



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber - Ashford Borough Council on Tuesday, 26th June, 2018 at 7.00 pm.

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Chilton (Chairman)
Councillor Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Bartlett, Buchanan, Burgess, Dehnel, Farrell, Feacey, Knowles, Krause, Mrs Martin, Miss Martin

Agenda

	Page Nos..
1. Apologies/Substitutes	
2. Declarations of Interest	1 - 2
3. Minutes from the previous meeting for approval	3 - 6
4. Kent Savers presentation	
A presentation from Kent Savers on the role and promotion of credit unions in the Borough.	
5. Tenterden Community Hub presentation	
A presentation from Tenterden Community Hub on the work they do.	
6. Sickness/Absence 2017/2018 Report	7 - 20
7. Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection	21 - 26
8. Universal Credit Update	27 - 40

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Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct as adopted by the Council on 19 July 2012, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted). However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency reasons alone, such as:

- Membership of outside bodies that have made representations on agenda items, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: an effect on the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc; OR an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc, would both probably constitute either an OSI or in some cases a DPI].

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG’s Guide for Councillors, at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/part-5---codes-and-protocols>
- (c) If any Councillor has any doubt about the existence or nature of any DPI or OSI which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Corporate Director (Law and Governance) and Monitoring Officer or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democratic Services as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **22nd May 2018**.

Present:

Cllr. Michael (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Bartlett, Burgess, Farrell, B. Heyes, Knowles, Krause, Miss. Martin, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Webb.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Cllr. Heyes and Mrs. Webb attended as Substitute Members for Cllrs. Buchanan and Feacey.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Chilton, Feacey.

Also Present:

Cllrs. N. Bell, Galpin, Shorter.

Director of Finance & Economy, Head of Corporate Property and Projects, Head of Legal & Democracy, Head of Finance, Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Comms, Senior Accountant, Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer, Member Services Officer.

014 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 24th April 2018 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

015 Agenda and Tabled Papers

A Member commented that she had not received a hard copy of the agenda in the post until Saturday, and considering the large volume of papers attached to this meeting's agenda, she wondered if in future the papers could be sent out any earlier.

The Committee considered whether the meeting should be carried over to a forthcoming date owing to the large amount of papers pertaining to the meeting. Some Members expressed concerns that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were not being given a thorough opportunity to scrutinise particular issues, in certain situations when not all of the relevant papers were available or were delayed. Another Member pointed out that there had been a large amount of questions submitted regarding the report for this agenda and this had subsequently generated a lot of work for Officers, and they had to be allowed time to undertake this extra work. He assured Members that any delays with providing papers were not intentional. The Vice Chairman in the Chair agreed to look further into this issue and report back to the Committee.

016 Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 4 2017/18

The Corporate and Scrutiny Overview Officer introduced this item and explained that the report provided an overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 4 2017/18 and the whole of 2017/18.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following points/questions were raised:

- A Member asked how the Town's vacancy rates (recorded on Page 10 of the report) compared to other Boroughs in Kent. The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer confirmed that Ashford's rates were lower than other Kent Boroughs and were considered good compared to national figures.
- A question was asked querying what methods were used to measure footfall. The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer explained that there were four counters placed at various sites in the town centre. An infrared sensor recorded each person that walked past it. However, one person could be counted multiple times if they were to walk back and forth in front of the counter. The figures were therefore reconciled to account for duplication. Year on year a clear increase in footfall had been seen.
- A Member asked for further detail on statistics concerning the decline in smokers in Ashford. The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer advised that the figures had been sourced primarily from The Kent Public Health Observatory and Public Health England and indication was that the use of e-cigarettes had contributed to smoking cessation.
- The Member raised a concern that some of the statistics within the Performance Report were not wholly relevant and said it would be more beneficial to have sight of figures that required further examination by the Committee. The Vice Chairman in the Chair agreed that the data within the report needed to be meaningful. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT added that a new reporting process had been considered and would be created at Management Team level to review service performance on a monthly basis. He encouraged Members to discuss any concerns or ideas that they had with the Portfolio Holders.

- The Vice Chairman in the Chair asked if the deployment of staff across services to address capacity issues could create problems further down the line, since it was felt that staff were already working to their full capability. The Portfolio Holder explained that each situation would be discussed at Management Team level and it was continually evolving. It was a case of identifying priorities alongside any shortfalls and tackling each scenario appropriately to ensure staff were managed correctly. A Member added that concerns over staffing levels had been raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Task Groups meetings and that something was drastically wrong. She suggested this issue be raised at a separate meeting. The Portfolio Holder advised that the year-end figures were due to be published shortly and the information demonstrated satisfactory outcomes for the financial year.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

017 Overview and Scrutiny 2018/18 Annual Report and 2018/19 Work Programme

The Vice Chairman in the Chair introduced this item and commented that the Committee had covered a good variety of subjects.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

018 Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection

A Member asked whether the topic of additional resources should be included to be discussed as part of the Mid Term Financial Plan at Overview and Scrutiny in September 2018. The Vice Chairman in the Chair agreed.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

019 Exclusion of the Public

The Vice Chairman in the Chair then read the resolution to exclude the press and members of the public.

Resolved:

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of this item as it was likely that there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 where

in the circumstances the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

020 A Better Choice for Property Limited – Trading Company

Some Members of the Committee suggested that this session be adjourned in order to provide more time for the tabled papers to be reviewed. The Vice Chairman in the Chair suggested instead that, the opportunity to hear the answers provided by Officers should be taken at this time, since many of the questions had been emailed in advance to the Committee prior to the Meeting.

The Committee then considered the exempt tabled papers that contained responses to questions submitted previously by Members, and Officers provided further detail to enquiries made at the meeting. The Vice Chairman in the Chair thanked the Officers and Portfolio Holders for their time and hard work.

Recommendations:

- That**
- i) the six monthly report to TEB should include a table setting out affordable social rented property, local needs housing and specific accommodation for vulnerable people**
 - ii) TEB’s right to appoint Directors is no longer subject to approval by the Leader**
 - iii) the appointment of an experienced non-executive Director to minimise the risk of governance failings**
 - iv) a firm be appointed to carry out a review of the tax affairs of the Property Company and address whether the UK Corporate Interest Restriction rules apply to the Property Company as it is “grouped” with the Council and whether the Criminal Finances Act 2017 could apply to Councillors**
 - v) Cabinet to change the financial guidelines to ensure that a Director can no longer act singularly to purchase property**

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Agenda Item No:



Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Sickness Absence 2017/18

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

Consider the information provided in this report and advise officers:

1. If the committee would wish to receive a further update in a year's time
 2. If any further information is required
-

Date of O&S meeting: 26 June 2018

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Chilton

Relevant Portfolio(s): Cllr Alan Pickering – Portfolio Holder Human Resources and Customer Services

Summary: This report provides annual information on sickness absenteeism for 2017/18

Exempt from Publication: **NO**

Background Papers: **none**

Contact: Joy Cross
HR Manager
joy.cross@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330 400

Sickness Absence 2017/18:

Introduction and Background

1. This report provides members with sickness absence figures for the financial year 2017/18
2. Data is presented in the following sections in order to provide more in-depth information to Members for their review; number of day's sickness absence per employee, comparison with previous year, chronological comparison information, service comparisons, national and sector comparison information, review of sickness absence reasons, well-being focus.
3. The reported figures for Ashford Borough Council employees have been obtained from all sickness absences recorded on the iTrent Payroll and HR system.
4. The figures are presented as the average number of working days lost to sickness per FTE (full time equivalent) employee averaged during the reported period.
5. The council's level of annual sickness absence is compared with previously reported figures, nationally reported figures and with some of our neighbouring authorities.

Sickness Absence 2017/18

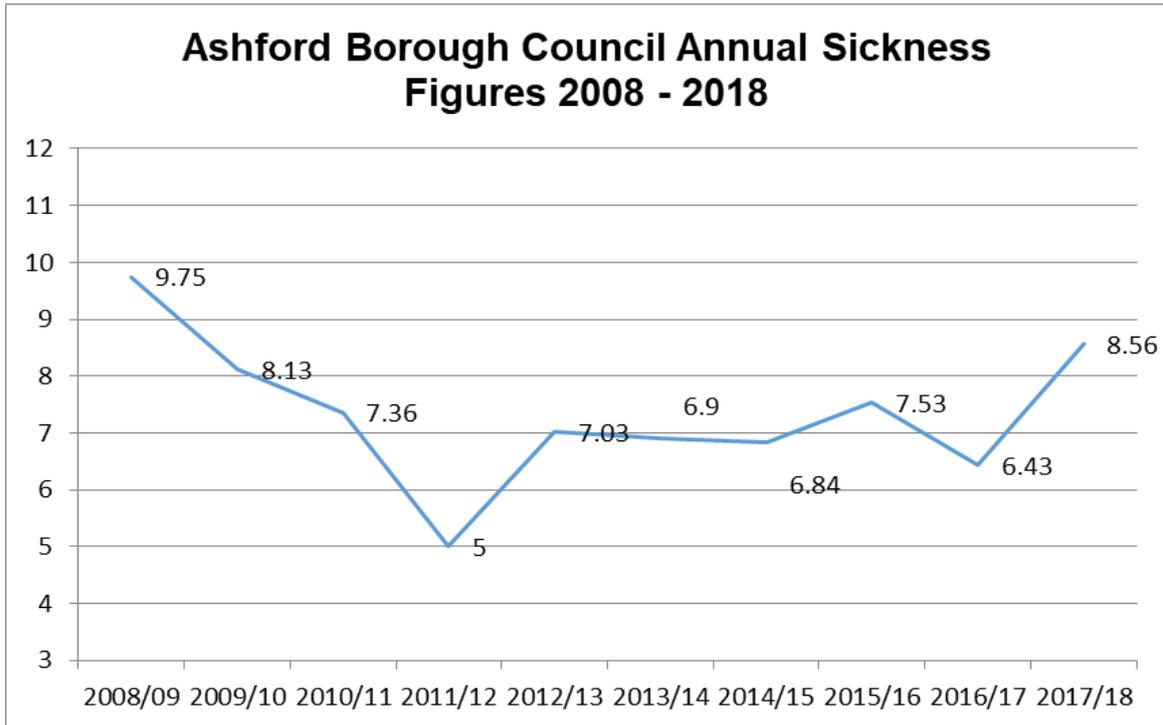
6. A total of 3,495 days (averaged)ⁱ were lost to sickness absence across the 12 month period from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. Based on the average number of 408.07 FTEⁱⁱ (full time equivalent) employees across the 12 month period, the total amount of working days 3,495 days lost due to sickness equals 8.56 days per FTE.
7. 319 employees incurred sickness absence periods during the period 2017/2018. A total of 136 employees 29% (average headcount)ⁱⁱⁱ of employees did not incur any periods of sickness absence during the 12 month period. This figure remains broadly constant when compared to last year's figure of 32%, a third of employees with 100% attendance.
8. Of the 3,495 days lost due to sickness absence within the period 55% of this absence is categorised as short term absence, namely absence lasting up to 4 weeks / 20 days. Therefore 45% of absenteeism is categorised as long-term and, in this period lasted up to 217 days.
9. The report deals with issues relating to long term sickness absence and short term sickness absences separately as the nature of these two types of sickness absence, and the way in which they are supported, differs significantly. It is therefore useful to consider the average days lost in each category.
 - Average days lost due to short term sickness absence equals 4.71 days per FTE.
 - Average days lost due to long term sickness absence equals 3.85 days per FTE.

Comparison With Last Year

10. Last year a total of 2,525.27 days (averaged) were lost to sickness absence across the 12 month period from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017; there has been an increase of 969.73 days this year. There has also been an increase in the average number of employee, last year we reported an average FTE (full time equivalent) of 392.15 and this figure has increased by 15.92 FTE.
11. The total amount of working days lost due to sickness for 2017/2018 equates to 8.56 days per FTE; this figure has increased by 2.13 days from the previous year.
12. The number of employees incurring sickness absence remains broadly constant when compared with the previous year. In 2016/2017 300 employees incurred sickness absence periods whereas this figure is now 319 employees. Last year, based on average headcount, 32% of employees did not incur any periods of sickness absence during the 12 month period; this years figure is 29%. Therefore a similar number of employees are taking more time off work due to sickness absence.
13. This year 55% of absence is categorised as short term absence and 45% of absence is categorised as long term. Last year 27% of sickness absence was short term and 73% was due to long term sickness absence. Within the long term category the longest sickness absence period was 91 days whereas this year the figure is 217 days. Long term sickness absence was reported in cases relating to 27 employees previously this figure was 12. The figures indicate two separate threads;
 - employees have experienced more short term absence than previously
 - a greater number of employees are taking long term absence over a longer period.
14. The reason for the increase in short sickness absence is thought to be well managed and attributable to more focused management, increased awareness of mental ill health and increased HR resources.
15. The increase in long term sickness absence has been well managed and 24 of the 27 employees have either returned to work or left the employment of the council.

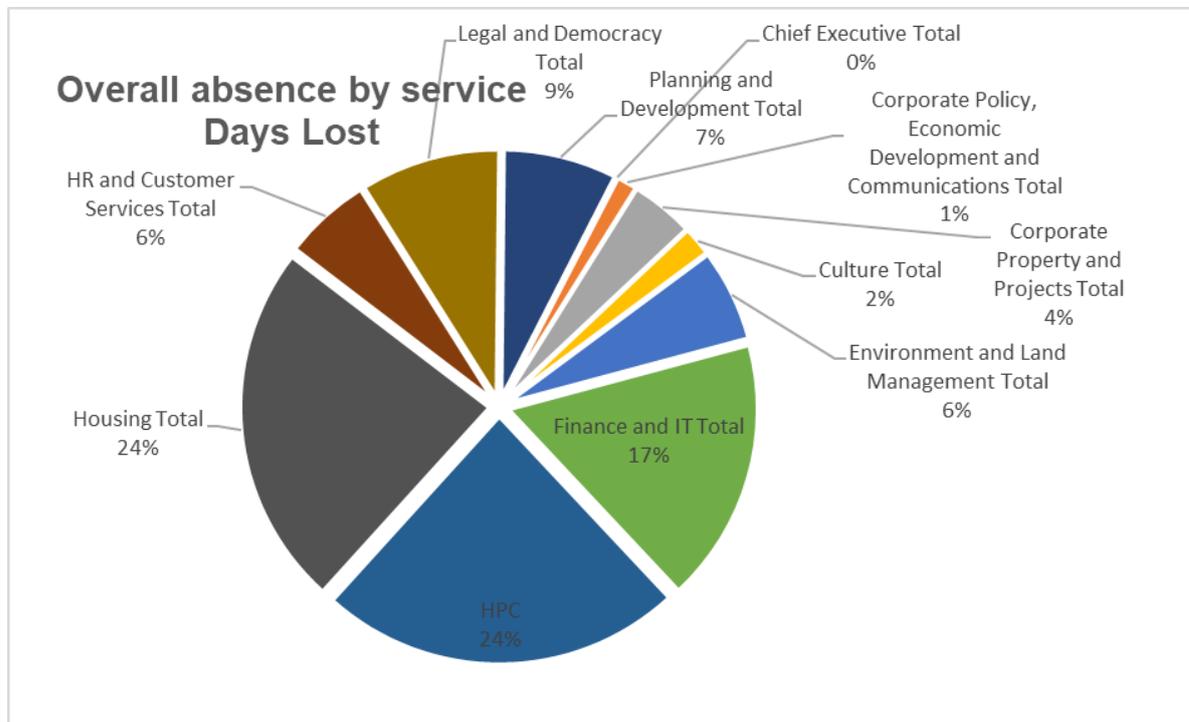
Chronological Comparison Information

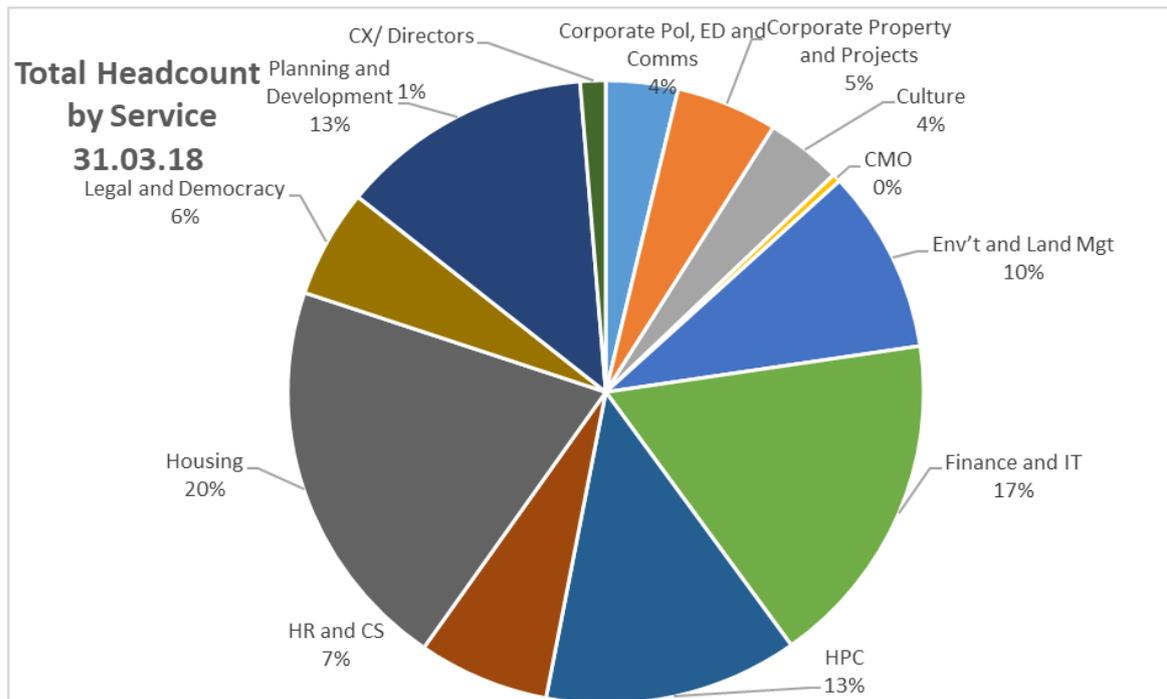
16. The chart featured below shows the number of day's sickness absence per employee (FTE) for each financial year since 2008/2009. The figures demonstrate that sickness absence levels have remained within a constant range in recent years although this year's figure is notably higher at 8.56 days FTE than the previous year.



Service Comparison

17. The charts below show how absence is distributed amongst services with Days Lost by Service area being displayed against Total Headcount at 31st March 2018.





18. There is clear overall correlation between these two charts indicating that absence is distributed evenly across the organisation rather than being disproportionately prevalent in one particular area. The only minor exception to this is in the Health, Parking and Community Safety Service where overall figures are inflated owing to a small number of long-term absences.

