



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 18 March 2019

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Contact: Fungai Nyamukapa

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Members: Councillors: L Martin-Haugh (Chair), P Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), S Barr, J Brown, M Downing, J Fraser, J Hanafin, ME Gardner, L Kelly, J Mead, S Mead, A Mitchell CC, R Parker CC and S-J Potter

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 18 FEBRUARY 2019

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 February 2019

Pages 5 – 8

3. PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

To consider the following Part I Decisions of the Executive taken on 14 March 2019

| Executive Agenda Item | | Page No |
|-----------------------|--|---------|
| 2. | Minutes of the Executive – 13 February 2019 | 5 |
| 3. | Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees | 13 |
| 4. | Third Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2019/20 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account | 27 |
| 5. | Third Quarter Capital Monitoring Report 2019/20 – General Fund and Housing Revenue Account | 39 |
| 6. | Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy | 49 |
| 7. | Corporate Performance for Quarter Three 2018/19 | 133 |
| 8. | Co-operative Neighbourhood Management Programme Delivery 2018/19 | 173 |

Notice of Decisions to follow

PLEASE BRING YOUR AGENDA AND REPORTS FOR THE EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2019.

4. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the 2019/20 Municipal Year

Pages 9 – 16

5. SBC SICKNESS MANAGEMENT REPORT

To consider the SBC Sickness Management Report

Pages 17 – 24

6. URGENT PART 1 DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

7. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

To consider any Part 1 business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

8. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions :

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006
2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure

9. PART II MINUTES - 18 FEBRUARY 2019

To approve as a correct record the Part II Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 February 2019

Pages 25 – 26

10. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

To consider the following Part II decisions of the Executive taken on 18 February 2019:

| Executive Agenda Item | | Page No |
|-----------------------------|---|------------|
| 11. | Part II Minutes – 13 February 2019 | 189 |
| 12. | Housing Benefit Overpayments write offs greater than £10,000 | 193 |
| 13. | Formation of a Wholly Owned Housing Development Company – Business Plan and Financial Projections | 197 |
| 14. | Regeneration Scheme Update and the Disposal of our Residential Properties at Giles Crescent (Former Wedgewood Way Scheme/ Du Pont Site) | 331 |

Notice of Decisions to follow

PLEASE BRING YOUR AGENDA AND REPORTS FOR THE EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON 18 FEBRUARY 2019.

11. URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

12. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent

Agenda Published 8 March 2019

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday, 18 February 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair)
Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Jody Hanafin,
Michelle Gardner, Lizzy Kelly, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell
CC, Robin Parker CC and Sarah-Jane Potter

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.30pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor James Fraser.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JANUARY AND 29 JANUARY 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees held on 15 January and 29 January 2019 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the Executive – 23 January 2019

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

Final General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2019/20

The Committee noted the discussions at the Executive including the request that the Leader's Financial Services Group give consideration and closely monitor the single person occupancy rate for Council Tax premiums for 2020/21.

Officers referred to an issue that had been raised regarding some recent misinformation which had been discussed at a residents' group in connection with the Council's budget.

Following concerns raised by Members regarding the provision of replacement recycling bins and boxes, officers agreed to request the Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) to write to Members advising them of the current proposal for replacements.

In response to a question regarding staff affected by efficiencies, the Chief Executive advised that steps were in place to ensure that compulsory redundancies were the last resort for the Council.

Members were pleased to note that the Council's digital plan included the issue of accessing committee papers electronically resulting in the reduction in printing costs.

Final Capital Strategy 2018/19 – 2023/24

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive. Members noted the update on the Capital Programme Investment Strategy.

Annual Treasury Management Strategy Including Prudential Code Indicators 2019/20

The Assistant Director (Finance and Estates) referred to a replacement page 206 of the agenda which had been tabled at the meeting and corrected a figure on page 192 of the report.

In relation to the misinformation which had been provided to residents around the Council's cash reserves, the Assistant Director advised that the £60million referred to in the report had been allocated to various schemes. Members requested that officers ensure that this is clearly communicated where possible to ensure the public was fully informed.

Community Engagement Framework

The Community Development Manager introduced a report summarising the draft development of a Community Engagement Framework which built upon the recommendations from the review into resident engagement undertaken by the Community Select Committee.

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive on the report.

In response to a question, officers advised that the new Community Engagement Framework was still in development but there would be further work around engagement with Councillors to ensure ward Members were introduced to the Resident Involvement/Neighbourhood Wardens and Community Development Officers working in their areas. Officers advised that the role of the Community Development Service would be to support and encourage residents groups and attend resident meetings in their allocated areas through a practical framework and toolkit approach.

In relation to Diversity and Inclusion, Members were interested in how the Council reached out to minority groups around the Town. The Community Development Manager agreed to contact Councillor Michelle Gardner when looking to undertake any work around resident involvement for the Council in building diversity in groups and services.

In terms of locality working, Members were concerned with the thinking behind the initial breakdown of areas but was advised that these areas could change once other Business Units within the Council came on board with locality working.

Members thanked the Community Development Officer and the wider team for their work in this area.

4 **URGENT PART 1 DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 to 7 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following items being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Committee noted the comments of the Executive.

8 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

9 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

North Hertfordshire College

The Chief Executive updated the Committee on matters regarding North

Hertfordshire College.

CHAIR

Meeting OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Portfolio Area
Date 18 MARCH 2019



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2019-20

Authors Stephen Weaver | 2332
Contributor Richard Protheroe & Matt Partridge
Lead Officers Matt Partridge
Contact Officer Stephen Weaver | 2332

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Committee for the new Municipal Year.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Members' feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny (see section 4) be noted.
- 2.2 That having considered ideas put forward by individual Members, and from the public (see section 5), the Committee determines the subject matters to be added to a 'long list' work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2019/2020.
- 2.3 That consideration is given to including in the work programme, specific monitoring or review of recommendations from previous studies (see section 6.2).
- 2.4 That the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings to carry out policy development work identified so far for the Committee (see section 7.1) be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committees are asked to draft their work programme ahead of the new Municipal year in order that work may begin as soon as the Committees are appointed at Annual Council. Any outstanding and unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.
- 3.2 During January and February 2019 Members provided feedback on the current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.
- 3.3 When considering what work to undertake in the coming year, Members may wish to consider if the matter in question is of a cross-cutting nature and might lend itself to being considered jointly with another Select Committee.
- 3.4 Officers have also been requested to bring to the Committee's attention, likely Portfolio Holder Advisory Group (PHAG) policy development items that the Select Committee might be requested to consider and comment on before reports there are submitted to the Executive.
- 3.5 The Committee may also consider whether specific time should be allocated for monitoring or review of recommendations of previous studies. It is recognised that there is a limited dedicated officer resource for the scrutiny work of three Scrutiny Committees and therefore it is important to ensure that work plans are in place in order that the call on those resources and on each Committee's time on all its activities are prioritised and evenly spread across the year.
- 3.6 Budget & Policy Framework Items
 - 3.6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility to scrutinise Budget and Policy Framework items. The following matters have been identified for scrutiny by the Committee as Budget & Policy Framework items -
 - The HRA and Rent Setting
 - General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting
 - Savings and Growth Proposals
 - Council Tax Support Scheme
 - 3.6.2 The Committee may be required to scrutinise any further Budget and Policy Framework items as and when required in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Article 4 and Section 4 Rules of Procedure.

4 MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SCRUTINY

- 4.1 In January 2019, all Members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees were emailed a survey to gauge views of the Scrutiny work undertaken and ideas for future studies. The following summary is based on the ten replies received from the 22 Members who are on one or more of the Council's Scrutiny Committees.
- 4.2 Members were asked to comment on current scrutiny activity and any issues that could be addressed to improve the current arrangements. Members provided challenge around the following areas:

- 4.2.1 Scrutiny of the way that we do Scrutiny.
- 4.2.2 Involvement of opposition members in the Scrutiny process – should opposition members occasionally be able to chair some Scrutiny functions like working parties?
- 4.3 Members have also previously provided feedback following Scrutiny Member Training, this included the following points:
- The scrutiny process must be more Member-led and Members must take greater ownership
 - There must be time made available to engage in scrutiny investigations and information gathering. Time committed must be utilised efficiently
 - Members need to work on prioritisation
 - Members need to work on identifying sources of verbal and written evidence and assessing the value of them.
 - Members should review decisions post implementation
 - Members must feel able to challenge evidence presented
 - Any papers, reports and evidence must be presented in a timely way
Members can say that they won't consider issues presented late
- 4.4 As part of the 2019 Members' Survey, Members did not provide any comment and suggestions for Scrutiny Member Training.

5 MEMBERS' AND RESIDENTS' IDEAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

5.1 Scrutiny Members' Suggestions for Future Scrutiny Review Items

5.1.1 The following issues have been raised by Members as potential Scrutiny review items:

5.1.2 Procurement & General Robustness of our IT structures Officer

Comment: Officers are currently developing an IT strategy for consideration by Members. This will include a delivery plan to enhance our IT service provision and prepare for the future. An all Member briefing will be provided in late spring, and it is anticipated a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group will be set up to review the draft strategy ahead of consideration by the Executive.

5.1.3 **Scrutiny of the way that we do Scrutiny Officer Comment:** The Council is awaiting the Housing Communities & Local Government guidance on Scrutiny prior to embarking on a local review of the function. This was expected to be provided by the end of 2018, then in the new year. There is currently no expected publishing date from HC&LG nor any advice on this from the CfPS. There will also be links with the Constitutional Services Business Review.

5.1.4 **Involvement of opposition members in the Scrutiny process** – should opposition members occasionally be able to chair some Scrutiny functions like working parties? (Some connections with 5.1.3 above). **Officer Comment:** Opposition Members play a key role in the work of the three scrutiny Committees, and in their policy development capacity when supporting meetings of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group.

- 5.1.5 **How widely SBC casts the net when asking for comments on planning applications.** Currently, it seems that they ask only immediate neighbours, but often the residents who live opposite would be more affected by a development because they are the ones who could see it. **Officer Comment:** The consultation requirements of planning applications is determined by national requirements and by the planning process. A factual response can be provided to this statement but it recommended that any further consideration would be a matter for the Planning & Development Committee to consider.
- 5.1.6 **Complaints handling** from the public or from members. I believe that this review was shelved in favour of the sickness absence review but it now needs to be done. **Officer Comment:** This review was started in 2017, was due to continue in 2018 but was replaced by the committees work on Sickness Management and it is possible to recommence this review if the Committee would like to prioritise this.
- 5.1.7 **The range, choice and style of live entertainment offered at the Gordon Craig Theatre** **Officer comment:** Note that this issue will be raised at the Community Select Committee a possible scrutiny review item.
- 5.1.8 **Provision of refreshments for members prior to 6pm meetings.** **Officer Comment:** A review was completed in 2014 on this subject.
- 5.1.9 **The role of Community Development Officers and Neighbourhood Wardens.** **Officer comment:** Note that this issue will be raised at the Community Select Committee a possible scrutiny review item. More broadly a review of the Cooperative Neighbourhood Management (CNM) programme will be presented to the Executive at its meeting in March 2019 which incorporates the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens and Community Development Officers would precede the start of the new Municipal Year. The O&S Committee will have an opportunity to comment on this item at the March meeting.
- 5.2 **Issues Raised by the Public**
- 5.2.1 None so far but any issues identified from the public via the Council's social media and the website will be updated at the meeting.
- 5.3 Members are asked to consider, which of the above items they wish to include in their work programme and which approach they favour to review the items, based on those suggested at paragraphs 4.4 and 4.4.1, namely a more in-depth review or a one-off discussion item?
- 5.3.1 Members should note that whatever issues they agree to be scrutinised as a main review item would be subject to a full scoping process and subsequently a scoping document would need to be agreed by the Committee at a future meeting. Other items, which can be addressed by a briefing and discussion item, may not require a full scoping document.
- 5.4 **Work Programme Schedule for 2019/20**
- 5.4.1 When the Scrutiny Work Programme is agreed by the Community Select Committee, the Scrutiny Officer will, using the agreed dates for generic Select Committee meetings in the Calendar of Meetings, draw together a work programme schedule for the 2019/20 Municipal Year, including scrutiny

review meetings, monitoring of previous reviews selected by Members and policy development meetings, which will be circulated to Members, and electronic diary invites will be sent to all Community Select Committee Members.

