

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL



Council Offices,
Urban Road,
Kirkby in Ashfield
Nottingham
NG17 8DA

Agenda

Scrutiny Panel B

Date: **Tuesday, 16th January, 2018**

Time: **6.30 pm**

Venue: **Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road,
Kirkby-in-Ashfield**

For any further information please contact:

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SCRUTINY PANEL B

Membership

Chairman: Councillor Helen Hollis

Vice-Chairman: Councillor Mike Smith

Councillors:

Rachel Bissett

Glenys Maxwell

Christine Quinn-Wilcox

Sam Wilson

Christian Chapman

Lauren Mitchell

Paul Roberts

FILMING/AUDIO RECORDING NOTICE

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SUMMONS

You are hereby requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel B to be held at the time/place and on the date mentioned above for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.



R. Mitchell
Chief Executive

AGENDA

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1. To receive apologies for absence, if any.
2. **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests.**
3. To approve as a correct record the minutes of a meeting of the Panel held on 21st November, 2017. 5 - 10
4. **Scrutiny Introduction to Consideration of Attendance Management.** 11 - 16

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SCRUTINY PANEL B

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

on Tuesday, 21st November, 2017 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Helen Hollis in the Chair;

Councillors Christian Chapman, Lauren Mitchell,
Christine Quinn-Wilcox, Paul Roberts,
Mike Smith and Sam Wilson.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Rachel Bissett and Glenys Maxwell.

Officers Present: Mike Joy, Julie Robinson and Phil Warrington.

SB.7 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

SB.8 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 18th October, 2017 be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.9 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Chairman reminded Members that the Panel had previously undertaken a scrutiny review in respect of the access to homelessness services and how we work with partner agencies in addressing and preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage, including consideration of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which at the time of the review was still a Bill. The findings and recommendations of the Panel were submitted to the Cabinet in October, 2017 for consideration.

The Cabinet consequently recognised the importance of developing effective initiatives to prevent homelessness in the District and the need to facilitate early intervention with persons at risk of homelessness and provide advice, support and guidance in order to prevent homelessness.

The Cabinet also agreed that Members of this Panel be kept informed of progress in respect of the Homelessness Reduction Act to enable the Panel to revisit the homelessness issue as part of its work programme.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Phil Warrington, the Council's Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager, who was in attendance to update Members on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the fundamental changes to the way in which homelessness services are accessed and delivered.

He explained that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 becomes law in April 2018 and the key changes to existing legislation/policy were summarised as follows:-

- The Act extends the period during which someone might qualify as threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days;
- There will be a duty to consider an applicant as threatened with homelessness if they present a valid section 21 notice;
- Where an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness an assessment must be conducted and a personal housing plan agreed. The Council must work with the applicant on the agreed actions with the aim of ensuring the applicant has, and is able to retain suitable accommodation;
- For applicants who are threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need, the Council will have a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent their homelessness. The prevent duty will last for 56 days;
- For those applicants who become homeless the Council will have a duty to relieve their homelessness. This will apply to all applicants irrespective of their priority need. The relief duty will last for 56 days;
- Free homelessness advice and information should be available to any person in the local authority area;
- There will be a duty requiring all specified public authorities to notify the Council of service users they think may be homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- There is an extension to the applicant's right to request a review of homelessness decisions in relation to the new duties.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager informed the Panel that nationally Homelessness Services had a number of gaps but through the new Act early intervention will increase the number of successful preventions and ensure that those persons at risk of homelessness are supported earlier and for longer.

Members were encouraged by the early intervention strategies piloted in Wales and its impact on homelessness figures and costs. The early signs indicate that the extension of the 'threatened with homelessness' period is working well and there has been a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation in the long term.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager proceeded to outline what the main implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 would be for this Council namely:-

- Greater level of assistance to be provided to a greater number of applicants;
- Front loading prevention casework including the development of Personal Housing Plans for each applicant seeking assistance;

- Greater reliance on ICT – software will need to be reviewed and replaced;
- Need to review and extend advice services;
- Potential implications for temporary accommodation;
- Fewer traditional homeless duties accepted;
- Pressure to develop and make available more affordable housing options.

