

Appendix - Sickness Absence Report (CGAC)

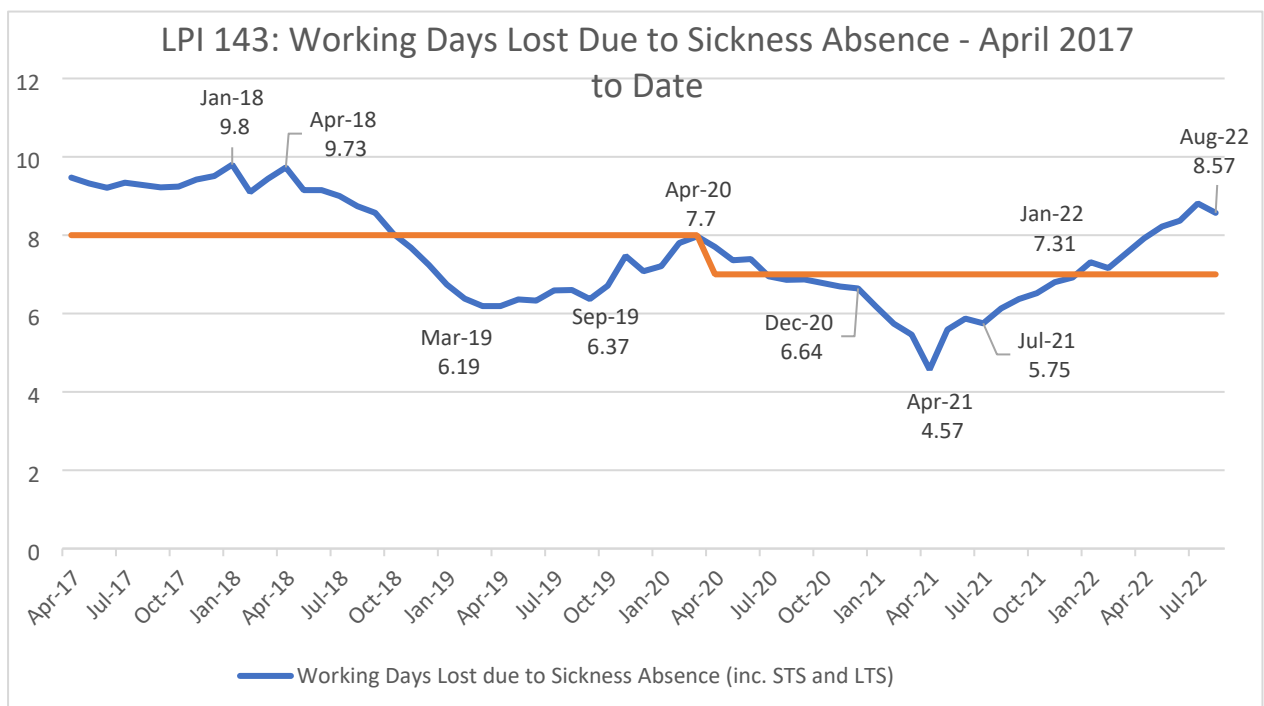
31 October 2022

This report reviews for the committee recent trends and developments regarding sickness absence for the Council looking back to before the Covid-19 pandemic up to the current time. It was also thought that it would be helpful to include at the end an update on the Council's staff turnover.

5-year summary of sickness plus impact of covid

The graph below shows sickness for the last 5 year period from April 2017 to date.

LPI 143: Working Days Lost Due to Sickness Absence – April 2017 to August 2022



In April 2018 a new Absence Management Policy was introduced across the Council. This policy was intended to make the approach to managing absences more consistent for managers and sickness absence triggers were introduced for the first time.

The new policy brought in the requirement for all managers to undertake a **Return-to-Work** meeting with any member of staff who was absent through sickness from 1 day +. This would ensure that managers are proactive in response to the absences within their team and to advise the staff member that their sickness has been noted and support was available.

