

Managing Absence





Managing Absence





1: Summary

- 1.1 How the Council manages the attendance of its employees is a high profile issue, of interest particularly for the media (and consequently the public). The public sector has the worst attendance rates of any sector of the economy, and the Government has challenged public sector organisations to perform better.
- 1.2 For the 2001/2 year the BCC Best Value target of 8% lost time / 18 days per employee was met and performance improved against the previous year. There was 7.98% lost time / 17.96 days per employee, compared against 2000/1 where there was 8.50% lost time / 18.55 days per employee.
- 1.3 There has been a great deal of positive effort made by many departments to address the problems with absence. There is unquestionable commitment at senior levels to ensure that absence targets are met; whilst there is still some progress to be made in achieving greater consistency across all departments, this corporate commitment still remains.
- 1.4 It is a positive sign that the Best Value target for 2001/2 was met. This demonstrates that the re-focusing of attention upon absence as an issue has had an impact. It is important to recognise that this may not be the result of one particular action (i.e. changing the procedure), but the combination of a number of different actions.
- 1.5 The Managing Attendance Group (MAG) Peer Audit recognised the progress that has been made with regard to absence. This used an audit method whereby departments audited one another, as well as seeking the view of senior officers and employees. This was an innovative method for the Council, examining how the new procedure had been implemented. It highlighted
- The inconsistency between departments in issuing Notifications of Concern (NOCs)
 - Managerial training and awareness issues linked to this
 - A perceived unfairness in the criteria used to assess 'unsatisfactory' attendance



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Recommendations:

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R1	Information on attendance should be maintained regularly (at least monthly) for the entire organisation. This should <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be in a common format • Show performance against relevant measures • Include details of estimated costs • Be timely (i.e. no more than 28 days old at publication) 	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Information Framework	30 April 2003

31 July 2003



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R8	There should be clear guidance for managers as to when an employee should be allowed to take leave, and when this should be recorded as absence.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	31 July 2003
R9	Managers should speak to the individual (or in exceptional circumstances, the person calling on their behalf) at the time of notification of the absence.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	30 April 2003
R10	Managers should be encouraged to adopt a welfare and information gathering approach with regard to handling notification of absence.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	31 July 2003
R11	The point at which absence relating to disability or industrial injuries / accidents at work should be referred to Occupational Health as being problematic for service provision should be clear.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	31 July 2003
R12	There should be clear guidance within the procedure over where a manager may consider not issuing an NOC / FNOC.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	31 July 2003
R13	A standard corporate briefing on attendance standards expected throughout the probationary period and further employment must be delivered to every new entrant. This should be an expected outcome of a corporate induction programme.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Induction and Probationary Period Framework	31 July 2003
R14	Monitoring of performance must take place regularly within the probationary period. Attendance must be one of the criteria monitored and the criteria expected must be clearly defined.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Induction and Probationary Period Framework	31 July 2003
R15	The cases of all current long term sick staff should be reviewed to ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All current required actions (such as case reviews and referrals) have been carried out. Identify further action and precise dates for this. 	Departmental Personnel Officers Delivery of Service	30 April 2003



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Documentation





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Items for Further Discussion:

No.	Items for Further Discussion	Responsibility	Completion Date
D1	<p>Departments should have individual sickness absence targets, which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collectively deliver the corporate absence target Take account of individual department issues in the short term Seek improvement from all departments 	<p>Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Information Framework</p>	14 January 2004
D2	<p>The criteria stating at what point attendance becomes unsatisfactory should be changed to reflect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of instances of absence, and A percentage of absence Over a timescale expressed in weeks <p>This should also be reflected in the criteria at further stages of the procedure (i.e. after a Notification of Concern has been issued).</p>	<p>Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework</p>	14 January 2004
D3	<p>The criteria defining unsatisfactory attendance should be directly linked to organisational targets (i.e. BV12), and should therefore change in line with corporate targets.</p>	<p>Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework</p>	14 January 2004
D4	<p>There should be a clear link between the criteria used for attendance in both the probationary period and further employment. Ideally, these should be the same (i.e. 26 weeks).</p>	<p>Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework</p>	14 January 2004
D5	<p>Managers should pay attention to employees who have accumulated days absence equal to or greater than the target average per FTE expressed in BV12, where no formal action has been considered.</p> <p>The action taken at this stage should remain the same as in the current procedure.</p>	<p>Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework</p>	14 January 2004
D6	<p>Where a manager considers that a Notification of Concern or Final Notification of Concern should not be issued, prior to advising the individual, they should discuss this with a suitable senior manager and Personnel Officer, to ensure consistency.</p>	<p>Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework</p>	14 January 2004



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- D7 Prior to issuing a Notification of Concern, managers should be required to adjourn from the RTWI and give reasonable time to consider this. At this point a Personnel Officer may advise them.

- D8 Clear corporate guidance must be given to managers that they will be expected to

Chief Personnel Officer
Policy: Procedure
Framework

14 January 2004



3: Introduction

3.1 Background

3.1.1 Managing absence is not a new issue for the City Council. As long ago as November 1999, District Audit examined the management of absence in the City Council and made 31 recommendations in the form of an action plan. A brief chronology of events in relation to absence is shown in Appendix 1.

3.1.2 How the Council manages absence has also attracted attention in the local media. In an article on 05 December 2000 the Birmingham Post criticised the management of absence in the Council, dubbing BCC “the sickest of Britain’s big city councils”. Absence rates had risen year on year since the introduction of the previous procedure in 1996, and the Council’s average number of days lost per employee was 16.1 days a year.

3.1.3 The response to this was two-fold, involving

- Setting a Best Value target to achieve top quartile performance (Thec/ 11.4 Tj -5Tj T* 0.02255Tj Tan lo) by March Tc 0.29517467



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3.2 The Purpose of this Review:

- 3.2.1 Attendance and absence is a vast subject area, with extremely complicated inter-relationships between the relevant factors. It is affected by the tlytwe6o 552 42 | 56 t is affected by the tlytwe6o 552 42 | 56 t is affected by the tlytwe6o 552 42 | 56 t is



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environment they have no choice. That makes it even more important that our customers are satisfied that they are receiving value for money. To do that, we must show that we are deserving of their trust and spend public money as if it were our own.

- 3.3.3 Many of the concerns voiced about attendance management as a practice emanate from a concern that it is unfair to penalise in employment those who are 'genuinely ill'. We must be cognisant of the fact that we are not seeking to pass judgement on whether sickness is real, feigned or exaggerated. Our driving concern in managing attendance is that we must ensure that we are able as a Council to deliver the services that we have an obligation to provide.
- 3.3.4 In doing so there is the fact that Birmingham City Council employs nearly 50,000 people who deliver those services. It is a fact that people are ill from time to time. Occasionally they have accidents and incidents that cause them to be absent. And in managing people we must not only remember but also accept this to a certain extent. Just as employees have responsibilities to behave reasonably within the terms of their contract of employment, the Council has a responsibility to behave as a reasonable employer. The limit of that reasonability is where it affects the organisation's ability to provide services to the people of Birmingham. The consideration on behalf of the employee is that they in turn accept this fact.
- 3.3.5 How we manage the people who work for us when they do not perform is a matter of concern, but should also be a cause for celebration when they do. Managing people is a skill, not an additional responsibility for technical experts. We need to ensure that
- We recruit, select and develop those who are competent in applying this skill (or who have the potential to develop it)
 - People managers and not pure technical specialists occupy people manager roles
 - We need to manage their performance actively too
- 3.3.6 Managers have a great deal of influence over what the Council achieves. It is a team game in every sense of the phrase: we can only achieve overall if everyone achieves. Managers have the responsibility to manage and motivate staff to deliver. Managing requires consistency and motivation means using positive and negative influences to achieve results. But to expect managers to do so without clear and structured measurement of performance from senior managers, and without the training and expert support necessary to do so, is willing them to fail.



