

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 17th April, 2012 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor J P Findlow (Chairman)
Councillor D Newton (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors G Baxendale, B Burkhill, S Corcoran, W S Davies, F Keegan,
D Neilson and D Topping

Apologies

Councillors G Barton, B Moran and G Wait

185 **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Lisa Quinn - Director of Finance and Business Services
Paul Bradshaw – Head of HR and Organisational Development
Melanie Henniker – HR Delivery manager
Mark Nedderman – Senior Scrutiny Officer

186 **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillor D Flude

187 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2012 be confirmed as a corrected record and signed by the Chairman.

188 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

189 **PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION**

There were no members of the public present at the meeting who wished to address the committee.

190 **WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee reviewed the work programme for 2012/13.

At the previous meeting of the Committee, Members had resolved to review the Council's policy in respect of exemptions on Council tax for second and empty homes in anticipation of an expected change in legislation. It was suggested that this item should now be added to the Committee's work programme

In connection with the item concerning Mayoralty/Civic arrangements, the Senior Scrutiny Officer reported that there were no outstanding matters to investigate in connection with this item.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the report be received;
- (b) That an item be added to the work programme to brief Members in June 2012 on the current arrangements which provide discounts in respect of Council Tax for empty properties and second homes in Cheshire East, with a view to the policy being reviewed.
- (c) That the item relating to the Mayoralty/Civic arrangements in Cheshire east be deleted from the work programme.

191 **FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS**

The Committee considered items listed in the current forward plan.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be received.

192 **SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT**

Councillor D Flude attended the meeting and addressed the Committee in respect of this matter.

The Committee considered a report of the Head of HR and Organisation Development relating to sickness absence in Cheshire East.

The Committee was informed that during 2009/10, the average number of days lost due to sickness was 7.05. This had risen to 8.19 days during 2010/11.

By way of comparison, a North West Employers survey carried out in April 2011 had determined that the average sickness absence rate for Unitary Councils in the North West was 9.15 days. The Chartered Institute of Personnel in its report into Absence Management for 2011 confirmed that for employers in public services with 5000 or more staff, the average number of days lost was 9.6 days and for private sector services was 11.8 days.

Over sixty percent of all working days lost due to sickness was categorised as long term sickness and accounted for approximately

a quarter of all the employees absent. (Long term sickness was defined by the Council as 15 working days or more).

There were a number of contributory factors that may be leading to an increase in sickness absence statistics, including better reporting arrangements which had provided better accuracy; stress related to Council restructures, the ongoing challenging financial situation leading to further reviews and uncertainty for staff, and the recent review of staff terms and conditions of employment.

A number of measures were in place to address sickness rates including strategic intervention in the Waste and Recycling Service, and in addition, the Health and Safety Team had been involved in reminding employees of preventative measures in relation to injuries.

The Attendance Management Policy would be reviewed with a view to simplifying the process and ensuring that the trigger points were appropriate in the circumstances and to support managers in taking action on attendance at a timely and early stage.

The HR Delivery Team would continue to provide coaching and training for managers in attendance management, both through the Corporate Training Programme and also on a local one-to-one or team basis as required and considered effective. This training would focus on the proactive management of attendance with a view to retaining employees in work and to support them in returning to work as soon as practicably possible.

Additional proactive measures included:

- A number of Health and Wellbeing events being held in May.
- Close working with the Occupational Health Service to identify proactive health promotion strategies and activities that could be rolled out across the Council and sustained in the longer term.
- The possible introduction of an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). An EAP was a resource for employees to enable them to access support, usually in the form of counselling, to help them deal with difficult issues (whether work-related or in their personal life).

The Committee was in favour of measures to provide support to staff during sickness absences, particularly those relating to alleviating the effects of stress, but felt that the target set for the average number of days sickness per employee should be lower than the existing target of 9 days.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received;

- (b) That the measures outlined in paragraphs 4.1 - 4.7 of the report be supported , particularly the proposals relating to the setting up of an Employee Assistance programme (EAP);
- (c) That the Head of HR and Organisational Development be requested to consider introducing a new lower target than the existing 9 days for the average number of days leave taken by Cheshire East employees;
- (d) That subject to affordability, the Head of HR and Organisational development be requested to carry out a staff satisfaction survey as the last one was carried out in 2009.

193 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 4 Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

194 **REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS TO MANAGE WORKFORCE CHANGE**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of HR and Organisational development relating to proposals to manage workforce change in connection with the Councils Voluntary redundancy Scheme.
The Committee was presented with 5 potential options which would be the subject of negotiation with trade unions.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received;
- (b) That Cabinet be informed that this committee recommends that that the Council should give further consideration to options 4 and a combination of options 5 and 3;
- (c) That whichever option is adopted, Cabinet be requested to consider ensuring that the new scheme should be in place for a period extending beyond 12 months in order to introduce stability into the system.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.37 pm

Councillor J P Findlow (Chairman)