

HR Briefing 2019

Sickness Absence Rates

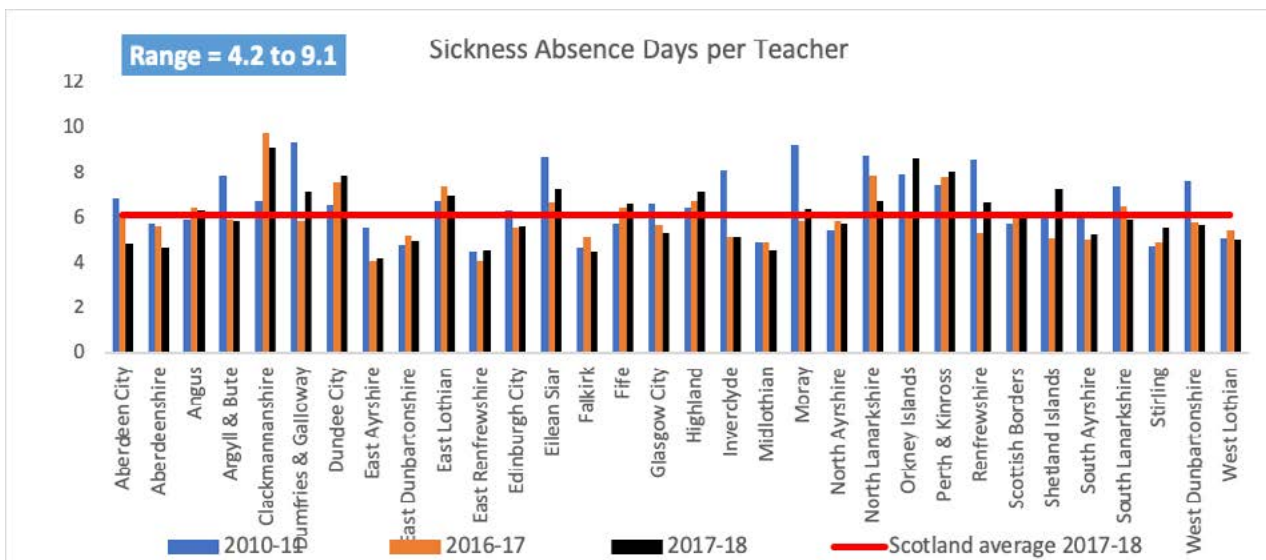
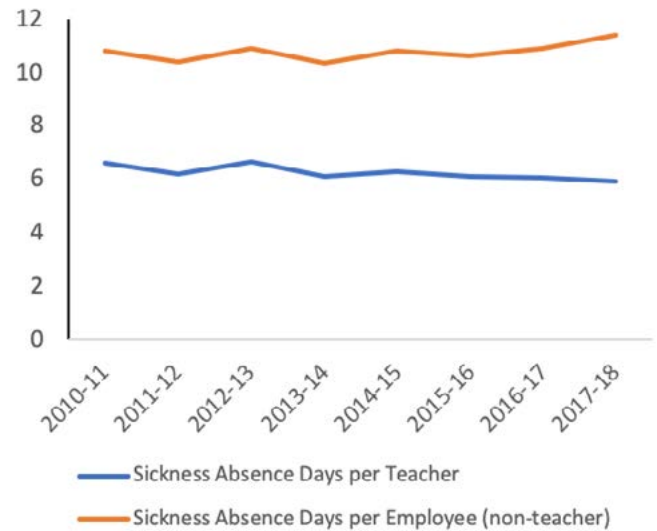
The management of sickness absence is a major priority for councils in their efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of their workforce and to manage their costs. Although local context will differ, authorities are adopting similar policies and good practice procedures and are generally focusing on employee wellbeing as well as health, in particular supporting good mental health.

Absence levels overall are at their highest since 2010/11, increasing by 6%; however, during the same period full time equivalent staff numbers have reduced by 10.3%. The data reveals a different pattern for teaching staff and non-teaching staff.

Although there have been fluctuations, Sickness Absence days for teaching staff have reduced by 10.2%, from 6.6 days to 5.9 days since 2010/11, and from 6.1 to 5.9 days in the past 12 months (a 2.1% reduction). The data reveals an overall reduction in days lost for teaching staff against a backdrop of unchanged teacher numbers.

