



Northern Ireland Audit Office

Absenteeism in Northern Ireland Councils 2009-10

REPORT BY THE CHIEF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUDITOR
26 November 2010





This report has been prepared under Article 26 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005.

John Buchanan
Chief Local Government Auditor
November 2010

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Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Scope of the report

In accordance with Article 26 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, the Chief Local Government Auditor requested absenteeism data from each of the 26 district councils for the year ending 31 March 2010:

- numbers of absences;
- duration of absences;
- numbers of full time equivalent employees;
- potential working days available;
- causes of absenteeism;
- absenteeism policies; and
- absenteeism targets.

Unless otherwise stated the analysis contained in this report is based on the data provided by the 26 councils.



Main findings

Absenteeism within councils

- Magherafelt District Council had the lowest average annual absenteeism rate of 7.91 days for the 2007-10 period. Had all councils matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate, a total of £6.2 million a year could have been gained in productivity (paragraphs 3 and 8).
- Average annual absenteeism rates for four councils were more than double the rate recorded in Magherafelt District Council for the 2007-10 period. These were Craigavon Borough Council (17.99 days), Derry City Council (17.15 days), Carrickfergus Borough Council (16.90 days) and Ballymoney Borough Council (16.28 days)(paragraphs 3 and 4).
- Down District Council had the largest increase in average annual absenteeism rate. The rate of 14.79 days recorded for the 2007-10 period is 4.92 days or almost 50 per cent more than the 2004-07 rate of 9.86 days. This represents an average annual productivity loss of £190,000 for the Council. No other council experienced a productivity loss over the two periods in excess of £100,000 (paragraphs 5 and 12).
- Of the 18 councils showing an improvement over the two periods, Cookstown District Council improved the most with a significant reduction in its absenteeism rate of 5.4 days from 14.20 days in 2004-07 to 8.80 days in 2007-10 (paragraphs 6 and 11).
- Improved absenteeism has led to Lisburn City Council gaining £1.4 million in additional productivity since a peak absenteeism rate in 2000-03. From 2002-05 Belfast City Council and Newry and Mourne District Council have gained £2.7 million and £1.4 million respectively as a result of steadily reducing their absenteeism rates (In focus analysis pages 17, 25 and 33).
- In Ballymoney Borough Council, 46 per cent of total days lost due to absenteeism was caused by stress,

depression, mental health and fatigue. This is more than four times the rate of stress-related absence recorded in Magherafelt District Council, Fermanagh District Council, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council and Armagh City and District Council (paragraph 14).

- Further commentary on each council's three-year average annual absenteeism is at [Appendix 3](#) (paragraph 15).
- Variations in absenteeism rates between councils, and the proportion of this attributable to stress-related absence, appear to have no discernable pattern. One factor which does vary between councils is the management of absenteeism. We recommend that councils with high and rising absenteeism rates should review their own management practices and benchmark these against those councils with low and falling absenteeism rates (paragraphs 18, 19 and 20).
- The most frequent change in council practices, where reductions in absenteeism have been sustained over a period of years, is the increased involvement of both senior and line management in the oversight of absenteeism (paragraph 21).

Absenteeism for the sector as a whole

- The 26 Northern Ireland councils employed a total of 9,841 full time equivalent staff in 2009-10. During this period almost 122,000 working days were lost as a result of sickness absence. This represents an average absenteeism rate of 12.39 days, or two and a half weeks of absence, for each employee during 2009-10 (paragraph 26).
- The 2009-10 absenteeism rate reflects a marginal reduction of 0.04 days when compared to the 2008-09 rate of 12.43 days. This absenteeism rate for all Northern Ireland councils is now lower than any annual rate recorded this decade and is a reduction of 2.28 days (16 per cent) from the peak recorded in 2002-03. Increased staff efficiency will be particularly welcome for councils given the current economic climate (paragraph 27).

Executive Summary

- The level of absence due to swine flu in Northern Ireland councils during 2009-10 was relatively low and had only a small impact on absenteeism, accounting for one per cent of the total absenteeism reported. The 2009-10 absenteeism rate in Northern Ireland councils would have fallen by a further 0.12 days to 12.27 days had absences caused by swine flu been excluded (paragraph 29).
- Increased staff costs of £19 million in 2009-10, when combined with the marginally reduced absenteeism rate, have increased the cost of lost productivity due to absence in Northern Ireland councils by £0.9 million from £15.5 million in 2008-09 to £16.4 million in 2009-10 (paragraph 30).
- Reflecting the reduction in the absenteeism rate for the sector as a whole, annual absenteeism rates for 2009-10 fell in 15 councils when compared to 2008-09 (paragraph 31).
- Across Northern Ireland councils, 42 per cent of full time equivalent employees (4,169) had no absence during 2009-10. This is a marked increase from the 40 per cent recorded in 2008-09. For twelve councils the proportion of full time equivalent staff with no absence increased year-on-year over the 2007-10 period (paragraph 33).
- Although the absenteeism rate for Northern Ireland councils is lower than both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive rate and the Northern Ireland Health Service rate, it is higher than the latest available Northern Ireland Civil Service rate (paragraph 34).
- In 2009-10, long term absence in councils represents 67 per cent of the total time lost due to absenteeism and costs £11 million in lost productivity. We recommend that particular attention is paid to the management of long term absence when councils benchmark their absenteeism management practices (paragraphs 42, 43 and 44).

Causes of absence in councils

- In 2009-10 all councils reported summary information on the causes of absence, and for this report we modified the classification to take specific account of absences in 2009-10 as a result of swine flu (paragraph 45).
- While *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue* remain the largest cause of days lost due to absenteeism (22 per cent), the 2009-10 figure represents a one per cent reduction from the previous year. Lost productivity due to stress-related absenteeism has risen from £3.5 million in 2008-09 to £3.6 million in 2009-10 as the falling rate has been offset by increased staff costs. Absences due to this cause of illness last more than five weeks on average (paragraphs 46 and 51).
- There was little variation in the causes of absence in Northern Ireland councils between 2008-09 and 2009-10 (paragraph 48).

Absenteeism policies in councils

- All councils have a written absenteeism policy with the exception of Magherafelt District Council. However, we recommend all councils including Magherafelt District Council should establish written absenteeism policies which are subject to councillor approval and published for the benefit of ratepayers, electors and council staff. We recommend that councils monitor adherence to their policies and revise them when necessary (paragraphs 53 and 55).
- The number of councils periodically informing staff of absence levels has increased from 20 in 2008-09 to 21 in 2009-10. It is our view that councils should make all staff aware of absence statistics on a regular basis to emphasise the importance of absenteeism and the effect it has on council services (paragraph 57).
- 21 councils have implemented a stress or mental health policy. As stress-related absence remains the single largest cause of days lost due to absenteeism



in Northern Ireland councils, we particularly welcome the action being taken by some councils to address this. It is our view that all councils should be proactive in their management of stress-related absenteeism (paragraphs 58 and 59).

Absenteeism targets in councils

- There is currently no requirement for Northern Ireland councils to set long term targets for the reduction of absenteeism. In 2009-10, 19 of the 26 councils had established corporate or departmental level targets for managing absenteeism rates (paragraphs 61 and 62).
- Of the 19 councils with absenteeism reduction targets in place for 2009-10, 17 indicated to us that they notified staff of the target. As with past absenteeism performance we recommend future targets are communicated to staff (paragraph 67).
- We recommend that councils with higher absenteeism rates should benchmark their management practices against councils with lower absenteeism rates (paragraph 20). This should include the establishment and monitoring of targets which, over an established timeframe, will assist councils to focus on progress towards absenteeism levels which match, or improve upon, the lowest rates currently found in Northern Ireland councils (paragraph 69).
- Of the 19 councils with established absenteeism reduction targets, 17 indicated their target had been approved by councillors. Given the importance of absenteeism management, and the potential productivity gains arising from falling absenteeism rates, we recommend that the absenteeism policies established by councils should be approved at the highest level (paragraph 70).
- It is disappointing to note that in a period of improving absenteeism only 7 of the 19 councils were able to meet the 2009-10 absenteeism target they had set. Councils should ensure the targets set for absenteeism are challenging but at the same time realistic (paragraph 71).

Absenteeism data in councils

- We asked for completed absenteeism data questionnaires to be returned by 30 June 2010. 18 councils had submitted responses on or before this date. Castlereagh Borough Council was again the last council to submit a return on 31 August 2010, more than 8 weeks after the due date (paragraphs 72 and 73).
- We recommend that all councils should ensure absenteeism data is compiled on a timely basis and its accuracy tested (paragraph 74).
- The effective management of absenteeism in councils requires reliable absence data. Councils should ensure the integrity of the data used to calculate and monitor absenteeism rates and to set absenteeism targets (paragraph 76).
- In general we noted an improvement in the quality of absenteeism data presented by councils. We commend those councils who provided us with good quality absenteeism information by 30 June 2010. This improvement has enabled the earlier publication of this report (26 November 2010 as opposed to 11 December 2009 for the 2008-09 report) (paragraphs 74 and 78).



Report



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Absenteeism within councils

1. For the purposes of this section of the report, absenteeism data for each council has been analysed over a three-year period and an average annual absenteeism rate¹ derived for the period. This counters the impact of annual fluctuations in absenteeism which could distort our findings, particularly within smaller councils (paragraph 25). The resulting three-year derived rate provides a better illustration of the underlying absenteeism

position for each council. All councils should, however, continue to monitor their absenteeism regularly as part of an ongoing process of absenteeism management.

2. Figure 1 sets out the three-year average annual absenteeism rate for each council for the period April 2007 to March 2010². Absenteeism rates calculated for the previous three-year period, April 2004 to March 2007, allow comparisons between the two periods to be made.

I Three-year average annual absenteeism rates for each Northern Ireland council³

Average annual absenteeism rates for 2007-10 range from 7.91 to 17.99 days. The rates for four councils are more than double the lowest rate.

