

Managing Sickness Absence 2025/26

Final Internal Audit Report



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Detailed Findings	5
Annex 1: Management Actions	10
Annex 2: Objective, scope, and distribution	18
Annex 3: Our classification systems	19

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Executive summary

Partial Assurance

Partial

There are significant weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it could be or could become inadequate and ineffective.

Introduction

The Managing Sickness Absence review is part of the agreed internal audit plan for 2024/25. The effective management of sickness absence is in the interests of both the Council and their staff, and robust sickness absence policies can, if implemented properly, help improve attendance at work, the health and wellbeing of staff and ultimately customer services. Sickness absence can have a significant impact on both performance and costs to the organisation and therefore needs to be managed in a consistent, supportive, and effective way so that operational and service levels are maintained.

Objective

The objective of this review is to assess the adequacy of design and operating effectiveness of the key controls established to ensure directorate adherence to the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy and supporting guidance.

Key Findings

The following are the key findings from the audit:

- **Policy and Procedures in place:** An up-to-date sickness absence policy is accessible to staff that clearly outlines the employee and line managers responsibilities for the management of short and long-term sickness absence, supported by a suite of letter templates covering informal and formal meetings.
- **Failure to record sickness absences on Agresso on a timely basis:** Audit informed of instances of sickness absences not recorded on Agresso on a timely basis resulting in Payroll having to calculate sickness benefit relating to absences that occurred in prior periods and undertaking additional work writing to employees informing them of deductions from their salary.
- **RTW meetings not always recorded on Agresso:** For a random sample of twenty-four sickness absences that covered all Directorates, the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team ran a query within Agresso to identify whether a RTW form had been completed based on the first day of absence. The findings showed a compliance rate of 17%. Semi-structured interviews were held with seven line managers and Audit informed that in the case of one

Line Manager RTW meetings would not be recorded on Agresso for short-term absences but rather an informal meeting would be held and they further advised that in the case of one long-term absence the outcome of a return to work meeting was held on a local folder rather than recorded on the RTW form on Agresso.

- **Lack of audit trail to fit notes uploaded on to Agresso.** There is an inconsistent approach followed by line managers in the way fit notes are uploaded on to Agresso. The Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team informed Audit that for the sample of sickness absences the majority of fit notes had been archived on Agresso which would indicate the line manager had not attached the document to the relevant RTW form on Agresso which would provide a clear audit trail.
- **Lack of understanding of the Council's sickness absence triggers:** Of the Council's four sickness absence triggers listed in the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy, staff are aware of only one: 6 or more days of absence incurred within the past 6 months.
- **Line Managers not automatically informed when certain sickness absence triggers are activated:** Line Managers are not automatically sent email notifications from Agresso when the following two triggers are activated: three separate periods of absence in the previous six months; and a single period of sickness absence that goes beyond 28-day calendar.
- **Stage One formal absence meeting procedures not being applied consistently:** Audit informed that some Line Managers apply their discretion in determining whether to convene a stage one formal absence meeting on receipt of a sickness absence trigger notification whereas in the case of the Customer Services Centre team an invitation to attend a stage one formal absence meeting is sent to all members of staff who appear on the email notification.
- **MI Dashboard:** Comprehensive sickness absence reporting forms part of the Monthly HR DLT Report.

Areas of good practice

The audit identified the following areas of good practice:

Customer Services Centre (CSC): Management has put in place the following procedures designed to ensure sickness absence within the teams is managed effectively.:

- RTW meeting are held on the first day the member of staff returns to work. If the Team Leader conducting the meeting is not the individual's Line Manager an email summarising the key points is sent to the relevant Team Leader who uploads the information onto Agresso thereby ensuring a record of the meeting is recorded on Agresso on a timely basis.
- A log is kept that records the date the RTW meeting was completed and by whom to ensure all meetings are conducted and recorded on Agresso.
- Where a sickness absence trigger has been activated in respect of a member of the CSC team, the employee is invited to attend a First Formal Interview under Stage One of the

Council's policy in order that the manager is able to review the absence in detail and to gain a better understanding of the employee's support requirements.

- Following the first formal sickness absence meeting an outcome letter is provided to the individual and copied to HR. In order to provide continued support to the employee, bi-monthly meetings are held during a 12-month review period.