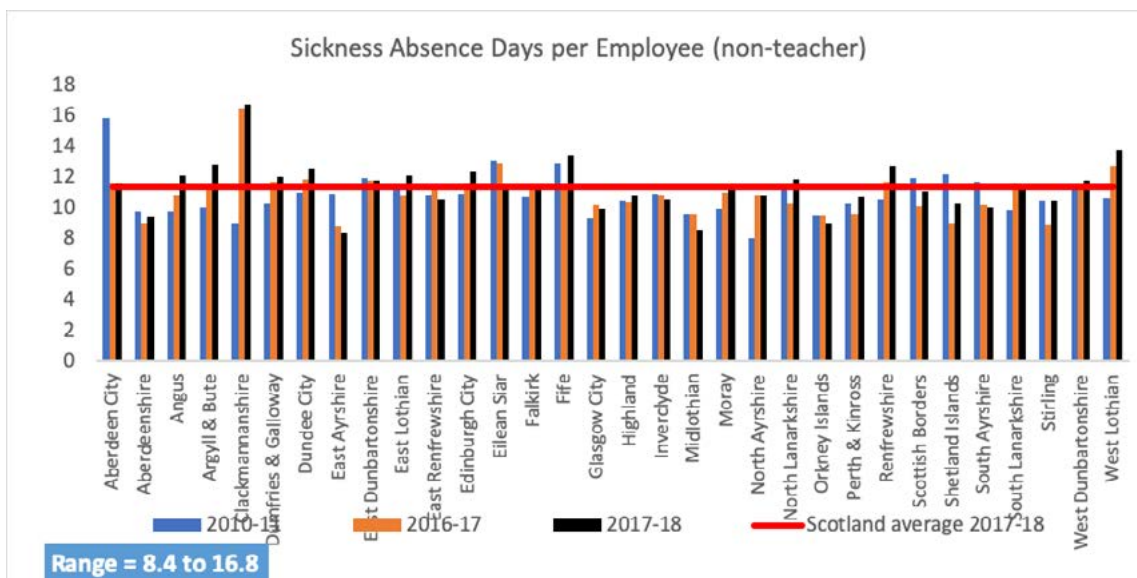
The number of absence days ranges from 4.2 to 9.1, with rural and smaller authorities tending to report slightly higher levels. 15 out of 32 councils showed an increase in Teachers absence between 2016/17 and 2017/18.

National Trend: Sickness Absence



Sickness absence days for non-teaching staff are higher than those for teachers, and have increased by 5.7% since 2010/11, from 10.8 days to 11.4 days. Although there have again been fluctuations during this period, the 4.5% increase in the past 12 months has taken levels to their highest point since the base year. In contrast to teaching staff, while overall days lost for non-teaching staff also fell, this was in parallel with a 10% reduction in overall staff numbers since 2010/11.

The number of days lost range from 8.4 to 16.8 with no systematic relationship to size, rurality or deprivation. 20 out of the 32 authorities showed an increase in absence between 2016/17 and 2017/18.



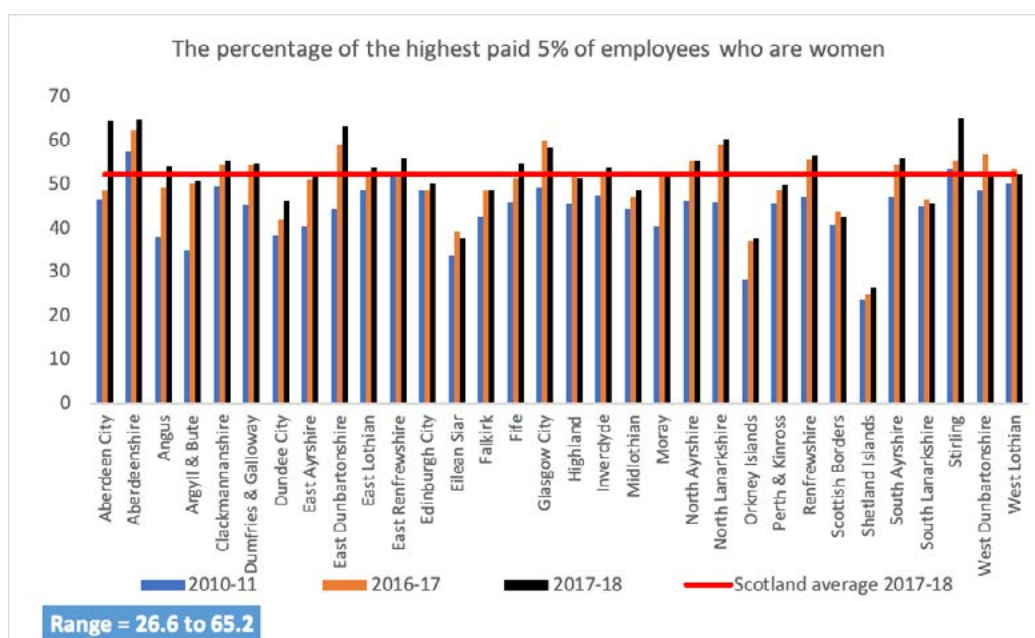
Work within Family Groups has identified the following factors as important in understanding the variation between authorities in sickness absence levels:

- Workforce composition and age profile
- Priority given to performance management and business intelligence to support early intervention
- Strategic priority given to Health and Wellbeing initiatives
- Level of staff engagement and involvement
- Differences in Absence Management policy and procedures, including the point at which disciplinary intervention is triggered
- Level of flexible working practices
- Level and type of occupational health and counselling
- Level of resource dedicated to maximising attendance and managing absence

Gender Equality

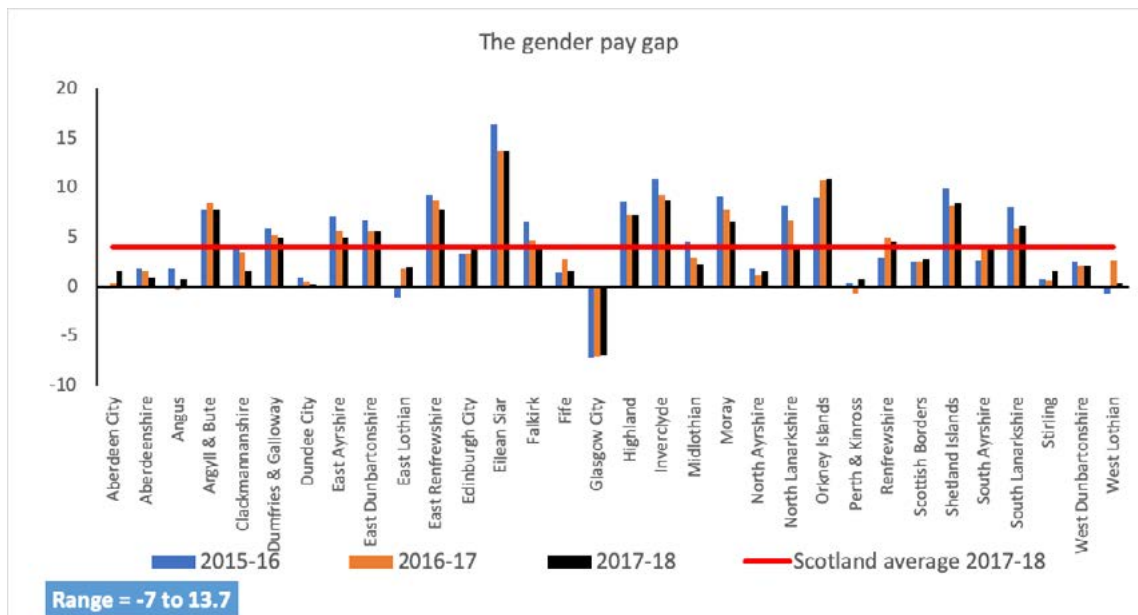
The percentage of women in the top 5% of earners in councils is a significant measure of the attempts by councils to ensure equal opportunity between genders. From 2010/11 to 2017/18 this has increased from 46.3% to 54.6%. The range across councils is from 27% to 65%, with rural councils reporting lower rates.

While this is an important measure reflecting the progress that has been made in relation to gender equality in senior positions within local government, there is a need to capture the progress being made across the wider workforce.



As such, our measure of the gender pay gap represents the difference between men's and women's earnings within local authorities and is a key measure under the Public-Sector Equality Duty. This measure takes the average (mean) hourly rate of pay (excluding overtime) for female employees and divides this by average (mean) hourly rate for male employees. This is used to calculate the percentage difference between pay for men and pay for women. Negative values indicate that women are paid more than men. Both part-time and full-time employees are included. This is only the third year of publication, and this measure will be subject to review and on-going development across the coming period.

In 2017/18 the Gender Pay Gap was 3.9%, reducing from 4.5% in 2015/16. The gap ranges from -7.0% to 13.7%, (0.2% to 13.7% excluding Glasgow as an outlier) with rural areas reporting wider gaps on average.



The following factors have been identified as important in understanding the variation between authorities in the gender pay gap.