The Panel were informed that typically around 500 enquiries relating to homelessness issues are received per quarter. These in turn equate to around 80 homelessness preventions per quarter and 20 acceptance of duties per quarter.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager then summarised the funding streams that the Council will receive to help implement the Act, these included:-

- New Burdens funding of £114,545 confirmed until 2019/20;
- Flexible Homelessness Grant of £105,000 confirmed until 2019/20;
- ICT one off grant – anticipated to be £9,000.

At this stage additional funding beyond 2019/20 is unknown and there is an expectation that efficiencies will be achieved to cover long term costs.

To conclude, the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager reported that since April 2017 regular meetings have been held with Mansfield District Council regarding the implementation of the Act and the impact on the delivery of homelessness services through the Housing Options Shared Service Team.

An outline action plan has been developed which has focused on the following areas:-

- Staffing resources (including Team size/structure, skills, culture and training requirements);
- Fit for purpose ICT system and exploration of automating the services where possible;
- Review of operational procedures and processes.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager stressed that the next 6 months would be challenging as there was still a significant amount of work to be undertaken with regard to the implementation of the Act.

Members acknowledged that the Council's current homelessness service needs to adapt to ensure that it reflects the new requirements. The Panel also recognised the importance of developing effective prevention initiatives to facilitate early intervention with households/persons at risk of homelessness to provide more detailed advice, support and guidance thus preventing homelessness wherever possible.

Panel Members then took the opportunity to ask questions of the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager and in doing so discussed the following:-

- Members expressed their support for the proposal to extend the period during which someone might qualify as threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, to enable Local Authorities to intervene earlier to avert a crisis;
- Working with Landlords to make them aware of legislation/policy;
- Potential that casework associated with homelessness prevention would significantly increase;
- It is essential that there is a greater awareness of the level of help and support that can be provided, including when that assistance starts;
- The need to develop a wider range of affordable housing solutions;
- The Council should continue to work in partnership with key organisations who offer expertise and support, for example Framework, to ensure the service is as effective and beneficial as possible;
- Concerns regarding unknown ICT and staffing costs as going forward additional funding has not yet been confirmed.

Following conclusion of the presentation and debate, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager for his informative update and valuable contributions towards the Panel's review.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Panel note the proposed changes to the delivery of the Council's front line statutory homelessness service, as outlined in the report;
- b) the Panel note the actions being taken to implement the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, including priorities for expenditure;
- c) the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager be requested to take on board the views and comments of the Panel in respect of this issue and include such in any further report submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

SB.10 Scrutiny Review of CCTV - Update

The Scrutiny Manager reported that at the last meeting Members had agreed the scope and terms of reference for a scrutiny review of CCTV namely, to gain an understanding of CCTV, how it contributes to the Council's corporate priorities and what impact it may have within the community.

As part of the discussion it was suggested that a site visit be facilitated to enable Panel Members to view the new CCTV control room at the Police Headquarters, Sherwood Lodge.

The Scrutiny Manager explained that unfortunately there had been a delay in launching the new control room due to a number of technical issues and consequently all site visits to this venue had been affected. He assured Members that as soon as the Council receive notification arrangements will be put in place to enable the site visit to take place.

The Scrutiny Manager also informed the Panel that he was in the process of arranging a meeting with the relevant Officers from Newark and Sherwood District Council to enable Members to gain an understanding of the activities undertaken in the development of their CCTV commercialism plan.

Furthermore, updates regarding the potential for securing mandatory provision of CCTV for various types of business/commercial premises through its licensing and planning processes would be presented to the Panel in due course.

The meeting closed at 7.52 p.m.

Chairman.