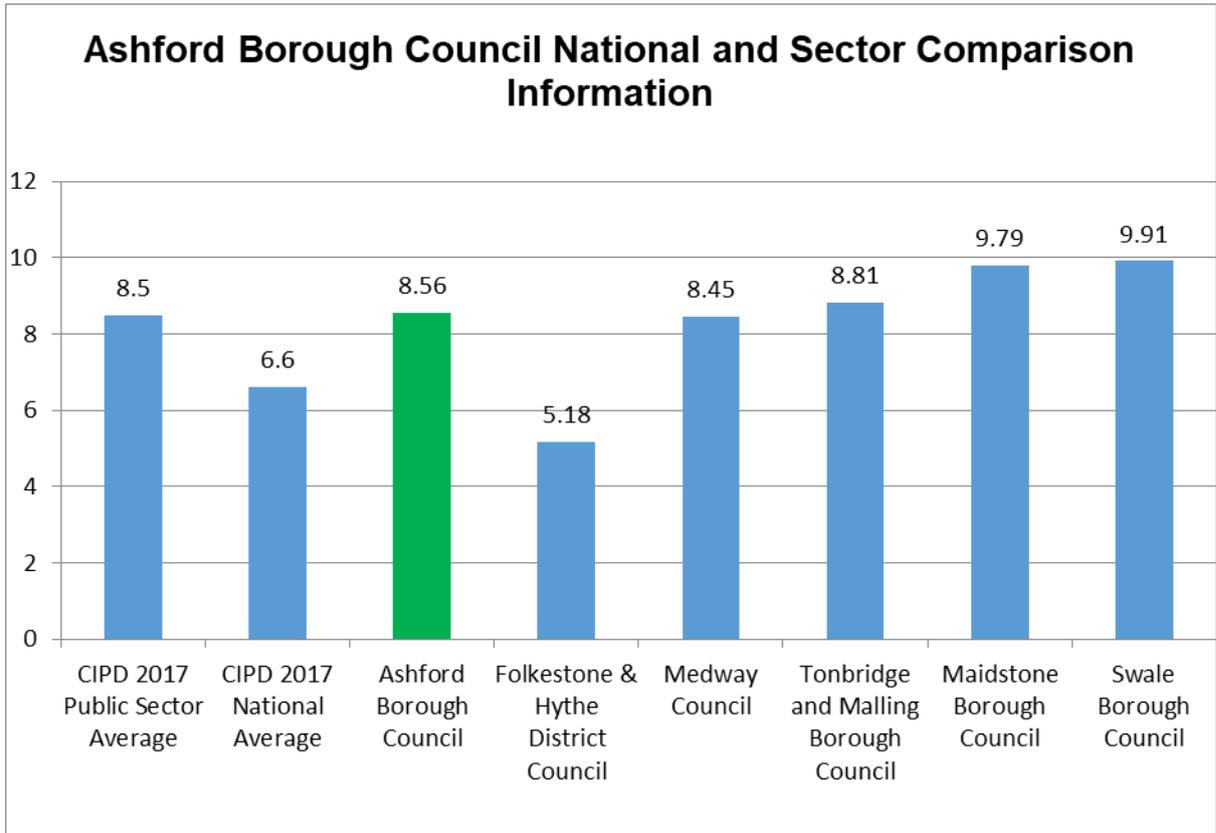
National Comparison Information and Sector Comparison Information

19. The 2017 Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey (was the Absence Management survey) produced by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported on national absence trends across sectors. The survey reported a national average sickness absence rate of 6.6 days per employee (FTE).

20. The CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey reported an average sickness rate for the public sector of 8.5 days per employee (FTE); this is a static figure from the previous year.

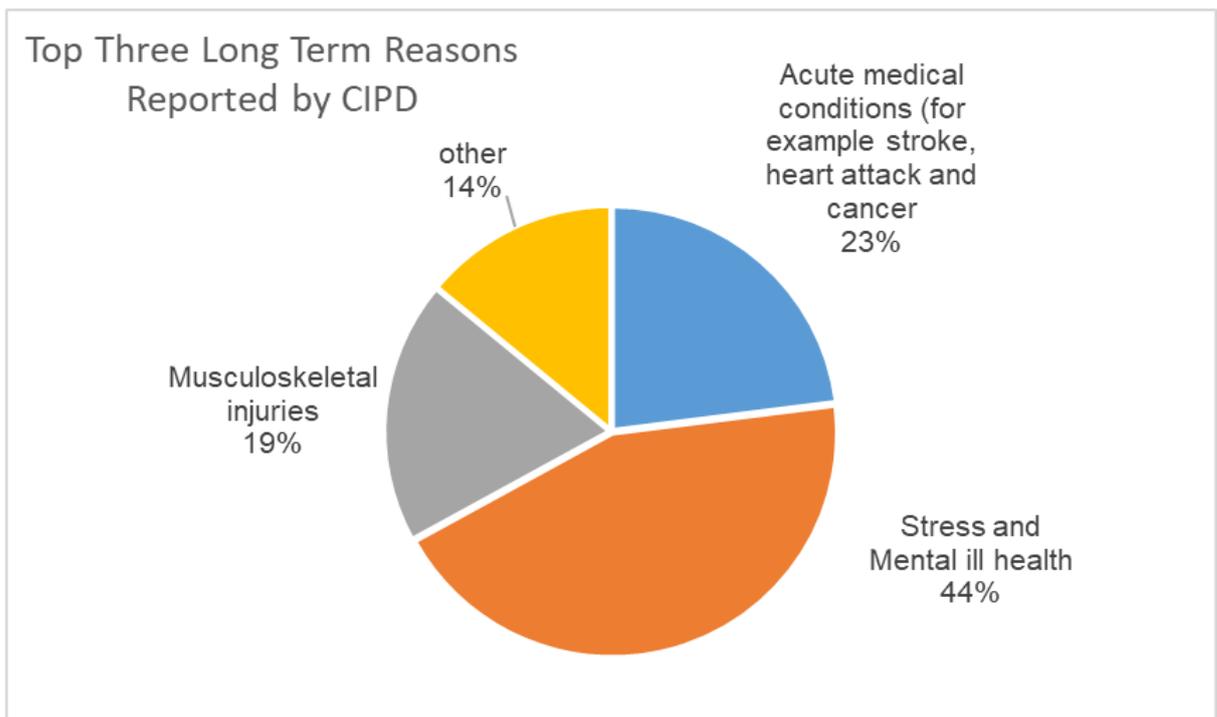
21. The chart below shows how the council compares with the afore mentioned national averages.

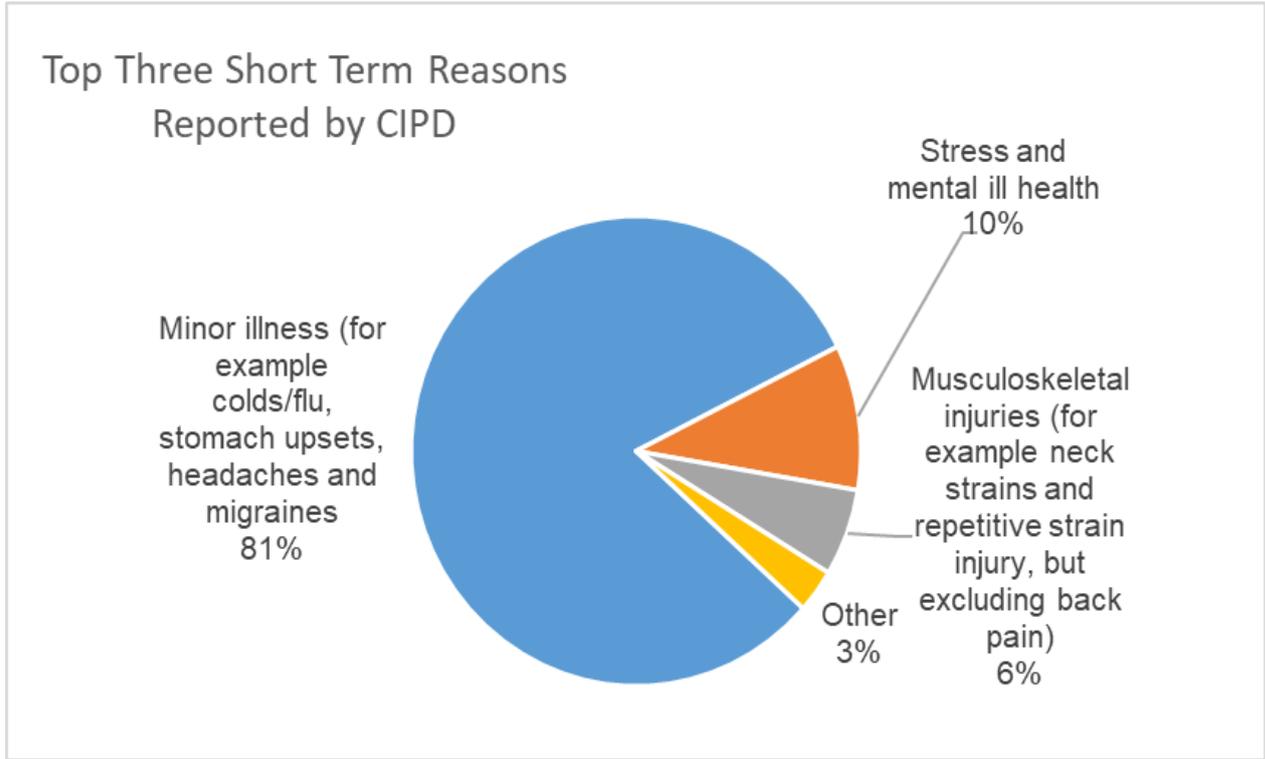
22. Additionally, the chart below shows how the council compares with reported sickness levels of some of our neighbouring local authorities, according to data reported within the Kent HR Network.



Review of sickness absence by reason

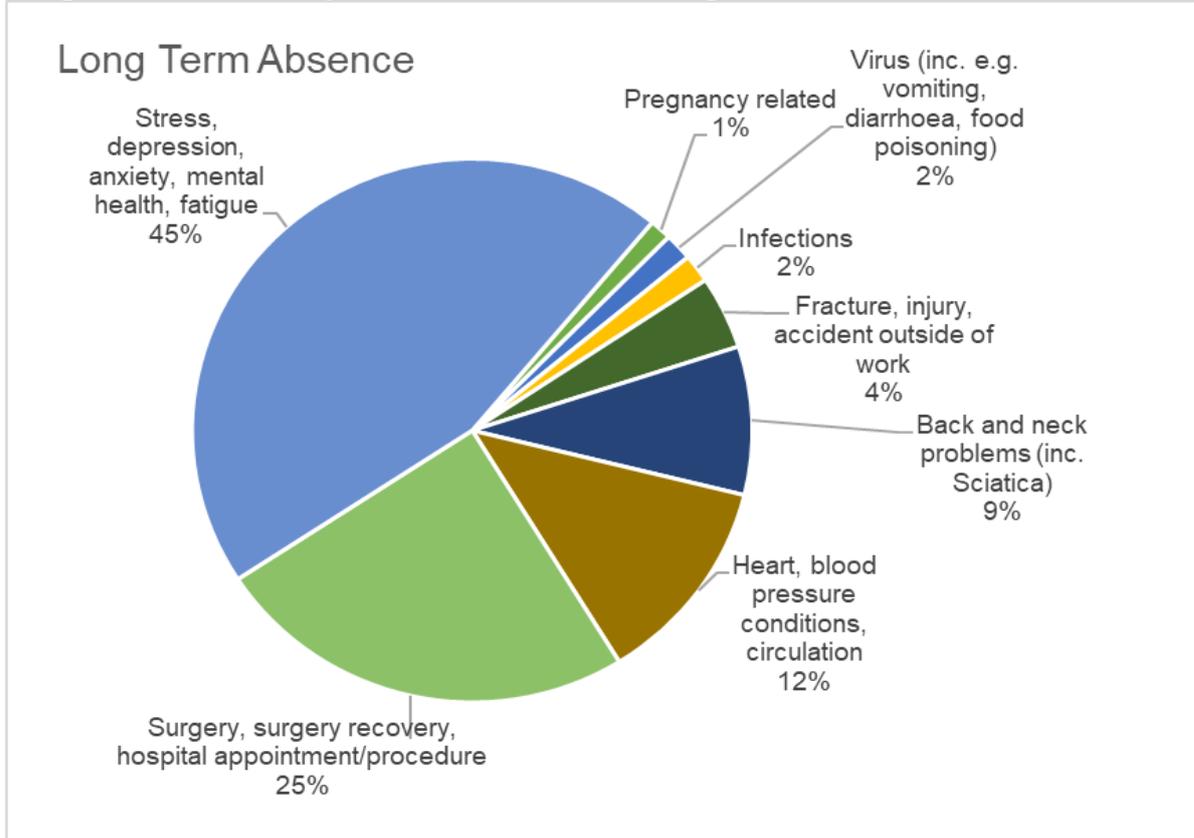
23. The CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work survey reported on the most prevalent reasons for both long term sickness absence and short term sickness absence (up to four weeks).





24. The two charts below detail the reasons^{iv} for our long term and short term sickness absence and as mentioned below the absence reasons follow national trends. Further details on absence reasons are featured in Appendix One and Two.

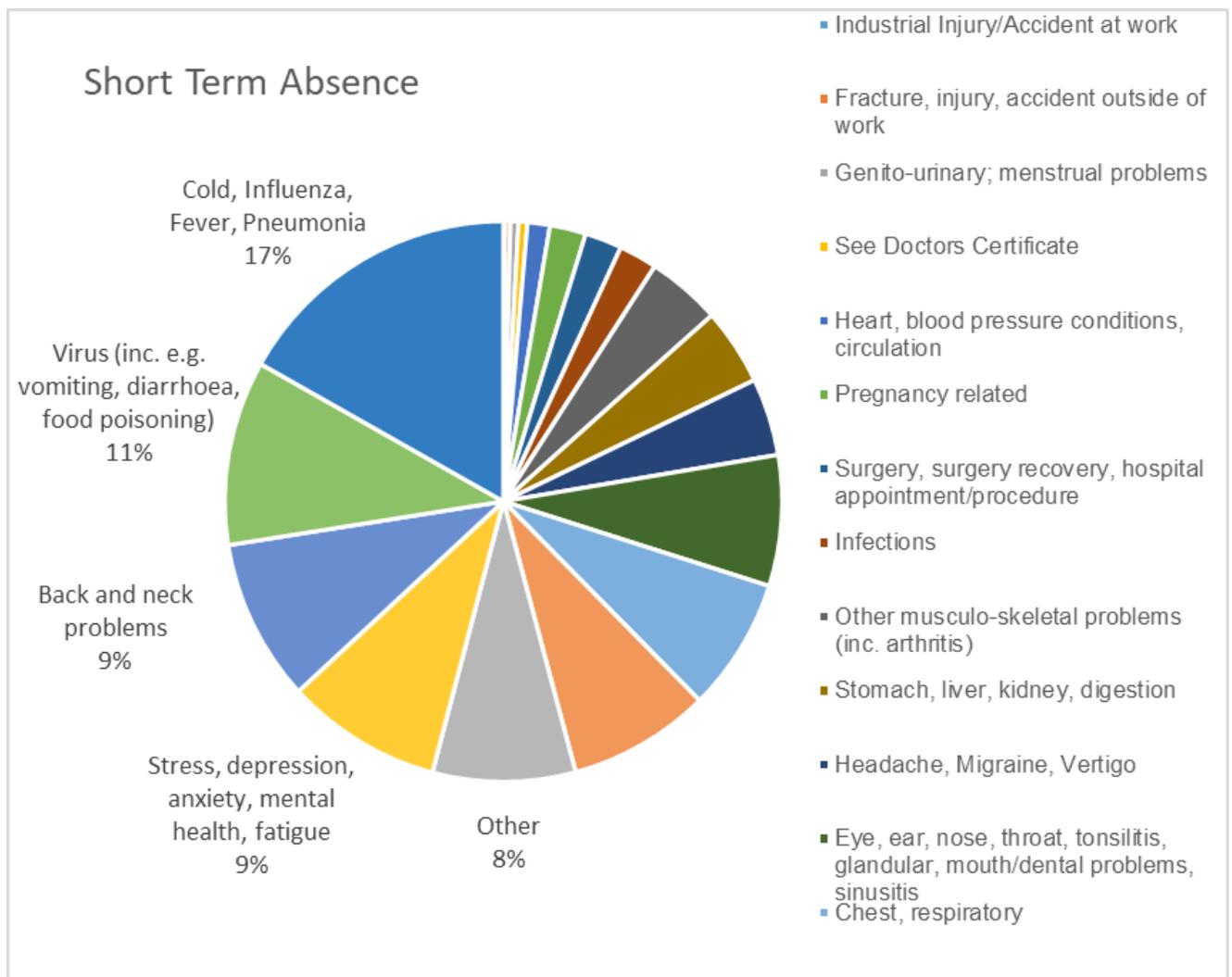
25. Long Term Absence By Reason – Ashford Borough Council



26. Comparison with National trends - long term.

- CIPD trends indicate that 44% of long term absence is caused by stress and mental ill health; 45% of long terms absence in the council is attributable to stress, depression, anxiety, mental health and fatigue.
- 23% of long term absence according to the CIPD is due to acute medical conditions such as cancer, stroke, heart conditions. Surgery, surgical recovery, hospital appointments/procedures make up 25% of long term sickness absence within the council; we know from detailed case knowledge of these instances that the surgery experienced by these employees was related to cancer.

27. Short Term Absence By Reason



28. Comparison with National trends - short term.

- The CIPD report that 81% of short term absence is caused by a wide range of minor ailments such as cold, flus, stomach upsets and headaches. This trend is reflected on the council's data with cold, Influenza, Fever and Pneumonia, together with Virus

(inc vomiting and diarrhoea) making up 28% of our short term absenteeism. Other minor ailments can be viewed in Appendix One.

- Mental ill health makes up 10% of short term absence within the council and this figure is represented in the CIPD's figures (9%). Similarly back and neck problems and make up 9% of reported short term absence by the CIPD and the council.

Well-Being Focus

29. The increase in mental ill health (including stress) as the major cause of sickness absence is recognised as a national trend and this trend is mirrored within the council.

30. The council utilises support from an occupational health provider to provide medical opinion and an employee assistance programme to provide online, telephone and face to face counselling.

31. In addition, to the supportive health provider mechanisms in place to assist employees who suffering from mental ill health; a number of proactive well being initiatives are offered to council employees in recognition of this nationwide health trend.

32. This year initiatives have included:

- Regular articles on wellbeing within monthly staff communications.
- Workplace Wellbeing Week to focus on proactive wellbeing for employees.
- Raising awareness of the counselling services provided by Health Assured
- Raising awareness of lifestyle benefits offered by CSSC & Reward-Gateway
- Wellbeing Symposium

33. This year initiatives have been in addition to the overall support provided to employees and managers in the area of sickness absence, an overview of these is provided in Appendix Three.

Conclusion

34. Sickness absence levels have increased for the council but it should be noted that they reflect overall national trends both in terms of absence levels and absence reasons.

35. A summary of the figures within this report are summarised below

Description	2017-2018	2016-2017
Number of days (averaged) lost due to sickness absence across the 12 month period from 1 st April to 31 st March	2,525.27	969.73
Total amount of working days lost due to sickness within the year FTE	8.56	6.43

Number of employees incurring sickness absence	319	300
% of employees taking no time off work due to sickness absence	32%	29%
% of short term and long term absence	55% and 45%	27% and 73%
Number of cases of long term sickness absence	27	12

36. Although the levels of sickness absence have increased by 2.13 days per FTE for 2017/18. Sickness absences are actively managed via HR assistance, supportive health provider mechanisms and proactive well being initiatives.

37. Sickness absence will continue to be well managed in the future through the planned review of the Sickness Policy and the incorporation of the core and enhanced standards detailed within the *Stevenson / Farmer Review of Mental health and employers - Thriving at Work*.

