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HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION

Ministerial Task Force for Health, Safety and Productivity - One Year On Report

A Paper by Samantha Pittman, Band 4, Public Services Programme

Advisor: Mark Dempsey

Cleared by Jane Willis on 24th November 2005

Issue

1. The Ministerial Task Force for Health, Safety and Productivity (MTF) has achieved a good deal since it published its report on sickness absence in the public sector in November 2004. This paper updates the Commission on this progress, which is reflected in reducing sickness absence rates in the civil service and wider public sector. Supported by HSE, the MTF released its 'One-Year On' report at a Stakeholder Summit on 15th November 2005.

Timing

2. Routine

Recommendation

3. That the Commission notes the 'One Year On' report (**Annex A**), and the progress being made in improving attendance management in the public sector.

Background

4. Following the publication of the Government/HSC 'Revitalising' initiative in 2000, HSC recognised that the public sector (which accounts for approximately 20% of the workforce) needed to make a contribution to achieving targets, especially for days lost through work related ill health. The programme aimed to achieve a 30% reduction in the number of days lost to work related injury and ill health in the public sector by 2010.
5. The then Minister For Work (Des Browne) asked HSE to establish the MTF to provide the impetus to deliver reduced sickness absence. Membership included ministers from DWP, as well as:
 - HM Treasury, as a large employer and given its interest in the efficiency and delivery agendas – Des Browne attends in his current role;

- The Cabinet Office, given its interest civil service employment and delivery issues;
- The Home Office, ODPM and Department of Health in view of their sponsorship of large public sector operations such as the Police, local authorities and the NHS.
- Ministers from the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

6. In the Spending Review 2004 announcement, the Chancellor asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to undertake a review of the public sector's management of long term sickness absence, and the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Cabinet Secretary to "consult on, and negotiate changes to, the current arrangements for self certification".

7. The MTF took this work forward and produced, with the Cabinet Office, a joint review of 'Managing Sickness Absence in the Public Sector' in November 2004 (previously reported to the Commission, Ref MISC/04/42). The review was well received by all stakeholders as being balanced and well thought through. It concluded that further action was needed to:

- secure sustained commitment from managers at the top level;
- deliver the right data and systems to support better attendance management; and
- provide leadership and support for line managers.

8. It proposed a series of pilots to explore innovative approaches to some long standing issues, and actions to address working practices and long term absence issues. The MTF agreed a plan for the delivery of the review in February 2005.

9. HSE provides the MTF secretariat. It has led the work to develop and follow up the recommendations of the review, and to coordinate HSE's work in the public sector.

Argument

10. As chairman of the MTF, Lord Hunt views stakeholder engagement as a priority. The MTF agreed to a strategy for stakeholder engagement across the public sector, which included bilateral meetings with key stakeholders and a summit on sickness absence management in November.

11. Lord Hunt led the stakeholder summit on 15 November, an event designed to report on progress since the MTF published its report on sickness absence in the public sector last year. The summit included case studies from both Acas and the Royal Mail – and highlighted HSE's central role.

12. In his first public engagement as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, John Hutton expressed his personal interest in, and support for, the work of the MTF. He also stressed the important links between this work and the Health, Work and Wellbeing agenda. Des Browne, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, emphasised the Treasury's support for the work of the MTF and welcomed its contribution to public sector efficiency and productivity. Bill Callaghan spoke about the importance of partnership and the need to tackle stress in the public sector.

13. At the summit the MTF 'One Year On' report (**Annex A**) was launched, to coincide with the publication of the latest Cabinet Office statistics on sickness absence in the civil service. These show that the number of days lost through sickness absence in the civil service has fallen by about 10%, from 10 days in 2003 to 9.1 days in 2004. Encouragingly HSE's figures have fallen from 8.8 days to 7.8 days in the same period.

14. The work of the MTF is designed to make a key contribution to achieving the 'Revitalising' targets. Its success so far, as demonstrated in the civil service statistics, should help ensure the 'days lost target' is met. This target is referred to in paragraph 4 of a Commission Paper from CoSAS, for the 6th December 2005 meeting. The paper is entitled 'Implications of the 2004/05 health and safety statistics', Ref HSC/05/127.

Consultation

15. All departments and organisations participating in pilots were consulted over the progress with, and success of, these initiatives. This forms part of our approach to using partnership working to improve sickness absence management.

Presentation

16. Disappointingly, the stakeholder event and report received little media attention. However, the MTF gives HSE the opportunity to engage the civil service and wider public sector, at a senior level, on the issue of sickness absence.

Costs and Benefits

16. Benefits of reporting on the MTF's continued work include: maintaining the MTF as a high-level influencer; raising the profile of HSE within the senior public sector; and, demonstrating the impact of the work of the MTF/HSE on achieving targets.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

17. Funded from existing resources.

Environmental Implications

18. None

Other Implications

19. None

Action

20. HSC is invited to note the report on progress in the public sector (**Annex A**).