



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Working Group - Workforce**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 29 March 2021 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor C Anderson (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

J A Hale
M H Jones
G J Tanner

Councillor(s)

C A Holley
S M Jones
L V Walton

Councillor(s)

L James
C L Philpott

Other Attendees

Andrea Lewis

Cabinet Member - Homes, Energy & Service Transformation (Deputy Leader)

Clive Lloyd

Cabinet Member - Adult Social Care & Community Health Services

Officer(s)

Geoff Bacon
Adrian Chard

Head of Property Services
Strategic Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager

Adam Hill
Liz Jordan

Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Resources
Scrutiny Officer

Sarah Lackenby

Chief Digital & Transformation Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): M Durke, D H Hopkins and A H Stevens

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

No disclosures of interest were made.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

No declarations were made.

3 Public Question Time

No questions were submitted.

4 WORKFORCE Report

Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy and Service Transformation and Clive Lloyd, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Community Health Services attended for this item, together with relevant officers.

Sarah Lackenby, Chief Transformation Officer provided a brief update.

Cabinet Members and officers responded to questions provided by Working Group Members prior to the meeting and further questions raised at the meeting.

The following main issues were discussed:

- Panel felt mapping was important and requested baseline data and comparative information for last 3 years, to see if more or fewer staff in total and where the changes have occurred. Officers will circulate it to the Panel.
- Sickness levels appear to have reduced. There will be more work undertaken to look into it in more detail.
- A lot of activity on Track, Trace, Protect (TTP) and volunteering. Great how workforce responded to crisis. Staff eager to be involved and to help out where they could at food banks etc.
- Health and Safety put in place a large amount of support for the wellbeing of the workforce. Staff have been encouraged to take leave, especially from the summer onwards and this continues. If staff are unable to take leave they are able to carry over up to 20 days annual leave to be taken in next two years.
- Panel queried Trade Union (TU) engagement and insights. Informed meetings with Unions were held weekly during height of pandemic and are now held two-weekly. Any issues were raised and addressed at the meetings and the Director of Social Services attended first 10 minutes to answer direct questions about Social Services.
- Panel queried if staff have found it harder to work from home as time has gone on. Informed results of survey were very positive. 87% said they liked working from home. Intention is to follow it up with another staff survey in a few months, now that restrictions are lifting.
- Panel asked about the route for staff to take if they are not getting support. Informed in survey, 77% of staff felt they knew where to go to get help. There are different avenues. Officers felt staff should speak to line manager in first instance, or if they feel they cannot, can go to Human Resources or can refer directly into the Psychological Support Service (Psychological First Aid) and can access information online.
- Panel was concerned about whether staff want to work from home because it makes them happy and suits their lifestyle or because they are afraid to go out. Panel feel all staff should have some face-to-face contact with colleagues/managers and queried if this is happening. Officers confirmed in survey, 84% said they would like to work two days or more from home after pandemic; 85% said they feel more productive working from home. Officers said they had not heard of staff so far being afraid to go out. This will be explored in the follow up survey. If staff have to go into the office, making sure they have a safe environment.
- Panel raised issue about when offices re-open and meetings start again in person. They asked what the general feeling was about staff stress and anxiety of meeting face-to-face, especially with the public. Officers confirmed

trying to assess what risks will be and putting appropriate measures in place to ensure staff have appropriate equipment and social distancing in place between member of staff and public. All this is being documented in risk assessment and managers working with teams on this.