5.5 Alignment of Scrutiny with the Strategic Leadership Team

5.5.1 It is important that the three Scrutiny Committees (Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Community Select Committee and the Environment and Economy Select Committee) are aligned to the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). As such, the following Scrutiny Committees are covered by the relevant nine Assistant Directors and SLT areas:

5.5.2 Customer – Community Select Committee:

Assistant Director for Housing and Investment (Jaine Cresser) and the Assistant Director for Communities and Neighbourhoods (Rob Gregory)

5.5.3 Place – Environment and Economy Select Committee:

Assistant Director for Direct Services (Craig Miller), Assistant Director for Regeneration (Pat Lewis), Assistant Director for Housing Development (Ash Ahmed) and Assistant Director for Planning and Regulatory (Zayd Al-Jawad) (Interim Chris Berry)

5.5.4 Transformation and Support – Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Transformation (Richard Protheroe), Assistant Director for Finance and Estates (Clare Fletcher) and Assistant Director for Corporate Projects, Customer Services and Technology (Caron Starkey interim AD)

5.5.5 Role of the Assistant Directors and Scrutiny

5.5.6 The Assistant Directors will take a leadership role in assisting and supporting the relevant Scrutiny Committees and specific reviews that align to their area of expertise. The Assistant Directors will support each review through its various stages, from scoping of reviews, attending Chair and Vice-Chair briefings and offering support to the Scrutiny Officer in providing written and oral evidence for reviews as well as identifying 'Critical Friends' and other review witnesses. The Assistant Directors will liaise with the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder(s) and the Senior Leadership Team (CE and Assistant CE's).

5.5.7 Strategic Director, Matt Partridge from the Senior Leadership Team has overall responsibility for the Scrutiny function, deputised by Strategic Director Tom Pike.

6 MONITORING REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Committee may consider there is a need to undertake some follow-up work on recommendations arising from previous studies. It may be considered sufficient to simply request update briefings from the relevant Heads of Service to be circulated to Members at appropriate intervals. However, if the Committee requires more detailed consideration or examination of the progress of previous recommendations, this should be factored into its work programme.

6.2 Reports within the remit of this Committee that have been issued over the last five years or have been revisited within the last five years are as follows:

- Section 106 Agreements 2014-15
- Members' Expenses and Hospitality 2013-14
- Council Tax Support Scheme since 2012-13
- Media & Communications 2015 & 2018
- Complaints – Feedback Handling - (Incomplete review started in 2017-18)
- Sickness Management – Completed 2019

7 PORTFOLIO HOLDER ADVISORY GROUP - POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2019/2020

7.1 Following consultation with the Assistant Directors for Corporate Services & Transformation, Finance & Estates & Corp Projects and Customer Service & Technology the following matters have been identified for potential Policy Development at a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group (PHAG) meeting to be undertaken with the relevant Portfolio Holders during the Municipal Year for 2019/2020:

- ICT Strategy & Investment Programme, scheduled for Executive in June 2019, PHAG meeting early June 2019
- Customer Strategy to be scheduled for the Executive in 2019/20 and a PHAG meeting prior to this in 2019/20

7.2 In line with organising meeting dates to deliver the Committee's work programme, as detailed at Section 5.4.1, dates for Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings will be scheduled into Members' diaries once the relevant Assistant Directors confirm when Scrutiny Members can undertake this work, ahead of consideration by the Executive. If any further matters are identified by officers, Members will be notified and a meeting invitation sent to Members in due course.

7.3 These meetings will continue to be clerked by Constitutional Services but are private informal meetings Chaired by the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and supported by the relevant Assistant Director.

Financial Implications

8.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

8.1.2 A small budget of £1000 is held to support the work of the Select Committees in their research and study.

Legal Implications

- 8.2. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees is set out in the Local Government Act 2000. The recommendations made in this report are to facilitate the Committees to fully undertake this role.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.3. There are no direct Equalities and Diversity implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Specific equalities and diversity implications are considered during each scrutiny review.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e. they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:

- BD1 Submissions from Councillors and the Public.

