

Agency Spend and Sickness Absence

1. Background

1.1 Agency cover is used for a number of reasons, including to provide cover for staff absences in frontline services such as Adults and Children's Services.

1.2 At a strategic level, the following key performance measures in relation to sickness absence exist:

- Council Plan target of 9.24 days lost due to sickness absence per FTE employee, and
- Portfolio Plan target of 87% of 'return to work interviews' to be completed within seven days

1.3 Performance against these targets is monitored regularly through both the corporate Council Plan quarterly monitoring process and in the form of monthly dashboards presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT). In terms of days lost due to sickness, the addendum attached shows our performance over 2014/15, 2015/16 and year to date. As can be seen from this, there has been a year on year improvement and last year, for the first time, we achieved the Council Plan target.

1.4 In terms of performance against the 'return to work interviews' target, the table below sets this out over the same time period. Significant improvement has been achieved since Q4 in 2015/16.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2014/15	77.7%	74.9%	76.6%	70.5%
2015/16	70.2%	72.9%	72.0%	85.5%
2016/17	85.4%	85.3%		

1.5 Set against this background, a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to manage down sickness levels across the Council over the last 12/18 months. A number of initiatives, in conjunction with departments, have been put in place, a summary of which is detailed below.

2. Departmental Initiatives

2.1 Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Given the nature and size of the workforce, the majority of sickness absence occurs in ASC and CSD. Representatives from these two departments and Personnel & Training have worked together collaboratively to implement a number of initiatives:

- the identification of staff in their probationary year with high levels of sickness absence and putting in place specific measures to address this
- the identification of the "top ten employees" with the highest levels of sickness absence and then working with their line managers in a targeted way to ensure robust application of the Attendance Management Policy.
- production of quarterly absence dashboards for service areas and teams issued to Heads of Service. This gives Heads of Service oversight of absence levels within their teams and enables them to follow up with local managers the actions being taken.
- the design and development of an in-house workshop for line managers on absence processes, with a particular focus on how to manage difficult conversations.

- the development of a training video for managers on return to work conversation, initially developed by the CSD OD team, has now been added to the PAT Intranet pages as part of the suite of e-learning videos on attendance management.
- a trial of 'Wellbeing workshops' took place within the CSD ISEND Team during the summer, aimed at supporting line managers to support themselves and their staff. Following this success, it is now being rolled out to all line managers in CSD.
- specific mindfulness courses were run for CSD staff in January this year on a trial basis. These were well received and have now been made available to all staff across the Council via the Corporate Training offer.
- a jointly run training session between CSD and ASC on managing stress in the workplace was provided in 2015. As stress still remains one of the primary drivers of absence levels, a further targeted workshop for line managers has been developed and led by the lead clinician from our Occupational Health provider. Further sessions are planned.
- a tailored return to work approach in relation to stress/mental health absences has been developed. This better supports managers and returning staff with preventative measures in relation to any future absences.
- CSD teams trialed a "Wellbeing Plan" ahead of it being introduced more broadly as part of the new Attendance Management Policy. The lessons learned from this trial enabled us to ensure that the final version was fit for purpose.
- ASC has a high level of muscular-skeletal absences within the direct care workforce. An in-house pilot is currently being run whereby a physiotherapist is available to support employees with muscular-skeletal absences

