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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

Update on progress with the Commission's Government Setting an Example (GSE) Priority Programme

Advisor(s): Mark Dempsey and René McTaggart

Cleared by Peter Brown on 2nd December 2004

Issue

1. To bring to the Commission up to date on developments with the Government Setting an Example (GSE) priority programme.

Timing

2. Routine. This paper will be followed up by a more detailed presentation to the Commission at the 8th February meeting.

Recommendation

3. That the Commission notes developments with the programme, the interest from the Chancellor and the publication of a review of sickness absence in the public sector by the Ministerial Task Force on Health, Safety and Productivity.

Background

4. The GSE Programme was established at the request of Ministers to increase the priority given to addressing health and safety in the public sector. Prior to his departure to the Home Office, Des Browne sought the establishment of a Ministerial Task Force to give the programme ministerial support and direction. The Task Force was established in the summer 2004 with Jane Kennedy chairing and the HSE's GSE Team providing the Secretariat.
5. In his Spending Review 2004 announcement the Chancellor asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to undertake a review of long term sickness absence management in the public sector - the Secretary of State in turn asked the Task Force to take this work forward. The Chancellor also asked the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Cabinet Secretary to review the current arrangements for the self certification of short term absence in the civil service.
6. As many of the issues around managing attendance affect both long and short term sickness absence it was agreed that a joint review would be produced. This work was taken forward jointly by the our GSE team on behalf of the Task Force and the Cabinet Office. The review of sickness absence in the public sector was submitted to the Chancellor prior to his Pre Budget Report on 2nd December. A copy of the review is attached.
7. In his Pre Budget Report the Chancellor acknowledged the work of the Task Force and the Cabinet Office to produce the review and specifically referred to the need for:
 - leadership from top-level managers;

- real time data on absence, triggers for intervention and audit of management action;
- line managers having the skills and support to deal with case management, referral and return to work; and
- regular and supportive contact for those who are absent due to sickness.

8. A detailed **delivery plan** is now being drawn up by HSE and the Cabinet Office for the Task Force's approval in time for the 2005 Budget announcement.

Argument

9. While the Chancellor's focus is on the efficiency aspects of attendance management, taking the opportunity to link with high profile work has:

- helped to position HSE as an important player in helping to improve productivity in the public sector;
- opened up opportunities to promote the HSE work on stress management, MSD, rehabilitation and sickness absence systems more widely in the public sector;
- provided an opportunity to promote the PSA target on days lost and to form high level partnerships that will help to deliver the target. For example, we have established good working relationships with the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury, and held a high level meeting with HM Prison Service to design a programme of work to address their management of stress, MSDs, slips and trips and violence.

10. The delivery plan will now need to form a significant part of the GSE Programme Plan and will give us ways to ensure top level commitment that we have, until now, found difficult to unlock.

Consultation

11. The review was drafted by the HSE GSE Team in consultation with the Cabinet Office and a cross Whitehall group of lead officials. In addition stakeholders, including the trade unions, views were sought during the development of the review.

Presentation

12. The review is due to be published via Parliamentary Statement and on the HSE, DWP and Cabinet Office web pages from the 8th December. The review is embargoed until after the 8th December.

Costs and Benefits

13. None from this paper.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

14. The production of the review was absorbed as part of the resource allocation to the GSE programme. The work to develop the delivery plan and put in place the HSE activity to meet it will also be absorbed by the existing resource allocations.

Environmental and other Implications

15. N/A.

Action

16. The Commission is asked to note the recommendations of the review and the links to the delivery of the GSE programme.