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3.4 Corporate Performance Targets

3.4.1 The Best Value Performance Indicator 12 (BVPI 12) originally set objectives for absence in terms of

- The percentage of working days lost, and
- The average number of working days lost per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) ¹

3.4.2 The Government has shown increasing concern with levels of absence in the public sector, challenging the sector to reduce absence levels by 30% ². CBI figures show that the public sector lost on average 10.1 days per employee in 2001, in comparison to the private sector, which lost 6.7 days ³.

3.4.3 Fig. 1 below shows that the targets in this area become progressively more challenging, with the aim of achieving top quartile performance among Core Cities by March 2005. The Government has applied a new top quartile target to this indicator for 2002/3, to be achieved by 2007 ⁴. From 2002/3, BVPI 12 is expressed as an average number of working days lost per FTE.

Year	Percentage Rate	Days Lost per FTE
2001/2	8%	18.00
2002/3	(7%)	15
2003/4	(6%)	12.75
2004/5	(5%)	11.4

Fig. 1 : Best Value Performance Targets

3.4.4 When Birmingham's performance is compared to other core cities or the public sector in general, these targets are both reasonable and achievable.

3.4.5 Emphasis on managing attendance is not going to go away. With the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), BVPI 12 is almost certain to be included in the factors that are assessed as part of CPA. There will be no respite from the need to achieve better attendance.

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3.5 The Cost of Absence

3.5.1 Sickness absence does cost the organisation, but this is not a simple matter of expenditure. There are both direct and indirect costs of absence; these are shown in Fig. 2



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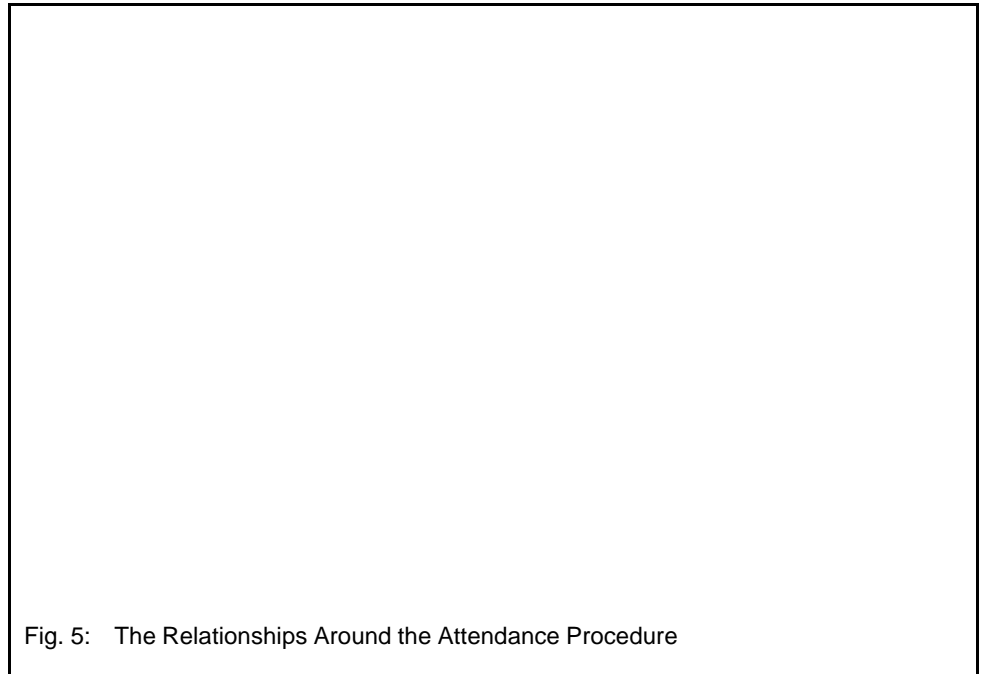


Fig. 5: The Relationships Around the Attendance Procedure

- 3.8 Who is Responsible?
 - 3.8.1 The Managing Attendance procedure gives the responsibility to all managers for ensuring that absence is kept within a defined, 'reasonable' level and that the procedure is applied fairly and consistently.
 - 3.8.2 Chief Officers and other senior officers of JNC grade have specific absence management targets within their performance contracts. However, formal performance management and appraisal does not extend lower within the organisation.
 - 3.8.3



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- Giving advice at the appropriate time in the formulation of service policy

3.9.4 It is not the role of the CPO to shadow or duplicate departmental arrangements. However, departments must handle their personnel affairs within the corporate framework co-ordinated by the CPO.



4: The Influence of Culture

- 4.1 The Importance of Culture
 - 4.1.1 Culture and the operation of procedures such as Managing Attendance are inextricably intertwined. How the procedure is perceived affects how it is put into practice. How the procedure is put into practice affects how it is perceived. Whilst the examination of the robustness of the procedure itself can be extracted and dealt with separately, issues relating to culture and operation of the procedure need to be dealt with to some degree in unison.
 - 4.1.2 The culture within the Council stems fundamentally from the beliefs, behaviour and aspirations of employees. However, these beliefs and aspirations are themselves influenced by managerial style and practice. Changes in culture can rarely be achieved rapidly, and this generally takes a number of years.
 - 4.1.3 Many of the factors covered here have outcomes in how the procedure operates. Where these are specifically related to the operation of the procedure, these are covered in [6: How the Procedure is Operated](#).
- 4.2 Performance Management
 - 4.2.1 The concept of performance applies to attendance at both an individual and an organisational level. To achieve the latter requires the former. Whilst it can be relatively easy to make managers understand that they are being measured against the level of attendance they achieve, making individuals understand that their own performance is part of this broader picture is much more difficult. The key link in the process of managing against performance is making people accountable for that performance.
 - 4.2.2 In terms of achieving levels of performance management seen in the private sector, the Council is a long way from achieving this goal. This is a factor acknowledged in the current Best Value Review of People. As mentioned in the introduction, formal assessment of performance does not presently exist for employees below JNC level (senior officers) in all departments. Incorporating appraisal of attendance into a wider appraisal of individual performance for all employees is a considerable step away.



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4.2.3 Nonetheless, this is the direction in which the Council must move in order to relate performance at an individual level to organisational achievement. Achieving a level of understanding in this area will also reap benefits in changing employee perceptions of the procedure.

4.3 Channels of Communication

4.3.1



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organisational attitude to managing absence merely typifies these. It is about more than simply getting people to attend. In many respects it is about changing the way we manage people to encourage them to want to attend. Such changes have consequences for other aspects of performance and achievement.

- 4.5.4 A programme of cultural change cannot be addressed through sending everyone on a course, changing the organisation logo or 4.5.4



5: The Managing Attendance Procedure

- 5.1 The Procedure
- 5.1.1 A flow chart of the Managing Attendance Procedure is shown for reference in Fig. 6.1 / 6.2 on pages 30 and 31.
- 5.2 What Do Other Organisations Do?
- 5.2.1 The revised Managing Attendance procedure is still relatively new. Although the procedure itself was already examined by the Involved People / Modern Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2001, it is pertinent to look at some aspects of the procedure and question whether the procedure is indeed 'the right approach' for Birmingham City Council.
- 5.2.2 Other organisations take a different approach to managing attendance, as can be expected by their differing objectives. How they manage absence may be reflective of those objectives and may not be entirely appropriate for the City Council. Looking at this does however offer alternative ways that absence can be managed procedurally. This is important in considering the solutions to where the current procedure is perceived to be deficient.
- 5.2.3 The organisations examined included a selection of other large local authorities, but also private sector companies, a university, an NHS trust and a trade union. The aim was to have a broad selection of sectors against which comparisons could be made. The full list of organisations and summary details of their attendance management procedures is shown in Appendix 3 .
- 5.2.4 Key points established from this were that, in comparison to the other organisations examined, the Council's procedure
- Is broadly similar in terms of sickness notification, Return To Work Interviews and absence certification
 - Is less specific regarding the trigger point for formal action
 - Is relatively more detailed regarding managing long-term absence

