



## HOW WE HELPED THE LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON TRANSFORM ITS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

### KEY DETAILS:

Employees Covered: **2825**

Service Type: **Complete Solution**

Absence Reduction: **35%**

With occupational health providers HML also recommending FirstCare, the council made the decision to implement our nurse-led service.

The London Borough of Hillingdon employs 2,800 staff over multiple sites, delivering a diverse range of services from refuse collection to planning, park and leisure facilities and social care.

### **The council approached FirstCare as inconsistencies in reporting meant that absence wasn't being captured and recorded accurately**

Consistency across multiple sites is one of the main challenges for a complex organisation such as a local authority. Prior to our involvement, the council suspected that absence was not being accurately reported, and were unsure about which managers were following return to work (RTW) procedures. However, it didn't have the tools in place to confirm its suspicions.

Mike Talbot, Human Resources and Organisation Development Service Manager at the London Borough of Hillingdon, explains the position:

"Ensuring that managers and employees consistently adhered to absence management procedures was incredibly difficult, especially on sites where there was limited access to the council's ICT provision."

The council was considering a systems overhaul to introduce uniformity across the numerous sites. However, Mike was impressed with our approach to wellbeing in the workplace, in the form of our nurse-led service, describing us as "category busters".

Prior to the council's go live date in January 2014, we attended a number of meetings to address anxieties and reassure employees. From briefing management and trade unions to explaining process, Mike was impressed by our transparent approach.



**Short-term absence reduced by 35% during the first year and days lost to absence decreased by 1,000 working days in both 2014 and 2015**

The inconsistencies in reporting that led the council to approach us were resolved from day one. Not only are all absences recorded in our system but employees get medical advice to help them return to work as quickly as possible. What's more, return to work (RTW) interviews are now logged directly into the FirstCare system.

The council saw results fast, with a 35% reduction in short-term absence rates in the first year. With our help, it has also seen days lost to absence decrease by 1,000 working days in both 2014 and 2015.

RTW compliance also rose from 69% to 82% during 2014, and has continued to rise incrementally since to around 90% today.

Ultimately, the council is now in complete control of absence management.

**The council's workforce have responded positively to the nurse-led service, with unclassified absence days down from 4,000 to 1,200**

Mike has been struck by the sharp 70% reduction in unclassified absence since we've been working with the council. Down from 4,000 to 1,200 days of unclassified absence, he attributes the reduction to the willingness of staff to speak to nurses, particularly around mental health issues.

The statistics have also revealed some interesting trends about absence in the different sectors working at the organisations. While the council anticipated high levels of stress in front line areas – social work for example – in fact the highest rates of absence due to anxiety occurred in administrative roles.

However, while austerity has impacted many sectors at the organisation, Mike explains that front line jobs have been protected while those in administrative roles have been subjected to a series of change. This narrative has led to particular pressures on staff in these roles, which the council is working to resolve.

**Based on the information about absence we've provided, the council has introduced measures to tackle the two top reasons for absence: musculoskeletal injury and stress and anxiety**

Aligning with national trends, the top reasons for absence at the organisation are musculoskeletal injury and stress and anxiety. Mike explains that data about the causes of absence has been used to inform investment in a number of new initiatives.

"We are now able to monitor compliance against our set targets, and record any reasons why targets are not met"

**Mike Talbot**  
Human Resources and  
Organisation Development  
Service Manager

Return-to-Work (RTW) compliance has continued to rise to around 90% today



“We felt that FirstCare provided a far better solution than any HRIS absence module could achieve”

**Mike Talbot**  
Human Resources and  
Organisation Development  
Service Manager

To tackle the stress and anxiety, the council has introduced an occupational healthcare service, including providing a physiotherapy clinic. The take up has been strong, with clinics held every two weeks being consistently full.

The council has also become more proactive in health surveillance and monitoring of its workforce. For example, by testing machinery for noise pollution and having regard for the physical side to jobs in everything from refuse collection to social care.

What's more, it's introduced preventative wellbeing initiatives to tackle stress and anxiety, including managing stress programmes for managers and building resistance workshops for employees.

**The council has recently extended its contract with us and is becoming more sophisticated at using the tools we provide to manage longer-term absence effectively**

The London Borough of Hillingdon has recently extended its FirstCare contract to integrate with its new HRIS system.

The council is also upgrading its service to give line managers the power to record more detailed information, such as the outcomes of RTW meetings. Ultimately, it now has the tools and the data to tackle longer-term absence – still a significant issue, with 60% of absence being long term – for example by making earlier interventions.

Mike is looking forward to the future:

“FirstCare continue to provide analysis benchmarking information and best practice advice to help us to continue to lower our absence rates.”

**FirstCare**

Absence Management Solutions

**Want to know more about effectively managing sickness absence? Or how we can help you reduce absence rates, increase productivity and reduce costs?**

**Call us on 03454 565 730 or email [info@firstcare.eu](mailto:info@firstcare.eu)**