	Three-year period 2004-07 (days)	Three-year period 2007-10 (days)	Movement (days)
Magherafelt District Council	7.44	7.91	0.47
Armagh City and District Council	9.68	8.17	-1.52
Fermanagh District Council	9.21	8.62	-0.58
Lisburn City Council	10.01	8.67	-1.33
Cookstown District Council	14.20	8.80	-5.40
Omagh District Council	14.15	10.99	-3.16
Castlereagh Borough Council	10.23	11.27	1.05
Strabane District Council	11.83	11.42	-0.41
Newtownabbey Borough Council	12.64	11.56	-1.08
Antrim Borough Council	12.69	11.67	-1.02
Limavady Borough Council	14.86	12.09	-2.77
Belfast City Council	15.90	12.44	-3.46
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	13.41	12.59	-0.82
Ballymena Borough Council	11.22	12.81	1.59
North Down Borough Council	12.65	13.13	0.48
Banbridge District Council	10.43	13.22	2.78
Newry and Mourne District Council	16.87	13.54	-3.34
Ards Borough Council	13.08	14.04	0.96
Moyle District Council	15.46	14.06	-1.40
Down District Council	9.86	14.79	4.92
Coleraine Borough Council	15.32	14.88	-0.44
Larne Borough Council	20.32	15.47	-4.85
Double the lowest rate (Magherafelt District Council)		15.82	
Ballymoney Borough Council	16.59	16.28	-0.31
Carrickfergus Borough Council	19.67	16.90	-2.77
Derry City Council	17.32	17.15	-0.16
Craigavon Borough Council	16.63	17.99	1.36

Source: Northern Ireland councils



3. With 7.91 days, Magherafelt District Council had the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the 2007-10 period. The equivalent absenteeism rates for four councils (Craigavon Borough Council (17.99 days), Derry City Council (17.15 days), Carrickfergus Borough Council (16.90 days) and Ballymoney Borough Council (16.28 days)) were more than double the rate recorded in Magherafelt District Council.
4. The council with the highest average annual absenteeism rate was Craigavon Borough Council with 17.99 days for the 2007-10 period.
5. The council that experienced the largest increase in its average annual absenteeism rate was Down District Council. The rate of 14.79 days recorded for the 2007-10 period is 4.92 days or almost 50 per cent more than the 2004-07 rate of 9.86 days. Banbridge District Council was the only other council to experience an increased average annual absenteeism rate of more than two days, recording a movement of 2.78 days across the two periods.
6. Of the 18 councils showing an improvement over the two periods, Cookstown District Council improved most with a reduction in its absenteeism rate of 5.40 days. At this council the average annual absenteeism rate reduced from 14.20 days in 2004-07 to 8.80 days in 2007-10. A notable reduction was also recorded in Larne Borough Council (4.85 days).
7. Within the three-year period 2007-10, five of the six councils with the highest absenteeism rates at the beginning of the period, and 11 councils in total, recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism. Only two councils experienced a year-on-year increase in absenteeism rates between 2007-08 and 2009-10.
8. The average annual staff cost for each council for the 2007-10 period is set out in Figure 2. By applying the three-year average absenteeism rates (Figure 1) to these figures, we have derived the average annual lost productivity arising for each council. They range from £180,000 in Magherafelt District Council to £4.1 million in Belfast City Council. Had all councils matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate of 7.91 days recorded by Magherafelt District Council, a total of £6.2 million a year could have been gained in productivity (Figure 2 and Appendix 1).
9. Councils with higher rates of absenteeism will secure the greatest proportionate productivity gains by a reduction to the rate recorded for Magherafelt District Council. In the case of Craigavon Borough Council a reduction in absenteeism rate, from the current rate of 17.99 days to 7.91 days, would lead to potential productivity gains of £651,000, equivalent to 4.5 per cent of staff costs.

1 The absenteeism rate is the average number of days a full time equivalent employee was absent in a period. The absenteeism rate is measured in working days lost per full time equivalent employee, referred to as 'days' in this report. If an employee who works reduced hours is absent, the absence is calculated on a full time equivalent basis.

2 Average annual absenteeism rates for April 2006 to March 2009 were reported in *Absenteeism in Northern Ireland Councils 2008-09* [PC2650 12/09]. These rates have not been compared with the periods 2004-07 and 2007-10, included in this report, due to their overlapping nature.

3 Marginal alterations have been made to the 2004-07 figures originally published in the *Absenteeism in Northern Ireland councils 2006-07* report due to a revision to our calculations of three-year absenteeism rates. In 24 councils the changes made amounted to 0.06 days or less; in one council the difference was 0.10 and in another it amounted to 0.15.

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2 Average annual staff costs and associated potential gains in productivity for each Northern Ireland council (2007-10) if the lowest absenteeism rate was equalled

Annual gains of £6.2 million in productivity could be made if all councils matched the lowest absenteeism rate reported by Magherafelt District Council.

	Average annual staff costs 2007-10 (£'000)	Average annual lost productivity 2007-10 (£'000)	Average annual potential productivity gains based on an absenteeism rate of 7.91 days (% of staff costs)	Average annual potential productivity gains based on an absenteeism rate of 7.91 days (£'000)
Magherafelt District Council	5,062	180	0.0	0.0
Armagh City and District Council	9,000	327	0.1	10
Fermanagh District Council	7,563	293	0.3	24
Lisburn City Council	13,331	519	0.3	46
Cookstown District Council	5,799	228	0.4	23
Omagh District Council	8,503	415	1.4	116
Castlereagh Borough Council	9,784	493	1.5	147
Strabane District Council	5,390	274	1.6	84
Newtownabbey Borough Council	11,283	597	1.7	188
Antrim Borough Council	8,110	409	1.6	132
Limavady Borough Council	4,449	237	1.8	82
Belfast City Council	73,864	4,079	2.0	1,485
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	7,384	418	2.1	155
Ballymena Borough Council	8,803	500	2.2	191
North Down Borough Council	10,199	594	2.3	236
Banbridge District Council	5,546	327	2.4	131
Newry and Mourne District Council	12,195	742	2.5	308
Ards Borough Council	10,211	659	2.8	288
Moyle District Council	3,432	208	2.7	91
Down District Council	8,545	570	3.1	265
Coleraine Borough Council	9,047	604	3.1	283
Larne Borough Council	5,125	354	3.4	173
Ballymoney Borough Council	3,754	273	3.7	140
Carrickfergus Borough Council	5,027	381	4.0	203
Derry City Council	17,271	1,343	4.2	724
Craigavon Borough Council	14,446	1,162	4.5	651
Total				6,176

Source: Chief Local Government Auditor (see Appendix 1)



3 Changes in average annual productivity for each Northern Ireland council resulting from a comparison of 2004-07 and 2007-10 absenteeism rates

Changes in average annual productivity resulting from a comparison of 2004-07 and 2007-10 absenteeism rates range from a gain in Belfast City Council of £1,135,000 to a loss in Down District Council of £190,000.

	Average absenteeism rate for the 2007-10 period (days) (Figure 1)	Average annual staff costs 2007-10 (£'000) (Figure 2)	Movement in three-year rate from 2004-07 to 2007-10 (days) (Figure 1)	Average annual increased productivity gain/loss based on 2007-10 costs using 2004-07 rate (£'000)
Magherafelt District Council	7.91	5,062	0.47	-11
Armagh City and District Council	8.17	9,000	-1.52	61
Fermanagh District Council	8.62	7,563	-0.58	20
Lisburn City Council	8.67	13,331	-1.33	80
Cookstown District Council	8.80	5,799	-5.40	140
Omagh District Council	10.99	8,503	-3.16	119
Castlereagh Borough Council	11.27	9,784	1.05	-46
Strabane District Council	11.42	5,390	-0.41	10
Newtownabbey Borough Council	11.56	11,283	-1.08	56
Antrim Borough Council	11.67	8,110	-1.02	36
Limavady Borough Council	12.09	4,449	-2.77	54
Belfast City Council	12.44	73,864	-3.46	1,135
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	12.59	7,384	-0.82	27
Ballymena Borough Council	12.81	8,803	1.59	-62
North Down Borough Council	13.13	10,199	0.48	-22
Banbridge District Council	13.22	5,546	2.78	-69
Newry and Mourne District Council	13.54	12,195	-3.34	183
Ards Borough Council	14.04	10,211	0.96	-45
Moyle District Council	14.06	3,432	-1.40	21
Down District Council	14.79	8,545	4.92	-190
Coleraine Borough Council	14.88	9,047	-0.44	18
Larne Borough Council	15.47	5,125	-4.85	111
Ballymoney Borough Council	16.28	3,754	-0.31	5
Carrickfergus Borough Council	16.90	5,027	-2.77	62
Derry City Council	17.15	17,271	-0.16	13
Craigavon Borough Council	17.99	14,446	1.36	-88

Source: Chief Local Government Auditor (see Appendix 2)

10. At Figure 3 and Appendix 2 we have estimated the gain or loss in average annual productivity resulting from the change in council absenteeism rates

between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, as shown in Figure 1.

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11. With £73.9 million of staff costs, the reduction by Belfast City Council in its absenteeism rate of 3.46 days between 2004-07 and 2007-10 has led to an average annual productivity gain of £1.1 million. Although Cookstown District Council has much smaller staff costs (£5.8 million), the 5.4 day reduction in its absenteeism rate over the same period represents an average annual productivity gain of £140,000.
12. Down District Council's increased absenteeism rate of 4.92 days between 2004-07 and 2007-10 represents an average annual productivity loss of £190,000 for the Council. No other council experienced a productivity loss over the two periods in excess of £100,000.
13. At paragraph 46 we have noted that *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue* is the largest cause of absenteeism in Northern Ireland councils and is responsible, on average, for 22 per cent of total days lost. Figure 4 sets out for all councils the proportion of absenteeism caused by stress-related absence in the period 2007-10.
14. In Ballymoney Borough Council, 46 per cent of total days lost due to absenteeism was caused by *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue*. This is more than four times the rate of stress-related absence recorded in Magherafelt District Council, Fermanagh District Council, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council and Armagh City and District Council. Although remaining as the council with the largest proportion of days lost caused by *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue*, Ballymoney Borough Council was one of only five councils to experience a year-on-year reduction in stress-related absence during the 2007-10 period.
15. Further commentary on each council's three-year average annual absenteeism is at [Appendix 3](#).
16. In the short term, it is unlikely that lower absenteeism rates would result in reduced staff costs for councils through a reduction in staff numbers. However, lower absenteeism rates would give rise to increased productivity due to higher levels of

4 Three-year average proportion of days lost due to stress, depression, mental health and fatigue for each Northern Ireland council (2007-10)

The average proportion of days lost due to stress-related absence ranges from 8 to 46 per cent.