HR Business Partners contact Line Managers of staff who appear on sickness absence trigger notifications where they have reached 6 days or more during the last 6 months to obtain an update on the management of the sickness absence and whether relevant support such as OH services has been considered.

Conclusion and Opinion

The Council has developed a control framework to support the health and well-being of staff and to deliver high quality services through effective management of sickness absence. Audit findings have identified the following areas of non-compliance that if addressed would strengthen the overall control framework and support the effective management of sickness absence:

- Instances of sickness absence not recorded on Agresso on a timely basis.
- RTW meetings are not recorded on Agresso in all cases of sickness absence.
- Fit notes uploaded on to Agresso in such a way as to prevent a clear audit trail.
- Lack of awareness amongst Line Managers on each of the sickness absence triggers set out in the Council's policy.
- Line Managers not automatically notified when sickness absence triggers relating to three absences within six months; and absences for more than 28 days have been activated.
- Decisions by Line Managers to invite employees to Stage One formal absence meetings are not being made on a consistent basis.

Based on the control weaknesses identified an audit opinion of **partial** assurance has been determined.

Detailed Findings

Detailed findings in respect of the identified risks are set out below.

Risk 1: The Council may not maintain appropriate sickness absence policies and procedures resulting in a failure to provide quality services efficiently and effectively.

The Managing Sickness Absence Policy was approved in April 2024 and implemented in June 2024. Whilst the review date is scheduled for April 2027, the Head of HR Policy & Strategy advised that a review of the policy is likely to be undertaken during 2025/26.

The policy is supported by a suite of formal and informal letter templates and a PowerPoint presentation outlining key aspects of the policy such as employee and manager responsibilities. The documents are accessible for staff as they are held on the Council's intranet.

A review of the policy noted that a fit note should be sent to the employee's line manager who will forward it to the payroll team. In practice, employees forward the fit note to their Line Manager who uploads the document on to Agresso. A copy of the note is not forwarded to the payroll team. **(Management Action 1 – Low Priority)**.

Conclusion

The Council's Sickness Absence management Policy outlines employee and line managers responsibilities for the management of short and long-term sickness absence.

The policy requires clarification on how fit notes are to be retained.

Risk 2: Periods of sickness absence may not be properly recorded and supported by appropriate documentation leading to a risk that sickness leave is inappropriately taken.

Timely and accurate sickness absence reporting on Agresso.

Payroll run a Transfer of Absence report from Agresso each month which extracts absence recorded in that particular month. The Payroll and Pensions Lead informed Audit of examples where 40+ sickness absence days had been entered in one month for an employee. This would indicate that some managers are not entering sickness absence on to Agresso on a timely basis. The Payroll and Pensions Lead informed Audit this delay causes problems for payroll as they have to calculate sickness benefit for prior periods and write to the employee informing them that there will be deductions from their salary. **(Management Action 2 – Medium Priority)**.

The Payroll Team, with the assistance of the Learning & Development Team, are looking to develop short videos for staff demonstrating how sickness absence should be recorded on Agresso with the aim of ensuring sickness absence is recorded promptly.

The Customer Services Centre maintain a daily staff attendance log which is updated by Team Leaders to record staff absence, thereby providing management with oversight of all staff sickness absence.

A random sample of twenty-four sickness absence episodes was selected across all Directorates for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 January 2025 and testing found that in three cases the reason for the absence was not recorded on Agresso. HR advised that there is not a

requirement for employees to disclose the nature of the sickness absence. To facilitate management information reporting HR may look to see if an additional checkbox can be added to the sickness absence form enabling the employee to state reason for absence not declared. **(Management Action 3 – Low Priority)**.

Holding Return to Work (RTW) Meetings for all sickness absences.

The Managing Sickness Absence Policy requires managers to discuss an employee's absence with them. This will be done at return-to-work meetings after each period of absence regardless of duration.

Semi-structured interviews were held with seven Line Managers, and it was found that in one case the manager held informal meetings with the employee for short-term periods of absence, but a record was not held on Agresso. The reason given was that either the employee did not raise a sickness absence on Agresso or the manager had other competing priorities. Furthermore, the manager informed audit that details of return to work meetings held for a member of staff on long-term sickness absence was held on a local folder rather than recorded on the RTW form on Agresso.

HR advised that MI reports to Directorates includes details on the proportion of sickness absence that were supported by a RTW meeting. Audit were unable to run a report that confirmed whether a specific period of absence was covered by a RTW meeting. as a result, Audit were unable to verify whether a RTW form had been completed for a random sample of twenty-four absences. The matter was raised with the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team who ran a query within Agresso to identify whether a RTW form had been completed for the selected absences based on the first day of absence. The results showed that out of the twenty-four absences only four RTW forms had been completed resulting in a compliance rate of 17%. **(Management Action 4 – High Priority)**.

Retention of RTW Forms on Agresso

The Business Support Officer within Direct Service Organisation, Environmental Services, has been granted proxy access rights to enter sickness absence information on to Agresso on behalf of supervisors, drivers and loaders who do not have access to a laptop and Agresso.

A manual RTW form is completed and signed by the employee and Line Manager, and the form is sent to the Business Support Officer who enters the data on to the RTW template form on Agresso.

Audit advised that due to an incident 2-3 years' ago in which documents held on Agresso simply disappeared there is now a lack of confidence within the DSO team that attached documents will be retained securely. As a result, Audit advised that copies of completed manual RTW forms and fit notes are retained on a shared drive within the service team as opposed to being retained on Agresso. **(Management Action 5 – Low Priority)**.

Fit Notes

The Managing Sickness Absence Policy states that if the absence continues for longer than seven days, then the individual will need to obtain a fit note from their doctor or other healthcare professional covering the remainder of the absence.

In the course of interviews with Line Managers, Audit informed that employees submit fit notes to their line manager and these notes are then uploaded on to Agresso.

There is no management reporting facility that shows whether a fit note has been attached on Agresso. As a result, Audit has been unable to confirm that a fit note has been uploaded for those sample items where a fit note is due. The issue was raised with the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team who looked in to the matter and informed Audit that where fit notes had been uploaded for a number of the sample items the document had been archived on Agresso and this meant there was a lack of a clear audit trail. It would appear line managers are not attaching fit notes to the RTW form on Agresso but more likely uploading it to the sickness absence record itself. The Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team advised that they need more time to establish the most appropriate method of uploading fit notes on to Agresso. (**Management Action 6 – Medium Priority**).

Conclusion

Audit findings indicate that sickness absence episodes are not always recorded on Agresso on a timely basis which leads to additional work for the payroll team.

Results indicate that a significant number of completed RTW forms are not recorded on Agresso.

Fit notes are uploaded on to Agresso on an inconsistent basis which has led to documents being archived on Agresso thereby preventing a clear audit trail.

Risk 3: Sickness absence is not managed on a consistent manner across the council.

Informal Action

Under the Council's Managing Sickness Policy an informal meeting can be held to address concerns in relation to ongoing periods of short-term absences, ongoing periods of longer-term absence, or one period of long-term absence. There are no specific trigger points for an informal action meeting to take place.

Line Managers informed Audit that informal discussions are held with staff and the outcome of such meetings are generally documented in the RTW meeting or during 1:1 meetings.

Formal Procedures

Council policy states a stage one formal absence meeting may be required in cases where the sickness absence triggers, as set out in the Managing Sickness Absence policy, have been activated and informal action has not resulted in the required improvement.

Audit established that in some cases where the Line Manager has been notified by email that a sickness absence trigger event has occurred they apply their discretion in determining whether to escalate to a stage one formal meeting, for example, if the absence was due to flu and there were no additional concerns about the absence a stage one formal absence meeting would not be deemed necessary.

In another example, a Line Manager requested a OH report to support a member of staff and the report took four months to arrive and a request for supportive equipment took a further three months to arrive. During this time, the employee's medical condition worsened, and this led to long-term period of sickness absence. Based on the delays in providing adequate support, the Line Manager chose not to conduct a stage 1 formal absence meeting.

In the case of the Customer Services Centre, the management team apply the following procedures:

- On receiving a sickness absence trigger notification in respect of a member of staff whose sickness absence has reached 6 days or more during the last 6 months, an invitation to attend a First Formal Interview under Stage One is sent to the individual and copied to the HR Business Partner. The letter emphasises the purpose of the meeting is to review their absence in detail and to gain better understanding of their support requirements. Links are provided to the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy and to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and the right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a work colleague of their choice.
- Following the first formal sickness absence meeting (Stage One) an outcome letter is provided to the individual and copied to HR. The agreed periods of sickness absence are listed and where appropriate the option to secure the services of Occupational Health (OH) is recorded. Bi-monthly interim meetings are held during a 12-month review period that is designed to provide continued support.

The findings indicate that decisions to move onto stage one formal absence meetings is not being applied in a consistent manner. **(Management Action 7 – Medium Priority).**

Conclusion

The Managing Sickness Absence Policy sets out the circumstances in which a stage one formal absence meeting will be required to be held, however, audit findings indicate that decisions to commence to a formal stage one sickness absence meeting are not being applied consistently.

Risk 4: Reports on sickness absence may not be received and reviewed regularly and/or no follow up action may be taken leading to poor management of staff with serious sickness concerns and increased risk of inappropriate use of sickness leave.

Sickness Absence Triggers

The policy contains details of sickness absence triggers designed to manage and analyse occurrences of short-term sickness absence and to provide an indication of when a manager needs to be concerned by absence rates and take appropriate action.

HR Business Partners contact Line Managers of staff who appear on sickness absence trigger notifications where they have reached 6 days or more during the last 6 months to obtain an update, to establish at which stage of the Council's policy has the absence reached and whether relevant ask whether support mechanisms such as OH has been considered.

Following discussion with Line Managers, Audit established that there was a lack of awareness of the following sickness absence triggers that are set out in the policy **(Management Action 8 – Medium Priority):**

- 3 separate periods of absence in the previous six months.
- There appears to be a pattern in, or type of sickness absence that raises management concern.
- A single period of sickness absence that goes beyond 28-day calendar days.

Audit established, through discussion with the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team that Line Managers do not receive automatic email notifications from Agresso informing them that the following two sickness absence triggers have been activated: 3 separate periods of absence in the previous six months; and a single period of sickness absence that goes beyond 28-day calendar days.

The Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team advised that in principle there is the functionality within Agresso to generate email notifications informing the Line Manager that the above two sickness absence trigger events have been activated for their employees. **(Management Action 9 – Medium Priority).**

MI Dashboard

As from January 2025, sickness absence reporting forms part of the Monthly HR DLT Reports Pack which Audit understand is presented to the CLT for the council as a whole and separate packs are issued to Directorates where HR Business Partners present the findings.

Conclusion

Sickness absence triggers have been established to manage short-term absence; however, Line Managers do not fully understand these. Line Managers do not receive email notifications that inform them of all in respect of all informing them of staff who have recorded sickness. Monitoring and reporting of sickness absence is appropriately undertaken.

Risk 5: Backfilling of key roles, absent through sickness, also has a negative financial impact on the Council.

The Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy does not refer to matters to be taken into consideration by Line Managers in cases where an employee's period of sickness absence may require a decision to be made as to whether their role requires to be backfilled. HR advised that the requirement that Line Managers should plan for backfilling of positions following the member of staff's period of absence rests with the Line Manager and for them to secure approval to recruit, the matter should not be captured in the HR policy.

Conclusion

Responsibility for backfilling key roles rests with Line Managers to secure approval to recruit.

Annex 1: Management Actions

Findings are exceptions-based and are designed to communicate key issues identified during the audit, together with suggested actions for improvement.

Assessed Risk 1: The Council may not maintain appropriate sickness absence policies and procedures resulting in a failure to provide quality services efficiently and effectively.

Managing Sickness Absence Policy and Procedures					
No	Expectation	Finding	Implication	Recommendation	Priority
1	Clear guidance is provided on the process of submitting and retaining fit notes.	<p>The Managing Sickness Absence policy states the fit note should be sent to the line manager who will forward it to the payroll team.</p> <p>In practice, employees forward the fit note to their Line Manager who uploads the document on to Agresso. A copy of the note is not forwarded to the payroll team.</p>	There is a risk that fit notes are not retained in line with Council procedures.	The Managing Sickness Absence Policy to be reviewed to ensure instructions on submission and retention of fit notes is in accordance with expected procedures.	Low
Management Response		This is included within the revised policy.		Responsible Individual	Tracy Walters
				Date for Implementation:	October 2025 (pending Employment committee endorsement)

Assessed Risk 2: Periods of sickness absence may not be properly recorded and supported by appropriate documentation leading to a risk that sickness leave is inappropriately taken.

