

Edinburgh Council challenged over stressed staff



A quarter of long-term staff absences at Edinburgh Council last year were caused by stress or mental health issues, new figures reveal.

The latest figures, obtained through Freedom of Information legislation, show that 707 Council workers were long-term absent last due to "stress, depression, mental health and fatigue syndromes."

Conservative MSP Gavin Brown urged the Council to review its procedures in aim of improving overall welfare of its staff.

Following such a review, Brown, MSP for Lothians, urges the council to take steps to combat occupational health issues: "The council should then consider carefully what action it can take to reduce stress in the workplace so that the absence rate decreases."

Edinburgh Council states there is no recorded link between absences due to stress and specific work-related issues but it is in the process of introducing a new stress management policy.



Convener of
Finance and
Resources Alasdair
Rankin

This new initiative should shortly come into effect, according to Cllr Alasdair Rankin, Finance & Resources Convener, said: "The Council is committed to promoting the health and

wellbeing of its staff, and provides access to a range of support for staff both at work and to facilitate the return to work of those who are off sick.

“Our existing arrangements are being enhanced through a new stress management policy, which will be implemented in the coming months. This will adopt a pro-active approach to the management of work related stress and reflects industry best practice.

“A confidential information, advice and counselling service for staff has already been introduced. The 24 hour helpline is free to call from a landline, and is there for work-related or personal matters.”

Lothians MSP Sarah Boyack, said the statistics represented a 'serious concern' for the health and well being of employees. "The extent of absence due to stress, mental health and fatigue underlines the importance of proper support services for employees and I am writing to the Council to ask what steps they are taking to address the situation and will also raise the matter in in the Scottish Parliament."

John Stevenson of Unison, Edinburgh, blamed cuts in public services for the increase in stress-related absenteeism at Edinburgh City Council. Unison has been negotiating with the council on the new stress policy and urges the identification of stress factors before they cause ill health.

"Our members face the public daily and see first hand their frustrations about cuts to services. With the extra workloads and extra pressures, something has to give and that manifests itself in stress absences, said Stevenson.

While recent absence rates have remained relatively stable at Edinburgh City Council, last year 2850 employees were off sick for at least a fortnight, well beyond the council's stated 'trigger point' of six or more days.

Independent MSP Margo MacDonald said:-“Whether or not this figure accurately reflects the situation in the City of Edinburgh Council or indeed any other of the councils in east central Scotland I would imagine there is considerable strain on all departments. Employees across the board are being asked in some cases to fundamentally restructure their processes and organisational boundaries at the same time as absorbing the cuts coming from central government. That is a recipe to produce stress and strain in any big authority.”

Submitted by [David Stewart](#)