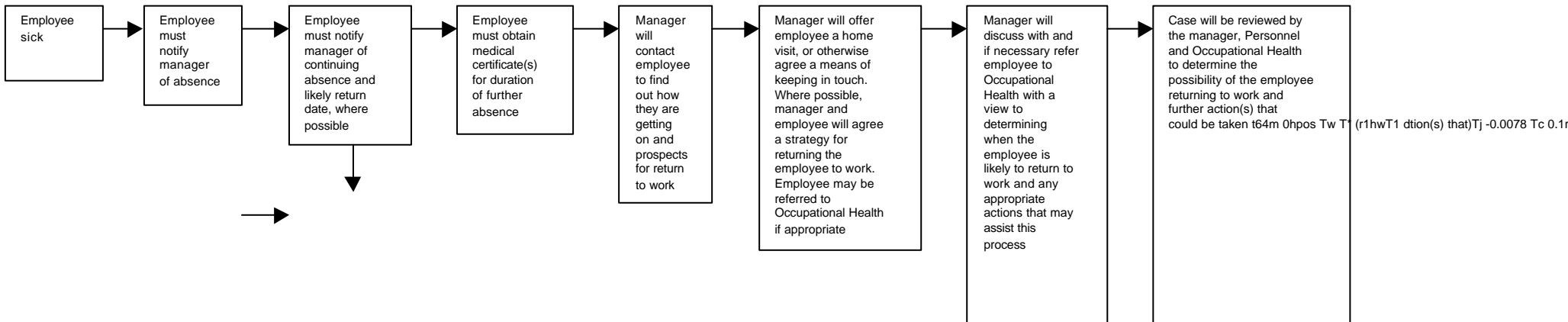


Fig. 6.1: Procedure Flow Chart

Source: Managing Attendance Procedure

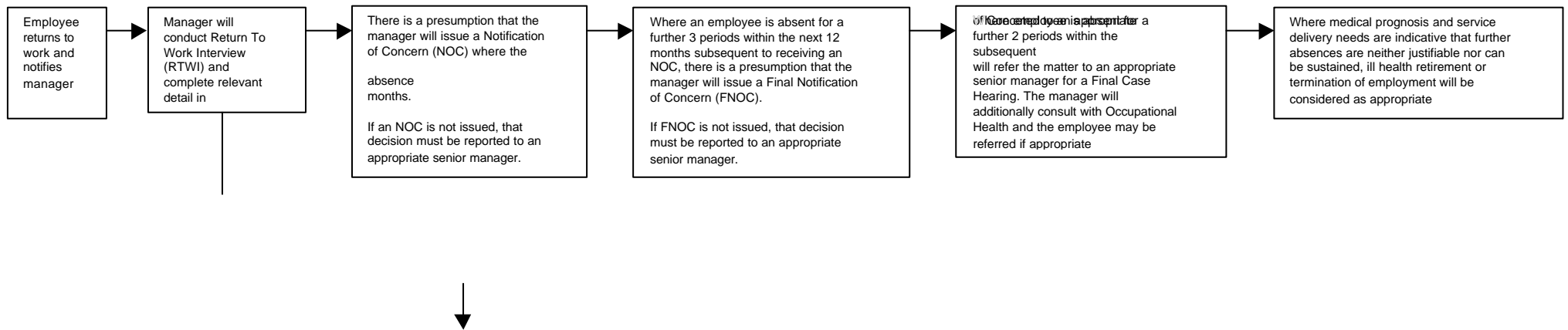


Fig. 6.2: Procedure Flow Chart Source: Managing Attendance Procedure



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5.2.5 Additionally, in terms of performance, the Council performed worse than these organisations. Although information was not available for all the organisations examined, our performance for 2001/2 was significantly worse than the other seven Core Cities (see Appendix 3).

5.3 The Criteria for Unsatisfactory Attendance

5.3.1 The starting point for examining the robustness of the Council's procedure was in terms of the criteria used to define unsatisfactory attendance. This is also an area that is easy to identify within other organisations' procedures – the point at which a decision is made about attendance.

5.3.2



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patterns, or providing assistance through promoting a healthy lifestyle.

- 5.3.8 This leaves the subject of absence criteria to address defining problematic volume and frequency of absence. However, it is pertinent to question whether the current criteria for issuing a Notification of Concern / Final Notification of Concern (NOC / FNOC) are actually appropriate.
- 5.3.9 The first point in relation to the criterion is that it is not reflective of the organisational objectives (in terms of Best Value Performance Indicator 12 – BV12). It expresses only frequency and not volume of absence.
- 5.3.10 Secondly, this criterion can lead to a ‘scattergun’ approach: the procedure being applied to those whose attendance is ‘less problematic’ than others. It does not distinguish between those who have had three instances of one-day absence and those who have had three instances of two months.
- 5.3.11 The final issue with the criteria is one that came across very strongly within the MAG Peer Audit. Nearly every department made reference to the fairness of the procedure in relation to the criteria to assess unsatisfactory attendance .
- 5.3.12 The problems with the perceived fairness of the procedure can be summarised as follows:
- (i) If there is no criterion relating volume of absence to unsatisfactory attendance, then there is no incentive for the employee to resume work as soon as possible
 - (ii) An employee could have three one-day instances of absence in a year and be issued with an NOC. This is a very strict definition of problematic attendance
 - (iii) Conversely, an employee with two, five-day periods of absence could not only self-certify for these, but would not reach the trigger point for issuing an NOC
- 5.3.13 The culmination of this is that this can lead to the procedure being perceived by both employees and managers as unfair and unduly harsh. The effects of this could be that
- Employees may automatically perceive the management of absence as a negative issue, rather than something that is accepted as part of good managerial practice
 - Managers may be less willing to apply the procedure because they consider it harsh
 - Managers would prefer to evade the difficult decisions sometimes



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needed to manage attendance

5.4 Managing Absence from Day One

- 5.4.1 The induction and probationary period are the most impressionable time that the organisation can have upon a new employee. Establishing clearly the standards of performance that are required of the employee at this stage is very important. In this respect, attendance is no different to any other aspect of performance or standards of behaviour.
- 5.4.2 Attendance during the probationary period can often be an indicator of future attendance. If there is poor attendance in the probationary period and this goes unchallenged, there is a likelihood of poor attendance continuing into the future.
- 5.4.3 This was emphasised by the District Auditor in the October 1999 report on Absence. Consequently, Chief Officers have a responsibility to ensure that
- New employees are informed of the requirements of sickness absence as part of induction
 - The probationary process considers employee attendance in confirming decisions about permanent employment
- 5.4.4 There are some key issues in how the Council inducts new staff regarding attendance. These are problems that also apply in other areas of personnel policy within the Council:
- This is not consistent across departments
 - In many cases this is done by written brief
 - The procedure itself states that it is the responsibility of the employee to familiarise themselves with the procedure, rather than the organisation ensuring that the employee is familiar with this
 - There is no guarantee that this will be read and understood
- 5.4.5 Whilst attendance is a factor that is considered, there is no guidance at present for managers on
- (i) What is unsatisfactory attendance within the probationary period, or
 - (ii) What to do about it if this occurs
- 5.4.6 A new employee can complete their probationary period with unsatisfactory attendance under the criteria. This means that attendance must be managed in accordance with the procedure



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applied to permanent employees (i.e. issue an NOC / FNOC). However, a serious doubt over the ability of the individual to perform has already been raised in this respect, at a point where managers are allegedly making a decision about whether to make them permanent is justified by performance.