2.2 Orbis

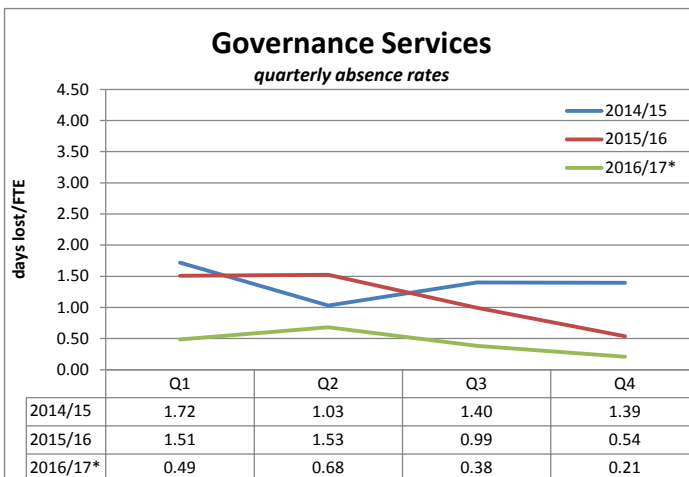
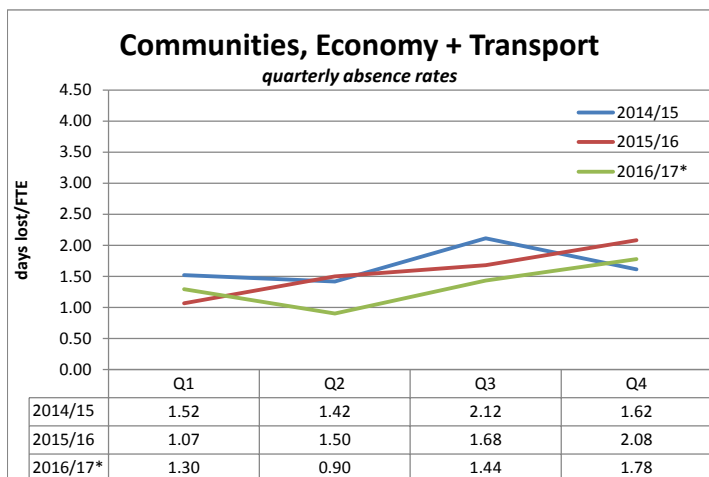
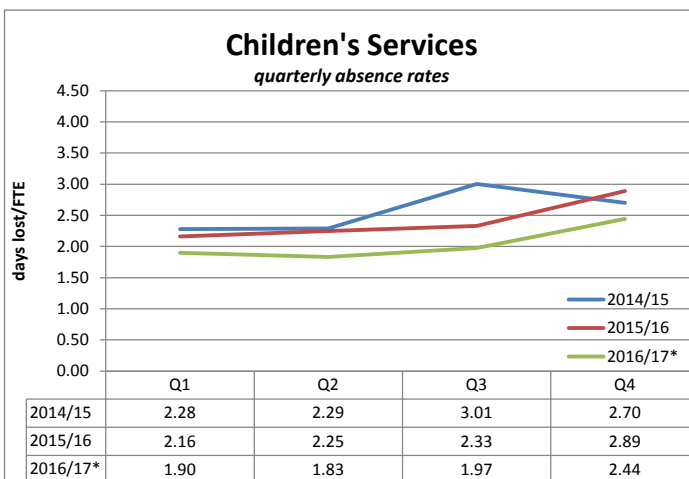
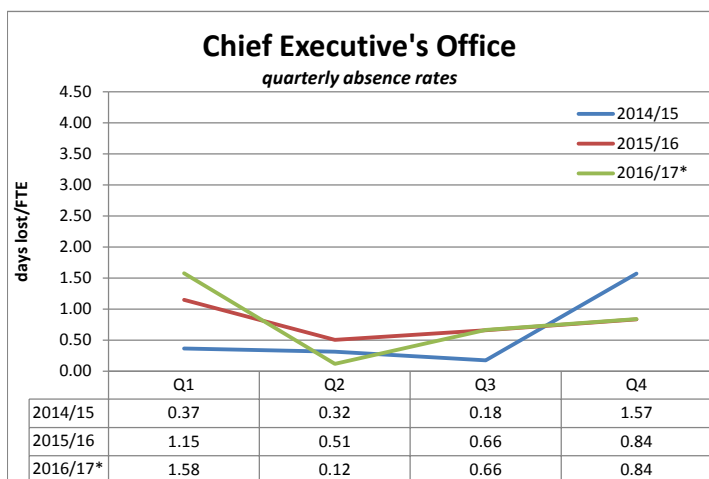
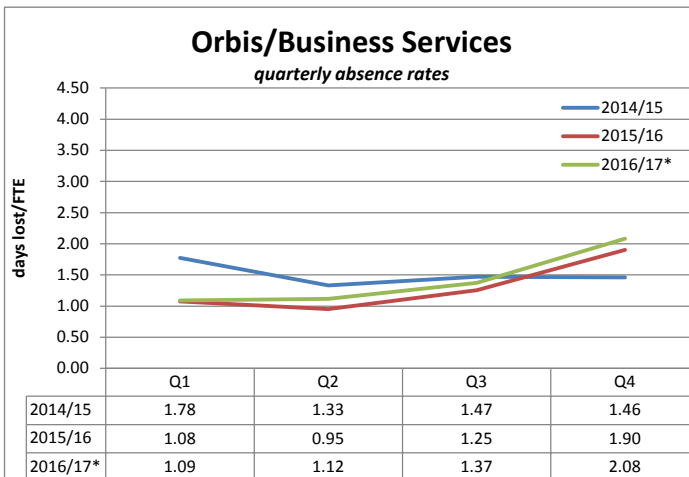
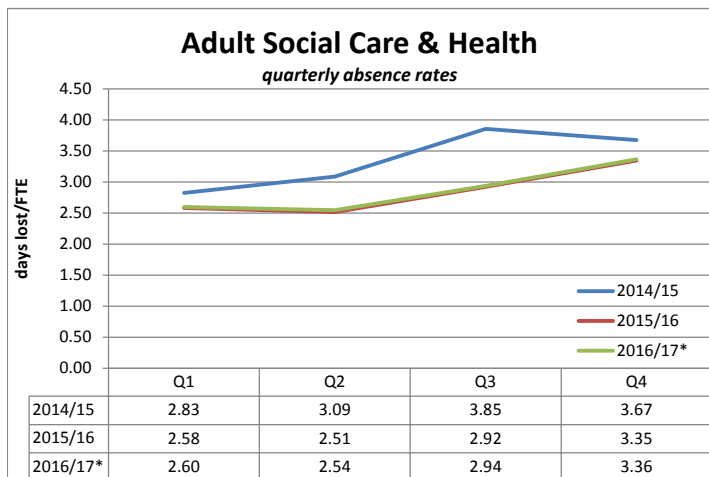
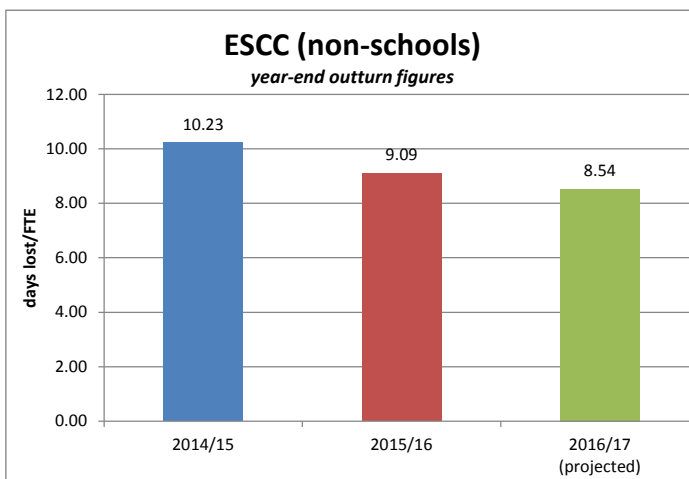
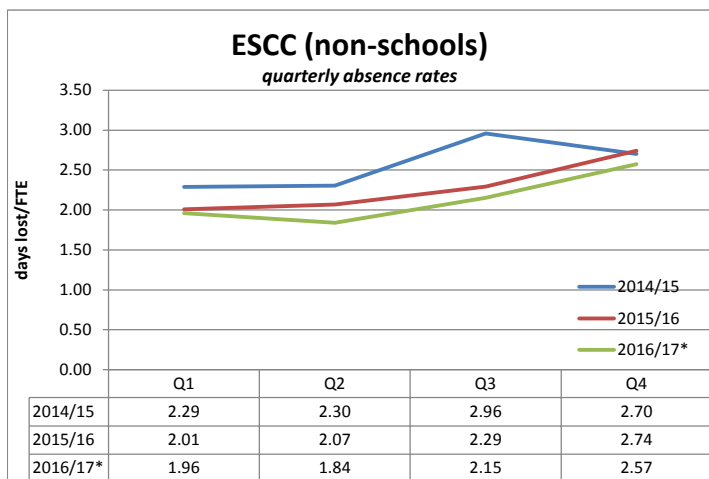
- an absence dashboard is provided to the Orbis Leadership Team (OLT) on a quarterly basis.
- targeted emails to managers reminding them to carry out return to work interviews have been developed and are now issued.
- the provision of management information to OLT on employees with short term absences on a quarterly basis.
- a series of resilience workshops have been delivered to Orbis senior managers and were well received.
- the LGA has awarded the Council a grant of £10k to further develop our on-line mindfulness programme, part of which will be tailored specifically for staff absent with work-related stress.
- the on-going promotion of the 'EPIC' values and behaviours to support the Orbis People Strategy aims.

2.3 Corporate (Personnel & Training)

- an Intranet campaign was developed around Stress Awareness Day, aimed at highlighting issues of stress and promoting the range of resources available to staff and managers.

- the production of a monthly report on the 'top 30 employees' with the highest levels of short-term absence. Line managers are contacted directly to agree strategies specific to the individual employee.
- a new course: "Resilience through Mindfulness" has been recently commissioned and is now available as part of the Corporate training offer.
- "Time to Change" pledge – as part of our commitment to this, we are working with Public Health to develop on-line resources around mental health support. Consideration is currently being given to training some employees as "mental health first aiders".
- an automated process has been developed whereby managers with employees absent due to mental health or stress are contacted by the tenth day of absence. The email is direct from FirstCare and provides guidance directly to managers on supporting staff with these types of absences.

Quarterly absence rates 2014/15 to 2016/17 (projected)



*2016/17 Q2 is draft figure, 2016/17 Q3+4 are projected

absence rate is days lost per FTE, expressed quarterly (not cumulative quarters as used for Council Plan monitoring)

excludes staff on temporary contracts with less than one year's ESCC service