Portfolio Holder Comments

38. To be provided at the Committee.

Contact and Email

Joy Cross HR Manager joy.cross@ashford.gov.uk 01233 330 400

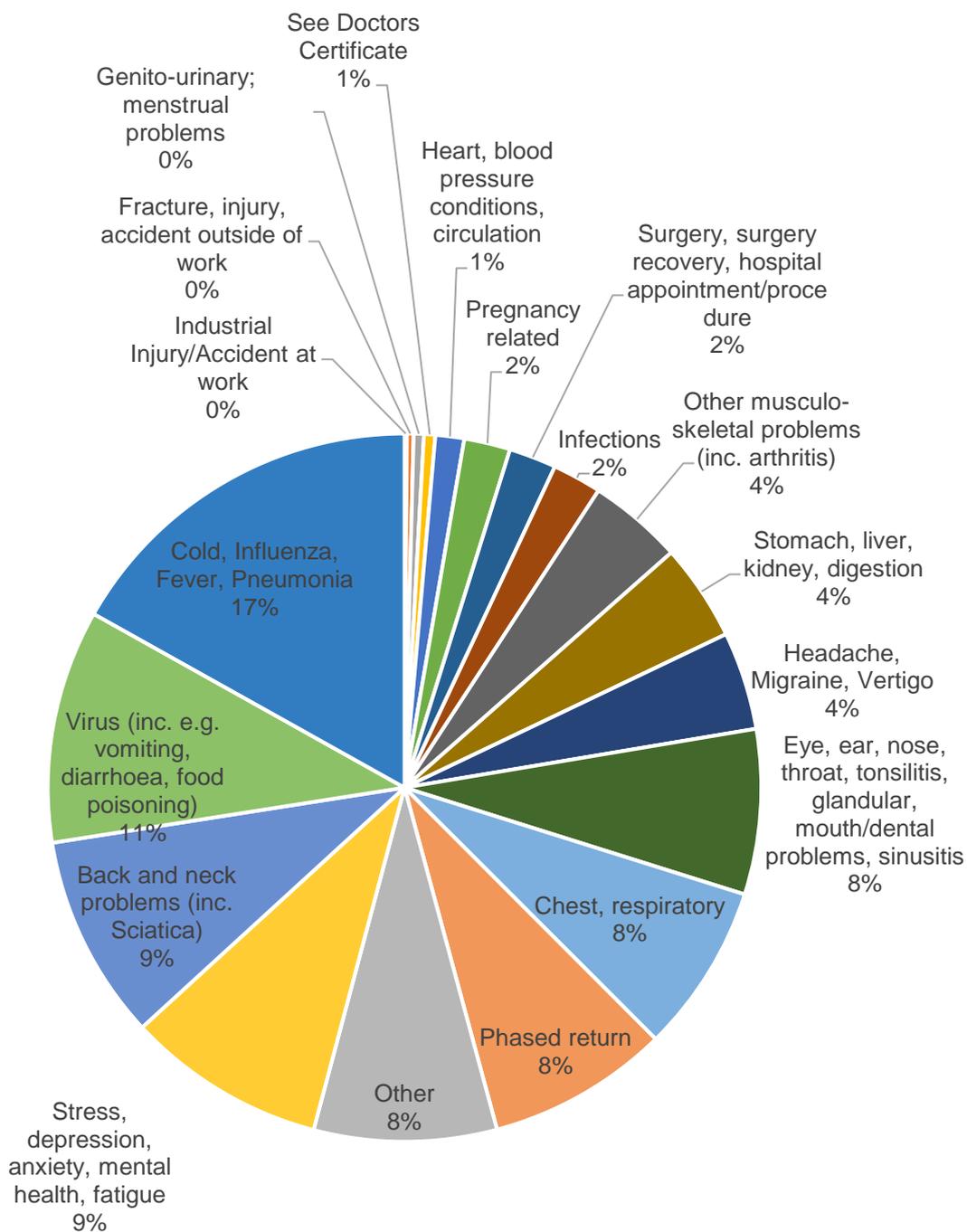
ⁱ A total of 3,495 days were lost to sickness absence across the 12 month period from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 - based on 25,862.32 hours lost / 7.4 average working day.

ⁱⁱ Average number of FTE employees is annualised by taking the number of FTE employees at the beginning and end of the review period / 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Average headcount for the review period rather than FTE equals 455.5 employees

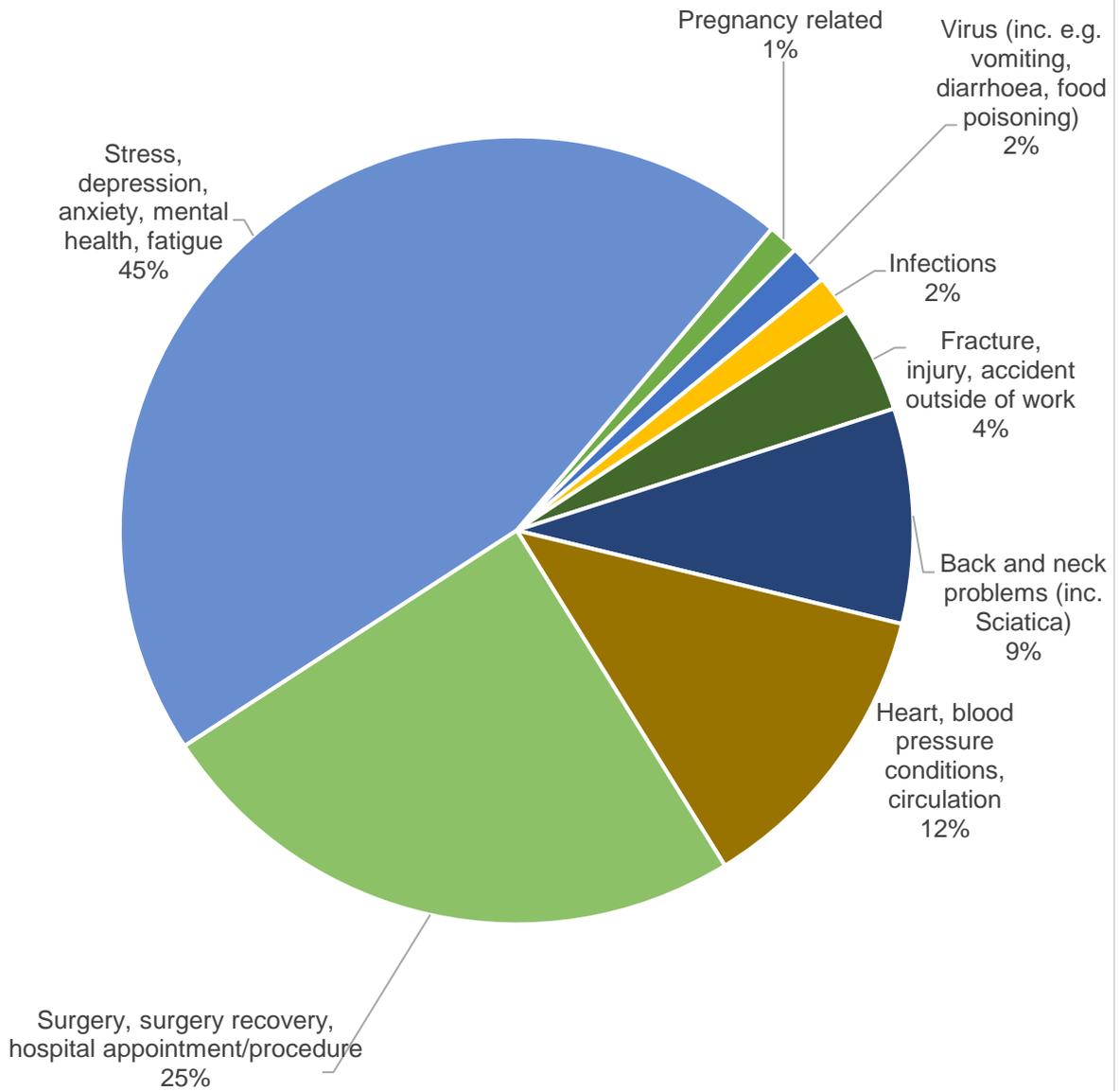
APPENDIX ONE

Short Term Absence



APPENDIX TWO

Long Term Absence



Sickness Absence 2017/18**Summary of support processes for managing sickness absence at Ashford Borough Council**26th June 2018

The following summary is provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the processes in place to support employees and managers with regard to sickness absence.

- Pre-commencement health questionnaire, aimed at understanding any health concerns the employee has after offer of employment and focusing on any reasonable adjustments that are specifically required.
- Clear guidelines for employees, issued as part of their induction, regarding absence reporting procedures.
- Established return to work process following sickness absence, which consists of a Return to Work Interview between employee and manager to discuss the absence including;
 - a focus on the seriousness and frequency of the absence,
 - ensuring that the employee is well enough to return,
 - consideration of a phased return, light duties, alternative duties, reduced hours,
 - discussion on alternative support available such as medical signposting,
 - requirement for an occupational health referral,
 - discussion of overall sickness record.
- Regular reporting from HR Officers to proactively flag with managers when employee absence levels are higher than expected.
- Access to occupational health practitioners in the event of long term sickness absence.
- Access to Health Assured, an employee assistance programme which provides employees with a 24 telephone helpline for counselling and information services.
- Access to up to eight face to face counselling sessions, per employee, per issue.
- Access to Active Care a proactive occupational health support service provided by Health Assured to employees in the first two weeks of absence (where that absence is due to mental ill health).
- Ability to refer employees proactively to a counsellor via Health Assured.
- Provision of specific support to employees diagnosed with a serious or terminal illness.
- Regular articles on health and wellbeing within monthly staff communications.
- Workplace Wellbeing Week focused on proactive wellbeing for employee's activities including NHS health checks, nutrition workshops, financial wellbeing, etc.
- Provision of health and wellbeing benefits offered by CSSC.
- Provision of lifestyle benefits offered by Reward-Gateway.
- Raising awareness of the counselling services provided by Health Assured.
- Training for employees and managers on recognising mental ill health in the workplace and improving personal resilience.
- Provision of sickness pay subject to length of service and the conditions contained within the Conditions of Service.

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Tracker – 26 June 2018

Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
Universal Credit roll-out preparation	26 June 2018	Finance and IT	An update for members on preparatory work carried out by the council in readiness for the expanded roll-out of Universal Credit in the borough.
Annual Sickness Report 2018/19	26 June 2018	HR & Customer Services	An annual update on sickness absenteeism for the council's employees.
Presentation on Credit Unions	26 June 2018		The O&S Committee to hear from Kent Savers and Tenterden Community Hub on the role and promotion of credit unions in the Borough. This item was identified as part of the discussion on the Housing Framework Annual Report at the October 2017 Committee.
Resident Management Companies and the Chilmington Management Organisation	24 July 2018	CMO	Following discussions raised during scrutiny of the 2018/19 draft budget, the Committee requested an overview of the Chilmington Management Organisation model in comparison to a 'traditional' resident management company; and the wider potential application of the CMO model.
Quarter 1 2018/19 performance	24 July 2018	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Information and analysis of performance against key performance indicators for the council for quarter 1 of 2018/19.
Scrutiny of the draft 2019/20 budget (Medium Term Financial Plan)	25 September 2018	Finance and IT	A summary of the Budget Scrutiny process and summary of the Medium Term Financial Plan will be presented to the Committee for Members to identify any overarching budgetary risks for consideration by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group.
Update on Implementation of Air Quality Strategy	25 September 2018	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	An update on the implementation of the council's Air Quality Strategy arising from the adopted Air Quality recommendations.

Housing Statement	23 October 2018	Housing/ Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	An overview of the council's Housing Statement (reported to the Committee in October 2017) following consultation.
Quarter 2 2018/19 performance	23 October 2018	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Information and analysis of performance against key performance indicators for the council for quarter 2 of 2018/19.
Kent Fire and Rescue Service	27 November 2018		Kent Fire and Rescue Service to be asked to attend and present on their capacity and resources in light of a lack of voluntary support.
Universal Credit roll-out progress	22 January 2019	Finance and IT	An update for Members on the early impacts and outputs of the wider Universal Credit roll-out in the borough.
Budget Scrutiny Task Group - Final report	22 January 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications/ Finance and IT	Presentation of the findings of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for discussion and approval by the Committee.
Community Safety Partnership and Safeguarding updates	26 February 2019	Community Safety and Wellbeing/ Housing	Annual updates to the Committee on the work of the Community Safety Partnership and the council's work on safeguarding adults and children at risk.
Quarter 3 2018/19 performance	26 February 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Information and analysis of performance against key performance indicators for the council for quarter 3 of 2018/19.
Town centre framework	26 March 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Following discussions raised during scrutiny of the 2018/19 draft budget, the Committee has requested a report on the town centre placemaking framework
Void properties	23 April 2019	Housing	Following discussions raised during scrutiny of the 2018/19 draft budget, the Committee has requested a report on work undertaken to address void properties in the PSL sector.
Broadband provision and planning	23 April 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications/ Planning and Development	Following discussions raised during scrutiny of the 2018/19 draft budget, the Committee has requested a report on the council's work on delivering high-speed broadband to new and existing properties within the borough.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report and 2019/20 Work Programme	28 May 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	The council's Constitution requires the O&S Committee to make an annual report to full Council. This report will summarise the Committee's work over the past year and detail its work programme for 2019/20.
Quarter 4 2018/19 performance	28 May 2019	Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications	Information and analysis of performance against key performance indicators for the council for quarter 4 of 2018/19.

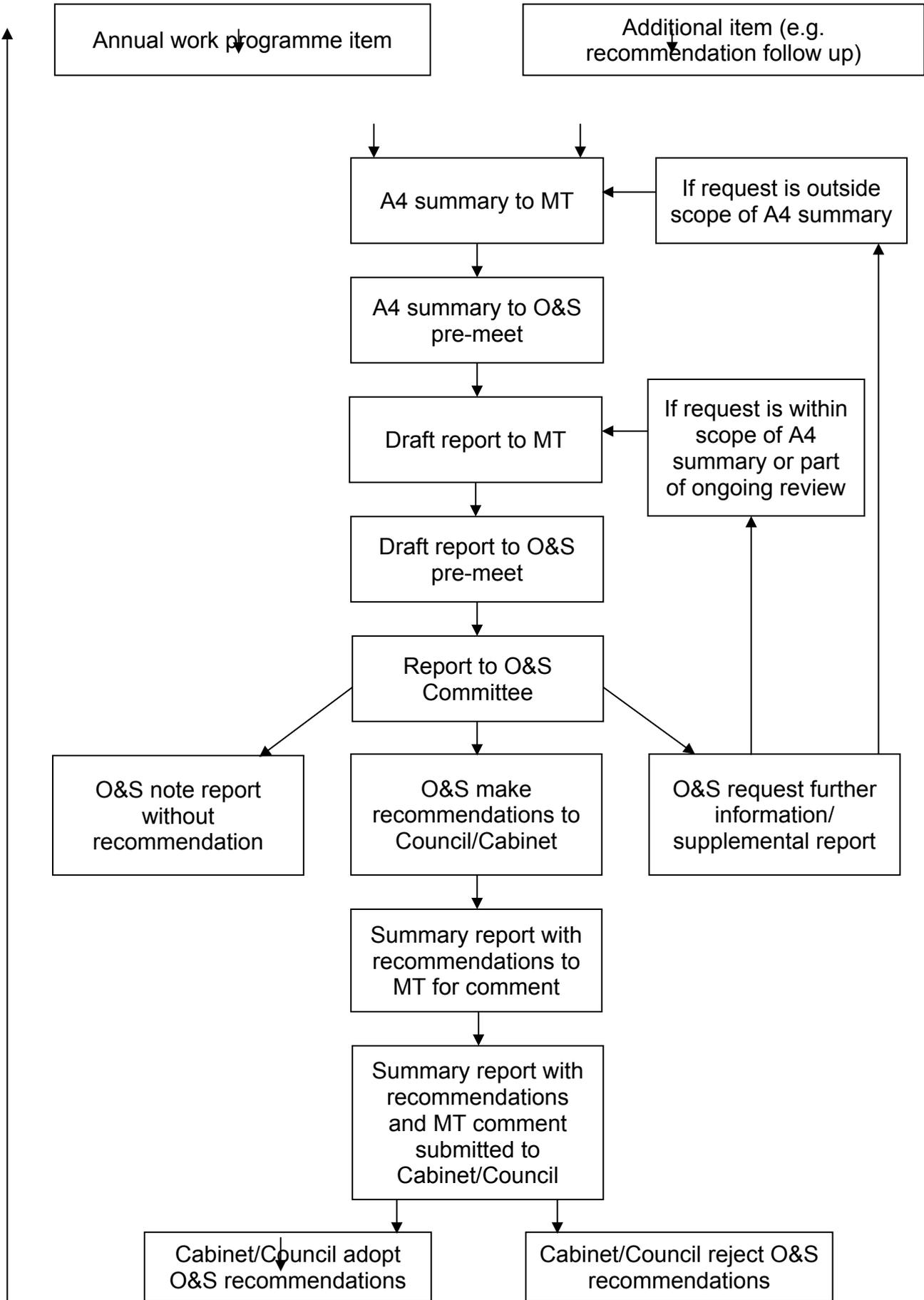
Recommendation Tracker

Report				
Findings of the Air Quality Task Group – Cabinet minute 330/2/18 refers				
Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Response	Implementation responsibility	Status
That the recommendations within the attached report be adopted as the basis for an Air Quality Strategy for the Borough.	Accepted	An action plan and strategy encompassing the agreed recommendations is currently in preparation and will shortly be submitted to Management Team for approval. An update report will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2018	Management Team	Ongoing
Report				
Commercial Investment				
Recommendations	Accepted/ Rejected	Response	Implementation responsibility	Status
Financial Reports including Red Book valuations are prepared annually in accordance with UK GAAP for management purposes. The output to include normal commercial property metrics and risk registers, such as estimated rental value and covenant strength of tenants.		Cabinet considered this recommendation at its meeting of 14 June 2018 and advised that it was minded not to adopt at this stage to allow for further examination of implications and costs, before consideration is given to whether they can be adopted.		

<p>A framework document should be prepared setting out social value yield and return targets for the Council's Property Strategy.</p>		<p>Cabinet considered this recommendation at its meeting of 14 June 2018 and advised that it was minded not to adopt at this stage to allow for further examination of implications and costs, before consideration is given to whether they can be adopted.</p>		
<p>A clear list of investment and social worth objectives to be included for each investment and reported on annually.</p>		<p>Cabinet considered this recommendation at its meeting of 14 June 2018 and advised that it was minded not to adopt at this stage to allow for further examination of implications and costs, before consideration is given to whether they can be adopted.</p>		

O&S Reporting flowchart

O&S Tracker records Committee forward plan and recommendations made



Recommendations referred to MT via O&S Tracker for assignment and updating

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Agenda Item No:



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Universal Credit Update – May 2018

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. To note the report

Date of O&S meeting:

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Chilton

Relevant Portfolio(s): Cllr Neil Shorter

Summary:

Exempt from Publication: **NO**

Background Papers:

Contact: Vikki.baker@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330440

Report Title:

Introduction and Background

1. Universal Credit (UC) replaces the following benefits & combines them into a single monthly payment:-
 - Income Support
 - Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
 - Income-related Employment & Support Allowance
 - Child Tax Credit
 - Working Tax Credit
 - Housing Benefit
2. Universal Credit is for Working Age customers only (not pensioners).
3. The UC live service began in Ashford in April 2015, however, since 1st January 2018, the opportunity for new customers in Live Service areas such as Ashford, to claim UC has been withdrawn. This is to enable DWP to focus upon UC Full Service implementation.
4. Ashford was due to roll out with UC Full Service in March 2018. The UC Full Service roll out scheduled has been delayed by a further 3 months and this date has now moved to 20th June 2018. This is to allow for changes/improvements to be made to UC Full Service systems & procedures which are required by the announcements made in the last budget (see below for more details).

