

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 7 June 2021 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T G Belben (Chair)

Kiran Khan (Vice-Chair)

M L Ayling, R G Burgess, R A Lanzer, Sue Mullins, Atif Nawaz, Simon Piggott,
A Pendlington and B A Smith

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R D Burrett

Officers Present:

Carron Burton

HR and OD Manager

Siraj Choudhury

Head of Legal, Governance & HR

Heather Girling

Democratic Services Officer

1. Disclosures of Interest and Whipping Declarations

The following disclosures were made:

Councillor	Item and Minute	Type and Nature of Disclosure
Councillor R A Lanzer	Appointments and Membership of Scrutiny Panels - HASC (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing
Councillor R A Lanzer	Appointments and Membership of Scrutiny Panels - JSSG (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor A Nawaz	Appointments and Membership of Scrutiny Panels - Council-Owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – CBC Parade Tenant/Shop Owner

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 8 March 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Staff Sickness Levels with Covid 19 and the Effects of Working From Home

Commission Members considered report [LDS/166](#) of the Head of Legal, Governance and HR. Under the scrutiny procedure rules, Councillor T Belben had requested a report on staff sickness levels with Covid19 and the effects and impacts of working from home.

During the discussion the following points were expressed:

Over the course of the pandemic sickness levels had decreased and this had been the national trend and throughout the rest of West Sussex. This was potentially due to a variety of reasons as a result of people exercising social distancing, improvements to hygiene (hand washing) together with home working. Viral infection data had also seen a reduction in the last quarter.

Recognition and support had been provided throughout the pandemic to employees working from home and to those not able to do so. It was acknowledged that staff were the most valuable asset and flexibility had been applied and work patterns adjusted where appropriate, particularly whilst home-schooling.

Support mechanisms were discussed in detail (Appendix A), some of these included:

- Counselling service. Council participates in partner counselling service and during the pandemic saw an increase in requests to be referred to counselling.
- Mental Health First Aiders – staff trained to be accessible for others to be contactable at ‘mini crisis points’ and also signpost to other support services.
- Able Futures – A Government Initiative to support people with mental health requirements. A self-referral service lasting a period of 9 month accessible for anyone in employment.
- Mindfulness course – self-motivated online course.
- Managers’ sessions – to ensure managers have the skills to support their team working from home.
- Reflective practice – assists in self-care and resilience.
- Staff surveys – 3 surveys issued and completed during the Covid period.
- HR consultants meet with managers on a regular basis to ‘sense-check on employees’ health and wellbeing.

The majority of the initiatives would continue in the future to aid employees’ health and wellbeing, with additional mechanisms being developed. However there was an acknowledgement that further promotional work was required.

Commission Members then raised a number of queries. The issues raised and the key responses included:

- Recognition that the pandemic placed added pressure on staff, all of whom responded quickly to working from home or continuing to work on the front line. The infrastructure had been in place to ensure a transition for home working and it

had been important to ensure a fluid support package was maintained. Further demand was placed on staff for those home schooling, if an individual was vulnerable or had a medical condition. In all instances support was provided. Should a further lockdown ensue, staff would adopt an agile approach to be able to 'flex-back' to home working.

- Acknowledgement that there was an element that people would be home working when marginally unwell due to the enhanced effort required to travel to the office. However there was a need to ensure that staff were not working when ill. The flexibility with hours and work patterns could support this.
- There was the possibility that sickness levels may increase following 21 June 2021 as restrictions were eased. However, staff would only be working in the office a few days a week and hand sanitisers and social distancing would still be maintained. Discussions have taken place in order to alleviate any reluctance to return and this would be completed in a phased manner.
- The Council's Covid19 Response Group met regularly and looked at future work patterns which included agile working, flexible approach, and having the correct infrastructure in place. This in turn aligned to getting ready to working in the new town hall whereby staff would be working a hybrid approach consisting of the office a few days a week and home working.
- Acknowledgement that upon returning to the office, further investigation may be required to ensure the wellbeing of staff. It was confirmed that managers were in regular contact with staff, both via MSTeams and face to face, where appropriate. In terms of the support mechanisms and the opportunities available, further work would be underway to increase the promotion of these via different platforms.
- Confirmation provided that there had not been an increase in the top 3 outside Covid related sickness absences (stress, mental health and muscular skeletal), despite many staff working from home and being in unfamiliar surroundings. Advice had been provided in relation to home working.
- Every year the Council continued to provide flu vaccines for staff and this take up had increased annually. Thought had been given to Covid vaccinations and whilst staff had been encouraged to be vaccinated, along with undertaking lateral flow testing, it was still an individual's choice.
- Confirmation provided that discussions had been held with staff as to preferred office days. It was important to be flexible and gain a balance. However the Town Hall, Depot and Tilgate Park would be the designated work place.
- The possibility of a health screening salary sacrifice scheme was suggested as a potential benefit for the health and wellbeing of staff.
- Confirmation that the Council would continue to follow the government's guidelines, whilst preparing to move to the new Town Hall. The work undertaken during the pandemic aligned itself with the transformation work and flexible service delivery, able to serve customers outside 8am-5pm allowing greater access to Council services. It was recognised there was a 'new normal' and staff had adopted skills which were interchangeable between home and office.
- Recognition that a further staff survey would be formulated during the summer. It would be paramount to ensure that the HR dept was part of the vetting process in terms of the questions. It was requested that the OSC receive a follow up report in 6-12 months' time (depending on timescales and circumstances).

RESOLVED

That the Commission notes the report, with the views expressed being acknowledged and documented by the officers. It was agreed that a follow up report be received by the Commission in 6-12 months' time.

5. **Appointments and Membership of Scrutiny Panels**

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted and approved the following memberships and appointments:

Council-Owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

Councillors Ayling, Lanzer, Lunnon, S Mullins, Mwangale and Peck, with Councillor Lanzer as Chair

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC)

It was moved by Councillor Ayling, seconded by Councillor Khan, that Councillor S Mullins be the Council's representative for HASC. Whilst Councillor Pendlington moved, seconded by Councillor Lanzer that Councillor R G Burgess be the Council appointment.

A vote was taken. Having put it to the vote which resulted in a tie, the Chair used their casting vote.

Councillor R G Burgess was appointed as the representative for the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Steering Group (JSSG)

Councillor T Belben

6. **Scrutiny Workshop**

A Scrutiny Workshop had been provisionally proposed for Wednesday 16 June. However, instead it was agreed to hold a small training session at this time for all Commission members.

7. **Forthcoming Decision List - and Provisional List of Reports for the Commission's following Meetings**

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

28 June 2021

1. Treasury Management Outturn 2020 – 2021
2. Financial Outturn 2020-2021 (Quarter 4)
3. Leisure Contract - Further Extension of Variation Order
4. Temporary Accommodation Modular Housing Solution
5. Telford Place Development Opportunity (Part B)
6. Crawley Fusion Innovation Centre Scheme (Part B)

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.52 pm

T G Belben (Chair)