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Our Ref:

FOI_334/complaint reply

Your Ref:

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Ms Vicky Gray

By Email

11th February 2009

Dear Ms Gray

Freedom of Information Request reference 2008 334

I am writing in response to your complaint of 9th January 2009 about the way in which your request for information was handled and will address each of your points in turn.

1. Recording sickness absence – yes we do indeed record this absence, but there is no specific category for stress, anxiety or depression, as these would fall within the generic category of mental health and we did offer to supply this figure if you required it, on the understanding that it covers a wider category of data than the specific information you were requesting.
2. Staff welfare – we take very seriously any allegations of bullying and any that we receive are investigated in accordance with our Unfair Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying policy and procedure. The point we were trying to make in our answer was that this information has only been recorded in a statistical format since December 2007. Prior to that it would only be recorded within an individual's personal (paper) file and in any Case papers, which are stored in sealed envelopes on the personal files and, in the case of leavers, are destroyed. We do not employ a specific welfare officer but this role forms part of many posts, including managers.



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3. Unfortunately, your comments regarding the ease of retrieving the information from our paper filing systems are inaccurate. Firstly, the files are not structured, information is filed on them largely in chronological order. Secondly, in the case of leavers, the files are archived off site and would need to be recalled to site before they could be inspected. Files on current employees are located in a number of buildings, not in one central location. In an authority with over 7000 current employees, you must appreciate that this kind of retrieval exercise would take well over the 2.5 days specified. The legislation gives an organisation the option, where this limit would be exceeded, to decline to provide the information – Section 12 of the Act refers.
4. With regard to your comment about running a query on a database to identify employees who had been off sick, this is indeed possible, but as your request covers a period in excess of 4 years, coupled with the data being collated and categorised to include ailments other than just stress, anxiety and depression, it would identify a considerable number of employees. Furthermore, as also explained above, files for employees who have left the Council's employ are archived off site and would need to be retrieved and manually examined along with those held on site. In addition, during the period covered by your request, our database system has been changed and updated so any query would need to be run on more than one database and cross-referenced, adding further to the time involved.

Turning to the response that was provided – we did ask you to let us know if you required the limited information we could provide on sickness absence and complaints of bullying, but I am advised that no response to this offer has been received.

Moreover, I must uphold the decision of my colleague that we decline to provide the information on numbers of employees who have claimed constructive dismissal on the grounds that the request is voluminous.

If you remain unhappy with this response, you may apply to the Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely



S T HEAPPEY
Director of Customer and Corporate Services