

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Tuesday, 6th November, 2012

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice Chair in the Chair) and Councillors David Bush, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Roger Hill, Gay Hopkins, Yvonne Smith Pat Witherspoon.

### Also Present:

Councillor Debbie Taylor  
Ms T Buckley and Mr R Colebrook (co-opted members from Unison).

### Officers:

T Beech, H Broughton, C Felton, D Poole, G Revans, I Roberts, J Staniland, M Stanley and J Willis.

### Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

## MINUTE 99

### SICKNESS POLICY PRE-SCRUTINY SHORT, SHARP REVIEW

The Committee received the final report of the Sickness Policy Pre-Scrutiny Short, Sharp Review Group, which was presented by the members of the group; Councillors Fisher and Witherspoon.

The Committee was advised that the group had not been permitted to access the new Sickness Absence Policy proposed by Officers during their review. The Councillors had been prevented from scrutinising the report because, in accordance with the Council's constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Members were not entitled to access reports in a draft form. Members were advised that the report from Officers was not due to be finalised until Monday 12th November.

During the course of the review the group had, however, received evidence from a wide range of sources. An overview had been provided about the changes that Officers were proposing to the Council's Sickness Absence Policy. The content of the Council's existing Sickness Absence

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Policy had also been considered alongside policies adopted by other local authorities. A number of expert witnesses had been interviewed during the review including: representatives of the Council's Finance department; representatives of Human Resources; the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management, Councillor Mould; and union representatives from UCATT and Unison.

The Committee's co-opted members, from the union Unison, welcomed the review and noted that the group's recommendations reflected a common sense approach to managing staff absences due to sickness. Members were advised that Redditch Borough Council had a good track record in managing sickness absences. However, the review was considered to be timely, following the introduction of service transformation and shared services. In particular, it was suggested that the review would help managers to support staff absent due to stress related illnesses.

During the course of the group's interviews with union representatives the subject of a staff survey had been discussed. Members had recognised the potential value of the survey. However, the group had concluded that further work needed to be undertaken to review the potential uses of a survey.

The content of the proposed A5 laminated guide to the Sickness Absence Policy was discussed in detail. The group explained that the aim of this recommendation would be to ensure that employees were provided with simple guidance notes that could be referred to in the event of unexpected sickness. A simple guide was considered to be of more practical assistance to staff in these circumstances than reference to a lengthier policy document. To reassure staff that the guide was intended to be a practical tool it was suggested that consideration should be given as to the most appropriate method to use to communicate the introduction of the guide to staff.

## **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) the Council's Sickness Absence Policy should be updated and reduced in length, in order to clarify the structure and process for managing both short-term and long-term sickness absences;**
- 2) the terminology used in the policy be sensitive to the needs of staff experiencing sickness;**
- 3) an A5 laminated guide to the Council's Sickness Absence Policy should be provided for the use of managers and staff;**

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- 4) all changes to the Council's Sickness Absence Policy should be communicated to managers and staff;
- 5) the Sickness Absence Policy should be included in the induction process for new staff and managers employed by the Council;
  - a) staff and managers should also receive regular refresher training;
- 6) the Sickness Absence Policy should be applied consistently to staff across all service areas, but managers should be encouraged, recognising individual circumstances and different working environments to apply the policy appropriately;
- 7) the occupational health service available to staff experiencing sickness should be reviewed;
- 8) communication should form an integral part of the transformation process to ensure that staff understand the reasons for changes made to services as part of the transformation process and how transformation may impact on them; and

**RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 9.10 pm