CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L

Response to Request for Information

Reference   FOI 003587
Date   16 May 2019

Sickness Absence

Request:

I was wondering if you could point me to any recent report about sickness and absence figures linked to mental ill-health? Just council employees please

I have looked on the council website and cannot see any figures. I was after figures from the last couple of years.

Mental ill health is one of the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK, accounting for approximately 70 million work days lost each year.* This has a significant human cost to individuals as well as impacting on employers and the populations they serve, therefore as a Council we recognise that it is vital to support the mental health and wellbeing of our workforce.

We are doing this in three key ways. Firstly, by ensuring that we have the right policies and practices in place to support employees who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health. Secondly, by creating a positive working environment in which people feel supported and valued, and have the resources available to them to help improve their wellbeing. Thirdly, by promoting awareness around mental health and actively working to reduce stigma.

The Council signed the *Time to Change* Employer Pledge in December 2018, which demonstrated our commitment to changing the way we think and act around mental health in the workplace. As part of the Pledge we have trained 32 of our employees in Mental Health First Aid, with further training taking place at the end of June. People experiencing difficulties with their mental health can also access support via the Council's Employee Assistance Programme.

In addition, we have demonstrated our support for the West Midlands Combined Authority's *This Is Me* campaign, which focuses on ending the stigma around mental health problems.

However, we do not consider it appropriate or ethical to disclose the amount of sickness absence within City of Wolverhampton Council that was due to mental health problems. Although it would not be possible to identify individuals from this figure, we recognise that people may self-identify within that group and feel targeted as a result.

Research shows that many people taking sick days for a mental health problem will give another reason.** While we do not believe that people should feel pressured to disclose a mental health problem, we do want them to feel able to do so if they wish in order to access the support they need. An important part of that is providing assurance of confidentiality, and treating mental health problems with the same respect and privacy as we do physical health problems.

In light of this, the Council is declining to provide the requested information and trusts that the requestor will respect the Council's efforts to support its employees.

*Mental Health Foundation/Unum - https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/managing-mental-health-workplace

**Time to Change - https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/get-your-workplace-involved/employer-pledge