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| Report Title                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Absence Reduction Plan 2026/27                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| Author                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Suzanne Hartshorne, Deputy Director of People and Organisational Development                                                                                                                                                                             |  |
| Accountable Director                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Mandy Wilcock, Director of People and Organisational Development                                                                                                                                                                                         |  |
| Previous committees/groups                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| Recommended action(s)<br>(assurance, approval, information)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Information/Assurance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| Purpose of the paper                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | The report provides the Committee with an overview of the work to further understand any potential underlying, and supplementary, reasons for sickness absence. The outcome of the work will lay the foundations for the 2026/27 absence reduction plan. |  |
| Executive Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| <div>1. This paper outlines the work undertaken to understand the sustained levels of high sickness absence across the Trust, which will shape the 2026/27 Absence Reduction Plan to support the Trust priority to improve sickness absence by 0.5% by 31 March 2027.</div> <div>2. Absence has remained above 7% despite previous interventions, with mental health and musculoskeletal issues the leading causes. A deep dive review of two years' data across key operational areas confirms consistent patterns of long-term and short-term absence, with 999 operations reflecting Trust wide trends.</div> <div>3. Analysis highlights links between absence, leadership capacity, workload pressures, and staff morale. Certain stations—particularly Brighouse, Preston, and Rotherham—exhibit multiple high-risk indicators, including elevated absence rates, high team leader ratios, lower staff survey results, and limited shift flexibility. Lower indicator stations such as Middlewood, Honley, and Keighley demonstrate more favourable patterns and will provide comparative learning.</div> <div>4. The emerging focus for interventions includes enhanced mental health support, targeted leadership development, operational improvements (especially handover delays), and flexible working. The plan will initially target the three most challenged stations, with successful approaches scaled across the Trust to improve attendance and support staff wellbeing.</div> <div>5. The Committee are asked to note the contents of the paper.</div> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| Recommendation(s)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | The Committee are asked to note the contents of the paper.                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |
| Link to Board Assurance Framework Risks (board and level 2 committees only)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <div>6. Develop and sustain an open and positive workplace culture.</div> <div>7. Support staff health and well-being effectively.</div>                                                                                                                 |  |

# Absence Reduction Plan 2026/27

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper outlines the work undertaken to understand the sustained levels of high sickness absence across the Trust, which will shape the 2026/27 Absence Reduction Plan to support the Trust priority to improve sickness absence by 0.5% by 31 March 27.
- 1.2 Absence has remained above 7% despite previous interventions, with mental health and musculoskeletal issues the leading causes. A deep dive review of two years' data across key operational areas confirms consistent patterns of long-term and short-term absence, with 999 operations reflecting Trust wide trends.
- 1.3 Analysis highlights links between absence, leadership capacity, workload pressures, and staff morale. Certain stations—particularly Brighouse, Preston, and Rotherham—exhibit multiple high-risk indicators, including elevated absence rates, high team leader ratios, lower staff survey results, and limited shift flexibility. Lower indicator stations such as Middlewood, Honley, and Keighley demonstrate more favourable patterns and will provide comparative learning.
- 1.4 The emerging focus for interventions includes enhanced mental health support, targeted leadership development, operational improvements (especially handover delays), and flexible working. The plan will initially target the three most challenged stations, with successful approaches scaled across the Trust to improve attendance and support staff wellbeing.
- 1.5 The Committee are asked to note the contents of the paper.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The NHS People Promise sets out ***“We are safe and healthy - We look after ourselves and each other. Wellbeing is our business and our priority – and if we are unwell, we are supported to get the help we need.”*** Locally, the YAS 2024/29 Strategy, specifically the ‘Our People’ ambition, sets out that we aim to work towards “improving staff health, wellbeing and attendance, and reducing sickness absence rates to better than NHS average”. Hence, the Trust plans to reduce absence are central to meeting these promises and ambitions.
- 2.2 The average Trust sickness absence for 2024-25 was 7.1% with higher rates in the call centres. The target for 2025-26 was to achieve a 0.5% reduction from a base line of 6.58% i.e. target of 6.08%. Despite efforts through the Health and Wellbeing plan and the 2025/26 Absence Reduction Plan, the absence rate has remained near 7%, making it unlikely the target will be achieved.
- 2.3 In terms of benchmarking, the NHS Ambulance Sector Dashboard’s latest data (September 2025), shows the average YTD (year to date) absence at 6.74%. Across the ambulance service, average absence has been consistently above 6.5% with the highest at 6.75% (August 2025) and lowest at 6.23% (May 2025). For November 2025, it is clear that YAS absence is similar to the rest of the Ambulance sector, as they report the following:

| Trust                             | %     |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| East of England Ambulance Service | 8.30% |
| East Midlands Ambulance Service   | 7.69% |
| London Ambulance Service          | 7.26% |
| South Western Ambulance Service   | 6.89% |

| Trust                       | %     |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Welsh Ambulance Service     | 7.95% |
| Yorkshire Ambulance Service | 7.70% |

- 2.4 Discussions at the People and Culture Group have led to assumptions there could be a causality between absence, morale and leadership. Commencing with a full data analysis, work has commenced to explore underlying and supplementary reasons for absence other than health that could be contributing to the sustained absence levels.