Live Service vs Full Service

5. In June 2018, when Universal Credit Full Service is due to be rolled out in Ashford, claimants will continue to make their new claims for Universal Credit on line as they do now. Under Universal Credit Full Service, Universal Credit claims are managed on an ongoing basis online, rather than on the phone. Claimants will need to communicate with the Universal Credit Service Centre & their Job Centre Work Coach online. They will be expected to regularly check their Universal Credit online journal & carry out any instructions, or “to dos” that have been communicated to them such as requests for further information, requests to attend a meeting with their Work Coach, reporting their job search activity to satisfy their claimant commitment. To see what a Universal Credit online journal looks like please visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8zJD7z-TSE>
6. Under Universal Credit Full Service the customer owns & is responsible for their own data. As a result of this under the new system, the Ashford Borough Council Housing Benefit team will not be given detailed information about a customer’s Universal Credit claim by the DWP. If Ashford Borough Council

need clarification from a Universal Credit customer regarding their Universal Credit entitlement, the customer will need to come to Ashford Borough Council to show information from their online journal.

7. Currently under Live Service the Local Authority can phone the UC Service Centre to obtain information regarding UC customers. This won't be permitted under Full Service
8. Ashford is in a Live Universal Credit Service area therefore currently only single claimants without children or any complex needs can claim Universal Credit in Ashford. From 20th June 2018, Ashford Borough Council enters Universal Credit Full Service. This will mean that all new working age claimants will claim Universal Credit rather than the legacy benefits. From 20 June 2018 they will not be able to make a new claim for Housing Benefit unless they:
 - Have reached State Pension Age ([Visit Gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for information on pensionable ages)
 - Have more than two children, unless they have received Universal Credit within the last six months
 - Are in exempt accommodation or temporary accommodation (they will need to claim Universal Credit but they may also get some help from Ashford Borough Council for their housing costs)
9. Live Service UC customers will eventually be moved over to Full Service and this is yet to be timetabled by the DWP. Ashford Borough Council will need to work with DWP to communicate with their customers when this occurs, to ensure that all affected customers do not suffer an interruption in service, or a break in their claim.

November 2017 budget announcements

10. Some welcome announcements were made in November's budget, regarding Universal Credit. The changes to Universal Credit is what has led to the 3 month delay in roll out. The details of the changes have now been confirmed. The outline of the changes are:-
 - Stays in temporary accommodation are to be paid through Housing Benefit from April 2018
 - The 7 waiting days were abolished from February 2018
 - A transitional period of 2 weeks for anyone moving from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit, has been introduced from April 2018
 - There was an increase in the amount of advance payment a claimant can request from 50% to 100% of potential UC award, and that can be repaid by the customer over a 12 month rather than a 6 month period, from January 2018

- From January 2018 Ashford stopped taking new UC claims (single claimants without complex needs). The Live Service was switched off so all new claimants now claim the old legacy benefits until Full Service is rolled out in June 2018. Anyone already in receipt of UC will remain on UC
 - Roll out of Full Service has been put back by 3 months for all Job Centres. For Ashford this means our go live date has moved from March 2018 to June 2018
11. In March 2018, the Secretary of State for DWP confirmed that DWP will be amending the regulations so that all 18 – 21 year olds will be entitled to claim support for housing costs in Universal Credit. Currently 18-21 year olds who make a claim to UC in a Full Service area, have to meet certain criteria in order to receive support for housing costs. DWP will implement this change as soon as possible (no date has been announced yet).

Update from Neighbouring Local Authorities

12. As part of our preparation for this change, Officers have been monitoring the experiences of our neighbouring authorities who are transferring to UC at an earlier date than the Council.
13. Swale Borough Council Went live with UC Full Service in December 2017. East Kent Services went live with UC Full Service as follows:-
- Dover District Council - most postcodes went live in May 2017
 - Thanet District Council – half postcodes went live July 2017 & the other half in September 2017(they rolled it out by half the postcodes at a time after lessons learned from DDC).
 - Canterbury City Council are due to go live in July 2018
14. Below is a brief outline of some feedback from Swale Borough Council & East Kent Services, regarding how UC Full Service has affected them

Update from Swale Borough Council

Q. Who's delivering Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) & Assisted Digital Support (ADS) & has there been much demand on the service?

A. We are, CAB dropped out. There is very little demand, nothing for digital at all.

Q. Have you seen a drop in HB new claims?

A. Yes. Hopefully some more detailed figures will follow in due course

Q. Is there a significant increase in the UC notifications from the data hub & has this put a strain on your assessment staff?

A. There is an increase in UC notifications but they are quicker to deal with compared with an HB new claim and then the changes in circumstances.

Q. Are you finding you're having to reassess Council Tax Support (CTS) claimants in receipt of UC every month & therefore sending new Council Tax bills out every month?

A. No we amended our scheme so we just reassess them every 4 months unless there is a significant change.

Q. Has there been much confusion as to whether a claimant needs to claim UC or HB (especially with the April changes)

A. No I wouldn't say there has been. We put an extra person on reception when we went live but after 10 days we didn't need them. We did ring people who put in or ask to claim HB to check if they needed to claim UC. The most confusion has been caused by JCP not quite understanding the housing side.

Q. Have you seen an increase in the demand for your Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget?

A. We spent our whole grant, someone said the other day that we have a lot of UC DHP claims but our HB caseload has dropped by 1,000 over the past year. Probably a lot of these people are now claiming UC so they will claim a DHP as a UC claimant.

Update from East Kent Services

Q. Who's delivering PBS & ADS & has there been much demand on the service?

A. *PBS has been delivered by CAB (we pay them a set amount). ADS is delivered by the customer services team. We have had to introduce afternoon appointments at the Gateway in Margate and Whitfield for Dover District Council - it's a bit of a headache as we have to contact the customer beforehand to make sure they bring everything they need, otherwise they can't progress through the verification stage. It's fairly steady from what I understand. You need staff who can deal with the claims quickly and methodically and that can keep the conversation with the customer on track.*

Q. Have you seen a drop in HB new claims?

A. *Yes, Here are the latest figures*

LA	Caseload April 17	Caseload at 31.03.18	No of CTS Assessments with UC at 31.01.18	% of current caseload where there is UC element at 31.01.18
CCC (Canterbury)	11633	11431	117	1%

DDC (Dover)	10612	9869	862	8.7%
TDC (Thanet)	17661	16095	1003	6%

Q. Is there a significant increase in the UC notifications from the data hub & has this put a strain on your assessment staff?

A. *Yes! Originally we were downloading them and indexing them into our document imaging system, however it soon became apparent that the indexing team weren't coping with just one site, so we had to introduce automation straight into the processing system to relieve them. We have seen cases where they have revisited the same assessment period 2-3 times! You also get records for people out of the area who haven't claimed in ages, but their interests are still set with us. As you get sent details of awards for people who aren't claiming HB/CTS, we were inviting these customers to claim CTS as we didn't want our recovery rates to suffer. Which means we had to leave these unlinked files on the system for a while awaiting a response. Just last week, we moved to stop this as we weren't getting much success and now auto-delete these records after 7 days. If the customer claims in the meantime, it matches them and saves us re-keying the awards, but doing the write-outs to encourage claims was not cost effective.*

Q. Are you finding you're having to reassess CTS claimants in receipt of UC every month & therefore sending new Council Tax bills out every month?

A. *In a lot of cases yes, your basic JSA/IS/ESA cases where there are no changes are fine, but if they take out advances, or have a managed payment to landlord, their system generates a file which then reassesses the claim. If the overall figure is the same (no earnings, just movement on the adjustments) then it won't recalculate the award. But earnings cases do generate more work and therefore will reset the Council tax recovery. We have started emailing Council tax to advise them of the date the customer normally gets their UC, so they can have discussions with the customer on the best date to set their direct debit.*

Q. Has there been much confusion as to whether a claimant needs to claim UC or HB (especially with the April changes)

A. *In the beginning. Getting the message right at the front end and having a good link with the JCP/service centre should improve that. We had a lot of customers being told by staff at ESA that they needed to claim from us, I believe this is down to those staff not being trained on UC and what constitutes a change. That has calmed down now as the Partnership Manager has raised incidences like this immediately.*

Q. Have you seen an increase in the demand for your DHP budget?

A. *Definitely! Thanet was wiped out, we had to ask the Housing Options team to add another £30K in. Dover underspent by around £250- compared to Canterbury (who hasn't hit Full Service yet) they had £46k left. I would be having conversations with your Housing Options teams on the DHP policy as you need to be sure there is enough money to help people. The main issue was Rent in advance/Rent deposit. We couldn't pay DHP as there was no entitlement to HB or UC HE, therefore Housing options had to pay the money upfront and then we repaid the Homeless protection fund from the DHP when UC Housing Element was in*

payment. This is an administrative burden, which could easily be fixed if they changed the regs slightly!

Also- the 2 week run-on is an administrative nightmare- we have to set a manual underpayment and offset any HB paid past the UC claim date. We are hoping Civica can give us an automated solution quickly as it has slowed us down!