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Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL B	Date:	16 JANUARY 2018
Heading:	SCRUTINY INTRODUCTION TO CONSIDERATION OF ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT		
Portfolio Holder:	N/A		
Ward/s:	N/A		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose Of Report

Following consultation, Attendance Management was added to the Scrutiny Workplan in 2017. The item was added to the Workplan in order for Members to consider how the Attendance Management Policy was supporting staff at work and helping to manage sickness absence in a constructive way.

This scoping report provides an overview of the Attendance Management Policy for Members to consider and review areas of concern or progress since the last consideration of this topic in 2015.

The Panel recognises that there has been significant work done to establish a comprehensive framework for managers at all levels to deal with absence. Consideration of this topic does not seek to investigate this framework, but rather how effectively these tools have been in supporting employees and managers in improving attendance. To Assist Members in consideration of this topic a Member of the Human Resources Team will be in attendance at the meeting.

Recommendation(s)

Members are requested to;

- Note the information contained in the report;
- Consider any areas of attendance management that would benefit from further Scrutiny involvement;
- Consider any further information required.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Attendance Management was added to the Scrutiny workplan in 2017.

Alternative Options Considered (With Reasons Why Not Adopted)

None at this stage of the consideration, should the topic be progressed the Panel will consult with the appropriate officers to consider all options.

Detailed Information

Scrutiny last considered attendance management in 2015, whereby Members discussed the following initiatives that had recently been introduced;

- The introduction of 'Stress Action Plans' to help identify and address the reasons why employees who are absent with stress are stressed;
- Sending letters to all Ashfield's General Practitioners (G.P's) explaining what support the Council could offer to help employees return to work;
- The introduction of a new 'Employee Assistance Programme' to provide counselling as well as online information and support;
- Quarterly meetings between Human Resources and Service Directors to discuss sickness absences. In addition 'Exception Reports' are now produced for the Service Directors to highlight when employees have not been managed in line with the Attendance Management Policy;
- Promoting healthy lifestyles, with the introduction of workplace health schemes and exercise referral schemes, stop smoking and weight management services, as well as cognitive behaviour therapy or 'talking cures';
- Greater use of the physiotherapy service to help those who are absent with muscular or skeletal problems;

In addition to the initiatives that were already being implemented, Members also raised a number of other issues relating to attendance management. These included;

- Mental health problems / Stress - A key challenge was to encourage people to come forward and acknowledge that they are having difficulties so that they could be helped.
- Hot spot areas – Understanding the different working environments and challenges associated with these;
- Support and training offered to managers to deal with attendance issues;
- Good practice from other authorities to understand the differences in approach to managing attendance.

Attendance Management Policy

The current Attendance Management Policy was approved at Council in July 2013 and subsequently revised in 2015 and 2016. This policy applies to all employees of Ashfield District Council under all terms and conditions. The objective of this policy is to provide a framework for supporting employees to maintain expected levels of attendance and to outline the approach that will be taken in circumstances where employees are unable to maintain expected levels due to reasons related to their health.

The Council is committed to promoting health and well being in the workplace. The policy is designed, therefore, to provide a framework in which an employee is given every reasonable opportunity to improve their attendance. It outlines the steps that will need to be taken to

improve attendance and makes clear the possible consequences in cases where an employee is unable to achieve an acceptable level of attendance.

The Council sets absence triggers for absence under short term and long term absence. If an employee meets any of the following trigger points during a 12 month rolling period they will be invited to attend a meeting with their manager/supervisor. Trigger reports are also reviewed regularly by the Corporate Leadership Team.

