



**To/
Councillor David Hopkins
Cabinet Member for Corporate
Services & Performance**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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SPC/2022-23/4

16 December 2022

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 15 November 2022. It is about the follow up on the Workforce Scrutiny Working Group. A formal written response is required by 6 January.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 15 November: Follow up – Workforce Scrutiny Working Group

The Committee takes responsibility for following up on previous Scrutiny Working Groups, to check on progress with the topic / issue(s) and response to any specific suggestions or recommendations made and agreed action coming out of the scrutiny session.

At our Committee meeting in November, we followed up on the Workforce Scrutiny Working Group, which last met and concluded in Feb 2022 having originally met in March 2021. The Working Group included discussion on the impact of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of staff; how the Council is supporting this; issues around home working; staff sickness; staff turnover; use of agency staff and pressures. We noted that the Working Group were positive about the way the Council was supporting the workforce and councillors had confidence that the Authority was progressing in the right direction.

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Thank you for the comprehensive report on progress since the Working Group, including update on issues raised by the Working Group, informing us of actions taken in the delivery of work and achievements on Workforce. We appreciated Rachael Davies, recently appointed Head of HR & Service Centre, taking the Committee through this report at our meeting. We heard about key developments including recent agreement by Cabinet of a Post Pandemic Working Model (and seven agreed principles), and Workforce Strategy 2022-27, which now provided a longer-term picture and clearer focus on workforce priorities. We agreed that there should be clarity around standards and expectations regarding future working and customer contact, given there is now an established mix of office and home working across the organisation. We noted that each service area should now be producing a set of principles and operational requirements, including public access, and analysis of job roles and their position regarding agile working taking account of the needs of the service, to provide a definitive picture for the longer-term.

The latest position was also provided on wellbeing and sickness absence, agency workers, HR and Service Centre operations, Headcount/FTE, and Occupational Health Data. We noted that there has also been reporting to the Governance & Audit Committee following internal audits on Absence Management and the Employment of Agency Staff and improvement actions taken.

Staff wellbeing and sickness absence is clearly a big concern, and we noted that Covid related issues have had a significant impact on the level of absence over the past year but is hopefully on the decrease. We discussed the importance of approaches to helping those coming back from long-term sickness such as phased return, e.g., temporary reduction of hours, changes in work patterns, light duties, in conjunction with input from Occupational Health, and any medical advice.

With so much home working, it raises concern about how effectively we can monitor the mental health of staff who are working remotely and get support in place, but were given assurance about management processes in place and expectations that all members of staff have regular contact with managers about their wellbeing and performance, and clear lines of communication to talk about issues. We asked about training provision for managers on recognising and responding to mental health issues, to improve awareness and ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills to effectively support members of staff and make positive interventions. We noted there have been longstanding issues with training records because of weaknesses in existing Council ICT system reporting, but is expected to be resolved with the implementation of the new Oracle Fusion system from April 2023. We hope that the new system does deliver the anticipated improvements which should enable accurate and 'on demand' reporting on all learning and development training activity, including wellbeing and occupational health training. We welcome the availability of live 'day by day' reporting next year, but would

however appreciate any current data on the uptake of wellbeing / mental health training across the Authority if you are able to provide this.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. Specifically, we would appreciate any data that tells us about the uptake of wellbeing / mental health training by staff.

Please provide your response to this and any other comments about our letter by 6 January. We will then publish both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Black', written in a cursive style.

COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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