- 5.4.7 Failing to induct new starters with the appropriate standards of performance means that managing their performance is at best hit and miss. This is also a missed opportunity for the organisation: at this early stage with the Council, we should be taking the opportunity to impress standards of good behaviour on employees. We should be opening our employment relationship with new staff as we mean to go on.
- 5.5 Disability-Related Absence
- 5.5.1 The Managing Attendance procedure covers absence related to disabilities. However, disability related absences are not considered for the purpose of determining whether an NOC / FNOC should be issued.
- 5.5.2 The exception is where the extent of disability-related absences becomes unacceptable in terms of 'providing a service'. In such cases, after making appropriate adjustments, managers are advised to explore medical redeployment with advice from Occupational Health. It does not however elaborate upon specifically where this point may lie.
- 5.5.3 Whilst the Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their disability, it does not state that disability-related absence cannot be managed. In doing so, there is an obligation upon employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace, work and pattern of work, in order to reduce the prospects of ongoing absence.
- 5.5.4 The price of getting it wrong in relation to disability is high. In addition to the lack of limits an Employment Tribunal has on compensation, there is a very high cost to the reputation of the employer. In the case of a prominent Council such as Birmingham, with perceived social responsibilities to be a 'model employer', these potential costs to reputation are significantly higher.
- 5.6 Industrial Injuries
- 5.6.1 Similarly to disability-related absence, absence related to industrial injuries is not considered for the purpose of determining whether an



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NOC / FNOC is to be issued under the procedure. Similar provisions to those for disability exist for how industrial injury-related absence should be managed.

- 5.6.2 This is a change to the previous procedure, where managers were given latitude to take the impact of absence related to accidents at work into consideration in taking action to manage absence.
- 5.6.3 There is anecdotal evidence that some areas of the Council have experienced an increase in industrial injury-related absence since the procedure was changed. The managerial perception of this where this has occurred is that there may be an element of this being used as a means of avoiding an NOC / FNOC being issued.
- 5.6.4 Unless the injury results in disability, there is no specific legislation covering this. The individual has a right to take legal action against their employer where they have been injured as a result of negligence on the part of the employer. However, there is again no legislation that indicates that an industrial injury or accident at work cannot be managed within attendance management processes.
- 5.7 The Scope for Changing the Procedure
- 5.7.1 It is recognised good practice to consult with recognised trade unions on issues such as the management of attendance. It is important though to acknowledge that trade unions can often provide useful suggestions and improvements to how processes are operated.
- 5.7.2 How attendance is managed can be a thorny subject at best with trade unions. Unison is the largest union among the Council's staff, and has voiced particular concerns about the procedure. Their concerns include that it is
- Used by poor managers as a fast track means of dismissing people
 - Trying to bully people into being healthy
 - Inconsistently applied
 - Caused by poor management of health and safety
- 5.7.3 This is not to say that these concerns are entirely founded upon fact. Each of these is a fair criticism of a procedure that is not applied properly. They are also representative of the concerns that need to be addressed in creating a more positive perception of the issue of managing attendance.
- 5.7.4 A general point to be cognisant of is that trade unions are unlikely in principle to support or fully endorse any process that could ultimately



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Option:	Rationale:
1: No change is needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are satisfied that the procedure is fit for purpose as it stands. The procedure will deliver our organisational goals.
2: Evaluate further before change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is too soon to evaluate whether the procedure is fit for purpose. Insufficient time has been allowed for the procedure to bed in and the effects to become manifest. The value of change now is outweighed by the effort involved in changing now.
3: Change is needed as soon as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The procedure is not fit for purpose. Allowing the procedure to remain in place longer than it takes to change it risks managers being led to aim for targets not in line with our goals. Undesirable behaviours, attitudes and practices will become further entrenched by allowing the procedure to remain in place.

Fig. 7: Options for Changing the Procedure



6: How the Procedure is Operated

6.1 The Need to Operate Effectively

6.1.1 For a procedure to achieve what it is supposed to do, it needs not only to be fit for purpose, but also purposefully put into practice. Part of this is to do with the culture of the organisation, and part is to do with the mechanisms that facilitate the process. The culture of the organisation has been covered in section four; this section focuses on how the process is put into operation.

6.2 Measuring Absence Performance

6.2.1 Best Value Performance Indicator BV12 measures the average number of days absence per FTE. This can also be expressed in terms of a percentage of absence corporately (the proportion of time lost), which is how the initial BVPI targets were determined.

6.2.2 Performance against BV12 is provided quarterly from HRIS data to COG, broken down by department and manual / staff grade groupings. The information is also available to Departmental Management Teams (DMTs) via their Departmental Personnel Officer (DPO).

6.2.3 COG has considered a proposal to break down the corporate absence target into individual targets for each department for 2002/3 formulating this proposal, three possible means of establishing the target of 15 days per FTE were considered:

⁸. In

- (i) The target level for each department is set at the corporate level (i.e. 15 days per FTE)
- (ii) Each department be asked to deliver a proportion of the reduction in sickness required equal to the amount that the department contributes to corporate sickness (i.e. Social Services contributed 46.95% of absence in 2001/2; they would be required to contribute 46.95% of the required reduction of 27,870 days (a reduction from 22.74 to 20.61 days per FTE)

⁸ Chief Officers' Group, 28 August 2002.



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- decisions (and thereby possibly evade them)
- Are not being managed and directed effectively by senior managers

6.3 Managerial Competence in Applying the Procedure

6.3.1 Competence is a means of measuring ability. It is about being able to consistently achieve a defined standard of performance and defined outcomes. This is essential in not only being able to define the level of success of training and briefing, but also in giving individuals

managers

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framework at this point. In terms of 'completing' delivery of this, this is a long-term process that is ongoing.

- 6.3.6 This is relevant in terms of how managers have and are trained in applying the procedure. 'Training' for managers in the use of the Managing Attendance procedure thus far has consisted of a system of briefings designed to ensure that managers had the underpinning knowledge to operate the procedure. It was accepted that this was so, and this was intended mainly to bridge the gap between the old and new procedures.
- 6.3.7 The Managers' Briefing Pack provided standard briefings both for managers and for managers to brief to their staff. Departments were also expected to supplement this with additional departmental training programmes for managers on managing attendance. This had the benefit of enabling departments to go into greater detail regarding the particular issues that are specific within their departmental operation.
- 6.3.8 Many of the cultural factors that are crucial to the effectiveness of managing attendance are developed and embedded over time by a competence-based approach. These include:
- Managers and employees 'buying-in' to the process, and accepting its use
 - Managers being proficient in managing the procedure, employees perceiving this
 - Consistent application across the organisation
 - An understanding that the procedure contributes to organisational goals
- 6.3.9 However, a corporate training and development programme cannot stand alone and be geared solely to tackling this one issue. This is especially the case because the areas of competence it would be aiming to develop are also applicable in other areas. The development on attendance needs to work towards the overall framework being developed.
- 6.3.10 Instigating a corporate induction process is being examined as part of a review of recruitment and selection processes. The intention is that this is running by April 2003. Computer-based methods are being examined as part of this, as well as a half-day module on attendance for new managers, which could be up and running by January 2003.
- 6.3.11 There are currently no definite proposals to create what would amount to 'task teams' to assist in developing skills and practices in areas of high absence. However, given that significant proportions of



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Date of Report to COG	Information
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01 May is a case in point.