- Level of occupational segregation of men and women into different job sectors and industries; and LA approaches to tackling this
- Representation of women in senior management roles
- Paying women the same as men for the same or equivalent work
- The availability of affordable child care provision and equal sharing of family, care and domestic responsibilities.
- Opportunities for flexible working, for example job shares or quality part-time work

Learning from the 2019 Event

Continuing common themes across authorities are digital transformation within HR and a growing focus on employee wellbeing. The importance of ensuring equality and fair representation within local government workforce is an area of interest to all Councils; the extent to which each of these feature in local areas and what measures are being implemented to improve equality varies significantly.

Focus on Improving Equality (Including Gender Pay Gap)

A continuing focus on improving equality within local government permeates all Scottish councils. Occupational segregation still remains within certain job roles, and Councils continue to address this through initiatives such as visiting schools, increasing visibility of staff working in 'non-traditional roles', and aiming to break down the gender stereotyping of careers such as care. Inequalities concerning pay are also being addressed through the Living Wage programme, and other initiatives are looking at wage-inequality due to gender.

Fife has a programme called Understanding Dad which tackles gender inequality in the family, including the view that men cannot be a care giver. Also, **Fife** has used a male trainee in childcare in their advertising to help encourage other men to work in this sector.

Following on from the **Scottish Government's** £50,000 [Men in Early Years Challenge Fund](#) which aims to address the statistic that only 4% of childcare workers are male, several Colleges around Scotland are offering free courses to encourage more men to join the childcare profession: [Glasgow Kelvin College](#) / [Highlands](#) / [Edinburgh College](#)

North Ayrshire have carried out a case study around male childcare workers.

Argyll & Bute recently reviewed and carried out public consultation on proposed new equality outcomes, and as a result adopted a new set of equality outcomes for 2019 – 2023, which includes an aim to 'promote diversity across occupational groups'.

Angus are reviewing their policies and procedures to provide more detailed and comprehensive resources for managers and to enable them to be more autonomous.

In 2018 **Angus** Council introduced a programme called 'Mentor Me'; women looking to develop their career have the opportunity to be mentored by women in senior positions within the council.

Midlothian have introduced their [Gender Based Violence Policy](#) which aims to raise awareness of gender based violence as a serious health and social issue, which impacts on the workplace. The policy sends a positive message to employees with experience of abuse that they will be listened to and supported. This policy also provides a framework for managers to sensitively apply provisions within existing Council policies, when responding to employees who experience Gender Based Violence.

Half of all Scottish Local Authorities are now accredited Living Wage employers.

Midlothian were shortlisted for the [2018 Living Wage Innovation Award](#), an award for organisations showing innovation or furthering the reach of the Living Wage. There have been several positive outcomes following on from this commitment to the real Living Wage including helping to narrow the gender pay gap, reduced reliance on premium rate overtime, and an overall improvement in work life balance for staff.

Fife and **West Dunbartonshire** are looking to revise their pay structures; the introduction of Living Wage has wiped out several of the lower pay scales. **East Dunbartonshire** has incorporated living wage into its pay structures.

As well as the Council paying the living wage, **Fife** contractors must also be signed up to the living wage.

Digital Shift (Including Digital Skills)

With digital proficiency becoming increasingly essential in all aspects of local government, several councils are providing opportunities for staff to improve their digital skills. Overall, there is a shift to more digital ways of working, providing opportunities for Councils to review current IT systems are fit for purpose.

Dundee's recent digital survey highlighted Excel as a highly sought-after skill, the Council now provides an advanced Excel training course for employees. **West Dunbartonshire** employees are given basic digital training; however, it was identified that staff are not always able to objectively identify their own skill level. Work is underway to standardise expectations of proficiency with certain programmes, with a view to improving consistency. In **Argyll and Bute**, the union is looking deliver digital skills training to help staff with self-service.

West Dunbartonshire is looking to help employees deal with change. They have done a lot around digital, including the creation of a new digital team. Traditional trades, such as buildings and repair, are now having to use digital methods instead of pen and paper. All trade staff who work remotely now have mobile devices. This change aims to improve efficiency and level of contact whilst out in the field. After some initial hesitation, staff have quickly adjusted to this new way of working.

Fife have changed their HR pay system to Oracle and have five members of staff seconded into this work.

Employee Wellbeing: Physical, Mental, Financial (Including Manager Training)

The effects of centralisation and the generalising of previously specialised roles are being felt across all service areas. With changes to job roles, and staff taking on a wider variety of tasks, some staff are finding it challenging to adapt. To counter this, councils are offering a variety of training courses and development opportunities to support their staff to feel confident and knowledgeable when facing new tasks.

Fife has been working with [PAM](#) as a health partner on a pilot called DAYONE. This allows staff to contact a nurse right away to get health advice rather than having to wait for a GP appointment. As an effect of this pilot, Customer Service in Fife had a week with no absences, which was the first time this has been the case for years.

North Ayrshire 'Personal Days' pilot scheme; Staff working in certain services can call in last-minute to take the day off and it gets deducted from their AL entitlement. This has led to a 37% improvement in absences. 450 staff participated in the pilot. **Midlothian** have a similar system in place. **West Dunbartonshire** allows staff to have personal days, which come off annual leave entitlement. A total of 5 days can be used for personal days.

West Dunbartonshire's wellbeing strategy contains support around financial wellbeing. West Dunbartonshire has been signed up to [West Dunbartonshire Advice Partnership](#).

North Ayrshire [Get Connected](#) – Staff have the opportunity to volunteer 2 days to help give back to the local community.

West Dunbartonshire recently had a wellbeing information day for staff which was well attended. The Council has recently relaunched its approach to employee wellbeing.

Fife continue to publish their quarterly [Health, Safety & Wellbeing](#) newsletter which aims to support Council employees by highlighting trending issues, giving helpful advice and signposting onwards to further sources of support and information. The newsletter covers practical tips for improving physical, mental and financial wellbeing, as well as keeping staff updated on the ongoing work going on in the Council to address employee wellbeing. Some examples of this include Fife's 'Having Difficult Conversations' course, which is being offered to line-managers, and aims to have a positive impact on absence levels by better equipping those with people management responsibilities to feel confident addressing difficult situations with employees. The Council is also working with the NHS to deliver the 'Mentally Health Workplace' training course to managers and supervisors across the Council. Once accredited, groups of trainers will begin cascading the training to other employees.

Angus are reviewing their absence management policy and guidance to include a greater emphasis on health and wellbeing, including the development of a health and wellbeing strategy.

Recruitment

Recruitment (particularly for social care roles) remains a challenge, particularly in rural areas. **Fife** report that due to the tourist-focused nature of the area, many private sector roles in hotels, hospitality etc. are higher paid, and therefore more appealing to local people.

Argyll and Bute have produced video testimonials in which employees from across, and at all levels, of the organisation talk about their job, how they came to be in it and the opportunities available within the Council.

The importance of developing the young workforce was highlighted by several councils. **West Dunbartonshire** are adapting their flexible working policies in response to research highlighting the importance of flexible hours and home working for young people entering the workforce. **Fife** are investing in their youth investment fund with the aim of encouraging young people aged 24 and under to consider a career in local government. They have also ring-fenced jobs for apprentices to give people an opportunity to stay once their apprenticeship has finished. **Angus** continue to raise the profile of the work being conducted in relation to modern apprenticeships, ensuring that all young people in the area know about all the opportunities open to them, regardless of gender, and know how to access them.

In **Angus**, recruitment and equalities training, both of which are compulsory for managers, continues to be delivered and kept up-to-date. Training includes targeted learning regarding gender stereotyping and equalities issues, with a view to supporting managers to understand the deep-rooted challenges and potential biases which exist within the workplace.

Argyll and Bute are working alongside their communications team to shift to gender neutral recruitment guidance. Strategic planning review is underway to decrease occupational segregation by rewording of job adverts in traditionally segregated service areas to encourage the under-represented group to apply.

Culture Change

Some Councils are considering the implementation of policies directly focused on addressing the impact of menopause on their staff, including providing support to affected employees and increasing wider understanding about the issues menopausal women may face in the workplace. **South Lanarkshire's** [Menopause Policy](#) will ensure that all line managers have been trained to understand how the menopause can affect employees at work, enabling them to provide guidance and support to those affected and allowing adjustments to be made that may be necessary to provide that support. A recent discussion at Holyrood saw MSPs tackling the stigma and taboo around the menopause in the workplace, which was the [first time any government has discussed the subject in the UK](#). **Dundee**

are looking to introduce a menopause programme. During group discussions, it was brought up that **Police Scotland** has a menopause programme in place which is for anyone affected by menopause, including men experiencing issues at home because of it.

Other

Uncertainty over Brexit is impacting HR within Councils. For example, **Falkirk** are undertaking a data collection exercise regarding employee nationalities. The sensitivity of this subject warrants a supportive approach to address staff uncertainties. Employment paperwork has been amended to include a question on nationality as part of new start induction process.

Fife has a young people working group which meets every few months. The group is an opportunity for employees under 25 to meet people of a similar age who work in different departments in the council, offer feedback and suggestion to the Council, and to learn and develop through workshops and training specifically organised for young people.