	Proportion of days lost due to stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (%)
Ballymoney Borough Council	46
Craigavon Borough Council	33
Coleraine Borough Council	30
Down District Council	30
Castlereagh Borough Council	29
Larne Borough Council	29
Limavady Borough Council	25
Moyle District Council	25
Ballymena Borough Council	24
Derry City Council*	24
Belfast City Council	24
Strabane District Council	24
Antrim Borough Council	23
Carrickfergus Borough Council	21
Banbridge District Council	19
Newry and Mourne District Council	19
Lisburn City Council	18
Ards Borough Council	17
Omagh District Council	17
Cookstown District Council	16
North Down Borough Council	14
Newtownabbey Borough Council	13
Armagh City and District Council	11
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	10
Fermanagh District Council	10
Magherafelt District Council	8

* Information on causes of absence was not available for 2007-08 for this Council therefore its average is based on 2 years.

Source: Northern Ireland councils



attendance. Hence the comparisons between councils consider the potential for gains in productivity (paragraph 8). In the longer term, councils should have the option of either maintaining increased levels of productivity or alternatively reducing staff numbers and costs.

17. An immediate benefit of lower absenteeism should be a tangible reduction in overtime and temporary staff costs. We recommend councils monitor these costs to ensure that falling absenteeism is reflected in cost reductions. Similarly we recommend that councils with increasing absenteeism rates should monitor the additional costs resulting through overtime and the employment of temporary staff.
18. Variations in absenteeism rates between councils, and the proportion of this attributable to stress-related absence, appear to have no discernable pattern. It is unlikely that differences in activity have been a factor. For the most part, councils operate within the same legislative framework, providing essentially the same services. In addition, neither the size of a council, nor its geographical location, appears to significantly influence its absenteeism rate. High and low absenteeism rates are found in both large and small councils, and in both urban and rural councils. Similarly, there appears to be no relationship between the political control of councils and absenteeism.
19. One factor which does vary between councils is the management of absenteeism. This report addresses three absenteeism management issues at a high level: policies (paragraphs 53 to 60); targets (paragraphs 61 to 71); and data (paragraphs 72 to 78). Our review is not detailed enough to link specific management practices with absenteeism rates or causes of absence but research elsewhere⁴ has shown the significant impact that effective management has in reducing absenteeism.
20. We recommend that councils with high and rising absenteeism rates should review their own management practices and benchmark these against those councils with low and falling absenteeism rates. We have noted cases where such

benchmarking is in progress and where increased management attention to absenteeism has been matched by reductions in absenteeism rates.

21. We recognise that line managers have a key role to play if a council is to implement effective absenteeism management procedures. Several councils informed us that they provide line managers with specific absenteeism management training, to enable them to perform their role to a higher standard and to promote consistency across their organisations. Ensuring line managers are equipped to be an effective part of a council's processes to address absenteeism should be a particular priority for those councils with high or rising absenteeism rates. The most frequent change in council practices, where reductions in absenteeism have been sustained over a period of years, is the increased involvement of both senior and line management in the oversight of absenteeism.
22. It is our view that the potential gains in productivity for councils noted in Figure 2 are both significant and attainable. We accept, however, that councils with high absenteeism rates are likely to take longer to realise these gains.
23. For this, and previous Absenteeism in Northern Ireland Councils reports, we have recorded statistics which span the last decade. In this current report we have included 'in focus analysis' of three councils where a sustained change in absenteeism has had a significant ongoing impact on the councils' staff productivity (pages 17, 25 and 33).
24. Due to the postponement in implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) we have not provided figures on post-RPA councils in this report. The Minister of the Environment wrote to the Speaker of the Assembly on 15th June 2010 to advise on progress with the local government reform programme⁵. He commented that

"The Executive has now considered all of the issues around the delivery of the local government reform programme and we have concluded that it will not now be possible to create the eleven new councils

⁴ Cabinet Office: *Working Well Together*, 1998; The Work Foundation: *Attendance management*, 2003; and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development: *Absence Management*, 2006; CBI: *On the path to recovery: Absence and workplace health survey*, 2010

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together with their new functions in 2011 as planned...

“I regret that the Executive have not yet reached agreement on an alternative delivery timetable, but I can say that the Executive remains committed to delivering our vision for local government...That is why I will be bringing fresh proposals on a delivery timetable before the Executive over the summer, with a view to reaching agreement within the Executive and providing clarity on the delivery timetable for all those affected by or with an interest in local government reform.”

As this report was being prepared, new proposals on RPA had not yet been brought before the Executive.

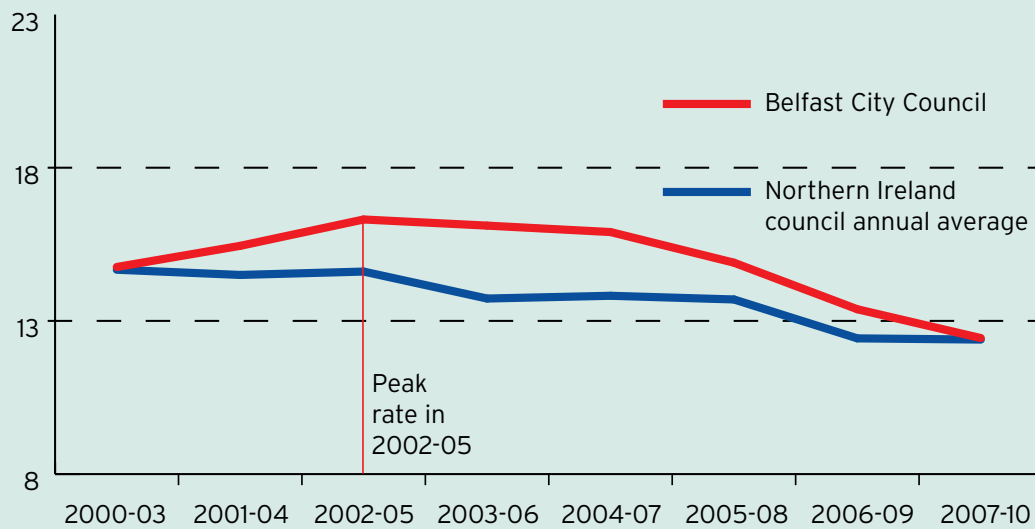
25. Unless otherwise stated, references to Northern Ireland councils in the remaining sections of this report reflect an annual position, as opposed to the three-year derived annual absenteeism rates calculated for individual council analysis. When grouped together, Northern Ireland councils provide absenteeism data which is less susceptible to year-on-year fluctuations.

5 Minister of Environment's letter to the Speaker http://www.doeni.gov.uk/sub_346-10_signed_letter_to_speaker.pdf



In Focus Analysis: Belfast City Council

Improved absenteeism since 2002-05 has led to a £2.7 million gain in additional staff productivity



The Belfast City Council absenteeism rate peaked at 16.31 days in 2002-05. It has steadily reduced to 12.44 days in 2007-10, a reduction of 3.87 days from the peak.

By reducing the absenteeism rate from its peak of 16.31 days Belfast City Council has obtained £2.7 million in additional staff productivity over the period 2002-05 to 2007-10.

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Absenteeism for the sector as a whole

- 26. The 26 Northern Ireland councils employed a total of 9,841 full time equivalent staff in 2009-10. During this period almost 122,000 working days were lost as a result of sickness absence. This represents an average absenteeism rate of 12.39 days⁶, or two and a half weeks of absence, for each employee during 2009-10 (Figure 5).
- 27. The 2009-10 absenteeism rate reflects a marginal reduction of 0.04 days when compared to the 2008-09 rate of 12.43 days. This continued reduction means the absenteeism rate for all Northern Ireland councils is lower than any annual rate recorded this decade and is a reduction of 2.28 days (16 per cent) from the peak recorded in 2002-03. Increased staff efficiency will be particularly welcome for councils given the current economic climate (Figure 6).

5 Combined absenteeism data for the 26 Northern Ireland councils (2008-09 and 2009-10)

The 2009-10 absenteeism rate reduced to 12.39 days.

	2008-09	2009-10
Potential working days available	2,182,756	2,208,761
Number of full time equivalent employees	9,753	9,841
Days lost due to absence	121,214	121,898
Lost productivity rate (per cent)	5.55%	5.52%
Average absenteeism rate (days)	12.43	12.39

Source: Northern Ireland councils

6 Northern Ireland council absenteeism rates since 2000-01

The absenteeism rate for 2009-10 is marginally lower than 2008-09 and 2.28 days (16 per cent) lower than the peak rate in 2002-03.



Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

⁶ The average absenteeism rate for 2009-10 is the mean rate for all 9,841 full time equivalent staff in Northern Ireland councils. The median absenteeism rate across all 26 councils for 2009-10 is 11.77 days.



28. There has been a seven per cent increase in gross staff costs in Northern Ireland councils, from £280 million in 2008-09 to £299 million in 2009-10 (Figure 7). The main factors contributing to this rise of £19 million were

- councils employed an additional 88 full time equivalent staff;
- some councils implemented revised grading agreements;
- council pension contributions increased by one per cent.

29. During 2009 there was a risk that the swine flu pandemic could have a severe impact on public services including councils. Swine flu is a respiratory illness caused by a new strain of the flu A virus named '**Pandemic (H1N1) 2009**' by the World Health Organization. On 10 August 2010 the Director-General of the World Health Organization announced that the world has moved into the post-pandemic period of the H1N1 (2009) influenza pandemic⁷. The announcement was made following a meeting of its Emergency Committee which reviewed global epidemiological data indicating that the flu virus, worldwide, is transitioning towards seasonal flu characteristics and patterns of transmission. The level of absence due to swine flu in Northern Ireland councils during 2009-10 was relatively low. It had only a small impact on absenteeism with swine flu accounting for one per cent of the total absenteeism reported (Figure 16). The 2009-10 absenteeism rate in Northern Ireland councils would have fallen by a further 0.12 days to 12.27 days had absences caused by swine flu been excluded.

7 Comparison of the cost of absenteeism in Northern Ireland councils (2008-09 and 2009-10)

The projected 2009-10 cost of absenteeism is £16.4 million.

	2008-09	2009-10
Average absenteeism rate (days)	12.43	12.39
Lost productivity rate (per cent)	5.55	5.52
Gross staff costs (£m)	280	299
Projected cost of absenteeism (£m)	15.5	16.4

Source: Northern Ireland councils

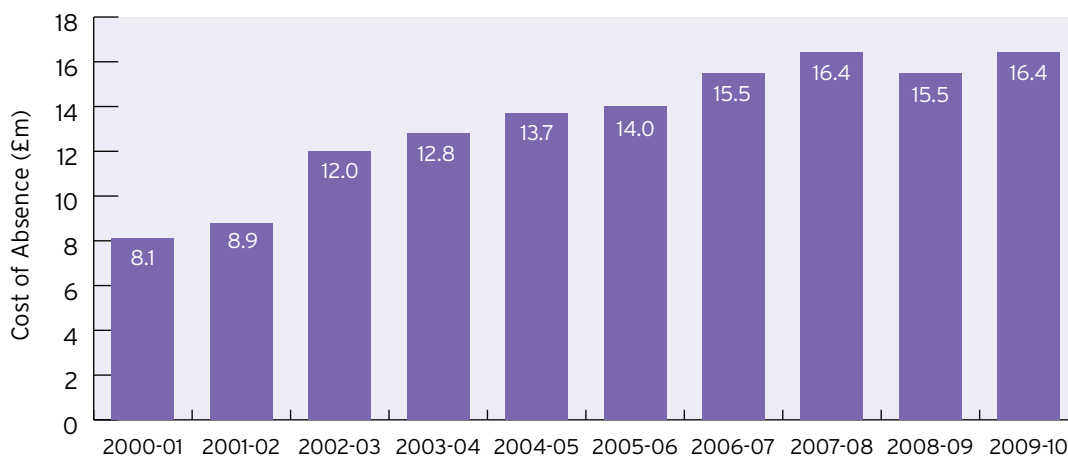
7 World Health Organisation <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

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- 30. Increased staff costs of £19 million in 2009-10, when combined with the marginally reduced absenteeism rate, have increased the cost of lost productivity due to absence in Northern Ireland councils by £0.9 million from £15.5 million in 2008-09 to £16.4 million in 2009-10 (Figure 7 and Figure 8).
- 31. Although we recommend absenteeism performance should be benchmarked against others, the most important comparisons are to be made with performance in the same organisation or sector over time. Reflecting the reduction in the absenteeism rate for the sector as a whole, annual absenteeism rates for 2009-10 fell in 15 councils when compared to 2008-09. The extent of these reductions ranged from 1 to 36 per cent.
- 32. Across Northern Ireland councils, 42 per cent of full time equivalent employees (4,169) had no absence during 2009-10. This represents a marked increase from the 40 per cent recorded in 2008-09 and the 37 per cent recorded in 2007-08.

8 Cost of absence in Northern Ireland councils since 2000-01⁸

Following a fall in the cost of absenteeism in 2008-09, the cost for 2009-10 has once more exceeded £16 million.



Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

⁸ These costs have not been adjusted to take account of inflation.



33. When examining each council's performance we have derived the average annual rate for staff with no absence over the three-year period 2007-10. There remains considerable variation between councils, ranging from Armagh City and District Council (59 per cent) to Strabane District Council (27 per cent) (Figure 9). For twelve councils the proportion of full time equivalent staff with no absence increased year-on-year over the 2007-10 period. Only one council reported a year-on-year decrease.

9 Annual average proportion of full time equivalent staff with no absence in each Northern Ireland council (2007-10)

Annual average proportion of full time equivalent staff with no absence in 2007-10 ranges from 27 to 59 per cent.

	Annual average proportion of staff with no absence 2007-10 (%)
Armagh City and District Council	59
Lisburn City Council	55
Castlereagh Borough Council	53
Ballymena Borough Council	49
Antrim Borough Council	47
Larne Borough Council	47
Magherafelt District Council	46
Down District Council	46
Craigavon Borough Council	42
Omagh District Council	42
Fermanagh District Council	42
Moyle District Council	41
Ballymoney Borough Council	41
Derry City Council	40
North Down Borough Council	39
Newtownabbey Borough Council	36
Belfast City Council	36
Coleraine Borough Council	35
Cookstown District Council	35
Limavady Borough Council	35
Banbridge District Council	35
Carrickfergus Borough Council	33
Newry and Mourne District Council	32
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	32
Ards Borough Council	30
Strabane District Council	27

Note that Councils first reported the proportion of full time equivalent staff with no absence in their 2007-08 returns. Three year averages have been available for the first time this year.

Source: Northern Ireland councils

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34. The absenteeism rate for Northern Ireland councils as a sector is lower than both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive rate and the Northern Ireland Health Service rate, but higher than the latest available Northern Ireland Civil Service rate (Figure 10). Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service do not include the small proportion of staff designated as industrial staff.
35. The latest available absenteeism rate for local authorities in England and Wales (2008-09, 9.2) has improved by 0.2 days from the 2007-08 rate and remains more than 3 days lower than the 2009-10 rate for Northern Ireland councils. Public sector absenteeism across the UK is generally recorded at higher levels than the private sector.
36. Currently only five Northern Ireland councils have average absenteeism rates below the latest available average for England and Wales local authorities. At paragraph 20, we recommend that councils with higher absenteeism rates benchmark their management practices against councils with lower absenteeism rates. Significant improvements by councils with high absenteeism rates would close the current absenteeism gap between the Northern Ireland council sector and the equivalent sector in the rest of the UK.
37. As was the case when comparing one council with another, absenteeism comparisons for the sector as a whole consider the potential for gains in productivity.
38. The 2009-10 absenteeism rate in Northern Ireland councils is 35 per cent higher than the rate recorded for England and Wales local authorities in 2008-09 (2009-10 figures were not available). Had the Northern Ireland rate been similar to that of the latest available rate in England and Wales local

10 Absenteeism rates in relevant employment sectors⁹

The 2009-10 absenteeism rate for Northern Ireland councils is lower than that of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Northern Ireland Health Service but higher than the latest available rate for the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

	2008-09 (days)	2009-10 (days)
Northern Ireland Housing Executive ¹⁰	13.20	13.60
Northern Ireland Health Service ¹¹	12.79	12.59
Northern Ireland councils	12.43	12.39
Northern Ireland Civil Service ¹²	11.00	-
England and Wales local authorities ¹³	9.20	-
UK Economy ¹⁴	6.70	6.40

Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

9 There is no single rate available for the Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards. Comparisons have not been made with the education sector at this time.

10 Northern Ireland Housing Executive: *39th Annual Report 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010*

11 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Base information from Monitoring of Human Resource Activity reports (available at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk); days lost figures calculated by NIAO.

12 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: *Analysis of Sickness Absence in the NI Departments 2008/2009*. As this report was being prepared 2009-10 statistics for NI Departments were not available.

13 Local Government Employers/Local Government Association: *Local Government Sickness Absence Levels and Causes Survey 2008-2009*. There were no publicly available reports on absence in England & Wales Local Authorities for 2009-10.

14 Confederation of British Industry: *On the path to recovery (Absence and workplace health survey 2010)*, (based on a survey of 241 employers with 1.28 million employees. This is a calendar year figure for 2009.)



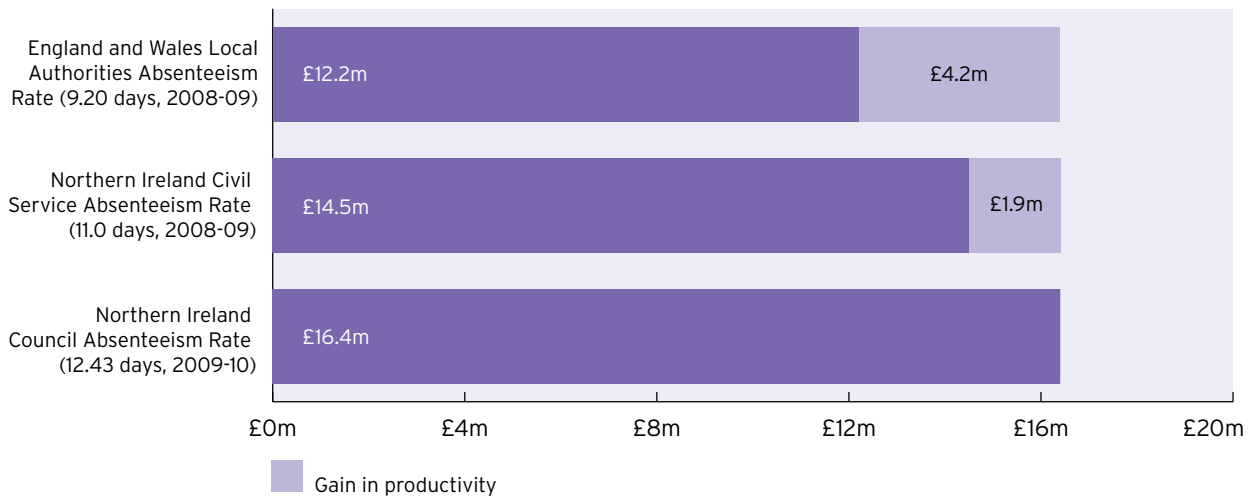
authorities, the gain in productivity would have been £4.2 million (Figure 11), or a gain of 138 staff in post at no additional cost.

39. Reducing the Northern Ireland council absenteeism rate to that of the Northern Ireland Civil Service would have resulted in a gain of £1.9 million on council productivity (Figure 11), or 63 more staff in post throughout the year at no additional cost.

40. Absences were classified as short term or long term, with a long term absence defined as lasting 20 or more working days. Councils reported that 12 per cent of 2009-10 absences were long term (Figure 12), an increase from 11 per cent reported in 2008-09. Councils reported that 65 employees had been on long term sickness absence and no longer in receipt of pay.

11 Comparison of the costs of absenteeism across relevant employment sectors

Reducing the Northern Ireland council absenteeism rate to that of other employment sectors would result in varying gains in productivity



Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

12 Analysis of 2009-10 absences in Northern Ireland councils by duration

12 per cent of absences were long term.

	Short Term	Long Term	All Absences
Days lost due to absence	39,949	81,949	121,898
Number of absences	10,590	1,487	12,077
Average length of an absence (days)	4	55	10
Days lost due to absence (per cent)	33	67	100
Absences (per cent)	88	12	100

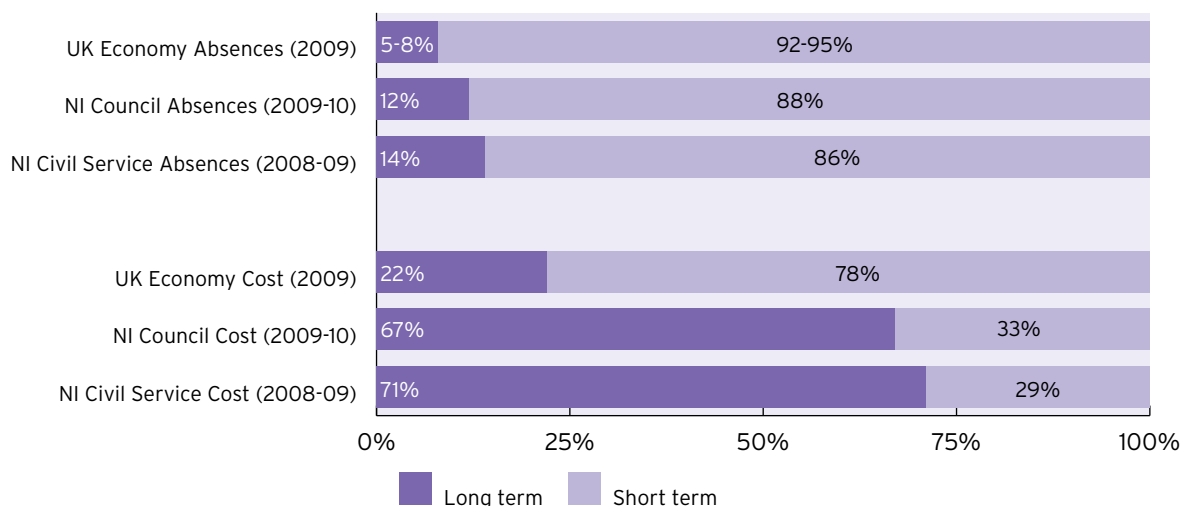
Source: Northern Ireland councils

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41. The proportion of absences classified as long term in Northern Ireland councils is at least 50 per cent higher than that found in the UK economy¹⁵, where five to eight per cent of absences were classified as long term (Figure 13).
42. The larger proportion of long term absences in councils has a significant impact on the cost of absenteeism. The most recent CBI survey on absence within the UK economy¹⁶ reports that long term absence represents 22 per cent of the total time lost due to absence. In Northern Ireland councils, 67 per cent of the total time lost due to absence in 2009-10 was as a result of long term absence. The proportional cost of long term absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service in 2008-09 (71 per cent) is slightly higher than that found in Northern Ireland councils. The issue of managing long term absences would appear to extend beyond councils into other parts of the Northern Ireland public sector.
43. In 2009-10, long term absences cost councils £11 million in lost productivity. If councils reduced the proportion of long term absence by at least 50 per cent to that found in the UK economy, the cost of long term absence could be reduced by over £7 million.
44. At paragraph 20 we recommend that councils with higher absenteeism rates should benchmark their management practices against councils with lower absenteeism rates. Given the relatively high levels of long term absenteeism in councils, and the associated costs, this benchmarking should pay particular attention to the management of long term absence.

13 Proportion of absences and their associated cost by duration

The larger proportion of long term absences in Northern Ireland has a significant impact on absence costs.



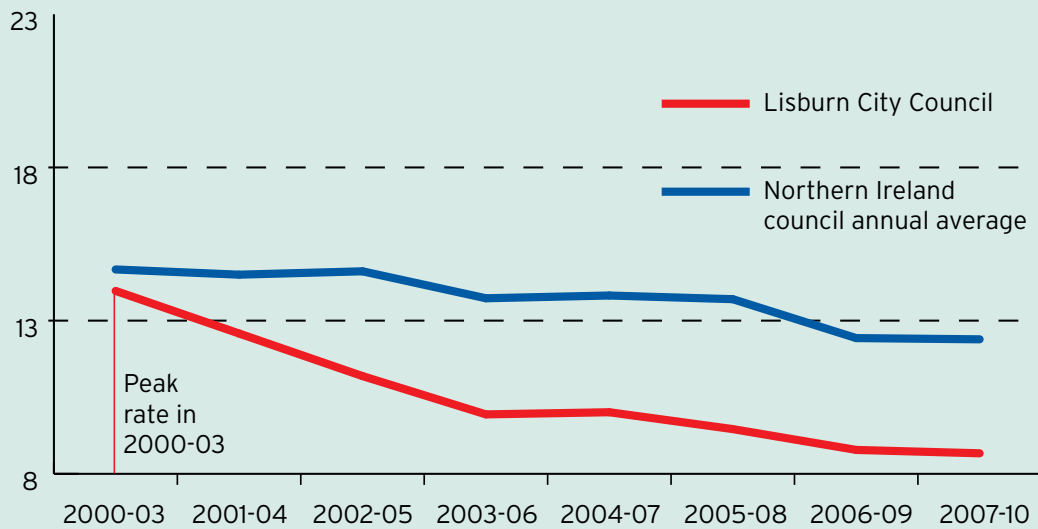
Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

15 Confederation of British Industry: *On the path to recovery: Absence and workplace health survey 2010*
 16 Confederation of British Industry: *On the path to recovery: Absence and workplace health survey 2010*



In Focus Analysis: Lisburn City Council

Improved absenteeism since 2000-03 has led to a £1.4 million gain in additional staff productivity



Lisburn City Council absenteeism peaked at 13.97 days in 2000-03. It has steadily reduced to 8.67 days in 2007-10, a decrease of 5.3 days from the peak.

By reducing the absenteeism rate from its peak of 13.97 days, Lisburn City Council has obtained £1.4 million in additional staff productivity over the period 2000-03 to 2007-10.

Causes of absence in councils

45. Councils were asked to categorise absences by cause, based on a classification developed by Local Government Employers¹⁷. For this report we modified the classification to take specific account of absences in 2009-10 as a result of swine flu.
46. While *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue* remains the largest cause of days lost due to absenteeism (22 per cent), the 2009-10 figure represents a one per cent reduction from the previous year. Lost productivity due to *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue* has however risen marginally by £0.1 million from £3.5 million in 2008-09 to £3.6 million in 2009-10 as the falling absenteeism rate has been offset by increased staff costs (Figure 14).
47. The causes of absence in Northern Ireland councils have been listed in Figure 14 according to total days lost (commencing with the cause of absence leading to the greatest time lost). As has been the case in previous years the two causes leading to most absenteeism are stress and musculoskeletal problems. This trend is again reflected in Northern Ireland councils, with 41 per cent of days lost due to these illnesses in 2009-10.

14 Lost productivity in Northern Ireland councils by cause of absence (2009-10)

The cause of absence which results in the highest amount of lost productivity in councils is *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue*.

	Days lost due to absenteeism	Days lost due to absenteeism (%)	Lost productivity (£m)
Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue	26,689	22	3.6
Musculoskeletal problems	23,143	19	3.1
Stomach, liver, kidney and digestion	12,568	10	1.7
Back and neck problems	11,706	10	1.6
Infections	11,694	10	1.6
Other	11,417	9	1.5
Heart, blood pressure and circulation	6,412	5	0.9
Chest and respiratory	5,057	4	0.7
Eye, ear, nose, mouth and dental	4,022	3	0.5
Neurological	3,497	3	0.5
Genito-Urinary and gynaecological	2,270	2	0.3
Pregnancy-related	2,235	2	0.3
Swine flu	1,187	1	0.2
Total	121,898	100	16.4

Source: Northern Ireland councils

¹⁷ Local Government Employers was formerly known as the Employers' Organisation for Local Government. It is a support organisation to England and Wales local authorities. Their classification was based primarily on those generally used in England and Wales local authorities and supplemented by the views of medical experts.

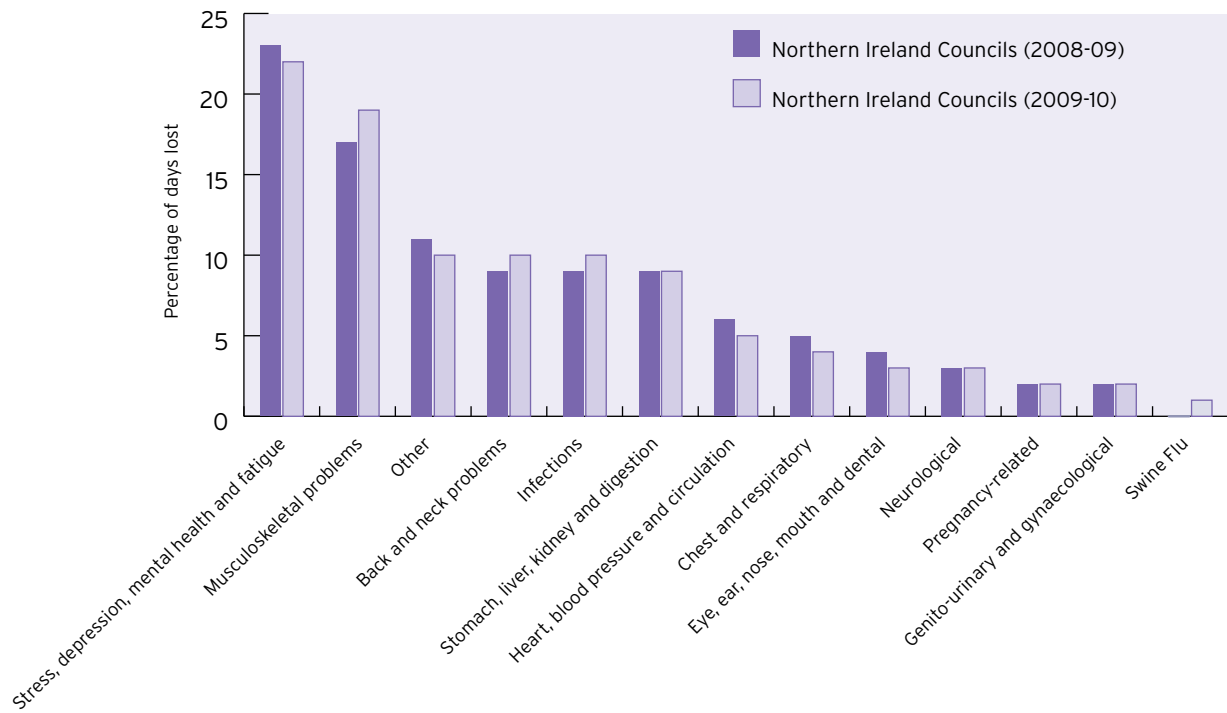


- 48. There was little variation in the causes of absence in Northern Ireland councils between 2008-09 and 2009-10 (Figure 15). Categories either stayed the same or changed by no more than two per cent.
- 49. Although the total number of absences has fallen by over 800 to 12,077 in 2009-10 (a reduction of six per cent), the total number of days lost due to

absenteeism has increased marginally from 121,214 to 121,898 (Figure 5). These movements reflect the fact that the number of short term absences has fallen but the number of long term absences has increased. Taken together the result has been that the average duration of an absence has increased from nine days in 2008-09 to ten days in 2009-10 (Figure 16).

15 Causes of absence in Northern Ireland councils for 2008-09 and 2009-10

Categories either stayed the same or changed by no more than two per cent.



Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

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16 Number of absences recorded by Northern Ireland councils for each cause (2009-10)

Infections and stomach, liver, kidney and digestion ailments cause 45 per cent of all absences.

	Days lost due to absenteeism	Absences	Average duration (days)	Absence (%)
Infections	11,694	2,816	4	23
Stomach, liver, kidney and digestion	12,568	2,704	5	22
Musculoskeletal problems	23,143	1,202	19	10
Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue	26,689	960	28	8
Back and neck problems	11,706	926	13	8
Other	11,417	912	13	8
Eye, ear, nose, mouth and dental	4,022	713	6	6
Chest and respiratory	5,057	673	8	6
Neurological	3,497	502	7	4
Pregnancy-related	2,235	175	13	1
Swine flu	1,187	168	7	1
Genito-Urinary and gynaecological	2,270	166	14	1
Heart, blood pressure and circulation	6,412	160	40	1
Totals (2009-10)	121,898	12,077	10	100
Totals (2008-09)	121,214	12,892	9	

Source: Northern Ireland councils

50. For 2009-10, 45 per cent of all absences in Northern Ireland councils were due to either *infections or stomach, liver, kidney and digestion illnesses*. The average duration of these absences, four and five days respectively, remains less than all other causes of absence (Figure 16).
51. Absences due to *stress, depression, mental health and fatigue* last on average 28 working days, equivalent to more than five working weeks. This is unchanged from the average duration reported in 2008-09.
52. A large proportion of councils, 22 of the 26 (increased from 20 in 2008-09) told us that they seek to determine whether each incidence of stress is work-related or not. This recognises that action can be taken by a council to alleviate at least some of the stress considered to be related to the work

environment. The Health and Safety Executive encourages organisations to tackle work-related stress in order to reduce sickness absence, to benefit the business and to comply with the law. It recommends that organisations assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and take measures to control that risk. The Health and Safety Executive has produced management standards for tackling work-related stress and these have been adopted in 17 councils, an increase of 3 in 2009-10. More information on what councils are doing to tackle stress-related absenteeism can be found at paragraph 58.



Absenteeism policies in councils

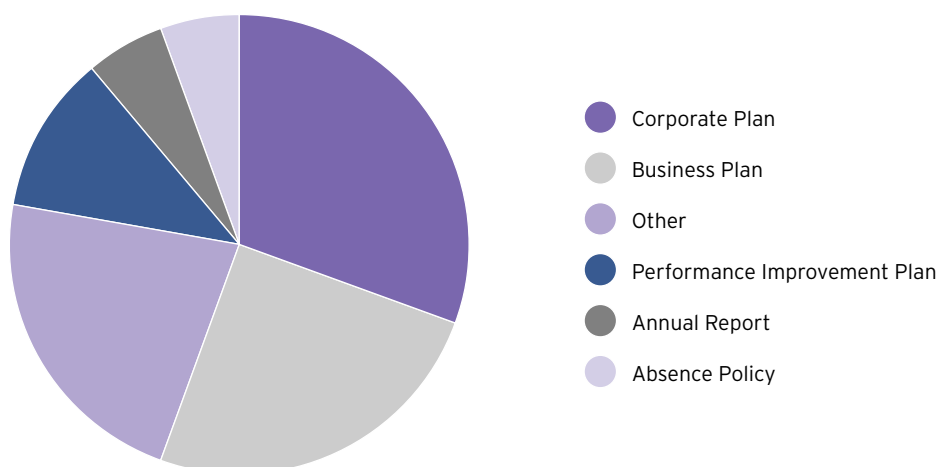
53. All councils have a written absenteeism policy with the exception of Magherafelt District Council. This Council's record of low absenteeism may suggest that a written absenteeism policy is not a prerequisite to managing absenteeism effectively. We recommend all councils, including Magherafelt District Council, should establish written absenteeism policies which are subject to councillor approval and published for the benefit of ratepayers, electors and council staff. It is our view that the effective communication of absenteeism policies should contain an indication of past performance and future targets (paragraphs 67 and 69).
54. The majority of absenteeism policies state that employees will be subject to an attendance review when their absence exceeds a level set out within the policy. For intermittent absence, these trigger points can vary from 5 to 10 days within a rolling 12 month period. The variance in this threshold does not have any discernable effect on the levels of short term absence reported by councils.
55. All councils indicate that they perform some internal monitoring to ensure their absenteeism policies are applied consistently. We recommend that councils closely monitor adherence to their policies and revise them when necessary.
56. Councils stated that staff were made aware of their absenteeism policy by a variety of methods, for example:
- providing new staff members with a copy during their induction session;
 - holding awareness sessions for all staff; and
 - including copies on Council intranet or shared drives.
57. The number of councils periodically informing staff of absence levels continues to increase from 14 in 2007-08 to 20 in 2008-09 and 21 in 2009-10. Some councils publish absenteeism information in their monthly staff newsletter; others pass information to line managers to be discussed at team briefing sessions. It is our view that councils should make all staff aware of absence statistics on a regular basis to emphasise the importance of absenteeism and the effect it has on council services.
58. Stress-related absence remains the single largest cause of days lost due to absenteeism in Northern Ireland councils, accounting for 22 per cent of days lost in 2009-10 (paragraph 46). By the beginning of this period, 21 councils had implemented a stress policy to manage this cause of absence in the workplace (an increase of one since 2008-09), and a number of councils have introduced various initiatives during the year including mental health awareness sessions. A typical stress management policy will set out the responsibilities of staff, Human Resources, managers and the Occupational Health Provider.
59. Some councils have stated in their absenteeism policy that in cases where an employee is absent from work due to stress, they will be referred to the Occupational Health Provider immediately. We particularly welcome the action taken by councils to address and promote awareness of stress-related issues in the workplace. It is our view that all councils should be proactive in their management of stress-related absenteeism.
60. An effective and up to date absence policy, applied consistently to all employees, is an important part of the management of absenteeism. At paragraph 53 we have recommended that councils should publish their absenteeism policies. All councils should pay particular attention to ensure that every employee is fully aware of how the policy applies to them.

Absenteeism targets in councils

61. There is currently no requirement for Northern Ireland councils to set long term targets for the reduction of absenteeism. Targets for absenteeism in 2010 had been set for the 11 Northern Ireland Civil Service departments¹⁸. This involves an overall reduction in sickness absence, from 15.5 days in 2003-04 to 9.5 days by 2009-10, which is approximately a seven per cent reduction target each year over the six year period.
62. In 2009-10, 19 of the 26 councils had established corporate or departmental level targets for managing absenteeism rates; this is one less than 2008-09. Ballymoney Borough Council no longer set a target which is disappointing given that the Council's absenteeism rate remains significantly above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average and is more than double the lowest rate found in Northern Ireland councils. Only seven councils achieved their set targets, despite 15 councils reporting a fall in absenteeism rates in 2009-10 (paragraph 31).
63. Ten of the 19 councils set targets to reduce absenteeism to a certain percentage of lost working time, the most common form of target. These ranged from 4.00 per cent to 6.10 per cent. Of these ten councils, four (Antrim Borough Council, Cookstown District Council, Lisburn City Council and Newtownabbey Borough Council) achieved their targets in 2009-10.
64. Two of these councils, Cookstown District Council and Newtownabbey Borough Council, had achieved targeted levels of absenteeism reductions in 2008-09; Cookstown District Council also achieved its target in 2007-08.
65. Of the nine councils using a different base for target setting, three (Limavady Borough Council, Moyle District Council and Strabane District Council) reported their targets had been achieved. Two of the three councils required improvements in 2008-09 rates in order to meet these targets. North Down Borough Council set its target to better the 2009-10 average for Northern Ireland councils.

17 Where the 19 councils with absenteeism targets record this

The majority of councils with absenteeism targets document these targets in business and corporate plans.



Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

18 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: Analysis of Sickness Absence in the NI Departments 2008-09



66. All councils with an absenteeism target include the target in at least one council document, as illustrated in Figure 17. The majority of these councils document their absence targets in business and corporate plans.
67. Of the 19 councils with absenteeism reduction targets in place for 2009-10, 16 indicated to us that they notified staff of the target, an increase of three from 2008-09. This comprised six councils which had achieved their targets and ten councils which had not. As with past absenteeism performance we recommend future targets are communicated to staff.
68. Councils use a variety of methods to communicate their targets to staff:
 - Discussion of targets at team briefing sessions;
 - Provision of target information to new staff members during their induction training;
 - Inclusion of information in staff newsletters and magazines;
 - References in corporate and business planning documents;
 - Dissemination of targets during staff recognition meetings.
69. At paragraph 20 we recommend that councils with higher absenteeism rates should benchmark their management practices against councils with lower absenteeism rates. This should include the establishment and monitoring of targets which, over an established timeframe, will assist councils to focus on their progress towards absenteeism levels which match, or improve upon, the lowest rates currently found in Northern Ireland councils.
70. Of the 19 councils with absenteeism reduction targets in place for 2009-10, 17 indicated their target had been approved by councillors. Given the importance of absenteeism management, and the potential productivity gains arising from falling absenteeism rates, we recommend that the absenteeism policies established by councils should be approved at the highest level.
71. It is disappointing to note that in a period of improving absenteeism only 7 of the 19 councils were able to meet the 2009-10 absenteeism target they had set. Councils should ensure the targets set for absenteeism are challenging but at the same time realistic and explore the reasons when a target is not achieved.

Absenteeism data in councils

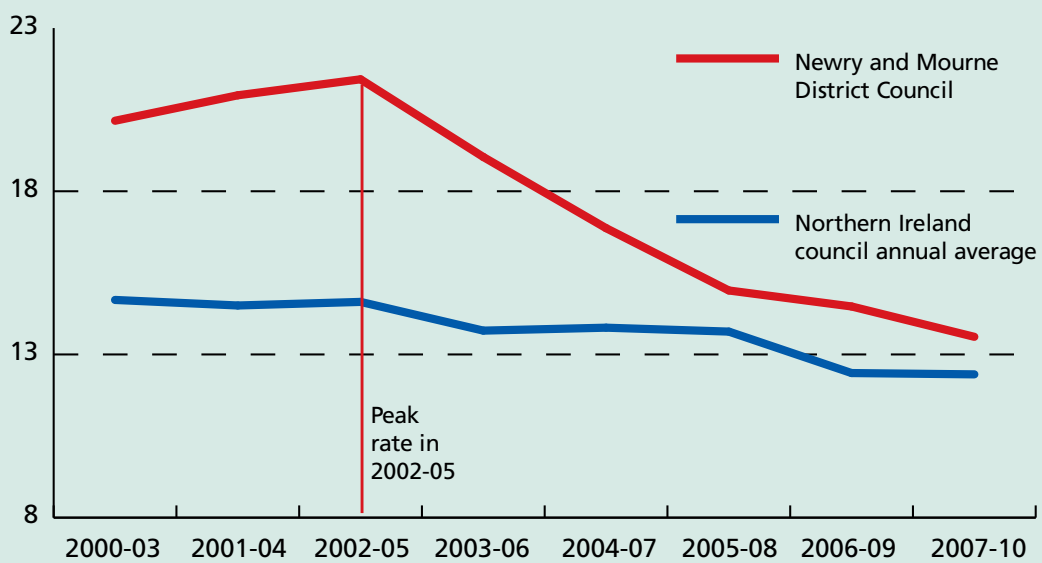
72. Data collection questionnaires, seeking details of absenteeism during the financial year to 31 March 2010, were issued to all 26 councils on 26 May 2010. We asked for completed questionnaires to be returned by 30 June 2010. Eighteen councils submitted responses on or before this date, an improvement of three when compared to the equivalent timetable last year. Returned data collection questionnaires were subjected to reasonableness tests to provide assurance on the integrity and consistency of the information presented.
73. For the third year in a row Castlereagh Borough Council was the last council to submit a return. This return was received on 31 August 2010, more than eight weeks after the due date.
74. We commend those councils who provided us with good quality absenteeism information by 30 June 2010. The apparent inability of some other councils to produce accurate absenteeism statistics within a reasonable period of time remains a matter of concern. This suggests that internally generated absenteeism information is often not available to councils on a timely basis and may not be reliable. Consequently, opportunities to monitor absenteeism and to react promptly may be lost. To assist internal management, we recommend that all councils should ensure absenteeism data is compiled on a timely basis and its accuracy tested.
75. For 2009-10, we visited ten councils and their returns were subjected to more detailed scrutiny. This included the examination of supporting documentation on a sample basis. This examination uncovered cases of missing documentation and inconsistencies in all councils, although these were of a minor nature.
76. The effective management of absenteeism in councils requires reliable absence data. Councils should ensure the integrity of the data used to calculate and monitor absenteeism rates and to set absenteeism targets.
77. In eight of the ten councils visited, absence policies stated that a return to work interview should be completed each time an employee returns from any absence due to sickness. On review, five councils could not provide evidence for every absence and in the worst case more than one in five records were incomplete. As the return to work interview has been ranked as the most effective absence management tool in previous reports¹⁹, councils should ensure that, where required, line managers carry out these interviews and formally document them.
78. In general we noted an improvement in the quality of absenteeism data presented by councils. This improvement has enabled the earlier publication of this report (26 November 2010 as opposed to 11 December 2009 for the 2008-09 report).

¹⁹ Up to and including our *Absenteeism in Northern Ireland Councils 2006-07* report [PC2163 01/08] we asked councils annually to rank their most effective absence management tools. We removed this question from subsequent studies due to the unchanging nature of council responses.



In Focus Analysis: Newry and Mourne District Council

Improved absenteeism since 2002-05 has led to a £1.4 million gain in additional staff productivity



Newry and Mourne District Council absenteeism peaked at 21.43 days in 2002-05. It has steadily reduced to 13.54 days in 2007-10, a decrease of 7.89 days from the peak.

By reducing the absenteeism rate from its peak of 21.43 days, Newry and Mourne District Council has obtained £1.4 million in additional staff productivity over the period 2002-05 to 2007-10.



Conclusions



Conclusions

Conclusions

79. We welcome the marginal fall in the overall Northern Ireland council absenteeism rate to 12.39 days. The current absenteeism rate for all Northern Ireland councils is now lower than any annual rate recorded this decade. There were 88 more full time equivalent staff employed in Northern Ireland councils during 2009-10. Due to the larger number of staff, the absenteeism rate fell even though the number of days lost due to absenteeism has risen from 121,214 in 2008-09 to 121,898 in 2009-10. We noted a fall of over one per cent in stress-related absence, the largest cause of days lost due to absenteeism. The number of incidents of absence has reduced in 2009-10 although the average duration of absence has increased from 9 days in 2008-09 to 10 days in 2009-10.
80. Council staff costs increased by £19 million in 2009-10. When combined with the significant reduction in the annual absenteeism rate, the result has been a £0.9 million increase in the cost of lost productivity due to absence in Northern Ireland councils from £15.5 million in 2008-09 to £16.4 million in 2009-10 (Figure 7).
81. We have noted the variation in absenteeism rates within councils continues. Four councils have rates which are double the lowest rate recorded by the best performing Northern Ireland council. We have noted our concern at the timeliness of absenteeism information prepared by some councils and instances where accuracy could be improved.
82. To assist councils, absenteeism information is included in the Annual Audit Letters issued to each council by the Local Government Auditor following his audit of the 2009-10 accounts. Consequently absenteeism matters will be raised directly with council Audit Committees. In addition, we are prepared to address this report specifically with council Audit Committees if requested to do so.
83. Given the substantial impact on increased productivity in Northern Ireland councils which would arise from further reductions in absenteeism, it is our intention to consider reviewing this matter again for the year ending 31 March 2011.

Appendices



Appendices

Appendix I: Potential gains in productivity for each Northern Ireland council (2007-10) if the lowest absenteeism rate was equalled (paragraph 8)

Annual gains of £6.2 million in productivity could be made if all councils matched the lowest absenteeism rate reported by Magherafelt District Council (2007-10).

	Average absenteeism rate for the 2007-10 period (days)	Average annual staff costs 2007-10 (£'000)	Average annual lost productivity 2007-10 (£'000)	Difference from absenteeism rate of 7.91 days	Average annual potential productivity gains based on an absenteeism rate of 7.91 days* (% of staff costs)	Average annual potential productivity gains based on an absenteeism rate of 7.91 days (£'000)
Magherafelt District Council	7.91	5,062	180	-	-	-
Armagh City and District Council	8.17	9,000	327	0.25	0.1	10
Fermanagh District Council	8.62	7,563	293	0.71	0.3	24
Lisburn City Council	8.67	13,331	519	0.76	0.3	46
Cookstown District Council	8.80	5,799	228	0.89	0.4	23
Omagh District Council	10.99	8,503	415	3.08	1.4	116
Castlereagh Borough Council	11.27	9,784	493	3.36	1.5	147
Strabane District Council	11.42	5,390	274	3.51	1.6	84
Newtownabbey Borough Council	11.56	11,283	597	3.64	1.7	188
Antrim Borough Council	11.67	8,110	409	3.76	1.6	132
Limavady Borough Council	12.09	4,449	237	4.18	1.8	82
Belfast City Council	12.44	73,864	4,079	4.53	2.0	1,485
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	12.59	7,384	418	4.68	2.1	155
Ballymena Borough Council	12.81	8,803	500	4.90	2.2	191
North Down Borough Council	13.13	10,199	594	5.22	2.3	236
Banbridge District Council	13.22	5,546	327	5.30	2.4	131
Newry and Mourne District Council	13.54	12,195	742	5.62	2.5	308
Ards Borough Council	14.04	10,211	659	6.13	2.8	288
Moyle District Council	14.06	3,432	208	6.14	2.7	91
Down District Council	14.79	8,545	570	6.87	3.1	265
Coleraine Borough Council	14.88	9,047	604	6.97	3.1	283
Larne Borough Council	15.47	5,125	354	7.56	3.4	173
Ballymoney Borough Council	16.28	3,754	273	8.37	3.7	140
Carrickfergus Borough Council	16.90	5,027	381	8.99	4.0	203
Derry City Council	17.15	17,271	1,343	9.24	4.2	724
Craigavon Borough Council	17.99	14,446	1,162	10.07	4.5	651
Total		283,123	16,186			6,176

*The potential productivity gain is derived from the difference in absenteeism rate when compared to a rate of 7.91 days (Figure 1), staff costs and the potential working days available to a full time equivalent employee over the period (224 days per year)

Source: Chief Local Government Auditor



Appendix 2: Change in annual productivity for each Northern Ireland council resulting from a comparison of 2004-07 and 2007-10 absenteeism rates (paragraph 10)

Changes in annual productivity resulting from a comparison of 2004-07 and 2007-10 absenteeism rates range from a gain in Belfast City Council of £1,135,000 to a loss in Down District Council of £190,000.

