

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Growing Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday, 8 March 2022
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bowler, Cain, Fielding, Green, Hayward, Lodge, Markham, McCarthy, Osborne, Risebury, Sumner and Tattersall.

48 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

49 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Lodge declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 51 as his partner is employed by BMBC.

Councillor Sumner declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 51 as her brother is employed by BMBC.

Councillor Risebury declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 51 as she is a Trade Union employee and member.

50 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Sustainable Barnsley Workstream meeting held on 8th February were received.

51 A Sustainable Workplace and a Healthy Workforce

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

Phil Quinn, Head of Service HR & Organisation Development, Core Services, BMBC
 Janet Glover, HR Advisor - Employee Wellbeing, Core Services, BMBC
 Ben Potts, Project Manager (Workstyle), Core Services, BMBC
 Michael Potter, Service Director Business Improvement, HR & Communications, Core Services BMBC
 Cllr Alan Gardiner, Cabinet Spokesperson Core Services, BMBC (attended virtually)

Michael Potter introduced the report, informing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the initiatives developed to support the emotional and physical wellbeing of employees, particularly during the pandemic. Key findings from the Feb 2020 (pre-

pandemic), May 2020 and October 2020 staff surveys were shared and Members were updated with regard to the actions implemented as a result of the surveys.

Members were informed how employee wellbeing was addressed during the pandemic and how different ways of working will help to sustain the organisation and drive it towards 2030, as well as helping to support our workforce in the process. An update on the progress the organisation is making in the return to the workplace was presented, which will involve working to a new hybrid model which will encourage green and active travel.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge the following matters were highlighted:

The gender pay gap identified within the staff surveys will be picked up in a series of action plans related to the People Strategy. The 2021 report showed positive progress in this regard, but will continue to be monitored at all levels within the organisation. Career progression routes for females with caring responsibilities are being monitored to ensure that any barriers are removed. Barnsley's aim is to make BMBC an employer of choice by offering flexibility, apprenticeships and coaching and mentoring opportunities alongside consideration of a development programme specifically for women in social care as it is acknowledged that the barriers females in work face are different to those faced by men.

Under the 'Barnsley is Our Office' initiative it has been agreed that from 4th April employees will work from a Barnsley location three days per week (with some exceptions). A myriad of different working patterns are being considered alongside a requirement for flexible office working space. Staff wellbeing will be monitored throughout the implementation and a range of metrics are currently being drawn up to monitor sickness absence, productivity, retention and recruitment. This will be monitored continuously and fully evaluated after six months. Staff reaction to the proposals has been mixed. Misconceptions and concerns will be addressed in individual teams.

BMBC has teamed up with Health Assured to deliver an employee assistance programme to support staff health and wellbeing. The scheme costs c£5,000 annually. Usage is slow at the moment, but it is fairly new scheme and will be further promoted. Regular usage statistics are provided. Support from the scheme is also available to the wider family of the employee. The breadth of support offered includes legal and financial support and guidance and help with addiction and relationship issues.

There have been a number of positives arising out of the pandemic. One of these is digital progression. For example, the use of Microsoft Teams in children's social care has led to increased productivity and quicker decision making in a more business-like manner. Every service now has a business continuity plan in place. Public perception of the Council appears to have improved due to the support that the Council has given during the pandemic. Partnership working is more effective, particularly with health partners such as SWYFT and Barnsley Hospital. The pandemic shone a light on the value of staff working from home and demonstrated that an agile hybrid working model works for the organisation and for individuals, particularly for those with caring responsibilities. Awareness of, and support for, staff

mental health and wellbeing has improved because of the pandemic, breaking down barriers for all.

There was a degree of staff anxiety within the organisation before the pandemic, as highlighted in the staff survey. This was due to a combination of factors, including: the challenges facing the organisation in terms of workload, budget cuts etc, the level of uncertainty in the jobs market, the ongoing impact of the austerity measures and the rising profile of mental health and anxiety problems. It is important that managers recognise mental health difficulties in their staff and support them to get the help and support they need in order to create a positive and inclusive culture. Targeted support for teams and individuals is available and there is an occupational health and counselling service with individual risk assessments for staff returning to work.

Work is being done across the organisation to ensure women are not disadvantaged due to issues such as caring responsibilities, maternity leave etc., with a range of options available including part time and flexible working. Lone workers are identified and individually risk assessed. Staff (of either gender) appear to be reluctant to report violence and aggression and this needs to improve. Car parking arrangements at Westgate are being reviewed so that staff do not have to walk long distances late at night. Childcare vouchers are available and the availability of creche facilities for staff, possibly with a discount, will be explored as the cost of childcare can sometimes be prohibitive.

Levels of work related stress are difficult to determine as there are multiple reasons for stress, only some of which may be work related. Workloads can cause stress for staff. Managers are provided with a pro forma checklist for regular one to one meetings and are advised to check on staff health and wellbeing on a regular basis, as a priority. There is a health and safety 'tool kit' and when work related stress is identified the Occupational Health service is involved and will make clear recommendations following assessments. If it is a team issue, specific tailored interventions will be put in place based on circumstances, including work with managers. Data and intelligence is gathered and triangulated and if patterns emerge involving a large amount of staff in a particular area, work is done to try to understand and address any issues. Core flexi hours were abandoned during pandemic, giving greater flexibility. This now needs to be monitored. The Trade Unions had highlighted that home energy costs are increasing and a working from home allowance has been included within the pay claim. Indeed, some staff have chosen to now work from the office 5 days per week and this is being constantly reviewed. The reward and recognition scheme for 100% attendance is being reviewed as it could lead to unintended consequences where staff come to work whilst ill and it also presents a disparity with hybrid working.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution;
- (ii) Members note the report;
- (iii) Consideration be given to extending the availability of childcare facilities for staff (to include an exploration of creche provision);
- (iv) Refresher training for managers to be offered to help with spotting the signs and having conversations with staff who may be suffering from poor mental health

- (v) Support services available be actively promoted, particularly the app and helpline, to increase uptake and subsequent support;
- (vi) All policies reflect duty of care requirements, regardless of where employees are working, particularly as the council is working towards 'Barnsley is our Office';
- (vii) Core flexible working hours be reinstated now that the organisation is in the 'recovery' phase after Covid, and
- (viii) The reward and recognition scheme for sickness absence be reviewed.

Chair