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Meeting OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY (SITTING AS A SELECT COMMITTEE)

Portfolio Area RESOURCES

Date 18 MARCH 2019

Authors Stephen Weaver Ext:2332 Clare Davies Ext:2164

Lead Officer Matt Partridge Ext:2456

Contact Officer Richard Protheroe Ext:2938



DRAFT - SICKNESS MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members with the draft report and recommendations for the review.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Members agree or amend the recommendations from the review below:
 1. That a comprehensive staff communication plan be developed and implemented prior to the introduction of First Care which, amongst other points, will highlight that this process has been introduced to improve employee wellbeing which in turn should reduce sickness levels.
 2. That officers seek to measure the return on investment post implementation of First Care. If possible the First Care contribution to the Council meeting its sickness target should be quantified and measured noting also that the First Care service contract also included a target for demonstrating an improvement in staff wellbeing and that the performance of the First Care Contract be revisited in a year to evaluate its success.
 3. That officers work with the Portfolio Holder to seek to reduce sickness absence which has been specifically associated with the undertaking of the Business Unit Reviews.

4. That the seasonal variations and peaks and troughs in certain Business Units sickness levels be recorded by officers and be provided to Members through the quarterly performance report.

5. That the Portfolio Holder and officers continue to seek to identify specific interventions which might help reduce sickness absence associated with stress, anxiety and depression (Please see Appendix E – Time to Change Action Plan and Section 4 of the Report dated 14 November 2018).

6. Approximately half of all staff has little or no sickness leave each year, the other half account for the remainder of the sickness figures (16-18 days a year). As such, Scrutiny Members support the Senior Leadership Team's efforts and measures they have introduced to address this issue and request that an update report be provided in approximately one year to further consider performance in this regard.

7. That the impact of ill health and pressures on staff who act as carers be acknowledged by the employer side as a genuine pressure and that the Council's sickness policy and other Council policies addresses this issue and provides sufficient support for carers.

8. That Councillor John Mead be requested to provide an example of the monthly staff survey undertaken in his workplace as part of the wellbeing policy with a view to potentially using a similar anonymous staff survey to gauge the wellbeing of SBC staff.

9. That the Volunteer Policy be publicised and promoted amongst staff and that an evaluation of its success be brought back to Members.

10. That the Council seeks to identify the causes of sickness covering underlying "big picture" issues such as pay restraint and austerity, office ergonomics, problems with ICT etc.

11. That from the information obtained from the two officers that HR recommended to be interviewed (Supported Housing & Customer Service Centre), the following additional recommendations be considered: (i) That officers undertake a questionnaire/survey with officers (at least with the two areas identified above, but could be broadened to include other areas) to establish staffs view of the current sickness management processes; and (ii) that further recommendations be established from 4.1.14 to 4.1.26

2.2 That any further recommendations from the meeting be submitted to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee to agree the final report and recommendations.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 In October 2018 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed a scoping document to scrutinise the issue of Sickness Management and a meeting was arranged for 14 November 2018 and 15 January 2019, where the following witnesses provided evidence to Members:

- Matthew Scrimshire, Development Manager, First Care
- Cllr Mrs Joan Lloyd, Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources

- Scott Crudgington, CE
- Matt Partridge, SD
- Clare Davies, Senior HR Manager
- Lloyd Walker, Waste Operations Manager (representing an area with high sickness stats)
- Greg Arends, Business Improvement Manager (representing an area with average sickness stats)
- Ann Tomlin and Diane Wenham Unison
- Kirsty Cody, Customer Service Centre & Kelly Potts, Housing Investment written submission to Members questions.

4 FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

4.1 The review established:

- 4.1.1 The introduction of First Care is a positive step by the Council to address its Sickness Management issues but care needs to be taken regarding its communication and delivery and before any such service is undertaken that staff are fully briefed on the proposals, to this end Members were concerned that there had so far been little consultation with staff on this important new service but were pleased to hear from the Senior HR Manager and the Strategic Director that a full consultation and communications plan will be used prior to the service going live. During the review Members expressed concern that views of employees had not yet been received on the new system. Officers advised that a date had not as yet been identified for the system to go live as background preparatory work was still being undertaken. It was noted that officers would develop a comprehensive communications plan to ensure employees were clear on the implications of First Care prior to the system going live.
- 4.1.2 Sickness Management remains within the control of SBC.
- 4.1.3 Some Business Units which are going through reviews are experiencing higher sickness figures.
- 4.1.4 SLT and Members share a commitment and passion for the health and wellbeing of SBC staff.
- 4.1.5 There are seasonal peaks and troughs in certain Business Units which are not always recorded.
- 4.1.6 Approximately half of all staff have little or no time off work through ill health each year, the other half account for the remainder of sickness (16-18 days a year).
- 4.1.7 Scrutiny Members support the measures that SLT have put in place so far to address sickness absence.
- 4.1.8 A focus on the issues that generate the highest number of absences is needed for stress, anxiety and depression.

- 4.1.9 As part of the review Members interviewed Ann Tomlin, Branch Secretary of Unison and Diane Wenham Chair of Unison. Unison gave their views to the Committee on the introduction of First Care as part of the Council's sickness policy, which they welcomed as it would provide consistency across the Council with every employee being treated fairly. Unison were of the view that the introduction of FirstCare Nurse led triage service would be a benefit over non-medically qualified Line Managers. The Unison representatives advised that the issues of the sickness policy and the potential introduction of FirstCare would be raised at a Unison away-day on health and wellbeing and subsequent feedback from Unison's away-day was that the discussion was positive, as Unison members believe it will then provide a consistent approach across the Council.
- 4.1.10 Members were of the view that Sickness Management needed to be considered in the context of a decade of austerity in local government with less staff delivering services that are more in demand with the public. The other "big picture" issues for staff are ICT systems that break down; ergonomics such as, toilets, heating, lighting, desk space etc. can all have an impact on staff.
- 4.1.11 Members expressed concern that views of employees had not yet been received on the new system. Officers advised that a date had not yet been identified for the system go live, as background preparatory work was still being undertaken. It was noted that officers would develop a comprehensive communications plan to ensure employees were clear on the implications of First Care prior to the system going live.
- 4.1.12 As part of the review, Human Resources approached Members of the East of England LGA with a Sickness Absence Survey (East of England LGA Survey Summary October 2018). The following 8 authorities responded to the survey with the following sickness absence rates for the last 2 years (including short term and long term where available). The context of the East of England LGA group is that the make-up of services delivered by these councils is not necessarily the same as those delivered by SBC so this can affect the figures as many no longer run their own Housing Service or Direct Services such as Refuse and Recycling. It is also worth noting that the calculation methods may vary across the authorities. Stevenage Statistics are also included:
- Stevenage Borough Council – January 2017 sickness absence was 8.27 days FTE (target 8.5 days). May 2018 9.71 days FTE and at September 2018 8.91 days FTE
- Luton Borough Council – 2017/18 = 11.65 days per FTE, 2018/19 = 11.72 days per FTE (Luton do not break down short term or long term sick leave)
- Central Bedfordshire Council – 2016/17 long term 4.84 days per FTE, short term 4.07 days per FTE. 2016/17 Total = 8.91 days per FTE. 2017/18 long term 5.42 days per FTE, short term 4.32 days per FTE. 2016/17 Total = 9.74 days per FTE
- Colchester Borough Council - 2017/18 long term 6.1 days per FTE, short term 3.46 days per FTE

Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils – 2016/17 long term 3.02 days per FTE, short term 2.13 days per FTE. 2017/18 long term 4.93 days per FTE, short term 2.0 days per FTE

North Herts District Council – 2016/17 long term 1.69 days per FTE, short term 3.25 days per FTE. 2017/18 long term 2.96 days per FTE, short term 4.23 days per FTE

East Herts District Council – 2016/17 long term 2.8 days per FTE, short term 3.2 days per FTE. 2017/18 long term 3.1 days per FTE, short term 3.1 days per FTE

North Norfolk Council – 2017/18 both long and short term sickness = 6.35 days per FTE. 2018/19 both long and short term sickness = 5.88 days per FTE

Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils – 2018/19 total only = 1.14% days per FTE

- 4.1.13 Members undertook a series of questions with representatives from the Customer Service Centre and Housing Investment via a written submission of questions to officers as it was not possible to co-ordinate a meeting with all parties, the following is the officers responses:
- 4.1.14 Do you think staff come into work when they are ill and should not be in work, and what do you think are the reasons for this? Housing Investment: *Yes, I feel the majority of my team are very conscientious and will in essence drag themselves in work when they are unwell. I think there are two main reasons for this, firstly, if they are not in work they appreciate that someone else will have to cover their shift or scheme for that day as our service cannot wait until the next day (visiting and responding to residents emergency calls) and secondly because they genuinely care about their role and their responsibilities. The office team including myself, will come into work when we shouldn't because there is always so much to do and we don't like taking time off. As a result illnesses such as a cold are passed between the team.* Customer Service Centre: *Sometimes, we tend to find those who have been off sick through an exceptional circumstance and as a result have been placed on an informal stage are the ones who will come to work regardless of how unwell they feel.*
- 4.1.15 What causes anxiety about calling in sick and how this could be reduced? Housing Investment: *As I mentioned above but also they don't like to have formal meetings about their sickness and no matter how much reassurance I do, they still become very anxious about hitting triggers.* Customer Service Centre: *I'm unsure about this one. One person who was being managed through the sickness policy commented they felt anxious calling in because they 'didn't want to get in trouble'. We've had no other comments about this. One way to reduce anxiety about calling in, is for staff to call into a third party, where they can seek medical guidance and discuss any issues they may have about attending work or options for coming back to work.*
- 4.1.16 Do you think that adequate discretion is used with the trigger system for back to work interviews and closer monitoring if the employee has more than 8

days sickness in a calendar year? Housing Investment: *I think this is where there are inconsistencies across the organisation. If a trigger has been hit, we will monitor as per the policy and have informal meetings.* Customer Service Centre: *I'm hoping this answers the above. We feel that we are unable to use discretion when managing sickness, for example, when an adviser has been off sick because of an exceptional circumstance (something that is unlikely to be repeated like miscarriage, broken bones, car crash) they then come back and are placed on an informal stage. They then have a day or two for something viral and are scrutinised over this when, had they not had the exceptional circumstance, they would not have to justify a one off sickness like this. As a manager, this can be challenging to manage because we are of the opinion that the adviser shouldn't have been placed on a sickness stage in the first place (particularly when they have a good track record).*

- 4.1.17 Do you feel employees return to work before they are ready to, to avoid triggering the system? Housing Investment: *Yes, however I do feel they as mentioned, they are only sick if genuinely unwell, therefore they return as soon as they feel they can come into work. That said, we have sent team members back home (and I have also been sent back home) when they have tried to return too soon and I have had comments about not wanting to hit a trigger / have a meeting.* Customer Service Centre: *No.*
- 4.1.18 What is your view of how Sickness Management is managed at SBC? Housing Investment: *I think this policy has improved by using a rolling 12 month period as previously, I felt some people knew how to avoid been escalated to the next stage and would forever be on stage 1 (on review for 3 month and then go off sick a short time after the review period). I do feel there should be something separate for planned medical operations / procedures.* Customer Service Centre: *Sometimes feels like one size fits all. There should be a rolling training programme for effective management of sickness management policy. HR advice and support can be inconsistent.*
- 4.1.19 What are employee's views on how their employer views sickness and the suggested changes to the sickness policy? (perhaps a rating system to see whether they think it is more to do with saving money than with improving employee wellbeing) Housing Investment: *I think the message has been about how much sickness costs the council, rather than the wellbeing of employees. I haven't seen the suggested changes so unable to comment. I can do a questionnaire with the wider team if you would like, maybe myself and Kirsty could use the same questions to make it consistent?* Customer Service Centre: *To our knowledge we aren't aware that the team feel it's a money saver. The team sometimes comment that they feel being on an informal isn't justified because they were unwell.*
- 4.1.20 Do you feel that the Council's Sickness Policy is applied fairly and equally? Housing Investment: *I think it is inconstant. I am aware of other departments not monitoring their sickness in the same way and use flexi or annual leave instead of recording an absence as sickness.* Customer Service Centre: *Yes, applied equally but no always fairly.*

- 4.1.21 How effective is the back to work interviews? Housing Investment: *I think they are effective and I use it to discuss reasons off, and if we need to adjust anything for them to return. I will plan any phased returns. I feel this is the informal discussion / meetings.* Customer Service Centre: *We don't feel these are effective in isolation. It would be useful to have access to previous RTW forms, sickness figures, reasons and informal/formal meeting documents all in one place. This would help to look at trends and identify potential underlying issues, which then opens up discussion with the team member.*
- 4.1.22 Do you think that staff are adequately helped during periods of sickness and back into work? Housing Investment: *Yes defiantly, we will always look to see what we can do to get someone back into work e.g. someone broke their arm and was unable to drive (therefore unable to do their usual role) so we worked with them and they came into Daneshill to do alternative work / projects.* Customer Service Centre: *Yes, in our service we believe they are.*
- 4.1.23 Do you suspect that some employees take sick leave when they could come into work? Are there underlying reasons for this? If so what could be done to encourage staff to attend? Housing Investment: *Maybe in some rare cases, I think it was an old culture where you could almost have 7 additional annual leave days but I genuinely believe this has changed and is no longer the case.* Customer Service Centre: *Yes, we feel that is because of the contact centre environment. If there was more flexibility in terms of duties and flexi-time I believe advisers would attend work when they may be feeling a little under the weather. Unfortunately, a contact centre environment is demand driven and flexitime if difficult to manage and apply.*
- 4.1.24 Why are staff sick? Pressure; having to hold down two jobs to pay bills; working conditions; bullying; cuts in staffing? Housing Investment: *In our area, we work with older people, visiting many different homes every day and as a result, the team will tend to pick up all the colds or illnesses etc. that are going around. I think there are a huge number of reasons why people are sick, I have seen a lot of cases where there are pressures / issues at home make them unwell and then they struggle to cope as they normally would at work.* Customer Service Centre: *Often because they pick up bugs from customers and each other. The contact centre environment is busy and varied and there is no opportunity for a long lunch, a quiet moment or an early finish. Life style choices can sometimes impact on team members attending work but we discuss this openly and honestly with them during return to work meetings and document.*
- 4.1.25 Is the current Sickness Policy and trigger points for interviews set at the right level? Housing Investment: *Yes, I think it's reasonable however I don't feel the informal trigger is right because we bring them in for formal a meeting calling it informal, but write with an outcome etc. which is formal and confusing. please see below, I would like to see planned medical procedures to be kept separate and not affect their triggers. I think the return to work is the informal meeting. If they have only been off for one reason and hit the*

trigger then you have all the discussions needed at the return to work, then meet up to have an informal meeting to repeat the discussion. Customer Service Centre: Yes, but discretion is needed.

- 4.1.26 If you could change anything about the current Sickness Policy what would it be? Housing Investment: *I would like to see something separate for planned operations etc. I appreciate they are unable to come into work as they are not fit and sick but I don't feel bringing them in for a sickness review meeting is necessarily appropriate. I would also like to change the informal formal meetings as they are formal. Customer Service Centre: Discretion for dealing with exceptional circumstances and improved sickness data.*

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications within this report.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 There are no direct legal implications within this report.

Staffing Implications

- 5.3 If the Executive Member for Resources accepts the Committees recommendations then there could be implications for staff if the corporate sickness policy is amended. Sickness absence has an impact on the delivery of services to customers and means that duties need to be covered or reallocated to ensure continuity of service delivery. Long periods of absence as well as unplanned short-term periods of absence can cause disruptions and put additional pressure on remaining team members.

Equalities & Diversity Implications

- 5.4 Members of staff who have medical conditions or disabilities are afforded time off for medical appointments and flexibility regarding working hours.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e. they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:

- BD1 East of England LGA Survey Summary October 2018.
BD2 SBC Sickness Absence Policy & Procedure Version 6 – June 2018

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

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