

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 13 June 2022 at 8.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T G Belben (Chair)

K Khan (Vice-Chair)

M L Ayling, H Hellier, I T Irvine, R A Lanzer, A Pendlington, S Piggott, S Pritchard, T Rana and S Sivarajah

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R D Burrett and S Malik

Officers Present:

Siraj Choudhury Head of Governance, People & Performance

Heather Girling Democratic Services Officer

Joe Mottershead HR Consultant

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 – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Appointments and Membership Of Scrutiny Panels (HASC) (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member for Public Health & Wellbeing

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 14 March 2022 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 Update Report

Commission Members considered report [LDS/184](#) of the Head of Governance, People & Performance. In June 2021, Councillor T Belben under the Scrutiny Procurement Rules had requested a report on staff sickness levels with Covid19 and the effects and impacts of working from home and an update was provided in November 2021. It was recommended that the OSC receive an annual update on staff welfare, sickness and morale.

During the discussion, with the Head of Governance, People & Performance and HR Consultant, the following points were expressed:

- Throughout the pandemic the majority of staff worked from home, whilst those that were not able to do so, continued their operational duties following completed risk assessments.
- It was acknowledged that whilst staff had been previously testing this had resulted in more cases of Covid being documented. However, as testing requirements had eased the number of cases had decreased and the number of staff since May had not reached double figures. In terms of figures and Covid absences, during 2021/22 quarter 4 Covid sickness was 24%, and Covid isolation was 1%. This compared to Q3 figures of Covid sickness 13% and Covid isolation of 1%. In terms of overall sickness, during quarter 4 stomach, liver, kidney attributed to 11%, stress, depression and mental health 8% and other musculoskeletal 8%.
- Staff had been asked to have a presence in the office at least two days per week if full time and one day a week for part time staff and the Council had seen little resistance to this change and adaptation to hybrid working. It was anticipated that this hybrid working would continue as the Council progressed to the new Town hall.
- The Council had continued to provide flu vaccines for staff and this take up had increased annually. In 2019, 167 individuals took up the offer and this had increased to 174 in 2020 and again in 2021 to 215 individuals. The Council would shortly be rolling out the programme for 2022.
- The Council's offer of support to staff had been made through the learning and development programme. The support outlined in report [LDS/166](#) remained and was further documented in [LDS/184](#). Part of the offer with further workshops for all colleagues had been delivered by Microsoft Teams and CBC Learning Channel and the workshop offer for people managers had been increased, including introducing those 'in person'. The Council's Wellbeing Team also delivered various sessions as an aid to assist employees.
- Additional sessions and workshops had been arranged for people managers along with the launch of a revised appraisal scheme.
- There continued to be a take up of the counselling service. 123 staff members had used the service since 2019, although it was not apparent if the figures included repeated sessions during this period (2019 = 41, 2020 = 34, 2021 = 32, 2022 = 16 to date). The offer to staff is one round comprising of 6 sessions. The Council was seeing a number of people requiring more than the 6 sessions and in part this was attributed to the difficulty in obtaining GP referrals and NHS mental health service referrals. In general, the feedback from the counselling service following the completion of sessions was positive and the numbers requiring the service over the last few years had decreased.
- It was also recognised that the Council had Mental Health first aiders who were trained to listen and guide staff to appropriate support if required. They compliment, rather than replace, the essential relationship staff had with their line

manager in helping individuals to stay both physically and mentally healthy in work.

- Staff surveys continued to be carried out and whilst the overall results continued to remain positive, one area that saw a downward trend was that staff were finding workload levels more challenging. It was hoped that the additional workshops and the refreshed appraisal scheme would assist in planning ahead for the coming year whilst looking to future support.
- It was recognised that whilst there was responsibility on the Council (as employer) to ensure it exercised its duty of care to staff there was also a need for staff to take responsibility for themselves, take advantage of the support and reach out when they were struggling.

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

- Query was raised whether the Council had responded to the [LGA Covid-19 Workforce Survey 2022](#). It contained specific information and data, such as, of those authorities that responded, two-thirds (66%) of the staff were unavailable because of 'Non-Covid sickness' (4% of all staff) and 25% were unavailable due to 'Confirmed/suspected Covid' (1% of all staff). When asked to assess the Council overall, in terms of whether they had enough staff to run services normally or not, of those that had responded, 53% of councils reported they were not operating normally. In response, it was acknowledged that the Council had experienced operational pressures within specific services, but the gradual return of the workforce had assisted in minimising risk.
- It was acknowledged there was difficulty in recruitment to various professional roles due to a skill shortage. Work had been carried out in terms of marketing and adapting the current recruitment material.
- It was queried whether a cost/benefit analysis had been conducted with regards to permanent remote working as it was thought this may assist not only in recruitment but also capacity, workload and efficiencies. In response, recent staff survey results had indicated that a balanced approach had been the preference due to the impact full remote working had on individual's mental health together with the implications for working/social relationships and inductions. However further work could be investigated.
- There was appreciation for the support and counselling currently on offer for staff, but it was requested if a distinction could be made between office and operational staff attending counselling to determine any trends for further support. It was confirmed that those requiring the service were encouraged to attend counselling at a beneficial time and managers to support this.
- Recognition that the pandemic had resulted in added pressure on staff. It was recognised there was other challenges the workforce may face going forwards and there was a need to identify the workload pressures and gaps. The staff surveys assisted in identifying the demands, anxieties and staff satisfaction.
- It was acknowledged that the legacy of the Covid pandemic would remain with the Council for a long time to come.
- The Commission's gratitude was relayed to the officers, particularly the HR and OD Manager who had contributed to the report. It wished to continue to receive an annual update.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and progress, with the views expressed being acknowledged and documented by the officers.

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, K Khan, Lanzer, Mwagale, Peck, Rana, with Councillor Lanzer as Chair.

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC)

It was moved by Councillor Khan, seconded by Councillor Ayling that Councillor Irvine be the Council's representative for HASC. There were no other nominations.

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

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

4 July

Treasury Management Outturn 2021 – 2022

Financial Outturn 2021-2022 (Quarter 4)

Public Spaces Protection Order - Keep your dog on a lead in Tilgate Park

Online Benefits (Part B)

Telford Place Land Proposal (Part B)

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.34 pm.

T G Belben (Chair)