- 6.5.8 Whilst Best Value Performance Indicators (BV12) exist for absence, the performance of departments and the Council as a whole is not shown against these. There is no real indication of whether departments and the Council as a whole are achieving or not.
- 6.5.9 The item relating to Managing Attendance is generally allocated around 15 minutes of discussion on the COG agenda. Whilst it is never noted without some discussion, it does not appear that aspects of departmental performance are challenged or praised at COG.
- 6.5.10 COG is the most senior level of management within the Council. It is appropriate that its role on issues such as attendance should be from an overview perspective,
- Ensuring that targets are being achieved and
 - Instigating action where they are not.
- 6.5.11 In discussing these points with the Acting Chief Executive, he agreed that the report has been in the same format for some time and would welcome ideas to refresh this. In doing so, he stated that he would look to the Chief Personnel Officer to do this. He however gave no indication of whether he proposed to change the way in which COG manages attendance.
- 6.5.12 COG has considered the matter of the information that they receive on attendance ⁹. Agreement was reached that COG would receive a monthly update on the Managing Attendance procedure, showing the extent to which departments are complying with and delivering the procedure. A specific format for this information was not agreed, although would be tabled for discussion at a later date.
- 6.6 Departmental Management Teams
- 6.6.1 Following the introduction of the new procedure, the means of managing attendance in each department was for Chief Officers to determine. How DMTs receive information on attendance



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6.6.3 Issues with how departments manage attendance through DMTs include:

- There is no standard format that departments must report in, which means that this cannot be readily brought together overall for the organisation
- Departments establish objectives for attendance themselves within the performance contracts of Assistant Directors
- The frequency of discussion of attendance in some departments is not appropriate – good practice would suggest that this should be taking place at least four weekly or monthly
- Some departments do not report against key performance indicators; some do, but there is no overall guidance or consistency to these

6.6.4 Whilst there is a degree of reason in allowing departments to take a managerial approach that best suits not only the nature of their own issues, but also their management teams, this does conflict with fundamental tenets of collating information. In order to keep the organisation heading in one direction, this needs all departments to be producing information in the same format, to the same frequency, measured against the same key success areas.

6.6.5 Taking a prescriptive approach to how an issue such as attendance is managed across the organisation has the disadvantage of not allowing departments to tailor the process to their needs. But there is a more important concern that they all deliver and show they are delivering against a set of centrally defined criteria.

6.6.6 Performance contracts (where they are in place) are a good mechanism for setting objectives for attendance, and establishing individual accountability. However, there are two problems within this. Firstly, only our most senior officers have performance contracts – a means of communicating these objectives throughout the organisation is needed. Secondly, allowing the setting of objectives on core human resource issues such as attendance by departments creates the potential for disparate objectives.

6.7 Line Managers

6.7.1 Information available to line managers comes principally from their own local records. This is supplemented by reports requested from Personnel. Personnel do not routinely provide information to managers in all departments. Such reports would prove useful to line managers.



this.

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6.9 Issuing Notifications of Concern / Final Notifications of Concern

6.9.1 One of the key revisions to the Managing Attendance procedure was the introduction of the presumption that line managers would issue an NOC / FNOC where individual attendance triggers this. This does not mean that an NOC / FNOC will always be issued, but it is reasonable to expect that it should occur in a high proportion of cases.

6.9.2 The MAG Audit of Chief Officers asked what percentage of employees meeting the triggers for NOCs and FNOCs have been issued with a notification. The purpose of this was to test the extent to which the presumption that a notification would be issued is actually being carried out. The results are shown in Fig. 10 (see next page).

6.9.3 Fig. 10 shows that:

- Although the presumption exists that an NOC / FNOC will be issued, this actually occurs in only slightly more than half of cases across the authority
- There is a marked inconsistency across departments, especially in issuing NOCs
- Some departments are clearly not implementing the procedure as it was intended, notably Corporate and Democratic Services and Economic Development

6.9.4 Even the departments with the highest rate of issuing NOCs in particular, are doing so in 60-70% of cases. This issue was egho MAG is 0 -12.75 TD



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Department	Employees Triggering Issue of NOC	NOCs Issued	Proportion
Corporate and Democratic Services	81	6	7.41%
Economic Development	74	18	24.32%
Education	76	35	46.05%
Environmental and Consumer Services	193	118	61.14%
Finance and Performance Review	195	120	61.54%
Housing	378	230	60.85%
Leisure and Culture	253	94	37.15%
Planning	23	14	60.87%
Social Services	392	264	67.35%
Transportation	173	65	37.57%
Urban Design	14	5	35.71%
Total	1852	969	52.32%

Final Notifications of Concern
01 October 2001 to 31 March 2002

Department	Employees Triggering Issue of FNOC	FNOCs Issued	Proportion
Corporate and Democratic Services	0	0	0.00%
Economic Development	3	1	33.33%
Education	0	0	0.00%
Environmental and Consumer Services	27	18	66.67%
Finance and Performance Review	12	11	91.67%
Housing	6	4	66.67%
Leisure and Culture	4	3	75.00%
Planning	5	1	20.00%
Social Services	36	17	47.22%
Transportation	4	1	25.00%
Urban Design	1	0	0.00%
Total	98	56	57.14%

Fig. 10: Issue of Notifications of Concern / Final Notifications of Concern
Source: MAG Audit

6.9.6 The issue of NOCs / FNOCs was reflected also in the concerns and comments raised by managers in the Peer Audit. Two important issues raised in a number of departments were the lack of discretion available to managers in issuing notifications and a lack of clarity about how discretion may be used.

6.9.7 It is also pertinent to bear in mind that previously managers had discretion in the issue of notifications, considering

- The previous absence record
- Knowledge of an underlying medical problem
- The nature of absence in relation to the job
- The length of each absence and / or any identifiable pattern
- Serious personal difficulties outside work



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there is a means of identifying and resolving the issue at an early stage

- 6.10.3 There are also arrangements for phased returns to work, which assist returning members of staff with the difficulties of adjusting to the workplace that can follow an extended period of absence.
- 6.10.4 The arrangements overall are appropriate to the Council's situation. They enable long term absence to be dealt with positively, but with sensible regard to the realistic prospect of a return to work and the needs of the individual.
- 6.10.5 However, the number of staff who are long term sick has (as on page 20 demonstrates) slightly increased since May 2001. Since the introduction of the new procedure in October 2001, these figures have only recently started to fall, with consecutive decreases from March to May. There has also been a significant fall in the number of cases where staff have been absent for more than 12 months.
- 6.10.6 Without accessing long-term sickness records on an individual basis, the causes of the rise in the numbers of long-term sick staff cannot be readily ascertained. Chief Officers' Group (COG) do however, receive a summary report on long term absences. Despite the overall progress, within this are numerous instances where reviews of cases have not taken place and the next stage of action is unclear. Such issues remain on the report from month to month and appear to go unchallenged. This may be the root cause of the rise of long term sickness: a sound procedure but no managerial action, even from the top.
- 6.10.7 The findings of Internal Audit in the MAG Peer Audit were along similar lines. Examining individual case files, they identified that three out of nine long-term sickness cases had no documentation providing evidence of a home visit. Again, this is another area of slack management. If there is no evidence, we are unable to prove that the procedure is being followed.
- 6.11 Refusal to Co-operate
- 6.11.1 Many of the perceptions of employees should naturally be expected to drive the view expressed by trade unions – the unions do after all exist to serve their members. The position of the trade unions regarding the Managing Attendance procedure is a complex one. re0.0951 fegar9 being1rt cop –d.

Fig. 4



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interview. Since absence is performance, it follows that a similar approach should apply. However, there is very little emphasis on using informal means within the procedure.

6.12.2 By dealing with appropriate issues informally, much can be achieved in terms of how people perceive the procedure. Provided that it is appropriate to do so, this allows a more gradual approach to be taken to managing performance, perceptibly increasing by incremental steps rather than jumping straight to formal procedures.

6.12.3 One aspect where informal processes are emphasised in the procedure is the obligation of senior managers to rewheroedu3OlicA I By def h8386 To

One



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- A significant proportion (38.96%) do not consider that it encourages people to come to work
- Nearly all (95.35%) surveyed consider that their manager administers the procedure fairly and reasonably

6.13.5 Prevalent issues raised within this included:

- The lack of managerial discretion in issuing NOCs
- No measurement of the length of absences or 'total absence'

6.13.6 This indicates on the surface that although employees consider the procedure to be unfair, they consider that their managers operate it fairly. However, were managers to implement the procedure as intended then this might create the perception of being unfair.



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- The departments can still demonstrate that they are progressing and meeting those targets;
- Progress towards resolving the longer term objective of dealing with root causes is demonstrable;
- Absence for the organisation overall does not exceed the corporate target.