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Short Term Absence

Stage 1 Triggers

- 9 working days or more sickness absence over a 12 month period pro rata for part time or job share employees.
- 3 or more occasions of sickness absence over a 12 month period.
- A pattern of absence that causes concern – one example would be absence on the days immediately prior to / after bank holidays or absence during the same period each year

Stage 2 Trigger

A pattern of an employee entering the Stage 1 process 2 or more times in a 2 year period (for instance if they have entered Stage 1 twice or more in two years)

Stage 3 Trigger

A pattern of an employee entering the Stage 2 process 2 or more times in a 2 year period (for instance if they have entered Stage 2 twice or more in two years)

Long Term Absence

Any continuous absence of 4 calendar weeks or more

Absence from work for part of a working day (i.e. where an employee leaves work having completed less than half a shift) is recorded as sickness absence and therefore will count towards any trigger scores for monitoring purposes.

Additional Workplace Health Initiatives in Place

There has been a considerable amount of work carried out during the last two years to improve performance relating to attendance management and consider initiatives and solutions. These have included the following;

Introduction of PAM Assist

PAM Assist is Ashfield District Councils Employee Assistance programme and provides a useful resource when signposting colleagues to support. The service is free and confidential and staffed by experienced and professional advisors who are available 24 hours of the day to answer your call. Through PAM Assist employees have access to clinical and professional expertise which gives them the chance to talk about all kinds of work and personal issues including:

- Debt advice
- Relationships
- Managing money
- Stress management
- Moving house
- Health advice
- Work issues
- Domestic abuse
- Drug/ alcohol addiction
- Family care and bereavement

Workplace Health Champions

Workplace Health Champions are individuals who possess the experience, enthusiasm and skills to encourage and support other individuals to engage in health promotion activities. Workplace Health Champions can get access to free training and support the workplace health programme at Ashfield District Council.

Workplace Health activities

Workplace Health Initiatives have been provided have included, amongst others;

- Holistic Therapies
- Walking / Fitness groups
- NHS Healthy Heart Checks
- Yoga
- Massages
- Help to stop smoking
- Learning at work

Performance

In quarter 2 (2017/18), the Year to Date actual sickness absence figure was 4.38 days/full time employee. The target is 4.75 days/full time employee. Quarter 3 is due to be reported to Cabinet February 2017. This is a significant improvement on the position when Scrutiny last considered the issue. At this point, the average days' absence per FTE reported was 13.97 for the year. Quarter 3 will demonstrate whether this improvement has been maintained.

Next Steps

In revisiting this topic as a workplan item, Members were in agreement that at this stage, the item does not warrant a full review. The topic was to be revisited to consider how the revised policy was impacting;

- Current performance
- employees, services and the community
- Financial impact
- Current initiatives being undertaken or considered to improve attendance

To support Members in revisiting this topic, A member of the Human Resources team will be in attendance to answer questions and provide a general update to Members on actions the Council has taken and is considering to take to improve attendance and support staff and managers in effectively managing attendance.

Therefore, Members should consider effectiveness of current policies and procedures, impact on staff, managers and the Council and whether there are any other initiatives, actions or revisions to consider.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

- The Council will maintain its commitment to workforce development and support staff through challenging changes
- The Council will maintain its commitment to workplace health and well-being support for all employees.

Legal:

There are no direct Legal implications at this stage, advice will be sought following the initial meeting on this topic.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	Sickness absence has significant resource implications, therefore ensuring Ashfield District Council has the correct policies and practices in place to support employees in improving attendance management is essential. Consideration of this topic should be done in full consultation with Finance should any recommendations be identified.
General Fund – Capital Programme	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	N/A

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Increases in sickness absence, increased stress for employees & impact on customers.	Understanding the measures in place to improve attendance management, support staff and healthy workplace initiatives through the Attendance Management Policy

Human Resources:

Effective attendance management procedures and initiatives ensure that the Council executes its employer responsibilities in a fair, reasonable, consistent, affordable and legally compliant manner.

Equalities

An Equality Impact Assessment was completed as part of the Policy review process and resultant actions were built into the HR Business planning process.

Other Implications:

Engagement from Unison and GMB will be invited should the Panel carry out a full review on this issue.

Reason(s) for Urgency (if applicable):

None

Report Author and Contact Officer

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