Recording sickness absence on Agresso					
No	Expectation	Finding	Implication	Recommendation	Priority
2	Line Managers record sickness absence on Agresso on timely basis.	Payroll run a Transfer of Absence report from Agresso each month which extracts absence recorded in that particular month. The Payroll and Pensions Lead informed Audit of examples where 40+ sickness absence days had been entered in one month for an employee. This would indicate that some managers are not entering sickness absence on to Agresso on a timely basis. Such delays cause problems for payroll as they have to calculate sickness benefit and write to the employee informing them that there will be deductions from their salary.	Staff paid incorrectly if absence not entered onto Agresso in suitable time.	Line Managers to be reminded of the need to record sickness absence on Agresso as soon as possible after being informed by the employee that they will be absent due to sickness.	Medium
3	Periods of sickness absence properly recorded.	A review of information recorded on Agresso in respect of a random sample of twenty-four sickness absence episodes found that in three cases the reason for the absence was not recorded. HR advised that employees are not obliged to provide reason for absence	Incomplete sickness absence information undermines management information reporting.	HR to examine feasibility of including additional checkbox in the sickness absence form that enables the employee to state that they do not wish to declare reason for absence, thereby enhancing management reporting.	Low
Management Response		Action Point 2: The recording of absence has been clarified as the line managers responsibility within the revised policy; the following has been included within the revision to mitigate absences not being recorded timely: All periods of absence, including sickness, must be accurately recorded on Agresso as soon as reported and when the individual returns to work. It		Responsible Individual: Date for Implementation:	Tracey Walters Action Point 2: October 2025 (pending Employment Committee Endorsement).

	<p>is the line manager's responsibility to ensure all sickness absence is recorded correctly.</p> <p>SBC's disciplinary process may be used to investigate any misuse or omissions, which could lead to disciplinary action for those responsible.</p> <p>Action point 3: Revised Policy now states the reason for absence to be recorded – feasibility on not declared to be worked through with Agresso team. Reliant on Agresso Team work packages priorities.</p>		<p>Action point 3: March 2026</p>
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<u>Return to Work Meetings</u>					
<u>No</u>	<u>Expectation</u>	<u>Finding</u>	<u>Implication</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Priority</u>
4	<p>A return-to-work (RTW) meeting should be conducted after every instance of sickness absence – even one day.</p>	<p>The Managing Sickness Absence Policy states managers will always take the time to discuss an employee's absence with them. This will be done at return-to-work meetings after each period of absence regardless of duration.</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews were held with seven Line Managers, and it was found that in one case the manager held informal meetings with the employee for short-term periods of absence, but a record was not held on Agresso. Furthermore, the manager informed audit that details of return to work meetings held for a member of staff on long-term sickness absence was held on a local folder rather than recorded on the RTW form on Agresso.</p> <p>In the absence of a report that confirmed whether a specific period of absence was</p>	<p>Where return to work interviews are not recorded on Agresso there is a lack of audit trail to confirm the meeting took place. There is also a risk that the Council is unaware of returning employees and action plans for returning staff are not put in place where necessary, leading to staff not being provided with sufficient support.</p>	<p>Line Managers to be reminded of the importance of adhering to the Managing Sickness Absence Policy with regards to conducting return to work and for a record of the meeting to be documented on the RTW form within Agresso.</p>	High

		covered by a RTW meeting, Audit were unable to verify whether a RTW form had been completed for a random sample of twenty-four absences. The matter was raised with the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team who ran a query within Agresso to identify whether a RTW form had been completed for the selected absences based on the first day of absence. The results showed that out of the twenty-four absences only four RTW forms had been completed resulting in a compliance rate of 17%.			
Management Response		Agresso currently does not allow the line manager to initiate the RTW form and is reliant on the employee in doing so – Agresso team to change the form parameters to allow the line manager to initiate & complete the RTW form. Reliant on Agresso Team work packages priorities.	Responsible Individual:	Tracy Walters/Steve Yeo	
			Date for Implementation	March 2026	