Triggers were introduced for absences of 7 days or 3 bouts in a rolling calendar year requiring managers to undertake a **Welfare Meeting** (recorded on a welfare form either manually or electronically) with the individual again to be involved in the absence of staff and to provide support and to assess if there are any on-going or underlying issues that need to be addressed at an early stage. Further triggers of 14 days and 5 bouts of sickness absence in a rolling calendar year would require a formal meeting to be held under the AMP. This again would involve support for the member of staff but also allow for a stage 1 caution to be issued if deemed appropriate.

The graph indicates that following the introduction of triggers there was an initial period of 14 months when each month sickness days either decreased or remain unchanged.

Impact of Covid on sickness rates

It is acknowledged that the coronavirus outbreak and the subsequent containment measures will have a long-lasting impact on the economy, businesses and working lives. Organisations have had to make rapid changes to how they operate, including how and where jobs are carried out, as well as ensuring staff working back in the offices can work safely. Workers in turn, have had to navigate new ways of working, as well as adapt to potentially changing circumstances in their personal & working lives.

Covid and the lockdown periods including the requirement for most staff to work from home, had a huge impact on reducing the sickness rates for this period.

With staff either working from home or, if they were unable to do this due to their job role remaining at home, fewer sickness days were recorded. With long periods not attending the workplace it is possible that the threshold for staff to advise work that they were sick was higher during this time. Also, absence due to Covid illness was not recorded as sickness. It is also likely that the isolation periods where staff remained at home (including on furlough) and did not attend work (so not mixing with other staff) coupled with the general guidance to socially distance, sanitise, wear masks and not socially mix led to fewer other infections, stomach upsets etc. and could also account for less injuries if people were not out and about in the normal way. The figures for the period July 2020 to April 2021 show that average sick days per employee went as low as 4.56 days with the Long Term and Short Term following the same pattern although it should be noted that the Long Term stayed relatively static as the reasons associated with this, such a life-threatening or chronic conditions, were not overly impacted by Covid.

When the pandemic hit, the advice that was provided from Government was fast moving and we adapted our practices to reflect the differing requirements for different services and for the constantly changing environment. In the early days of the pandemic the number of days lost to Covid was impacted considerably by staff who were advised to shield and a significant number who were identified as high risk due to an existing medical condition. The majority of these staff were based at CCS. Also, the number of days not worked was added to by the requirement to self-isolate if in contact with positive cases, family members or friends in the same household as well in the later stages by Track & Trace alerts to self-isolate. Shielding for the clinically extremely vulnerable groups made up a proportion of days not worked.

Importantly it was agreed corporately that we would not record any absence for reasons related to Covid as sickness and this was not counted towards absence management statistics and formal actions under the policy in relation to individual staff.

The total number of non-worked days recorded during Covid from March 2020 – March 2022 were;

Chichester Contract Services: 5505 days

East Pallant House: 1109 days

The significant difference here is largely accounted for by the fact that East Pallant House staff were, in the main, able to WFH whilst self-isolating but CCS staff could not.

For comparison the sickness rates over 5 years were:

Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Sickness absence (average number of sick days per employee per year)	9.44	6.19	7.97	5.46	7.54

The long-term sickness (LTS) and short - term sickness (STS) figures are also shown below:

End of March 2018	LTS = 6.18 days	STS = 3.26 days
End of March 2019	LTS= 3.09 days	STS = 3.10 days
End of March 2020	LTS = 5.01 days	STS = 2.96 days
End of March 2021	LTS = 4.00 days	STS = 1.46 days
End of March 2022	LTS = 4.29 days	STS = 3.25 days

Over this 5 year period the short term sickness remains relatively static in terms of days lost per employee (the exception being the Covid year). This indicates that short term absenteeism is not a growing concern within CDC.

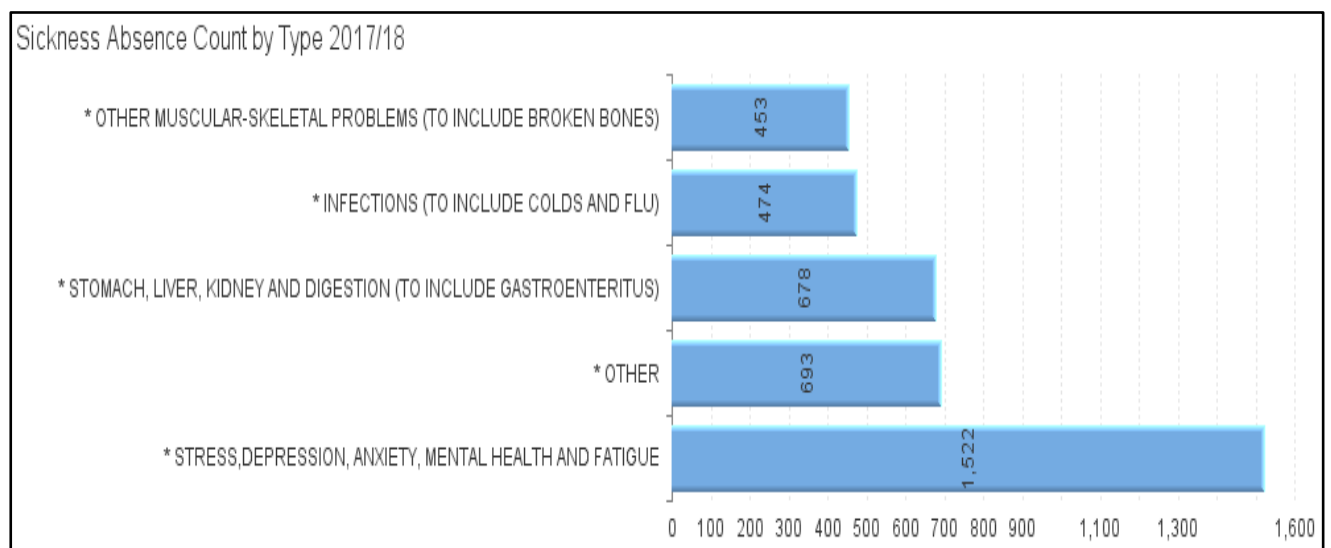
For illustrative purposes it should be noted if leavers are removed from the statistics the level of sickness absence is usually significantly lower.

For instance, for the year to the 30 September 2022, the total sickness with leavers was 4329 days and the average sick days was 8.66 days.

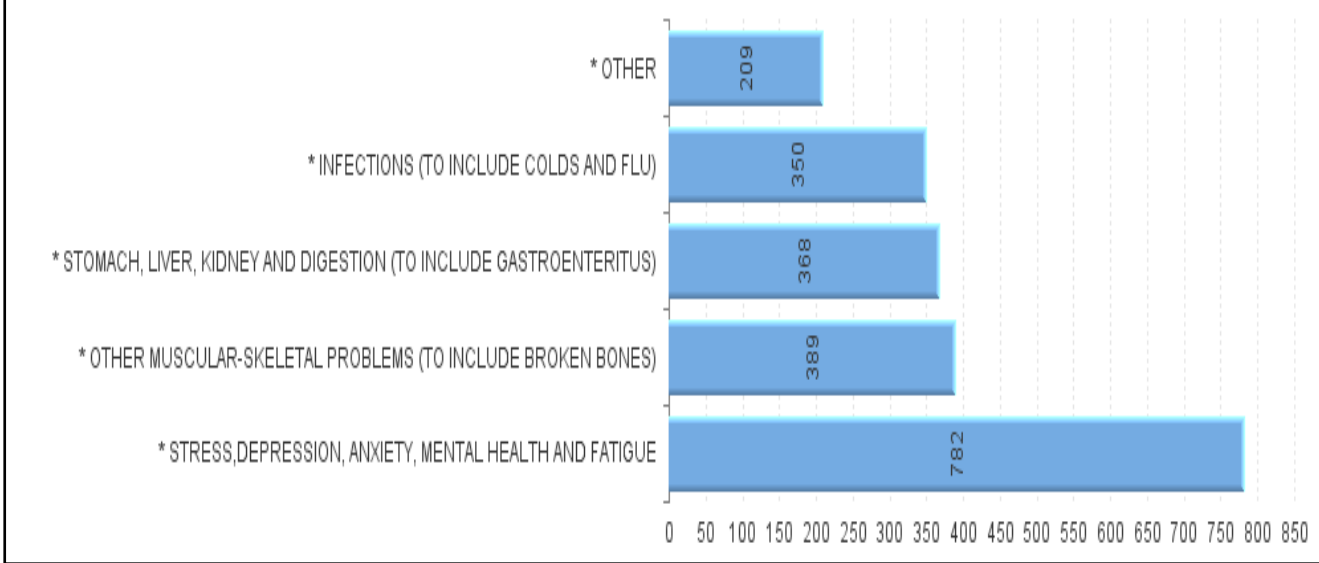
Minus the leavers the total sickness days was 3228 and the average sick days was 6.45 days.

