

# WELLAND INTERNAL AUDIT CONSORTIUM

## Harborough District Council



Date: 31 December 2011

REF: H/MABS2012

## MANAGING ABSENCE 2011-12

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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#### Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide management with assurance that the controls operating within the Managing Absence procedures are adequate in regard to the key risks of fraud or error.

It has been demonstrated that levels of sickness absence can be reduced significantly through effective management. The Council has achieved significant reductions in absence levels in recent years and is now in the upper quartile of local authorities.

#### Overview

The Sick Management Policy provides clear guidance to employees on their responsibilities in relation to reporting absence including reporting lines and expected timeframes. The Policy has been recently reviewed and includes the requirement for the line manager to include the Human Resources Team in every stage of action taken in respect of employee absence.

Policies and relevant forms are easily available to all staff via the intranet or directly from the Human Resources Team.

Benchmarking activities take place with neighbouring local authorities.

The Council has an absence target level of a maximum of 8.3 days per full time equivalent (fte) per year, progress to date last reported in period 5 was 2.86, continued employee absence at this level will enable the Council to stay below the top rate of 8.3 per fte per year.

Occupational Health, return-to-work and other specialist support is available to all staff and can be requested either by the line manager or the employee.

However, during review the following areas for improvement were noted:

- There is currently no process in place for line managers to submit monthly absence returns to the corporate Human Resources Team detailing absence figures for their team. The introduction of this process would enable the corporate Human Resources Team to produce timely and accurate data for analysis. Current reports are based on the information provided in the ESSP1 and return-to-work forms which, sample testing highlighted, are not always completed within a timely manner.
- Information provided to Management Board could be improved by reporting results of benchmarking undertaken and providing analysis of reasons for absence by service area.

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- There is an inconsistency with the deadline for the submission of the return-to-work form to be submitted to the Human Resources Team which has resulted in a delay in reporting.

These issues are addressed through the recommendations in the report. As a result of these findings, the overall assurance rating is given below.

As some risks have been identified and some recommendations made, the assurance rating following this audit is:

**Sound**

Range 56 – 75

**Assessed Score 75**

### Scope

The audit included an examination of the key controls to give assurance that:

- Absence is recorded accurately and on a timely basis;
- Council policies on absence recording and absence management are applied consistently; and
- Sensitive data, captured in the course of absence management processes, is held, processed and transferred under secure conditions compliant with Data Protection legislation.

*The recommendations are listed on the action plan, followed by the detailed report.*

### Acknowledgements

The help and co-operation of the Human Resources Team was much appreciated by the Auditor.

Elaine Laycock  
Assistant Auditor

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### ACTION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION	Section number	Priority	Officer Responsible	Agreed Action and completion date
The HR Manager updates the Sick Management Policy to reflect the deadline requirement stated on the return-to-work form.	02.01.01	3 - Low	Head of Corporate and Development Services	<b>Agreed to update the policy to match the return-to-work form. Note that no flexi adjustments are made until a RTW form has been received.</b>  <b>30/04/2011</b>
The HR Manager ensures that all line managers complete the compulsory training on return-to-work interviews.	04.02.01	3 - Low	Head of Corporate and Development Services	<b>Training has taken place. The training is also on line for easy access. Exceptions can be reported.</b>  <b>Completed</b>
The HR Manager updates and reissues the Employee Early Retirement Policy ensuring that it is subsequently updated regularly to reflect changes in employment law.	04.06.01	1 - High	Head of Corporate and Development Services	<b>Policy has been updated and needs to be uploaded onto intranet.</b>  <b>30/04/2012</b>

#### NOTES:

Action Plan Grade Classification:	H-High, M-Medium, L-Low	Order of Priority of Implementation. Please note that it will normally be expected that all recommendations will be implemented within 6 months.
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The range of Assurance ratings is as follows:

Audit Opinion:	Explanation:
GOOD	Minor risks have been identified.
SOUND	Some risks have been identified and some recommendations made.
MARGINAL	A number of risks have been identified and changes should be made.
UNSATISFACTORY*	Unacceptable risks have been identified and changes must be made.
UNSOUND*	Major risks exist and fundamental improvements are required.

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A rating of “Unsatisfactory” or “Unsound” requires immediate management attention and arrangements will be made for a further review to be carried out at a later (agreed) date.