

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SITTING AS A SELECT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 15 January 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair) (Chair), (Vice Chair), Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, James Fraser, Michelle Gardner, Jody Hanafin, 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: 7.45pm

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Phil Bibby CC.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2 REVIEW OF SBC SICKNESS MANAGEMENT**

The Committee considered a report detailing the information requested at the evidence gathering meeting on 14 November 2018.

The Chair reminded Members of the context of the review, what had already been established and what this meeting would cover including:

- The split between long term and short term sickness;
- The Council's policy of identifying patterns of sickness and underlying causes;
- What the Council does to help people back to work;
- Peer performance;
- Departmental split;
- The cost to the Council in productivity/pay;
- Impact on staff covering for long term absences;

The Chair welcomed Ann Tomlin, Branch Secretary of Unison and Diane Wenham Chair of Unison to the meeting who gave their views to the Committee on the introduction of First Care as part of the Council's sickness policy. On the whole, First Care would be welcomed as it would provide consistency across the Council with every employee being treated fairly. The representatives advised that a Unison awayday had been organised and would have a focus on health and wellbeing which would allow the matter to be considered further.

Members expressed concern that views of employees had not been received on the new system. Officers advised that a date had not 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.

Officers advised that unfortunately it had not been possible to arrange for the two officers recommended by HR to be interviewed. It was agreed that this now be done as a paper exercise with the outcomes to be reported back to Members. Members were asked to provide any suggestions for questions to the Scrutiny Officer.

Members raised a number of points around the review including:

- People who were carers might suffer from stress and anxiety – it was important the Council recognised this hidden group;
- The importance of timely and caring return to work interviews;
- The importance of the continued commitment to the “Time to Change” pledge which had been drawn up by organisations including Mind and the Department of Health;
- An example of a private sector organisation where the sickness levels reduced following a relaxing of the sickness policy combined with a monthly staff survey;
- Improvement in the reporting process for sickness management since MyView had been installed for Managers;
- In relation to the Volunteering Policy, as the policy had not been in place for too long, officers agreed to report the take-up figures to a future meeting;

Following further consideration, it was **RESOLVED**:

- (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.
- (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 as a joint working exercise with Human Resources, Unison consults its Members at its forthcoming awayday which would be focussing on health and wellbeing, on the sickness policy and in particular the First Care proposal.
- (8) 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 address this issue and provides sufficient support for carers.
- (9) That as it had not been possible to arrange for the two officers recommended by HR to be interviewed, it was agreed that this now be done as a paper exercise and the outcomes reported back to Members. Members should provide any suggestions for questions to the Scrutiny Officer.
- (10) 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.
- (11) That the Volunteer Policy be publicised and promoted amongst staff and that an evaluation of its success be brought back to Members.

3 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

4 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

5 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**