Over a 5-year period the top 5 sickness absence reasons are as below:

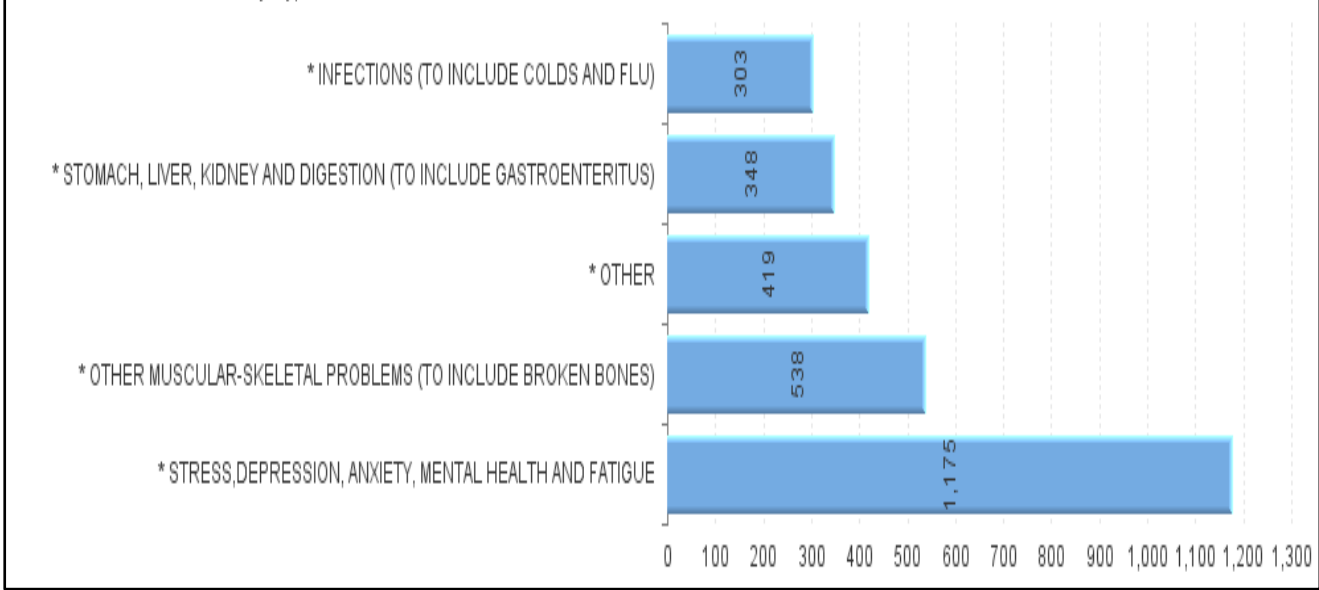
The sickness type "Other" reflects any sickness reason that cannot be captured within the 13 generic category reasons.