Ashford Borough Councils approach

15. All relevant staff have received UC training. Another external training provider is booked to deliver two whole day training sessions on UC on 14th & 21st May. This will ensure all staff are equipped with the latest UC information, in preparation for go live on 20th June 2018.
16. Regular fortnightly meetings have been scheduled with DWP in preparation for go live. It's important to keep the lines of communication with our DWP partners open & strong.
17. Some key HB processing staff have been trained on how to process the UC claims (for CTS).
18. Customer Service staff, housing staff as well as housing benefit staff have been trained on UC & which customers can claim UC & which ones need to claim HB.
19. Housing have funded an additional day for the Job Club to run (now Monday afternoons & Thursday afternoons). Whilst the Job Club is designed to help service users search for work, the staff working in the Job Club will also be available to help Job Seekers manage their UC online journals as part of that Job Searching process.
20. Ashford Borough Council took the decision not to accept the DWP's funding to provide Personal Budgeting Support & Assisted Digital Support. Providing this additional support is very labour intensive, with an anticipated fourfold increase in visits to Job Centre Plus there was concern that if this was accepted our own services could become overwhelmed at a time when we are seeking to manage this change and the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act which will affect the same resources. It was thought with current staffing levels the additional work was not a viable option, whilst the Council is maintaining all the services it has previously offered this allows us to keep some control over managing demand for support and allow us to refer to Job Centre Plus if we are unable to support the customer. Currently if a UC customer needs help to make an initial claim for UC online, DWP will need to provide that support.
21. Through the Job Club (see appendix A), the work of the Housing teams, the Welfare Intervention Officers, Housing Benefit teams, Customer Service staff, there will be some support, for our vulnerable customers who require additional help with their UC claims so it should be noted that we have not removed any services.

22. 'Space sessions' with housing staff are planned to discuss a joined up approach when dealing with Housing tenants in receipt of UC, and how a cross departmental approach can be taken to make the best use of the councils resources.
23. Housing Teams & the DHP team already work closely to maximise their budgets. This close working will continue as UC Full Service is introduced.
24. A UC working group has been set up comprising of Housing Staff, Housing Benefit staff & Customer Service staff. This group continues to meet monthly & discuss the operational impact/effects that UC will have across all departments.

Folkestone Jobcentre - UC go live 30th May 2018

25. Folkestone Jobcentre went live with Universal Credit Full Service on 30th May 2018. Ashford borders Folkestone & there are a handful of properties in Ashford that would have historically fallen under Folkestone Jobcentre (mainly Sellindge). However, DWP have taken a group of postcodes, that cover over 6000 properties, and moved them out of the Ashford Jobcentre area & aligned them to Folkestone Job Centre. They are:-

TN25 5 = Wye

TN25 6 = Mersham/ Smeeth

TN25 7 = Sevington/ Aldington/ Kingsnorth

TN26 2 = Appledore/Hamstreet/ Kenardington & Ruckinge

26. This means that any new working age customers, that need to make a claim for Housing Benefit (subject to the exceptions such as having 3 or more children, living in supported/exempt accommodation etc) living in the postcode areas listed above, will need to make a claim for Universal Credit rather than claiming the legacy benefits (HB, IS, JSA IB, ESA IR, WTC, CTC).
27. Ashford Jobcentre goes live with Universal Credit Full Service on 20th June 2018, so this just means that for these postcodes, go live is 3 weeks earlier. However, they will be aligned to Folkestone Jobcentre rather than Ashford Jobcentre. Any work-focused interviews will need to take place at Folkestone Jobcentre.
28. Many of the postcodes are much nearer to Ashford Jobcentre than Folkestone. It is concerning that some residents living in these postcodes may not have the funds or the transport to travel to Folkestone. Concerns have been raised with the DWP both verbally & more formally via a written letter. Residents claiming Universal Credit who live in the above postcode areas should not be expected to travel to Folkestone for their work-focussed interviews & to receive ongoing support from their Work Coach. It is hoped that any Universal Credit customers that find themselves in this position will be able to request to switch Jobcentres. We are awaiting an official response from the DWP regarding this matter.

Letter from Neil Couling

29. On 7th June 2018, a letter was received from Neil Couling, Director General, Universal Credit Programme (see appendix B). In this letter, several announcements regarding UC were made, including the plans for working age customers who are currently in receipt of the Severe Disability Premium, are to remain on the legacy benefits until they migrate onto Universal Credit. Migration was due to be complete in March 2023 (another year later than planned).
30. The Local Authority will now keep Housing Benefits claims for the following groups:
- Pensioners
 - Families with more than 2 children
 - Claimants receiving the Severe Disability Premium
 - Claimants living in supported or exempt accommodation
 - Claimants living in temporary accommodation
31. This means that the Council will continue to manage a significant caseload for the medium term and it is becoming more likely that there will be a reasonably significant number of cases remaining with the Council for the longer term.

Conclusion

32. It is too early to predict the impact that moving to UC Full Service will bring. Council staff will have all received several training sessions before Go Live, regular meetings are taking place with DWP to discuss any issues that arise regarding UC, office procedures are in place to deal with the UC notifications, the website is all set to be amended to take account of UC Go Live on 20th June 2018.
33. It is only eligible new claimants that will claim UC rather than HB. After speaking with neighbouring authorities, the drop in HB caseload is a gradual process, allowing the council to adjust steadily as time goes by. The move over to UC will be a gradual one in the early stages.

Contact and Email

34. Vikki.Baker@[ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Vikki.Baker@ashford.gov.uk) 01233 330440

Job Club Update – June 2018

The Job Club is staffed by one paid employee, (the Employment & Skills Officer) and one volunteer, currently. It is held weekly on Monday afternoons at the Ashford Gateway. Many of the people that attend the Job Club have medium to low literacy &/or digital skills, so find job searching more difficult than the average Ashford resident.

At the Gateway individuals have access to the internet, with staff on hand to assist those that are new to job searching or using the internet. The staff member and volunteer have experience in technology and CV writing.

There has been a total of 505 visits to the Job Club this year (Apr 17 to Mar 18). Based on 46 sessions that is an average of 11 clients per session throughout the year (there are only 12 PCs in the IT suite at the Gateway)

During the last year, the Employment & Skills Officer, managed to contact 315 people who had attended at least one session at the Job Club. 97 of those people have found either paid or unpaid work or entered training. That is almost 31%. Considering the limited skills that some of the Job Club clients have, 31% would be considered a pretty reasonable success rate.

With the introduction of Universal Credit, there will be even more need for Job Seekers to transact online. Their job searching activity must be logged on their Universal Credit online journal, which some Job Club clients may find difficult at first. With this in mind, the Job Club has been extended to also run on Thursday afternoons at Ashford Gateway, from April 2018. As part of their job searching process, the Employment & Skills Officer & her volunteer, can help Job Club clients update their journals as well as carry out their job searching activity.

The volunteer who helps out at the Job Club has been doing so for the past two years. She is reliable & attends every week without fail. She is patient with the clients & very knowledgeable when it comes to IT matters. She also is very grateful for the opportunity we have offered her.

"I'd like to thank both you and Sarah for helping to make this a fulfilling and enhancing experience for me. Before starting at the Job Club I had lost a lot of my confidence. I've found that because I'm treated as an equal I feel accepted. This is the hardest part about having a disability, especially if it's hidden. Trying to find people who will accept you for who you are and not for who you're expected to be. So, again, thank you for all your support."

The Job Club would struggle to run without the help of volunteers to support the council's Employment & Skills Officer.

Vikki Baker

13 June 2018



Department
for Work &
Pensions

www.dwp.gov.uk

Neil Couling,
Director General, Universal Credit
Programme
6th Floor, Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1A 9NA

neil.couling@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

7 June 2018

For the attention of:
Chief Executives,
Revenue and Benefits Managers
GB Local Authorities

Dear Colleagues

Today the Secretary of State made a Written Statement about Universal Credit. The statement highlights the increased pace of Universal Credit rollout and the changes we are making for the people we move on to Universal Credit.

The full statement can be found here:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-06-07/HCWS745/>

The main changes we are making are:

- Claimants in receipt of Severe Disability Premium will remain on legacy benefits until we move them as part of our managed migration plans, even if they experience a change in circumstances. At this point, they will qualify for transitional protection if their legacy entitlement is more than their Universal Credit payment. We will consider retrospective protection to any cases that have already moved to Universal Credit
- We will strengthen incentives for parents to take up short-term or temporary work by making sure receipt of childcare costs does not erode transitional protection
- We will make sure short-term increase in earnings don't end transitional protection. This includes claimants whose pay cycles or wages temporarily lift them out of Universal Credit entitlement. It is unfair that people should lose transitional protection, simply because they earn more. Therefore the

claimant's transitional protection will be re-awarded if they make a new claim within 3 months of when they received the additional payment.

- Finally, we will disregard capital over £16,000 for claimants we move from tax credits to Universal Credit for twelve months. After this time, the normal rules will apply and we will expect claimants with a high level of personal resources to fund themselves.

In order to implement these changes, we will now complete migration of all claimants to Universal Credit in March 2023.

As I explained in my letter 20 July 2016, the Government will begin incorporation of Housing Benefit for pensioners into Pension Credit once the Universal Credit timetable is completed. This means Local Authorities can expect to deliver Housing Benefit for pensioners into the next Parliament, beyond 2022.

Today we have also published the summary of the Universal Credit Full Business Case. This shows that Universal Credit will deliver £34bn benefit to the UK economy over ten years from a £2bn investment; and get an additional 200,000 people into work. The summary shows why implementing Universal Credit is so important.

The Business Case summary can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-programme-full-business-case-summary>

We continue to plan the most effective way to move legacy claimants on to Universal Credit and will share details with you as soon as they are available.

I hope you agree these announcements show Universal Credit is delivering at scale and we soon expect to reach the point where there are 1 million people on the UC caseload.

Local Authorities have played an important part in making this happen and I am grateful for continued support. I look forward to working with you as we head towards completing rollout at the end of this year.

Yours Sincerely



Neil Couling
Director General, Universal Credit Programme

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