No.	Items for Further Discussion	Responsibility	Completion Date
D1	Departments should have individual sickness absence targets, which <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectively deliver the corporate absence target • Take account of individual department issues in the short term • Seek improvement from all departments 	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Information Framework	14 January 2004

7.3 Getting the Right Information

7.3.1 Underpinning how attendance is managed within the Council is a lack of timely and appropriate information. COG receive information on the organisation overall, but this is not related to specific performance criteria and is focused particularly on long term absence. The information is not even consistent in format from department to department. Within departments, one of the main issues from managers was the lack of information that they receive.

7.3.2 The information collected must be comparable across departments. It should also enable the departments to be compared on their performance in the areas relating to absence that really matter – key performance indicators. For that reason it should also be shared within the departments, so that everyone knows how their department and section are performing.

7.3.3 It cannot be acceptable that information presented to Chief Officers regarding an important issue such as absence is over two months old. Information should be current and delivered in a timely fashion; if it is not then this increases the risk that action will be inappropriate.

7.3.4 Whilst the timeliness of information naturally increases moving up the organisation, at no stage should a time lag of more than a couple of weeks occur. We need to be examining ways of getting this information faster, and at the present a target of 14 days may not be achievable. In this respect, a timescale initially of 28 days would be



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appropriate, working towards reducing this over time.

- 7.3.5 Equally, the nature of the discussion that Chief Officers have regarding attendance (i.e. what they do with the information) needs to be around achievements and further actions. There needs to be a strong message sent out that the senior management team within the Council take absence seriously, and are determined to achieve our targets. As part of this, COG need to acknowledge and praise the departments that achieve, as well as challenging those that don't.
- 7.3.6 Relating information to performance ensures that by gathering information you are measuring what it is important to perform in. Some key indicators have emerged in looking at this, each of which provides indications of how attendance is being managed in departments. Many of these were developed within the MAG Peer Audit, but gathering this information should not just be an 'annual check-up'.
- 7.3.7 Reporting the cost of absence was a recommendation within the District Audit report on absence but this is still not a regular feature of reporting. This is a difficult area to quantify accurately if information is not available through systems such as HRIS, although it can be done by estimating costs. However, the principle that absence is costed should remain and be something that is done as a matter of course. This focuses attention on the issue and puts it into tangible terms that can be readily appreciated.
- 7.3.8 Indicators should enable managers to demonstrate what they are achieving in managing absence, but also demonstrate to senior managers that absence is being managed. Suggested indicators are included in recommendation R6 below.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R1	Information on attendance should be maintained regularly (at least monthly) for the entire organisation. This should <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be in a common format • Show performance against relevant measures • Include details of estimated costs • Be timely (i.e. no more than 28 days old at publication) 	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Information Framework	30 April 2003
R2	Methods of producing the relevant information faster must be explored. This should work towards a target timescale of 14 days or better.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Information Framework	31 July 2003



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- 7.4.4 The problem with this is that HRIS is a considerably long way from being able to put information directly into the hands of line managers. If the preferred means of delivering this is through HRIS alone, then delivery of the necessary elements of HRIS must be expedited to deal with the urgent need for information.
- 7.4.5 Purchasing a system specifically to deal with absence (options (ii) or (iii)) need not be expensive, but it does allow for some innovations in the way that managers work to be considered. Examples of this are
- A web-based browser system, allowing managers to access reports from their PC
 - Managers inputting information on attendance directly through this browser
 - Reports being generated automatically and sent directly to managers by e-mail
 - RTWI forms and sickness certifications being submitted electronically
- 7.4.6 Some of these do involve a big shift in how managers do things and a willingness to embrace the capability of technology to deliver. Making this move is a step change in culture all by itself.
- 7.4.7 The final option of using the tools already at managers' disposal is one that has been explored in the course of conducting this review. This was explored through running a pilot exercise of a simple spreadsheet to provide managers with the information they require. Details on this are contained in Appendix 5 .
- 7.4.8 Overall this pilot exercise demonstrated that
- The current delays in implementing the HRIS system should not preclude managers obtaining the information that they need to manage attendance
 - With guidance, the effort involved in such a task need not be unduly onerous
 - Assembling this information on a wider basis through this method would involve more work than a system that provides this automatically. However, this is an important issue and should not preclude this being considered as an interim measure until more elegant systems can be brought in
- 7.4.9



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- 7.6.8 On a par with this, the point at which managers should informally review the absence of individuals should also be directly related to the organisational objective. This is currently 20 days in a year. This should reflect the target average (i.e. in 2002/3, 15 days).
- 7.6.9 Calculating an individual's absence percentage is done by dividing the number of days absence by the number of days that they should have worked in the monitoring period, multiplied by 100. In such a calculation, authorised absence (e.g. annual leave) is treated as a day worked.
- 7.6.10 For example, in a 26 week period, a person working five days per week has 13 days absence and takes two days annual leave. The percentage is calculated as follows:
- Annual Leave: 2 days. Not included
 - Number of days absent: 13
 -



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this. Nonetheless, this does not make this acceptable. The purpose of introducing the presumption was to introduce greater consistency across departments in the issuing of NOCs / FNOCs, but this has not happened.

- 7.8.3 Managers must understand that when they are asked to consider the issue of an NOC / FNOC under the Managing Attendance procedure they are evaluating whether the employee's attendance has given rise to concern in relation to the acceptable organisational standards. It is incorrect for managers to arbitrarily assess attendance against whether they themselves are concerned about it.
- 7.8.4 T an 8pcam heart a matter of enforcing th8pcwith line managers. In doing so it is essential that the boundaries of discretion for managers be clarified and that there 8pca level of support for managers to ensure that they have appropriate guidance in taking decisions.
- 7.8.5 In clarifying the limits of discretion, guidance for managers should show examples of the kind of situations in which they might consider issuing or not issuing an NOC / FNOC. A detailed discussion around these situations should formca key part of ongoing managerial training.
- 7.8.6 In order to support the manager and ensure consistency, where the manager intends not to issue an NOC / FNOC they should be required not only to report on th8pcb but to discuss the merits of their decisionwith a Personnel Officer and / or senior manager. Theycwill be able to provide advice on thecwider consistency of decisions, to ensure that the manager 8pcable to evaluate their decision compared to other decisions taken in the organisation.
- 7.8.7 Such a discussion must clearly take place after they have gathered all the relevant information at the RTWI and before the manager gives their decision to the employee. The employee should also see that there 8pca clear period of consideration given to the decision to issue an NOC / FNOC.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R12			



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D6	Where a manager considers that a Notification of Concern or Final Notification of Concern should not be issued, prior to advising the individual, they should discuss this with a suitable senior manager and Personnel Officer, to ensure consistency.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	14 January 2004
D7	Prior to issuing a Notification of Concern, managers should be required to adjourn from the RTWI and give reasonable time to consider this. At this point a Personnel Officer may advise them.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	14 January 2004

7.9 Managing Attendance from Day One

- 7.9.1 To have any continued emphasis on absence as our workforce changes we need to ensure that all new entrants to the organisation understand the importance we place on satisfactory attendance. It needs to be clearly and consistently communicated at this early stage that this is a matter of performance. New entrants must understand clearly that if they do not perform satisfactorily within their probationary period, then we will give serious consideration to their continued employment.
- 7.9.2 There needs to be a consistent corporate emphasis on this. A standard briefing e f 34o17 Telve ed to adl new entrants . Tis ihould



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- 7.9.5 This may seem harsh. However, we must operate to the ethos that the probationary period is the initial opportunity for the new entrant to impress the authority with their performance. If we are to give this any meaning, we must be prepared to terminate employment where they have failed to impress. This should also be consistent in other areas of probationary performance.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R13	A standard corporate briefing on attendance standards expected throughout the probationary period and further employment must be delivered to every new entrant.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Induction and Probationary Period Framework	31 July 2003

This should be an expected outcome of a corporate induction programme.