### 3.0 DEEP DIVE ANALYSIS

- 3.1 Following discussions at the People and Culture Group, a comprehensive analysis of sickness absence for the period from November 1, 2023, to October 31, 2025, has been undertaken. The review focused on 999, Remote Patient Care (EOC, IUC), and the Patient Transport Service (PTS), with an initial emphasis on 999 operations as a proof of concept.
- 3.2 The full report is in Appendix A with the key points from the analysis below:
- Trust Sickness Absence - this has remained above target since Winter 2024. Long-term absence has an average of 4%, peaking in winter months, while short-term absence has established a new norm around 3.5%.
  - 999 Sickness Absence: The 999 Directorate mirrors Trust trends with high, and stable, absence rates around 7%. Anxiety, stress, and depression account for nearly half of all absences, particularly among 31-35 and 51-55-year-olds; Occupational Health data tells us that the majority is not work-related. Females have higher rates of mental health-related absences, while males have higher rates of musculoskeletal (MSK) and back problems.
  - Demand and Performance: High demand for Cat1 and Cat2 incidents persists, with Cat2 performance times regularly exceeding targets, especially during hospital handover delays. December 2024 marked a significant outlier for both demand and absence.
  - Team Leadership: Hull & East Riding has less experienced team leaders and the highest direct report ratios, with several stations exceeding recommended guidance. These stations also report the highest absence rates and lower staff survey scores for line management support.
  - Area Profiles:
    - Humber & North Yorkshire (HNY): High sickness absence rates, particularly in Hornsea, Driffield, and Preston stations, with anxiety, stress, and depression as leading causes. Improvements in hospital handovers positively impacted performance and absence, indicating a significant correlation with the long handover delays and sickness absence rising in Hull & East last year.
    - West Yorkshire (WY): On-scene demand and Cat1 incidents have reduced but are rising again with winter pressures. Cat2 performance remains stable, and handover times have improved.
    - South Yorkshire (SY): On-scene and Cat1 demand have reduced, with Cat2 demand and performance stable but subject to winter pressures. Handover times have dropped to under 15 minutes.
- 3.3 'Station Indicators' have been used with the six stations listed below, displaying higher or lower indicators depending on how many meet, or exceed the average, or recommended, guidance for each specific measure at the station level.
1. Sickness Absence Rate (>7% Average).
  2. Sickness Absence Rate per 100 Days (>31 Days Average).

3. Both absence rate and per 100 Days Exceeding Average.
4. Team Leader Ratio (Exceeds 1:25 Guidance).
5. Staff Survey Line Management Section Score Below Average (<65%).
6. Shift Flexibility (100% 12 Hour Shifts Only).

| Trust                         |             |           |              |                       |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Station Name                  | Total Score | Headcount | Absence rate | Rate per 100 FTE days |
| Highest Indicators            |             |           |              |                       |
| Brighthouse Ambulance Station | 5           | 67        | 8.6%         | 49.5                  |
| Rotherham Ambulance Station   | 5           | 164       | 8.0%         | 36.6                  |
| Harrogate Ambulance Station   | 4           | 78        | 9.2%         | 38.9                  |
| Lower Indicators              |             |           |              |                       |
| Middlewood Ambulance Station  | 0           | 218       | 5.8%         | 26.7                  |
| Honley Ambulance Station      | 0           | 43        | 5.6%         | 26.2                  |
| Keighley Ambulance Station    | 0           | 65        | 4.8%         | 20.1                  |

- 3.4 The intelligence will inform the scoping and planning of several targeted interventions to shape the 2026-27 absence reduction plan. The plan is expected to prioritise mental health support, leadership training for team leaders in areas with high absence rates, and operational enhancements such as improving hospital handovers and increasing flexible working options. Regional differences will be considered to customise support based on each area's specific challenges, with additional focus on strengthening line management in areas where staff survey scores are particularly low. The approach will be targeted using quality improvement methods where local learning will help us understand what works, what doesn't and scale accordingly.
- 3.5 The three stations with the highest indicators will have initial focus. The work will commence with focus groups and questionnaires to include the staff voice i.e. to focus on those interventions that matter most to the staff and help them to remain at work. Qualitative data will support the development of bespoke interventions for individual stations. The stations with the lower indicators will provide comparative learning.
- 3.6 As per the 2026/27 business plan, any interventions will aim to create a more supportive and efficient working environment, ultimately reducing sickness absence rates and improving overall performance within YAS.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Sickness absence remains a significant and challenge, driven primarily by mental health and MSK issues, with notable regional and operational variations. Leadership experience, team ratios, and management support are key factors influencing absence rates.
- 4.2 The work, as one of the three Trust business priorities (Trust Business Plan), will support development of the 2026/27 absence reduction plan. This will initially concentrate on three stations which will aim to understand any supplementary reasons for absence, with the aim to roll these out across the Trust where they bring successful outcomes.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The People Committee are asked to note the contents of this paper.

## 6.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A – YAS Sickness Absence Review (Deep Dive Report)