



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Sarah Gadsden
Interim Chief Executive
Improvement Service

via email

**Local Government and Communities
Committee**

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Dear Ms Gadsden,

Staff absenteeism in local authorities

At its meeting on 20 February 2019, the Local Government and Communities Committee took evidence on staff absenteeism in local authorities. This session builds on previous work considered by the Committee in 2018 on workforce planning and forms part of the Committee's 2020-21 pre-Budget scrutiny work.

At this meeting, the Committee heard from representatives of Clackmannanshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, the Society for Personnel and Development Scotland, UNISON Scotland and GMB Scotland and noted that the management of sickness absence continues to be a significant challenge for local authorities in Scotland.

During the session, witnesses raised concerns about the accuracy and comparability of sickness absence data reported in the Local Government Benchmarking Framework, highlighting significant differences in how this data is recorded at a local level. The Committee also discussed with witnesses the importance of having an effective forum for local authorities to discuss and share good practice about sickness absence management as well as effective policies and procedures, led by senior management, to help people feel supported in returning to work after a period of absence.

Following the evidence session, the Committee agreed to write to the Improvement Service to seek its views on the points I refer to above. The Committee also agreed to ask what work, if any, the Improvement Service have undertaken to address staff absenteeism, as the national improvement organisation for local government in Scotland and a key stakeholder in the delivery of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

In particular, the Committee would be grateful if the Improvement Service could outline any specific work it has progressed to support local authorities develop its flexible working policies given evidence heard at our meeting that flexible working may help reduce sickness absence.

The Committee would also be grateful if the Improvement Service could outline the extent to which it has collaborated with organisations in the private sector to understand how sickness absence is managed and to establish whether local authorities can learn any lessons from different private sector approaches.

The Official Report of the meeting on 20 February is available on the Committee's website at the following link—

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11953&mode=pdf>

I am also writing to COSLA and SOLACE Scotland in similar terms.

We look forward to receiving your response in due course.

Yours sincerely

James Dornan MSP
Convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee