

Item 3

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
12 February 2008

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and
Councillors B.F. Avery J.P., D.R. Brown, D. Farry, Mrs. J. Gray, B. Haigh,
T. Hogan and B.M. Ord

In Attendance: Councillors P. Gittins J.P., G.C. Gray, Mrs. S. Haigh, D.M. Hancock,
Mrs. S. J. Iveson and Mrs. E. Maddison

Apologies: Councillors V. Chapman, T.F. Forrest and Ms. I. Jackson

SL.29/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
No declarations of interest were received.

SL.30/07 MINUTES
The Minutes of the meetings held on 8th and 22nd January 2008 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

SL.31/07 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT: SICKNESS MANAGEMENT - PROGRESS ON ACTION PLAN
The Committee considered a report detailing the progress being made in implementing the actions/recommendations that had been agreed by Cabinet, following the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Sickness Management. (For copy see file of Minutes)

Alan Boddy, Head of Organisational Development and Helen Darby, Human Resources Manager (Strategy) attended the meeting to outline progress and respond to any queries.

The Committee was given details of the Council's current sickness absence statistics and measures that had been put in place to manage both short and long term absences. A copy of the presentation had been circulated to the Committee. (For copy see file of Minutes)

It was pointed out that all the recommendations detailed in the Action Plan had been implemented and it was therefore proposed that the Plan should be formally signed off. Absence statistics would still be reported to the Committee as part of the Performance Indicator half yearly and yearly reports.

A question was raised on whether any consideration had been given to introducing financial incentives for good attendance. It was reported that the introduction of incentives had been considered as part of the sickness management review, however it was not felt to be appropriate. Instead, managers were encouraged to speak to those members of staff with excellent attendance records to show their appreciation.

Members made specific reference to Local Government Reorganisation as being a potential cause of stress.

It was reported that officers were aware that some employees may be worried regarding their future employment as a result of Local Government Review and consequently the need to communicate information to employees as quickly as possible was seen as vitally important. It was pointed out that the Council had a Communication Strategy in place. It was also reported that guidance on dealing with the transfer of staff was expected to be issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government in June 2008.

Officers were aware that the number of staff suffering from stress may increase over the forthcoming year and consequently the Council was developing more proactive ways in identifying stress. A stress diagnostic tool was being piloted within the Leisure Services Department and would be rolled out to other departments. It was pointed out that 200 managers had received training in dealing with stress. The training enabled managers to carry out stress risk assessments.

Members noted that anyone diagnosed with stress would be immediately referred to Occupational Health and offered specialist counselling. It was noted that the Council's contract with Company Health was currently being re-negotiated and the provision of stress accessible counselling for employees would be a key component.

It was queried whether staff were allowed sick leave to undergo cosmetic surgery. It was explained that if the surgery had been recommended for medical reasons the Council would allow the staff to have paid sickness absence leave for the operation and recovery period. If it was purely for cosmetic reasons, staff would be required to take annual leave.

Clarification was sought on what constituted a trigger point. It was explained that a trigger point was either a sickness absence of more than twelve days in any twelve month period, or four or more periods of sickness absence in any twelve month period.

AGREED: *That the Committee is satisfied that the actions following the Overview and Scrutiny Review have been implemented and that sickness will continue to be monitored through the six monthly performance indicator reports.*

WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Work Programme for Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (For copy see file of Minutes)

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting on 20th November 2007, consideration had been given to a schedule of performance indicators relating to the Strategic Leadership portfolio and concern had been expressed regarding the Council's performance in respect of CPC 03 - Percentage of non-council housing capital projects within 5% budgeted cost and CPC 04 – Percentage of non- council Housing Capital Projects within 5% of projected timescale.

It was explained that the number of non-council housing capital projects had been significantly reduced.

It was pointed out that Cabinet at its meeting on 1st November 2007 had reduced the budget for the Council Offices at Green Lane by around 75% from just over £400,000 to £100,000.

In the period from 1st April 2007 to date, 3 projects had been completed. CPC 03 was presently at 67% (2 out of 3 projects completed within +/- 5% of budgeted cost. The project outside of the figures actually saved the Council 11.6% of the proposed budget) and CPC 04 was at 100% - all 3 projects had been completed within +/- 5% of the projected timescale. As a result of the reduction in budget, it was only envisaged that a maximum of 3 further projects would be completed this year.

AGREED: *That the information in respect of Performance Indicators CPC 03 and CPC 04 and the Work Programme be noted.*

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Mrs. G. Garrigan, Tel 01388 816166 ext 4237 email ggarrigan@sedgefield.gov.uk

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