	Average absenteeism rate for the 2007-10 period	Average annual staff costs 2007-10 (£'000)	Average annual lost productivity 2007-10 (£'000)	Average annual lost productivity 2007-10 using 2004-07 rate (£'000)	Movement in three-year rate from 2004-07 to 2007-10	Average annual increased productivity gain/loss based on 2007-10 using 2004-07 rate (£'000)
Magherafelt District Council	7.91	5,062	180	169	0.47	-11
Armagh City and District Council	8.17	9,000	327	388	-1.52	61
Fermanagh District Council	8.62	7,563	293	313	-0.58	20
Lisburn City Council	8.67	13,331	519	599	-1.33	80
Cookstown District Council	8.80	5,799	228	368	-5.40	140
Omagh District Council	10.99	8,503	415	534	-3.16	119
Castlereagh Borough Council	11.27	9,784	493	447	1.05	-46
Strabane District Council	11.42	5,390	274	284	-0.41	10
Newtownabbey Borough Council	11.56	11,283	597	653	-1.08	56
Antrim Borough Council	11.67	8,110	409	445	-1.02	36
Limavady Borough Council	12.09	4,449	237	291	-2.77	54
Belfast City Council	12.44	73,864	4,079	5,214	-3.46	1,135
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	12.59	7,384	418	445	-0.82	27
Ballymena Borough Council	12.81	8,803	500	438	1.59	-62
North Down Borough Council	13.13	10,199	594	572	0.48	-22
Banbridge District Council	13.22	5,546	327	258	2.78	-69
Newry and Mourne District Council	13.54	12,195	742	925	-3.34	183
Ards Borough Council	14.04	10,211	659	614	0.96	-45
Moyle District Council	14.06	3,432	208	229	-1.40	21
Down District Council	14.79	8,545	570	380	-0.44	-190
Coleraine Borough Council	14.88	9,047	604	622	-4.85	18
Larne Borough Council	15.47	5,125	354	465	0.00	111
Ballymoney Borough Council	16.28	3,754	273	278	-0.31	5
Carrickfergus Borough Council	16.90	5,027	381	443	-2.77	62
Derry City Council	17.15	17,271	1,343	1,356	-0.16	13
Craigavon Borough Council	17.99	14,446	1,162	1,074	1.36	-88

Source: Chief Local Government Auditor

Appendices

Appendix 3: Commentary on Northern Ireland councils' three-year average annual absenteeism rates (paragraph 15)

Antrim Borough Council

The 2007-10 three-year average absenteeism rate of 11.67 days for Antrim Borough Council is below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. The Council's absenteeism rate has improved in 2007-10 with a reduction of 1.02 days from 12.69 days in 2004-07. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £409,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £132,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £36,000 (Appendix 2).

23 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Ards Borough Council

Ards Borough Council has experienced an increase of 0.96 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate since 2004-07 when the rate was 13.08 days. The average rate of 14.04 days for 2007-10 is above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. This Council is one of only two councils recording a year-on-year increase in its absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £659,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £288,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £45,000 (Appendix 2).

17 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Armagh City and District Council

Armagh City and District Council has experienced a reduction of 1.51 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate over the two periods from 9.68 days in 2004-07 to 8.17 days in 2007-10. The Council's absenteeism rate is now significantly below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £327,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £10,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £61,000 (Appendix 2). There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

11 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Ballymena Borough Council

Ballymena Borough Council showed a considerable increase of 1.59 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate which has taken the Council's rate from 11.22 days in 2004-07 to 12.81 days in 2007-10. The 2007-10 absenteeism rate is marginally above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £500,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £191,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £62,000 (Appendix 2).

24 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).



Appendix 3: (continued)

Ballymoney Borough Council

Ballymoney Borough Council has experienced a reduction in its three-year average absenteeism rate from 16.59 days in 2004-07 to 16.28 days in 2007-10. The 2007-10 rate continues to place the Council significantly above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average and is more than double the lowest rate found in Northern Ireland councils. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £273,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £140,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £5,000 (Appendix 2).

46 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue, the highest figure recorded by a Northern Ireland council (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Banbridge District Council

Banbridge District Council experienced a considerable increase in its three-year average absenteeism rate of 2.79 days from 10.43 days in 2004-07 to 13.22 days in 2007-10. This Council has an absenteeism rate which is now above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £327,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £131,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1). There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £69,000 (Appendix 2).

19 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council experienced a considerable reduction of 3.46 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate from 15.90 days in 2004-07 to 12.44 days in 2007-10. The 2007-10 rate is marginally above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £4,079,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £1,485,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £1,135,000 (Appendix 2).

24 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Carrickfergus Borough Council

Carrickfergus Borough Council has experienced a considerable reduction in its three-year average absenteeism rate from 19.67 days in 2004-07 to 16.90 days in 2007-10. The 2007-10 rate, however, continues to place the Council significantly above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average and is more than double the lowest rate found in Northern Ireland councils. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £381,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £203,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £62,000 (Appendix 2).

21 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Appendices

Appendix 3: (continued)

Castlereagh Borough Council

Castlereagh Borough Council experienced an increase in its three-year average absenteeism rate from 10.23 days in 2004-07 to 11.27 days in 2007-10. Despite this increase of 1.11 days, the Council has an absenteeism rate below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £493,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £147,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £46,000 (Appendix 2).

29 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Coleraine Borough Council

Coleraine Borough Council experienced a reduction in its three-year average absenteeism rate of 0.44 days from 15.32 days in 2004-07 to 14.88 days in 2007-10. The Council's absenteeism rate is well above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £604,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £283,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £18,000 (Appendix 2).

30 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Cookstown District Council

Cookstown District Council has experienced a substantial reduction in its three-year average absenteeism rate of 5.40 days from 14.20 days in 2004-07 to 8.80 days in 2007-10. The Council's absenteeism rate is significantly below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £228,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £23,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £140,000 (Appendix 2).

16 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 45).

Craigavon Borough Council

Craigavon Borough Council's three-year average absenteeism rate of 17.99 days for 2007-10 is the highest of all 26 councils and is more than double the lowest rate found in Northern Ireland councils. The 2007-10 rate has increased by 1.36 days from the 2004-07 rate of 16.63 days. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £1,162,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £651,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £88,000 (Appendix 2).

33 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).



Appendix 3: (continued)

Derry City Council

Derry City Council experienced a marginal reduction in its three-year average absenteeism rate of 0.17 days from 17.32 days in 2004-07 to 17.15 days in 2007-10. The Council's absenteeism rate continues to be significantly above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average and is more than double the lowest rate found in Northern Ireland councils. Within the 2007-10 period, however, the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £1,343,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £724,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £13,000 (Appendix 2).

24 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Down District Council

Down District Council has experienced a substantial increase in its absenteeism rate of 4.93 days, moving from 9.86 days in 2004-07 to 14.79 days in 2007-10. This is well above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. This Council is one of only two councils recording a year-on-year increase in its absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £570,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £265,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £190,000 (Appendix 2).

30 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council

Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council experienced a reduction of 0.82 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate from 13.41 days in 2004-07 to 12.59 days in 2007-10. This Council is marginally above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £418,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £155,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £27,000 (Appendix 2).

10 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Fermanagh District Council

Fermanagh District Council has experienced a reduction of 0.59 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate, from 9.21 days in 2004-07 to 8.62 in 2007-10. This rate is significantly below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £293,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £24,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £20,000 (Appendix 2).

10 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Appendices

Appendix 3: (continued)

Larne Borough Council

Larne Borough Council experienced a substantial reduction in its three-year average absenteeism rate of 4.85 days from 20.32 days in 2004-07 to 15.47 days in 2007-10. The rate is well above the average rate for 2009-10. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £354,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £173,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period ([Appendix 1](#)).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £111,000 ([Appendix 2](#)).

29 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue ([Figure 4](#)). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Limavady Borough Council

Limavady Borough Council experienced a considerable reduction in its three-year average absenteeism rate of 2.77 days from 14.86 days in 2004-07 to 12.09 days in 2007-10. This Council is now marginally below the 2009-10 average for Northern Ireland councils. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £237,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £82,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period ([Appendix 1](#)).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £54,000 ([Appendix 2](#)).

25 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue ([Figure 4](#)). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Lisburn City Council

Lisburn City Council has experienced a reduction of 1.34 days from the 2004-07 average absenteeism rate of 10.01 days to 8.67 days in 2007-10. This rate is significantly below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £519,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £46,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period ([Appendix 1](#)).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £80,000 ([Appendix 2](#)).

18 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue ([Figure 4](#)). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Magherafelt District Council

Magherafelt District Council has achieved the lowest absenteeism rate of all 26 Northern Ireland Councils for the 2007-10 period. The Council experienced an increase of 0.47 days in its absenteeism rate from 7.44 days in 2004-07 to 7.91 days in 2007-10. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £180,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period ([Appendix 1](#)).

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £11,000 ([Appendix 2](#)).

Eight per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue ([Figure 4](#)). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).



Appendix 3: (continued)

Moyle District Council

Moyle District Council's three-year average absenteeism rate has reduced by 1.40 days from 15.46 days in 2004-07 to 14.06 days in 2007-10. The Council's 2007-10 absenteeism rate is above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £208,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £91,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £21,000 (Appendix 2).

25 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Newry and Mourne District Council

Newry and Mourne District Council's absenteeism rate has experienced a considerable reduction of 3.33 days from the 2004-07 rate of 16.87 days to the 2007-10 rate of 13.54 days. The 2007-10 absenteeism rate is above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £742,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £308,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £183,000 (Appendix 2).

19 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Newtownabbey Borough Council

Newtownabbey Borough Council experienced a reduction of 1.08 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate from 12.64 days in 2004-07 to 11.56 days in 2007-10, a rate which is below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £597,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £188,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £56,000 (Appendix 2).

13 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

North Down Borough Council

North Down Borough Council has experienced an increase of 0.48 days from the 2004-07 average annual absenteeism rate of 12.65 days to 13.13 days in 2007-10. This rate is above the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £594,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £236,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The rise in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity loss of £22,000 (Appendix 2).

14 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Appendices

Appendix 3: (continued)

Omagh District Council

Omagh District Council has experienced a considerable reduction of 3.16 days in its three-year average absenteeism rate from 14.15 days in 2004-07 to 10.99 days in 2007-10. The Council's absenteeism rate is below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. There was no discernable pattern in the Council's absenteeism rate within the 2007-10 period.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £415,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £116,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £119,000 (Appendix 2).

17 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).

Strabane District Council

Strabane District Council experienced a reduction in its absenteeism rate of 0.41 days from 11.83 days in 2004-07 to 11.42 days in 2007-10. This rate is below the Northern Ireland council 2009-10 average. Within the 2007-10 period the Council recorded a year-on-year reduction in absenteeism.

Absenteeism cost the Council an average of £274,000 in lost productivity each year during the 2007-10 period. This cost could have been reduced by £84,000 each year if the Council had matched the lowest average annual absenteeism rate for the period (Appendix 1).

The fall in absenteeism rates, between the 2004-07 and 2007-10 periods, has meant an average annual productivity gain of £10,000 (Appendix 2).

24 per cent of absenteeism in the Council was the result of stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (Figure 4). The average for Northern Ireland councils was 22 per cent (paragraph 46).



Northern Ireland Audit Office Reports published in 2010

Title	Date Published
Campsie Office Accommodation/Synergy e-Business Incubator (SeBI)	24 March 2010
The Management of Substitution Cover for Teachers: Follow-up Report	26 May 2010
Managing the Performance of NI Water	16 June 2010
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