

ORGANISATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF INFORMAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 2 MARCH 2021

Present:

Councillor Angelique Foster (Chair) (in the Chair)

Councillor Joseph Birkin
Councillor Maggie Jones
Councillor Heather Liggett

Councillor John Funnell
Councillor Pat Kerry
Councillor Philip Wright

Also Present:

S Veerman Overview and Scrutiny Manager
D Stanton Governance Officer
A Bond Governance Officer

Due to technical difficulties, the meeting was held informally.

OSC/ Apologies for Absence

50/2

0-21 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Maureen Potts and Patricia Bone.

OSC/ Declarations of Interest

51/2

0-21 Members are requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interest and/or other interest, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

There were no interests declared at this meeting.

OSC/ Minutes of Last Meeting

52/2

0-21 The Minutes of the Meeting, held on 2 February 2021 were noted and recommended for the Committee to approve at its next formal meeting.

OSC/ Scrutiny Review - Health and Wellbeing - Working from Home During the Pandemic

53/2

0-21 The Committee discussed the arrangements the Authority had put in place to support staff who were working from home during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Members had previously held discussion groups with a number of employees to seek their views on how they had found this period of Working from Home.

The Committee had heard mixed views ranging from it had worked well to others who had found it difficult for a variety of reasons. Many staff had welcomed the flexibility it provided, whilst others preferred working in their teams.

It was also noted by the Committee that absence levels had improved as less individuals had taken sick leave. The Committee discussed why this might be the case including reduction in infections due to social distancing, lockdowns and the ability to keep working at home which might not be the case in the office. There was a consensus that the current sickness absence levels were not a reliable indicator for setting future targets due to the Pandemic this year.

The Committee also discussed the environmental impact of working from home. Although there was a clear reduction in employees driving to and from places of work, more information was still needed in order to assess the full impact of this. For example, individuals were using their own electricity and heating within their homes.

The Committee also discussed the Authorities response in terms of physical and mental health support to staff working from home. The review had recognised that support needed to be available for staff working at home during the Pandemic for a variety of reasons including possible feelings of isolation if no contact with colleagues; IT skills such as undertaking virtual meetings; Health and Safety Advice; provision of appropriate equipment; and general information and advice.

A range of support had been in place for staff, and the Committee concluded this had generally worked well but some areas had been reactive due to the circumstances. The Committee praised the resilience, flexibility and hard work of all employees in adapting to the changing circumstances of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Committee also considered the draft agile working policy and the Human Resources Manager attended the meeting to discuss possible future working arrangements. Agile working was wider than just home working and the Committee discussed potential benefits and challenges moving forward. Options for how this might look and some of the issues that would need to be considered further were outlined.

Members recognised that the emphasis of agile working would need to be service driven but areas such as how the process might work included staff circumstances, whether the role was suitable for working from home, monitoring performance and hybrid arrangements which would need to be considered carefully. Members raised the possibility of involving experts from other organisations that had successfully implemented an agile working policy.

The Committee recognised the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Manager, as well as the wider Governance Team and thanked them for their support. Members also praised the work of the Committees across the Council for continuing to operate and deliver a high standard of work.

OSC/ Forward Plan of Executive Decisions - 15 February 2021 - 15 March 2021

54/2

0-21 AGREED – That the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions – 15 February 2021 to 15 March 2021 be noted.

OSC/ Work Programme

55/2

0-21 AGREED – That the Work Programme be noted.

OSC/ Additional Urgent Items

56/2

0-21 There were no additional urgent items.

OSC/ Date of Next Meeting

57/2

0-21 The next meeting of the Organisation Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 11 May 2021 at 10.00 am.