

**BARNSELEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**29<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2014**

5. **Present:** Councillors Ennis (Chair), D. Birkinshaw, P Birkinshaw, Brook, G Carr, Cave, Clarke, Davies, Frost, Hand-Davis, Hayward, Johnson, Makinson, Mathers, Mitchell, Morgan, Sim, Tattersall, Unsworth, Wilson and Worton together with co-opted Member Ms P Gould and statutory co-opted members Mr W A Haigh and Mr J Winter. - Parent Governor Representative and - Parent Governor Representative

Apologies for absence were received from Ms K Morrith in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

6. **Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest**

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest.

7. **Minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014 were approved as a true and accurate record, following the addition of Mr J Winter to the list of attendees.

8. **Task and Finish Group – new topic – Health Trainers**

The report of the Director of Human Resources, Performance and Communications was discussed. The purpose of the report was to ascertain the level of interest from Members in being involved in the Task and Finish Group topic of 'Health Trainers'. The topic falls within the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2014/15. Members were asked to send expressions of interest to either Cllr Ennis or Elizabeth Barnard by Friday 8<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

9. **Corporate Plan Performance Framework/work programme topic: Job Creation**

The report of the Director of Human Resources, Performance and Communications in respect of the topic of 'Job Creation' was considered. Performance indicator GE1 shows that the number of jobs in Barnsley in 2010 was 80,000. The number of jobs in 2011 was 81,000. According to figures released in April 2014, the year end out-turn for 2012 was 78,000 against a target of 82,000. This represents a shortfall of 4,000 jobs and shows a downward trend. For this reason, the traffic light status for this indicator is flagged as 'red' in the corporate plan performance report, indicating that performance is below target and thus is a cause for concern.

Mark Lynam, Head of Regeneration, Development, Environment and Culture (Strategy, Growth and Regeneration) was welcomed to the meeting. He gave an overview of Barnsley's economic journey; the changes in the job market in Barnsley

between 2009-12 and the challenge Barnsley is facing. There is a need to attract additional businesses to Barnsley; increase the number of jobs available; diversify the business base towards higher value sectors and increase the skill levels of Barnsley residents. Barnsley's economy is too small for the size of the Borough and the number of jobs available is contracting. Barnsley has 39,000 less jobs than it needs to get to a comparable average. The Jobs and Business Plan has been developed to address these issues and deliver the required growth.

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- (i) How does Barnsley compare with other Local Authorities?

Barnsley is comparable with its close neighbours, with some subtle differences. Leeds and Sheffield are in a different league altogether. Barnsley needs to strive to get to the regional average.

A Member pointed out that if people live in Barnsley but commute to the larger regional centres that is not necessarily a bad thing, especially with improved communication and transport links. They may work elsewhere but if they live and spend money in the Borough this is good for Barnsley.

- (ii) What plans are in place to support unemployed young people into jobs?

It was explained that this will be within the Children Young People and Families Employment Skills Strategy, aligned to the Jobs and Business Plan. Barnsley College is keen to look at the logistics sector as this is a big sector for the future. Members felt that if young people left the Barnsley area to find work they were unlikely to come back. There is a need to get the Advanced Learning Centres (ALCs) on board with careers advice when thinking about future employment, as sometimes young people choose the wrong courses. Young people have different expectations and training has to be in place to match need across a broad spectrum of job opportunities. There is a need to focus on core skills such as numeracy and literacy and work ethic and attitude to make sure that young people are 'work ready'.

It was pointed out that manufacturing has picked up recently but that it takes a number of years to reverse the trend. A good mix of high value manufacturing and logistics is required, not simply low paid distribution jobs.

- (iii) Is there any support for jobs in construction?

Construction is a good indicator of the state of the economy. Work is underway with the College and the option of placing conditions on developers under Section 106 arrangements (employment/apprentices) is under consideration.

- (iv) When will up to date figures for regeneration and employment be available? Are figures available from other organisations such as Barnsley Chamber of Commerce, Job Centre Plus or Barnsley College?

It was explained that up to date information will be available by the end of the year. The Council works closely with other organisations but trends can take 20 to 30 years to reverse and may not be reflected in the information.

Barnsley now has a new research and intelligence resource, 'MOSAIC' which gives access to over 850 million items of data including crime statistics and household information.

The scale of the task should not be underestimated. 39,000 jobs will not be provided by existing businesses alone, new businesses need to be brought to Barnsley but local people need the right skills to access jobs. There is a deficit of industrial land. More will need to be released and consideration given to investing in commercial development and infrastructure such as roads etc., to attract businesses. An application has been submitted to the Sheffield City Region to improve infrastructure around Junction 36. Members recalled that previous Objective 1 funding had been granted to the region based on the Gross Domestic Products of Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham but that most of the money was spent on infrastructure for Sheffield and that Barnsley didn't receive its fair share.

Mark was thanked for his attendance and contribution.

**10. Corporate Plan Performance Framework/work programme topic: Sickness Absence**

Julia Bell, Director of Human Resources, Performance and Communications and Lorraine Harrison, HR Manager, Business Advisory Service, were welcomed to the meeting and invited to give an overview of the issue of sickness absence.