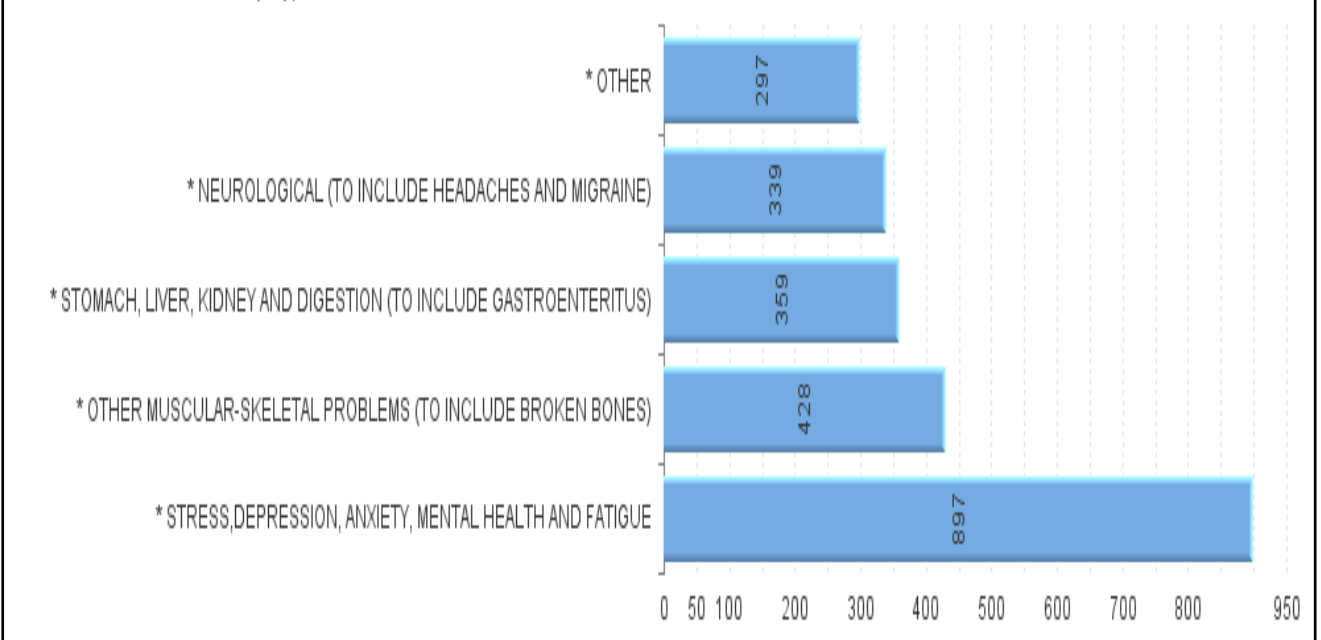
Sickness Absence Count by Type 2018/19



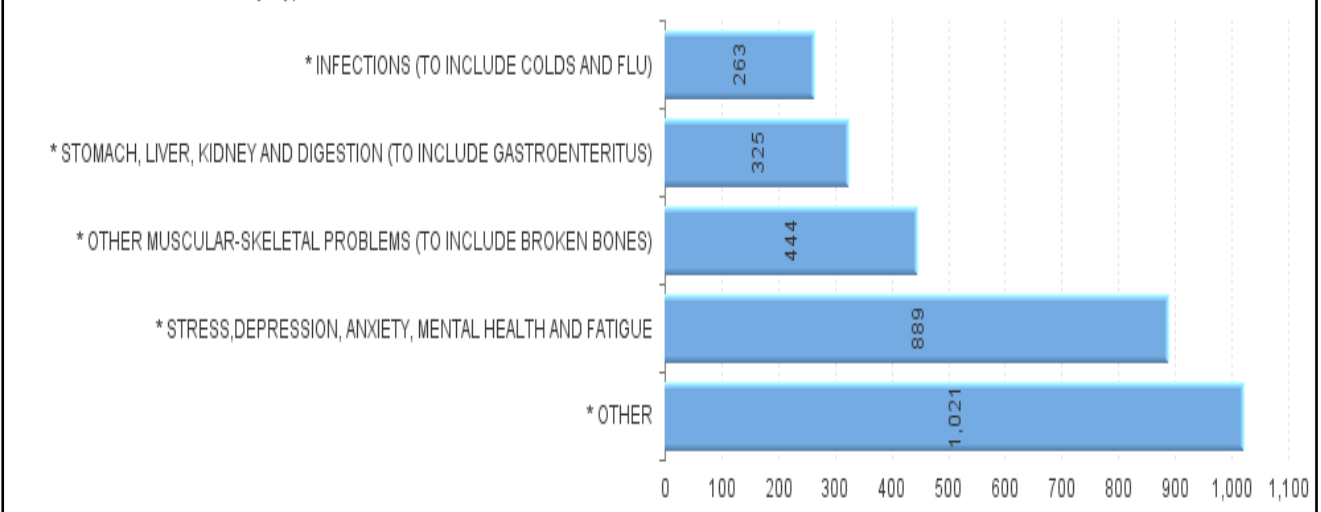
Sickness Absence Count by Type 2019/20



Sickness Absence Count by Type 2020/21



Sickness Absence Count by Type 2021/22



After the Covid restrictions came into force in late March 2020 we can see that the sickness absence average figures start to drop from July 2020 and this trend continues, reaching a low of 4.56 days recorded in April 2021.

Following a gradual return to staff coming back to work sickness rates started to increase month on month and are currently at a rate of 8.57 days at the end of August 2022.

Overall, the number of days absence per employee has remained fairly static in “normal” times hovering between the high 8s to the mid 7s and down on the 9 days + average days over the 2017 -2018 period.

Since 1st April 2022 in line with national guidance we have started to record all absences as a result of Covid as sickness and these now count towards triggers under the AMP. From

the 1 April to 31 August 2022 the number of staff absent with Covid was 45 with 183 days lost.

Managing sickness absence

The Council has a robust and proactive approach to managing absence and the levels are scrutinised each month to ensure that the correct actions are being taken and that staff and managers are supported in their different roles. We aim for consistency in applying the policy whilst also ensuring that each case is looked at individually and action taken accordingly. There is a fairly high degree of input from the HR team as they guide and advise managers through the process and through all the stages taking into account disability, life changing conditions, short term sickness problems and staff with mental health issues that can range from low mood to severe mental health conditions.

It has been noted that studies have shown that the Covid pandemic has had a worsening effect on some people with anxiety and mental health conditions and this needs to be taken into account post Covid.

The number of Absence Management 1st stage cautions that were issued in the 2021/22 year was 31. In addition to these 5 stage 2 cautions were issued. 2 staff were dismissed. Over the 5-year period we have dismissed 13 staff for absence management reasons. In January 2022, some further revisions to the Absence Management Policy (AMP) were made to make it clearer in some areas, make some minor changes and build the guidance given in relation to absence and stress, mental health, planned/emergency surgery and remote working/use of leave.