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would clearly be a catalyst for action within departments. What is needed is straightforward:

'It is about getting managers to commit to definite actions in definite timescales and then go out and achieve them. COG (or indeed any other management team) should not be expected to receive reports of inaction and delay and not to challenge this.'

- 7.10.3 Whether COG is an appropriate forum for questioning progress on numerous individual cases within each department is questionable, and is something that COG itself has questioned. An acceptable solution might be for departments to have in place a standard process for collating the information to enable senior managers to check progress. This would provide for greater managerial visibility of



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7.11.3 A slight change in philosophy should be considered here. The RTWI form is the core of the process and is a relatively good document for this. However, the purpose of the form can also be to record all the details of an instance of absence, the history prior to this and the consideration that the manager has given to this. This means that the information a manager needs to consider attendance should be available to them in one place (whether this be stored on paper, electronic means or both).

7.11.4 The RTWI form could be thus used to provide:

(i) Detail on the instance of absence being discussed (dates, duration, reason, contact with the manager whilst absent / attempts to contact made by the manager)

(ii) Detail on previous absences (W* n 9o TwD -0.3415 T8
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7.12 Future Reviews of the Procedure

7.12.1 Reviewing implementation of the procedure is a fundamental stage in ensuring effective implementation. That the Managing Attendance Group returned to examine implementation six months into the new procedure is an important step. That they were able to gain the commitment of departments in carrying out the audit in doing so is an important achievement.

7.12.2 Of course, the ultimate measure of success is what happens as a result of the audit. Many a good report or audit has fallen down due to a lack of a will to implement its recommendations.

7.12.3 Change to the way that absence is managed is, by virtue of a



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R19



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manage absence are by no means unique to managing absence, encouraging competent behaviour in these areas should be part of a programme of achieving wider objectives in managerial behaviour. Ultimately, through this process, a position will be reached whereby all managers who manage people have reached an appropriate level of competence in doing so.

7.13.7 A process of identifying areas of specific problems within the Council



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R22 As a broad aim of strategy, all managers of people should be working towards achieving competence in the managerial competences identified as appropriate to attendance management.

Chief Personnel Officer
Policy: Managerial
Training and
Competence
Framework

*

*This process will take a considerable time to achieve overall (longer than 12 months), and therefore such progress towards this should be measurable.

7.14 Return To Work Interviews

7.14.1 To deal with the lack of understanding on the purpose of the RTWI, there needs to be more explicit guidance and training for managers on how the interview should be conducted.

7.14.1 The purpose of a RTWI is to

- Welcome the employee back to work, let them know they have been missed, and update them on any changes that have occurred
- Gather appropriate information about the reason for the absence and how it may further impact upon their work
- Explain the Managing Attendance policy and procedure
- Discuss the employee's attendance record in the context of why we manage attendance
- Agree any actions necessary (on both sides) to improve attendance

7.14.2 Managers must understand this purpose and the reasons why RTWIs must be carried out in every case of absence. Managers need to be monitored on completion of RTWIs, ensuring that they conduct all RTWIs within three days of the individual returning to work.

7.14.3 There needs to be a process of training all people managers in the Council to a consistent standard of conducting RTWIs. Such training should (as is proposed within the Economic Development Department) also encompass carrying out mock RTWIs to give managers experience of this.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R23	Managers should adopt a welfare and information gathering approach with regard to conducting RTWIs. There should be set criteria for what the RTWI should provide.	Chief Personnel Officer Policy: Procedure Framework	31 July 2003



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- 7.15 Recognising Good Attendance
- 7.15.1 Attendance management, like many performance tools, is all too often perceived as a tool for chastisement. There are also incentives. Part of winning the psychological battle involves changing peoples' minds: getting people to reconsider whether they do genuinely need to be off sick. Clearly, this generally only applies to short term absences.
- 7.15.2 Some areas of departments already have good practice in this area. This does however need to be consistently applied across the organisation. Measures that might be considered here include:
- (i) Praising good attendance – showing it is valued
 - (ii) Offering incentives for good attendance – showing it can be valuable
 - (iii) Showing what the team has achieved from good attendance
- 7.15.3 It is important to note that even where absence is high, there will still be people who do not have any absence at all. This is above average performance. Openly praising such people (for example, those who have not lost any time in the last six months) shows them and others that good attendance is valued. This can be done in team meetings (when discussing performance), on staff notice boards and in newsletters to the team.
- 7.15.4 Incentives can be a double-edged sword. To achieve satisfactory performance is an obligation of all employees and can be thus assumed to have already been 'paid for' in paying the person's salary. However, above satisfactory performance can be rewarded simply and cheaply. This could include offering additional days off with pay, gift vouchers, small presentation awards and so forth. This could even be done in a 'prize draw' for sections of people.
- 7.15.5 Recognising good attendance is about communicating effectively what attendance delivers. Demonstrating tangibly to the team how service has improved, as a result of attendance is something that people can relate to and readily understand.
- 7.15.6 It is just as vital to be positive about good performance as it is to challenge poor performance. As an organisation we need to be imaginative and enthusiastic about how we do this.

No.	Items for Further Discussion	Responsibility	Completion Date
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D10 Standard mechanisms for recognising and rewarding good attendance should be put in place across the Council.

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Appendix 1: Brief Chronology of Events

	Sick-note city faces £60m bill – Birmingham Post
Spring 2001	The Managing Attendance Group (MAG) was formed to look at the attendance policy and procedure, developing the procedure flow chart and the Managers' Toolbox
June 2001	Negotiations progressing with trade unions, working towards a launch date for the revised process of 01 July 2001.
July 2001	District Audit commence examination of sickness absence across departments, management action taken, and a
	authorities
	recommendations
	in Evening Mail
	introduced





6. What progress has been made in the development of departmental policies to actively pursue health promotion?
7. How will you ensure that newly appointed managers / employees receive appropriate briefing in the future?
8. Is there any evidence that employees are not complying with their responsibilities under this scheme by
 - (i) Not making all reasonable efforts to respond to attempts by their line manager to maintain contact during their period of absence?
 - (ii) Not communicating with their line manager either on the first day of absence or at day four in cases of longer-term absence?
 - (iii) Refusing to participate in the return to work interview process or refusing home visits?
9. During the period 01 October 2001 to 31 March 2002, what percentage of employees meeting 'triggers' for NOCs have been issued with them?
10. During the same period, what percentage of employees meeting 'triggers' for FNOCs have been issued with them?
11. During the same period, what percentage of employees absent for more than four weeks have received home visits?
12. What percentage of managers have attended briefing sessions and has any evaluation been undertaken of the effectiveness of those briefing sessions?

Questions for Managers

1. Have you been adequately briefed on the Managing Attendance procedure? (Agree Strongly / Agree / Disagree / Disagree Strongly)
2. Have you received a copy of the Managers' Toolbox for Managing Attendance? (Yes / No)
3. Did you attend specific Managers' briefings? (Yes / No)
4. Did you brief your staff? (Yes / No)
5. Has there been an incident where an officer has had three periods of sickness and a Notification of Concern has not been issued? (Yes / No/ If no, why not?)
6. Do you feel you are competent and confident to fulfil your responsibilities for Managing Attendance? (Yes / No)
7. Have you encountered any hindrance or difficulties in managing attendance since October? (Yes / No / If so, what are they?)
8. What would help you to manage attendance better?
9. Do you believe that the policy helps the section manage and monitor sickness absence? (Yes / No)
10. Do you believe that the Managing Attendance policy is reasonably fair? (Agree Strongly / Agree / Disagree / Disagree Strongly)

Questions for Departmental Personnel Officers

1. How regularly do you report on sickness absence to DMT? Can you give an example of a report?
2. What interventions have you made to ensure proper application of the procedure?
3. What arrangements have been made to include the Managing Attendance procedure in induction?