<u>Retention of Manual Return to Work Forms</u>					
No	<u>Expectation</u>	<u>Finding</u>	<u>Implication</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	Priority
5	Clear policy in place on the retention of manual return to work forms to ensure a robust audit trail.	The Business Support Officer within Direct Service Organisation, Environmental Services, has been granted proxy access rights to enter sickness absence information on to Agresso on behalf of supervisors, drivers and loaders who do not have access to a laptop and Agresso.	Lack of clear guidance on the retention of manual return to work forms may risk supporting documentation becoming lost or misfiled and thereby	The Managing Sickness Absence Policy to be updated to reflect the Council's policy on the retention of manual completed return to work forms.	Low

	<p>A RTW manual form is completed and signed by the employee and Line Manager, and the form is sent to the Business Support Officer who enters the data on to the RTW template form on Agresso.</p> <p>Audit advised that due to an incident 2-3 years' ago where documents held on Agresso simply disappeared there is now a lack of confidence within the DSO team that attached documents will be retained securely. As a result, copies of completed manual RTW forms are retained on a shared drive within the service team and no record is held on Agresso.</p>	preventing a clear audit trail.		
Management Response	Standard procedure of completion via Agresso to be reinforced with operational areas and Agresso to be used for completion moving forward. Retention data therefore in line with the retention of the sickness absence. Therefore, retention remains within the system and not the service.	Responsible Individual: Tracy Walters Date for Implementation: November 2025		

<u>Retention of Fit Notes</u>					
No	Expectation	Finding	Implication	Recommendation	Priority
6	Fit notes are obtained from individuals for sickness absences longer than seven days and retained on Agresso to ensure clear audit trail.	There is no management information that shows whether a fit note has been attached on to Agresso. As a result, Audit has been unable to confirm that a fit note has been uploaded for sample items where a fit note is due. The issue was raised with the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team who looked into the matter and informed Audit that where fit notes had been uploaded for a number of the sample items the	There is an increased risk that clear audit trails are not maintained in order to demonstrate compliance with the absence management policy and procedures.	HR to liaise with the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team to determine the most appropriate method of uploading fit notes on to Agresso and this information to be made available to Line Managers.	Medium

		document had been archived on Agresso and this meant there was a lack of a clear audit trail. It would appear line managers are not attaching fit notes to the RTW form on Agresso but more likely uploading it to the sickness absence record itself.			
Management Response		Agresso looking at feasibility of this being uploaded to either their RTW form or the absence recorded. Reliant on Agresso Team work packages priorities.	Responsible Individual:	Steve Yeo	
			Date for Implementation	March 2026	

Assessed Risk 3: Sickness absence is not managed on a consistent manner across the council.

Stage One Formal Meeting					
No	Expectation	Finding	Implication	Recommendation	Priority
7	Decisions to convene a stage one formal absence meeting are applied consistently.	The policy states a stage one formal absence meeting will be required in cases of: where the sickness absence triggers outlined in section 13 of the policy have been activated and informal action has not resulted in the required improvement. Audit findings indicate that decisions to move on to stage one formal absence meetings are not being applied by Line Managers on a consistent basis. Some Line Managers apply their discretion in moving on to the formal absence meeting whereas in the case of the	The Council's policy on convening formal stage one meetings is not being applied consistently.	Line Managers to be reminded of the importance of adhering to the Managing Sickness Absence Policy with regards to moving to formal stage one absence meetings.	Medium

		Customer Services Centre an invitation to attend a formal stage one absence meeting is sent to staff who have incurred 6 or more days sickness absence in the past 6 months.			
Management Response		New policy revision provides greater guidance, clearer triggers, and structure to what is required at each stage. HR do not have sufficient resources to be able to monitor this aspect, and it is a management responsibility to follow the Councils Managing Sickness Absence Policy. Managers need to be held to account by the service heads in how they manage absence. However, HR will be holding skills byte sessions, as well as comms, to coach managers through the changes.		Responsible Individual:	Tracy Walters
				Date for Implementation:	November 2025

Assessed Risk 4: Reports on sickness absence may not be received and reviewed regularly and/or no follow up action may be taken leading to poor management of staff with serious sickness concerns and increased risk of inappropriate use of sickness leave.

<u>Sickness absence triggers</u>					
<u>No</u>	<u>Expectation</u>	<u>Finding</u>	<u>Implication</u>	<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Priority</u>
8	Line Managers have a clear understanding of the Council's sickness absence triggers.	Following semi-structured interviews held with seven Line Managers, Audit found that managers were not fully aware that the following events constituted a sickness absence trigger: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 separate periods of absence in the previous six months. 	Line Manager fail to take appropriate and timely action to manage and analyse occurrences of short-term sickness absence.	Line Managers to be reminded of sickness absence triggers that the Council use to manage and analyse occurrences of short-term sickness absence.	Medium

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There appears to be a pattern in, or type of sickness absence that raises management concern. • A single period of sickness absence that goes beyond 28-day calendar days. 			
9	Line Managers informed when sickness absence triggers are activated in respect of their employees.	<p>The Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team informed Audit that Line Managers do not receive automatic email notifications from Agresso informing them that the following two sickness absence triggers have been activated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 separate periods of absence in the previous six months. • A single period of sickness absence that goes beyond 28-day calendar days. <p>The Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team advised that in principle there is the functionality within Agresso to generate email notifications informing the Line Manager that the two sickness absence trigger events have been activated.</p>	Line Managers are given insufficient information to enable them to identify when a sickness absence trigger event has occurred and to take appropriate action in accordance with the Council's policy.	HR Team to liaise with the Agresso (Unit 4) Systems Team to agree upon a specification that would lead to automatic email notifications being sent to Line Managers where the following two sickness absence trigger events have occurred: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 separate periods of absence in the previous six months. • A single period of sickness absence that goes beyond 28-day calendar days. 	Medium
Management Response		<p>Action point 8: This is clarified within the revised policy and associated guidance.</p> <p>Action point 9: Agresso defects to be resolved and new triggers as per revised policy to be changed within the system.</p> <p>Reliant on Agresso Team work packages priorities.</p>		Responsible Individual:	Tracy Walters & Steve Yeo
				Date for Implementation	<p>Action Point 8: October 2025 (pending Employment committee endorsement)</p> <p>Action Point 9: March 2026</p>

Annex 2: Objective, scope, and distribution

Objective

The objective of this review is to assess the adequacy of design and operating effectiveness of the key controls established to ensure directorate adherence to the Council's Managing Sickness Absence Policy and supporting guidance.

Scope

In undertaking this review, we will consider whether:

- Policies and procedures in relation to managing attendance have been documented, are up to date and made available to all staff.
- Periods of sickness absence are properly recorded and supported by appropriate documentation.
- Managers are taking the required action at the appropriate stages.
- Monitoring and reporting of sickness absence is undertaken appropriately.

Distribution

Bal Toor, Director of HR Workforce & Transformation

Annabel Scholes, Executive Director and S151 Officer – Financial & Commercial (Final only)

Tracy Walters, Head of HR Policy & Strategy

Ian Kirby, Interim Head of Internal Audit

Annex 3: Our classification systems

Recommendation

Priority	Definition	Action required
High	Significant weakness in governance, risk management and control that if unresolved exposes the organisation to an unacceptable level of residual risk.	Remedial action must be taken urgently and within an agreed timescale.
Medium	Weakness in governance, risk management and control that if unresolved exposes the organisation to a high level of residual risk.	Remedial action should be taken at the earliest opportunity and within an agreed timescale.
Low	Scope for improvement in governance, risk management and control.	Remedial action should be prioritised and undertaken within an agreed timescale.

Annex 3: Our classification systems

Substantial	Substantial Assurance	The framework of governance, risk management and control is adequate and effective.
Reasonable	Reasonable Assurance	Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control.
Partial	Partial Assurance	There are significant weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it could be or could become inadequate and ineffective.
Minimal	Minimal Assurance	There are fundamental weaknesses in the framework of governance, risk management and control such that it is inadequate and ineffective or is likely to fail.

Recommendation

Priority	Definition	Action required
High	Significant weakness in governance, risk management and control that if unresolved exposes the organisation to an unacceptable level of residual risk.	Remedial action must be taken urgently and within an agreed timescale.
Medium	Weakness in governance, risk management and control that if unresolved exposes the organisation to a high level of residual risk.	Remedial action should be taken at the earliest opportunity and within an agreed timescale.
Low	Scope for improvement in governance, risk management and control.	Remedial action should be prioritised and undertaken within an agreed timescale.

