

## **SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP**

**THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2022**

Present: Councillor S Dannheimer, Chair

Councillors: I L Tyler  
M Hannah

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Easom and L Fletcher

### 15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### 16 **AGILE WORKING**

Members of the Working Group were updated with the Agile Working presentation and information that was provided at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 October 2022 from the Executive Director. Questions were asked in response to this information including: when people were not in the office how did they feel active, what were the safeguards, what do employees expect from homeworking and how should it be managed? The Executive Director confirmed that the data provided indicated that employees were managing stress and work related stress was low. The absence data indicated no rise of absence since home working. The Council has implemented Mental Health First Aid through the Health and Safety Officer. Training was being provided to all Heads of Service and Senior Management Team. An update would be provided to check if the Mental Health training recognised staff struggling working from home and how they would be signposted.

An example was provided at the meeting when a manual worker was absent from their usual work after an injury but was offered alternative work within the Council with the agreement of employee, general practitioner and Manager. The Council could look at options available if the employee wished to remain working rather than be absent long term. This provided some reassurance that manual workers had some alternative options to manage their long term absence

Discussions ensued with new starters and how training was provided. It was confirmed that new employees would initially be in the office with their line manager to establish working practices and ensure all training had been completed prior to being able to work from home. New employees could still work in an agile way in the office with the flexibility of sitting at any desk and utilising meeting spaces with the use of a laptop. In the event of a current employee not meeting targets then where appropriate face to face meetings would be arranged with their line manager rather than through Microsoft teams. Customer Services failing the needs of the service was provided as an example where the team was told to come back into the office to improve performance and ensure all targets were met.

Currently the Council was using, on average 25% of Council office space. Providing office space to voluntary organisations was currently being considered.

Members were asked whether digital exhaustion was being monitored and how employees worked in collaboration with other teams and what would the next steps mean for agile working. Agile working had become an important part of attracting new employees to the Council and retaining existing employees. It was recognised by Members that agile working provided flexibility for employees, helped to defray costs of commuting and reduced the CO2 emissions for employees and the Council Borough.

The Working Group concluded that they were happy with the agile working arrangements. Key questions on mental health for home workers, employee welfare, and performance were answered satisfactory. Where performance became an issue, arrangements were in place for employees to work from the Council offices in order for additional support to be provided. These arrangements could be reversed if employees meet the necessary performance improvements.

The wellbeing survey showed that employees were happy with the agile working arrangements and the data reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Working Group demonstrated that customer satisfaction was not adversely affected.

**Recommended to Overview and Scrutiny Committee that:**

- **It be ensured that Mental Health training encompasses identifying when individuals are struggling at home and to signpost where necessary.**
- **It be communicated to employees, to highlight that in the event of long term absence, appropriate opportunities can be considered for them to receive training in order to allow them to work during the period of absence, subject to the appropriate consent of their GP to carry out the training and work.**
- **Strengthening social cohesion be considered and collaboration with staff to welcome innovation opportunities. (The water cooler discussions)**
- **Managers consider where a face to face meeting may be more appropriate, in relation to performance management issues, rather than a meeting over Microsoft Teams.**
- **Where service delivery is adversely affected as a result of performance related issues, managers will take appropriate action including the potential of reducing or removing flexibility. When it can be demonstrated that performance has improved, managers can consider reintroducing flexible working arrangements.**

17 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

As the topic had reached a conclusion. There was no requirement to arrange a further meeting.