4. What health promotions policies have you implemented or are currently developing?
5. What action is the department taking to ensure Managing Attendance continues to be a high priority?
6. What evidence have you got to demonstrate that the policy is being implemented consistently throughout the department?
7. What problems have you encountered?

Questions to Employees

1. Have you been briefed on the Managing Attendance policy? (Yes / No)
2. Have you a reasonable understanding of it? (Yes / No)
3. Do you believe that the policy helps the section manage and monitor sickness absence? (Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree)
4. Do you believe that the Managing Attendance policy is reasonably fair? (Yes / No)
5. Does it encourage people to come to work? (Yes / No)
6. Do you consider your line manager is fair and reasonable in the way in which they administer the Managing Attendance policy? (Yes / No)



Appendix 3: Attendance Procedures in Other Organisations

Methodology

Details were obtained of Sickness and Absence policies used by various public and private sector organisations. These include other local authorities, universities, a health trust, a trade union and the retail sector. The list of organisations used is shown below.

Organisation	Sector	Activity
Bradford Metropolitan District Council	Public	Local Authority Leeds City Council
Croydon Council	Public	Local Authority
	ic	





In comparison to these organisations, Birmingham's procedure rates as follows:

Area	Rating	Notes
Sickness Reporting Procedure	=	



Appendix 4: The MAG Peer Audit: Summary of Results

This appendix summarises the results of the Managing Attendance Group Peer Audit, providing a summary of

- The issues raised by those audited within departments
- The relative weight of those responses (i.e. in how many departments the issue was reflected)
- The responses of line managers to the questionnaire

Responses to the Audit:

Line Manager Audit	Yes	No
1 Have you been adequately briefed on the Managing Attendance Procedure?	92.77%	7.23%
2 Have you received a copy of the Managers' Toolbox for Managing Attendance?	96.39%	3.61%
3 Did you attend specific Managers' briefings?	86.75%	13.25%
4 Did you brief your staff?	92.77%	7.23%
5 Has there been an incident where an officer has had three periods of sickness and a Notification of Concern has not been issued?	45.78%	54.22%
6 Do you feel you are competent and confident to fulfil your responsibilities for Managing Attendance?	92.77%	7.23%
7 Have you encountered any hindrance or difficulties in Managing Attendance since October?	34.94%	65.06%
9 Do you believe that the policy helps the section manage and monitor sickness absence?	83.13%	16.87%
10 Do you believe the Managing Attendance Procedure is reasonably fair?	73.49%	26.51%



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Appendix 5: Attendance Information

To demonstrate how information can be collected by line managers, a small pilot exercise was carried out in two contrasting environments:

- The Scrutiny team: An office environment with 16 staff in total, and
- Thimble Mill Lane Direct Labour Organisation: A predominantly manual environment, with around 170 staff

Through carrying out this pilot exercise the aim was to ascertain:

- The difficulty of managers maintaining information themselves
- The quality of the information managers can compile in terms of
 - Accuracy
 - Timeliness
 - Relevance to performance
- How this can be used in communicating with staff

A spreadsheet was designed to store and calculate information regarding attendance, in a format that would provide information to the line manager on areas of managing attendance that might require attention.

Feedback was sought from the users involved in this pilot exercise. The feedback indicated that the information provided was

- Easy to maintain and quickly available
- Timely, easy to understand and did not duplicate other information received on absence
- Relevant, enabling the action to be taken to be clearly identified and application of the procedure to be clearly monitored
- Useful for communicating performance to both the team and managers

An example of the information provided by this sheet is shown below.





Appendix 6:
Sample Return To Work Interview Form

Personal Details:

Name: _____ Payroll No.: _____
Department: _____ Section: _____

This Absence:

First day of absence: _____ Date resumed work: _____

Working days lost: _____

Reason for this absence: *

*Terms such as 'illness' or 'unwell' are insufficient. Be specific.

Previous absence in the last 12 months:

First day of absence:	Working days lost:	Date resumed work:	Reason:
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Contact while absent:

Date:	Type of contact:	Notes:
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



Return to Work Interview:

Date of Interview: _____

Present: _____

Areas covered during the interview: *

	May be accompanied by a representative
	How are you now? Glad to have you back
	Was the absence related to any problems at work?
	Was the absence due to an accident at work?
	Was the absence due to pregnancy?
	Was the absence related to a disability?
	Explain the difficulties that absence creates for the organisation: covering work, pressure on colleagues, service suffers
	Explain the absence policy
	Explain flexible alternatives to taking sickness absence
	Is there anything that we can do to help?

* Ticked as applicable. Further detail provided below where required.

Details of interview:

Actions agreed to improve attendance:

Signed: _____ (Manager)

_____ (Employee)

Data Protection Act, 1998:

The information used on this form will be used for the control and monitoring of sickness absence. Information will be processed in accordance with the requirements of the above Act.

The manager should keep the original copy of this form. A copy of the completed form must be given to:

- The employee, immediately following the interview
- The Personnel section



Appendix 7: Background Documents

The following documents are additional documentary sources of information regarding the management of attendance within the Council.

Date	Title	Date
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Appendix 8:

Comments on Items for Further Discussion

The following comments are those made during discussions with the Managing Attendance Group and the Cabinet Member for Human Resources and Equalities.

No.	Items for Further Discussion	Comments by MAG	Scrutiny Comments
D1	<p>Departments should have individual sickness absence targets, which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectively deliver the corporate absence target • Take account of individual department issues in the short term • Seek improvement from all departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Officers' Group has already expressed a view on this issue on 28 August 2002. • An issue was raised whereby the targets need to have consistency across the new Directorates if this is to be done (e.g. the differences between rates in Urban Design, Planning and Transportation). • Views were also expressed that we need to avoid giving the implication that we believe working in certain departments makes you more ill than in others. This was despite the nationally recognised issues with attendance in areas such as Social Services. • It was also suggested that differential targets between departments require different tools to address the issues. • The Cabinet member for HR and Equalities has also added that where there are different targets between departments, each department will inevitably seek to negotiate an easier target. Having one target makes this easy to control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a 'short' term situation over the next few years.



<p>D3 The criteria defining unsatisfactory attendance should be directly linked to organisational targets (i.e. BV12), and should therefore change in line with corporate targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Officers' Group has already expressed a view on this issue on 28 August 2002. • A view was also expressed that targets that change make the matter more complicated for managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an essential part of being able to achieve increasingly more difficult targets. As the target becomes more difficult, the criteria to measure performance should move with this.
<p>D4 There should be a clear link between the criteria used for attendance in both the probationary period and further employment. Ideally, these should be the same (i.e. 26 weeks).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This issue is linked to other issues relating to the probationary period (R21-24). These should be addressed as a whole with the probationary period process. • There must be a consistent standard between the standard of attendance expected in the probationary period and further employment. • It was agreed that attendance in the probationary period should be one of the factors assessed in making a suitability decision. • However, a means of achieving a linkage in the criteria was not known. 	
<p>D5 Managers should pay attention to employees who have accumulated days absence equal to or greater than the target average per FTE expressed in BV12, where no formal action has been considered.</p> <p>The action taken at this stage should remain the same as in the current procedure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This issue is linked to the review of the criteria (D2). • The point of 20 days was considered a felt-right norm for a trigger point, with the aim of keeping the process simple for managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a part of ensuring that the criteria within the procedure reflect the targets that we are required to achieve. • The target for 2003/4 is 11 days per FTE. Yet managers should be managing the absence against a figure almost twice this.
<p>D6 Where a manager considers that a Notification of Concern or Final Notification of Concern should not be issued, prior to advising the individual, they should discuss this with a suitable senior manager and Personnel Officer, to ensure consistency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was felt that a line manager should be seeking advice ahead of the RTWI, 	
<p>D7 Prior to issuing a Notification of Concern, managers should be required to adjourn from the RTWI and give reasonable time to consider this. At this point a Personnel Officer may advise them.</p>		