It was pointed out that sickness absence comes under the Corporate Health – Sustainable Council priority within the Corporate Plan. One of the themes around corporate health is in relation to 'People', encompassing sickness, performance and development reviews (PDRs), training plans and apprentice placements. The Quarter 4 (January to March 2013/14) Corporate Plan Performance Report, shows that there has been an increase in long term sickness absence, with a reduction in the levels of short term absences. However, the overall trend for the Council for 2013/14 shows an increase in absence levels over the period, with an average of 11 days lost through sickness absence against a target of 9.

A number of initiatives have been implemented, including the appointment of two Employee Wellbeing Advisors who work with managers across the organisation to ensure sickness absence procedures are being followed consistently and fairly and that employees are being supported through targeted interventions, particularly when a pattern of absence seems to be emerging. Other preventative initiatives are being explored, including routine workplace health checks. .

The main areas for targeted interventions are: musculoskeletal (including strains and sprains) and stress. Absence through stress includes work related stress and stress arising from domestic situations which then impacts on work. Managers are trained about the impact of stress on staff and have requested an online (BOLD) module. The Council is also looking at the effectiveness of current flexible working policies. It was highlighted that sickness absence in 2004/5 was 13.6 days per employee, which then reduced to 9 days but has now crept back up to 11 (5 days short term, 6 days long term).

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

(i) Is age a factor in sickness absence?

Although age can affect sickness absence, particularly for manual, physically demanding jobs, managers are encouraged to look at what employees are fit to do whilst they are recovering. Terms and conditions are good, with employees paid from day one of illness, with 6 months at full pay followed by 6 months half pay. There is no intention of looking at punitive measures such as stopping payments while staff are sick, but rather pro-active preventative measures are being explored.

A member felt that HR had worked hard to address sickness absence across the authority, which despite current performance was better than it was in previous years and should be congratulated for their continued efforts.

(ii) Are there any plans to use the 'Bradford Scale' in Barnsley?

It was pointed out that this is a weighted model, with points allocated to staff before actions are taken. There are no plans to introduce this, or anything similar, at the moment. Members expressed concern that with the size of the authority reducing, there could be instances of one member of staff being left to do the work of three. Members were reassured that although there was a need to downsize to a degree, there is no expectation that a member of staff will have to do the work of colleagues who are no longer here.

(iii) In terms of long term sickness, how many of that number are due to serious illnesses?

HR does have sickness information broken down by conditions, including staff with cancer and other life-limiting conditions. This will be provided to the Committee. Long term sickness starts after 4 weeks. Staff on long term sickness can return to work at any time if they psychologically want to be at work. Sadly last year there were 11 employees who died in service.

(iv) How can staff who do attend be rewarded? Is attendance incentivised?

There is a long service award for 25 years service and the workforce is largely very loyal, in difficult circumstances. Latest figures show that 1620 staff didn't have a single day off and reference was made to an employee who hadn't had a single day off sick in over 40 years. The concept of incentivising attendance is a difficult one, with a wide variety of opinion across the Council. It would be difficult in the current circumstances to reward staff financially or with extra days' leave. Whatever system is implemented, it must be fair, flexible and consistent with accurate reporting and recording. It may be that a simple 'thank you' letter from the Chief Executive would be a good first step.

(v) What policies are in place to support staff who are absent long term due to stress?

As highlighted earlier, staff can be absent through stress which is work related or originates at home. Staff are interviewed after 4 weeks' absence. If that member of

staff has an issue with their manager, they are able to talk in confidence to a named HR Link Officer. There is also a Whistleblowing Policy in place. A workplace counsellor is no longer employed but a panel of 10-12 independent trained counsellors is available. There is a need for staff to be open and honest so that effective support can be put in place.

(vi) Are clusters of sickness absence identified?

Clusters are examined, particularly in terms of accidents at work which may indicate a health and safety issue, but it is rare to find clusters of stress related absence.

(vii) What is the role of Occupational Health?

The Occupational Health Unit is now much reduced. A Doctor is retained and a call-off contract with Barnsley Hospital is in place for nurse practitioner services. Fast-track physiotherapy is also available to help employees to return to work quickly.

(viii) When will we know if the interventions are working? How do we compare with other local authorities?

By September, which will be 5 or 6 months after the interventions, we should know if the measures which have been put in place are working. Immediate action will be taken if the figures do not show some improvement.

Barnsley is in the top quartile when compared to other South Yorkshire Authorities, but is starting to creep up. Information is available across the Yorkshire and Humber region, but as this is calculated differently it may not be helpful for comparison purposes.

(ix) If the Government policy is for people to work longer, will this impact on sickness absence, as people could still be working at the age of 70?

It was highlighted that some people have to work until they are older because of financial commitments and pension concerns and some continue to work because they want to. There will be a need to look at how people are employed and at demographics. Some staff struggle throughout their 50s and 60s whilst others work up to the age of 70 without a problem.

Witnesses were thanked for their attendance and contributions.

**IT WAS AGREED** that:

- a) Data regarding long term sickness absence, broken down by condition, will be provided for consideration by the committee.
- b) The 'MOSAIC' resource will be searched to examine if useful background information around employment and demographics is available which could be considered by the Committee.

The Chair reported that Elizabeth Barnard, Scrutiny and Member Development Officer, would be leaving shortly to take up a post in the Council's Governance Unit. Members showed their appreciation for the work she had done with Scrutiny in Barnsley with a round of applause.