foley, Manager – Employee Relations & Wellbeing
Vikki Cuthbert, Interim Chief Officer – Governance
Jonathan Belford, Chief Officer – Finance
External Auditor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Aberdeen City Council had 8613 employees equating to 7078 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) at the end of September 2022. Monthly absence data indicates that the proportion of staff absent ranged between 4% and 14%, averaging at around 10%, over the past three years.

As set out in the supporting attendance and wellbeing policy, the Council values the contribution made by its employees and recognises that high levels of attendance at work are key to supporting the achievement of the Council's objectives and priorities. The Council is committed to maintaining high levels of attendance whilst ensuring that employees are treated fairly, consistently, and supportively.

Objective

The objective of this audit was to obtain assurance over compliance with corporate policy and determine whether the Council's absence improvement plan is having a positive impact on attendance.

Assurance has been obtained over compliance and reporting. Following consultation with the Service, however, it has been recognised that improvement work is ongoing to address absence levels across the Council, which according to the most recently available data are higher than the Scottish local Authority mean figure of 9.71 days per employee, with the ACC figure sitting at 10.32 days per employee and changes in the context of working post COVID-19. It was determined that the best use of resources would be to gain the assurance over compliance and reporting and then collaborate with People & Organisational Development going forward. As part of planning for the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan, we will hold in-depth discussions with management to identify when would be the optimal time to conduct a further review, whilst also supporting People & Organisation Development on a consultancy basis as they implemented the ongoing improvement work.

Assurance

The supporting attendance and wellbeing policy was last reviewed and reported to the Staff Governance Committee in November 2018. It sets out that it is to be reviewed every three years. The policy is subject to annual tabletop reviews with unions and management, and guidance has been updated in the interim. Since implementation of the policy, People & Organisational Development has been working on targeted support and intervention as part of ongoing absence improvement work.

There are comprehensive and accessible written procedures covering all aspects of attendance management, and in general there is good awareness of the requirements. Records of absence are maintained on the CoreHR system, which also highlights to managers where trigger points have been reached in respect of recurring absence, to promote active management of risks to attendance.

The system is used to populate the people performance dashboard within PowerBI for monitoring employee related data, including absence. Additional data is available to direct line managers via dashboards held on the CoreHR system. More detailed and interrogable analysis on causes and trends is being developed in Power BI for Service Management Teams (SMT's), with an intention to roll this out in 2022. People & Organisational Development plans to attend Function and Cluster SMT's quarterly to assist interpretation and provide guidance, in addition to existing case by case support where necessary. This reporting roll out and attendance at meetings has now begun.

Summary data is reported to the Staff Governance Committee biannually, and actions have been set out in response to key areas of focus including increasing accessibility and accuracy of data, early intervention, and further training and support for management.

Although system data was confirmed as accurate, supporting records of attendance and wellbeing meetings, or of actions taken (e.g. phased returns) and supporting reasons, are not always being retained by individual line managers. Records were also not always accessible in the event of changes in employment or line management. There is therefore less assurance that prescribed interventions under the policy are taking place as intended. The system provides options for recording whether and when return to work interviews took place, and to retain notes and supporting medical and other documentation. If these system functions are not being used there may be a training requirement – which is being addressed through the rollout of new processes, data, and support from People & Organisational Development described above.

Access to records is not automatically delegated or transferred where employees or managers change. People & Organisational Development will be reviewing options to ensure appropriate detail of absence history is available to new managers.

Management Response

The Service welcomes the report and the findings around compliance and reporting and the recognition that guidance is comprehensive and readily available.

A full review of the Supporting Attendance Policy will be undertaken following this cycle of collaboration with audit and following the this a full audit review. The revised policy will then be reported to Staff Governance Committee. When we look at the most recently available data on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework, we see the following:

Year	ACC non teaching average days per annum	Scottish Local Gov mean non teaching average days per annum	ACC teaching average day per annum	Scottish Local Gov teaching average days per annum
2020/2021	10.32	9.71	4.16	4.16
2019/2020	11.3	11.9	5.37	6.35
2018/2019	11.87	11.49	4.87	6.23

These figures demonstrate that absence levels within ACC have risen in comparison.

Meetings with both function and Cluster SMTs are now in progress, with each Cluster having an allocated P&OD Advisor who will meet with them on a quarterly basis initially (this will be reviewed to meet the needs of each cluster) to undertake a deep dive on the absence data, identify any areas of concern and put in place any support/early interventions that are identified. In addition, the Advisors will work with Service Managers, supporting them to understand their data and monitor ongoing open absences to ensure that these are being managed appropriately. This will include refresher training for supervisors and team leaders to ensure that records are being updated appropriately in the CoreHR system. This will include the recently approved introduction of reasonable adjustment passports. The discussions held at service, cluster, and function level, as informed by the data, will be used to inform local and corporate absence improvement plans; the Internal Audit team have

indicated their willingness to consult on these and assist with the development of the plans and, following implementation of the work, will carry out a further audit of their effectiveness to inform future developments through a cycle of continuous improvement.

The Absence Report on the People Performance Dashboard continues to be further developed and ensuring that Service Managers have access to the data for their services, including historic data for employees who have moved into the service, whilst maintaining appropriate confidentiality, has been identified as a priority development area.