A recent change to report is that with effect from July 2022 the sickness scheme for Chichester Contract Services (CCS) was fully aligned with that for other council services meaning that CCS staff now receive full pay during the first 7 days of sickness absence instead of half.

Turnover

The following table shows the staff turnover for the council over the last 5 years.

For the year commencing 1.4.22 Q1 turnover % was 15.28% and Q2 was 17.32%

Table 3.7 Turnover to 31.3.22

Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Turnover	9.27%	14.16%	9.16%	0.82%	16.61%

Turnover for the previous year had dropped considerably due to Covid 19 impacting on recruitment and staff not wanting to leave their current employment. However, as the pandemic eased and the employment market became more buoyant more staff appear to have been looking to move to other employers or have a change of direction. This has led to much higher turnover as staff look at work/life balance/ career changes and generally other opportunities within the employment market (see attached turnover analysis).

Following Covid not just in our region but also nationally job opportunities increased and more staff than normal have left the council. Staff have given a variety of reasons for wishing to change jobs or otherwise leave and this is reflected as a snapshot in the attached turnover exit analysis figures. Also, recent studies have indicated that more of the older workforce (50-70) have, post Covid reassessed their position and have left employment for

different lifestyle opportunities. This has opened up the market for more movement and increased vacancies and opportunities.

The situation has flagged up a need for the Council to become more flexible in our recruitment processes and more agile in appointing staff once a vacancy has occurred. There is still some way to go with this and we also need to be mindful that we need to follow best and fair practices in recruitment as well as trying to appoint the best staff we can in a timely manner. We have used market supplements and other recruitment tools as well as much greater promotion of wider staff benefits to attract and retain staff.

Catherine Green / Tim Radcliffe – Human Resources

October 2022