

SCRUTINY PANEL B

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Tuesday, 16th January, 2018 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Mike Smith in the Chair;

Councillors Christian Chapman, Glenys Maxwell,
Christine Quinn-Wilcox and Paul Roberts.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Rachel Bissett, Helen Hollis and
Lauren Mitchell.

Officers Present: Kate Hill, Mike Joy and Julie Robinson.

SB.11 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

SB.12 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 21st November, 2017 be
received and approved as a correct record.

SB.13 Scrutiny Introduction to Consideration of Attendance Management

The Chairman introduced the item and explained that the topic had been
placed on the Scrutiny Workplan to enable the Panel to consider how the
Attendance Management Policy was supporting employees and helping to
manage sickness absence in a constructive manner following its introduction
in 2015.

He informed the Panel that this topic was last considered via the Scrutiny
process in 2015 when the Attendance Management Policy was first
introduced. At that time Members were supportive of the new approach
following concerns about the Bradford Factor (the previous method and
formula used to manage attendance) and were keen to ensure that the Policy
was effective in supporting employees and managing attendance in a
constructive way.

The scoping report presented to the Panel provides an overview of the current
Attendance Management Policy for Members to consider and review any
areas of concern or progress.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Kate Hill, Senior HR Adviser for the Ashfield and Mansfield HR Shared Service who was in attendance to assist Members in their consideration of this topic.

The Senior HR Advisor proceeded to give an overview of the impact of the Attendance Management Policy and summarise the various initiatives implemented over the last 2 years to improve employee attendance:-

The main points considered were as follows:-

Stress Action Plans

Stress Action Plans were introduced to help identify and address the reasons why employees were absent with stress.

Ashfield General Practitioners

Letters were sent to all Ashfield GP's explaining what support the Council could offer to help employees return to work.

The Senior HR Adviser reported that unfortunately there had been very little feedback from this exercise.

Employee Assistance Programme

The introduction of a new 'Employee Assistance Programme' to provide counselling, online information and signposting to support.

Quarterly Meetings

Quarterly meetings between Human Resources and Directors are scheduled to discuss and review sickness absences and progress against the targets.

Promoting Health Lifestyles

Promotion of healthy lifestyles including the introduction of workplace health schemes, exercise referral schemes, stop smoking and weight management services.

Physiotherapy Service

Greater use of the physiotherapy service to assist employees with muscular/skeletal problems.

The Senior HR Adviser reported that the main objective of the Policy was to provide a framework for supporting employees to maintain expected levels of attendance. In addition to this the Human Resources Team provide a wealth of support and advice to ensure that attendance management was effectively monitored and administrated.

The Senior HR Adviser briefly outlined a number of other procedures that are in place to enable the Human Resources Team to observe the Attendance Management Policy and support employees including:-

- Monthly reports highlighting target/sickness.
- Monthly absence trigger reports for both short term and long term absence.

- Attendance at CLT to provide regular updates an attendance/sickness levels.
- Referrals to occupational health and/or support providers.
- Promotion of workplace health activities (holistic therapies, walking/fitness groups, yoga etc.).
- Development of workplace Health Champions.
- Identifying mental health problems in employees and rolling out mental health training.

The Senior HR Adviser also referred to the performance data for sickness absence figures for 2016/17 and 2017/18 respectively.

Members were advised that in 2016/17 the target was set at 10 days however, the actual sickness absence figure was 8.53 days per full time employee. In 2017/18 from April to September the target was set at 4.75 days (for 6 months) and the actual sickness absence figure was 4.38 days per full time employee with the target for the full year being 9.5 days per full time employee.

The Senior HR Adviser informed the Panel that the performance data for Quarter 3 (207/18) would be submitted to Cabinet in February. However, she asked Members to be mindful that sickness figures for December were likely to show an increase due to a rise in flu cases. Furthermore, there were also a number of long term absences in the workplace but all cases were being monitored.

Following the presentation Panel Members took the opportunity to ask questions of the Senior HR Adviser and in doing so discussed the following:-

- The significant improvement on sickness absence figures which was beneficial to both the employer and the employee.
- The impact of long term/disability sickness on performance data/targets.
- Disappointed that local GP's had been reluctant to get involved in explaining what support the Council could offer to employees returning to work after a period of absence.

The Scrutiny Manager suggested that this matter could be referred to the Health and Well Being Board for consideration.

- Were Managers able to consistently meet targets?
- How was the sickness absence data analysed?
- Relationships between Managers and staff and its impact on the attendance management process.
- Does Ashfield District Council have an ideal target figure they would like to reach in respect of sickness absence levels?

Following conclusion of the presentation and debate, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank the Senior HR Adviser for her informative update and valuable contributions towards the Panel's review.

Members acknowledged that significant measures had been put in place to improve sickness absence levels, support staff and introduce healthy workplace initiatives in line with the objectives of the Attendance Management Policy.

RESOLVED

that the following observations of the Panel be forwarded on to the Interim Director of Place and Communities and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources and Finance for their information:-

- a) the concerns of this Panel with regard to the lack of co-operation from local GP's in explaining what support the Council could offer to employees returning to work after a period of absence be forwarded onto the Health and Well Being Board for their attention;
- b) thanks and appreciation be forwarded onto the HR Team for their efforts in implementing the Attendance Management Policy and to employees for their contributions in improving the sickness absence levels;
- c) recognition of the effective preventative measures that have been put in place for employees through the various workplace initiatives;
- d) consideration be given to setting realistic and achievable sickness absence targets for employees in a more innovative way.

The meeting closed at 7.15 p.m.

Chairman.