

Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Absence Management Sub-Group

Wednesday, 16 January 2008

Present: Councillor Mike Devaney (Chair) and Councillors Terry Brown, Mrs Doreen Dickinson, Pat Haughton, Hasina Khan, June Molyneaux, Geoffrey Russell, Joyce Snape and Mrs Stella Walsh

Also in attendance: Lorraine Charlesworth (Director of Human Resources) and Ruth Hawes (Assistant Democratic Services Officer)

08.01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Danny Gee.

08.02 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by Members relating to the items on the agenda.

08.03 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Absence Management Sub-Group held on 3 October 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

08.04 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No members of the public requested to speak at the meeting.

08.05 INQUIRY DOCUMENTATION

The Sub-Group considered the enclosed scoping document, project plan, information checklist and witness checklist.

RESOLVED – That the Inquiry documentation be noted.

08.06 COLLECTING AND CONSIDERING EVIDENCE

The Sub-Group considered the information requested at the last meeting.

The Corporate Director of Human Resources advised that the Council policies on bereavement leave and special leave had been developed in conjunction with the 'staff matters' group and the unions, before being adopted by the Executive Cabinet. These policies have a positive impact on absence rates as, for example, staff might go off sick if they had been bereaved. Other Local Authorities have special leave and bereavement policies. The Chorley Council policies have been in place since April 2007.

Members considered and noted the South Ribble Borough Council Absence Management Policy. It was felt that in the Chorley policy had more detail and practical advice for managers on how to manage sickness.

The Corporate Director of Human Resources advised that some policy development work was being undertaken with West Lancashire District Council and there were plans to do some joint working with South Ribble Borough Council in the future.

Members were advised that the absences statistics for Chorley Council from April 2007 to the end of December 2007 were 5.5 days and return to work interviews completed were 90%. It was AGREED that figures were requested for the months of November and December alone. Comparative figures for other Lancashire local authorities were reported as 6.98 days for the same period. The annual target for the Council, to be reported in March, was 9.22 days. The Members commented on the excellent figures on absences and completed return to work interviews.

The Corporate Director of Human Resources reported that a colleague from Human Resources and herself had spent a day at BNFL at a convention for workplace listeners. In each department there was an informal buddy, this was a supporting, but not counselling, role. The listeners were well organised and informed and got together on an annual basis to share experiences and receive training. Chorley Council is planning to set up a workplace listener's scheme on a smaller scale.

Members discussed the Chorley Absence Management policy and noted that the policy was now embedded after its implementation in summer 2006. Managers were using the policy to manage sickness and were giving warnings where appropriate. Human Resources monitor reasons for sickness and would get involved where there were issues. As part of the ongoing efficiency inquiry all Directors were asked about the absences within their Directorate and positive responses were received on how the policy was being implemented.

The Sub-Group considered the reference form used when offering employment to a new member of staff. One of the questions related to the absence record of the person.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted and taken forward for the final report.

08.07 THE WAY FORWARD

The Members considered the objectives and desired outcomes for the inquiry and AGREED that the information and research undertaken by the Sub-Group met the requirements set down in the inquiry project outline. Overview and Scrutiny members would monitor the recommendations made by the Sub-Group on a quarterly basis.

The Corporate Director of Human Resources reported that from 1 April the Council would have a new Occupational Health contract with Chorley Hospital. The new contract meant that staff would only have to travel to Chorley Hospital. Work was being undertaken with Lancashire County Council on a well being strategy. It was AGREED that new initiatives and feedback on the new Occupational Health contract be reported as part of the monitoring of inquiry recommendations. Members were advised that the Council had recently been assessed for the Health Works Award.

There is a page on the loop advising staff of the initiatives and facilities available, the ticker and e-news and views were used to highlight information. Members discussed how the positive messages about absence management should be communicated to Chorley Council staff. Suggestions were made including team brief and the Chief Executive's Awards. It was noted that there are prizes for individual and team attendances at Chief Executive's Awards. The Sub-Group AGREED to recommend that the profile and communication to staff on health and well-being should be maintained, and if possible increased.

At the next meeting the Sub-Group would consider whether the target for absence should be changed for next year.

08.08 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 19 February at 6.30pm. Councillor Alan Cullens, Executive Member for Resources, would be invited to this meeting.

Chair