- Discussed staff stress and anxiety and whether the Authority employs psychologists in the Wellbeing Team. Officers felt it was something that needs to be reviewed when we come out of pandemic, under Workforce Planning. Front line staff have found it invaluable. Officers believe the Authority employ Talking Therapists (not psychologists) and will confirm their technical role outside of the meeting. Officers confirmed it is made clear to managers they have to be aware of potential health impacts of Covid, and if they identify any potential issue then its referred to occupational health as a stress related issue. Guidance also makes clear, managers to ensure they talk to staff on a regular basis.
- From Adult Services and Child and Family Services point of view, there is opportunity for Psychological First Aid run by Occupational Health and Corporate Services, offered to front line staff in social care. Directorate is also working with Association of Social workers on a wider wellbeing and psychological toolkit that staff can access online as and when they need to.
- Regarding vaccinations, officers confirmed front line staff in key areas have been offered vaccine. Adult Social Care staff were main cohort in priority two; 89% have received first dose, 74% second dose. In Education, specialist school staff were added into this cohort. A very small number not inclined to take vaccination.
- Panel asked about staff carrying out a role that was face-to-face with the public before the pandemic, and how this is working now as staff are working from home. Informed it is a mixed picture. Some face-to-face roles are continuing where they need too. Risk assessments are being done for these. Other roles have shifted to telephone and email support where people cannot get online.
- Panel also queried the effect staff working from home has had on the public as it feels many members of the public are not computer literate. Informed there was some work with Local Area Coordinators and the Third Sector, helping people directly who had to shift to online channels and needed help. Digital inclusion quite high in Swansea. Post pandemic officers hope older people will find it helpful to access more services by phone / online.
- District Housing Offices closed during pandemic. Surge to more residents contacting department online. Authority has been wanting this to happen. Cabinet Member thinks it is a success story.
- Authority has a stand-alone home working policy. It will be circulated to Panel following the meeting.
- Panel thought many of the staff who continued to work through pandemic might have been agency staff or outsourced staff and queried if we will be bringing those staff and services in-house. Panel's suggestion to take on agency staff who worked as refuse collectors etc will be taken back to the appropriate department to consider.
- Roll out of agile working will continue with further dialogue on aspects of it. Future agile working policy goes beyond pandemic.
- Panel felt flexibility of working from home is sometimes taken too far and home becomes work place not home. Officers confirmed will be optional to work from home in future. Plan is to offer flexible working; one of the locations is

working from home. It is job specific, for some jobs not appropriate to work from home, as need team support to do best for residents in Swansea.

- Panel queried how staff will be encouraged to complete the next survey and if it will be anonymous to enable a good appraisal. Officers confirmed first survey was anonymous and second one will be too. The response was exceptional with positivity around home working. Results of next survey, taking place around May time, will be analysed to see if opinion has changed.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

The Working Group discussed progress and made the following conclusions:

1. We would like to give our thanks and acknowledge the hard work and commitment of all staff, the senior management team and everyone in the organisation who have worked so hard doing their jobs and supporting the people of Swansea in very difficult times.
2. We found the briefing very informative and we are reassured that the Authority is doing what it can to support its workforce during and post pandemic.
3. We feel that mapping is important and ask that the supplementary data and comparative information requested prior to the meeting be provided to the Panel.
4. We were pleased to hear about the extensive engagement with the trade unions and hope that this will continue in the future.
5. We support the approach of having an agile working policy and accommodation strategy that is more flexible and provides work/life balance, whilst still meeting the needs of the residents of Swansea.
6. We recommend that support for health and wellbeing of staff be part of home working and request a copy of the stand-alone home working policy.
7. We made the suggestion and would like reassurance that agency workers, who have worked through the pandemic, will be offered a position with the Authority.
8. Regarding mental health help, we would like clarification of the correct procedure for staff to follow, the services they can access for help and what happens after the initial contact has been made. We would also like to see data on a) sickness taken for this reason, b) whether people think they have been helped and c) the services they accessed to get this help. We do not feel the follow up survey will pick this up.
9. We would like confirmation of the correct title for 'Talking Therapists', if they are employed by the Authority, and their role.
10. We would like reassurance that if a blended approach is taken, that members of the public who are not computer literate or are vulnerable will be given the help they need and that issues will be resolved, for example, phones are answered

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or forwarded on to someone else; issues with uploading photos for blue badge holders are resolved.

11. We will be recommending to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that a follow up meeting of this Working Group is held in six months, when the results of the follow up survey have been analysed and we understand better what the future holds for the Authority and its workforce.

Following on from this meeting:

A letter will be written from the Convener of the Working Group to the Cabinet Members, summarising the discussion and outlining the Working Group's thoughts and recommendations.

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm