

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Pratt (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: R.Roden, L. Guppy, V. Smith, A. Easson and
R. Harris

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): A Davies

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sally Thomas	HR Lead
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Sian Hayward	Digital and Technology Manager
Alan Burkitt	Policy Officer Equalities and Welsh Language
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer

1. Public Open Forum

We were joined in the Chamber by Mr Peter Sutherland who wished to raise the following issues;

- Over hanging verges and hedges in the area between Llanbadoc Church and Morris's Garden Centre are making the footpaths unpassable.
- On behalf of the Community Council, who are thrilled with the speeding signs through Llanbadoc, it was asked if County Councillors were involved with the decision to erect them.
- The burger van at Usk Island car park has been broken into, with all of the stock taken. The owner of the van is willing to place CCTV cameras at the site and it was asked if MCC would contribute to the cost.
- It was asked if local residents have been adequately notified of road closures for the Velothon.

Mr Sutherland was advised that his comments will be passed on to the relevant officer for response.

2. Return discussion on sickness absence

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am

Members requested that People Services return to Strong Communities Select Committee to give more detailed answers to questions previously raised.

1. The general consensus was that the report was poor lacked detail, and it was unclear who the report was aimed at.

The People Services annual report was produced for "People Board" and its purpose was to monitor progress against actions outlined in the previous people strategy. Today members will be reviewing the latest iteration of the people strategy " People to Purpose" which aims to address the issues that remain outstanding and relevant from the previous strategy whilst addressing the key themes identified in the new strategy. The themes have been identified based on a range of evidence including :Hr dashboard. Staff survey: regulatory feedback, workshops; training and current and future operating requirements identified in the corporate plan and enabling strategies.

2) The committee wants detailed statistical analysis combined with details of actions that are or are to be undertaken.

Detailed Impromptu reports are written and accessed by HR officers to work with managers to reduce sickness absence in their specific areas. Quarterly reports are provided for HR officers via the Sickness Dashboards and SIP spreadsheet which can be used to forecast projected sickness, trends for all areas throughout the Council both in graphical and numerical formats. All final year sickness figures are subjected to internal and Welsh Audit office review.

Actions Undertaken include: (1) Policy training (2) HR Business Partner Meetings which enable discussion (3) Talent LAB courses/training/personal development/stress awareness (4) SKYPE sessions with HR and Managers/Head-teachers to help manage absence effectively – enabling Q&A, informal discussion, peer to peer support (5) new Occupational Health provision – more proactive approach between OH provider and MCC.

3) Questions were asked about the cost to the authority of the very high level of absence. No answer was forthcoming.

There is a report within the HR officers folder in Impromptu that includes nominal costs e.g. days lost x hourly rate, this doesn't show the full costs of acting up, additional staff etc. So a full cost of sickness cannot be accurately determined

4) Questions were also asked about turnover of staff and termination interviews. What % of leaving employees are interviewed?

Turnover figures are shown and reported on the Service improvement plan and this spreadsheet is quarterly uploaded to the HUB. (turnover for 2016/27 for the

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am

whole organisation was 7.89% and 17/18 7.54 % and the attached shows breakdown of turnover across the organisation) Managers can review the turnover for their own service areas.

Exit interviews are not mandatory for those leaving the organisation, however we provide guidance to managers on how to carry out an exit interview although HR are not part of an exit interview process, unless specifically requested. Staff leaving are asked to complete a form which provides the organisation with basic information of why staff leave eg promotion, moving area, better opportunities elsewhere etc and we can run a report that reflects this however not all staff leaving complete the form. The business partnering meeting between Hr and managers can be used to outline the benefits and organisational intelligence that can be gained through undertaking exit interviews and a basis for discussing high turnover rates which may be a cause for concern, that managers can learn and develop their services from.

5) Training of managers was mentioned (How many have been trained, do managers consider the training to be adequate?)

Attendance management training is now mandatory and over 158 managers have been trained to date – We record level of perceived effect on work and new knowledge gained from training and feedback is running at around 90% which indicates the training is well received and improves knowledge and skills. Consequently we expect sickness management to improve and be reflected in improved sickness levels within services and overall we have seen an improved level of sickness absence at 10.8 per FTE

6) The statement was made that the authorities level of absence was comparable with other authorities. The statistical comparative data shows M.C.C. as being in the lower quartile and having higher levels of absence than other authorities.

MCC is around mid-point, not lower quartile. Complete all-Wales information can be provided to the Committee. MCC has seen a year on year improvement over the last 3 years. See attached all Wales position.

7) I am still unclear, as to whether, we encourage employees who need counselling to seek independent help without the need to refer to a line manager. I am also unclear that if an employee goes to H.R.to seek independent help, that the line manager remains unaware and that this is strictly confidential. I am also unclear as to whether all employees are aware that this option is available to them.

A line manager needs to approve the costs of referring an individual to our confidential external counselling service. However any employee can access HR for help/support on a confidential basis. As this happens on a frequent basis already I suspect employees are aware that this is available. We publicise our services on the HUB.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am**

8) I was surprised that H.R do not appear to consider the absence, protocols as part of their role. In my experience H.R. Played a very pro-active role in a identifying issues, developing absence monitoring protocols and being involved in their implementation. e.g H.R. always attended departmental absence monitoring meetings/ interviews and always accompanied managers on home visits.

HR are hugely involved in supporting and advising managers to manage sickness in their services. HR have revised the attendance management policy and deliver training on the policy as well as training on how to conduct a return to work interview, stress management, having difficult conversations , workflows etc on the hub, all aimed at supporting managers to manage sickness. Via the business partnering meeting hr discuss sickness levels, patterns of sickness, long and short term, with service managers on a regular basis and advise and support in areas where sickness levels are particularly high. HR attend some return to work interviews and support managers at welfare meetings.

9) As a committee member I am unclear about, what exactly are the procedures we have in place.

We have attendance management procedures with which we train all managers as it is part of mandatory training modules. 158 trained to date.

10) The absence levels in the authority are far too high and there must be a very high cost both in financial terms and in the excess workload which as a result others have to bear. This becomes a vicious circle.

We agree attendance continues to be a major focus of attention for Hr and management as reflected in the existing strategy and the draft strategy that is being reviewed by committee today. Whilst all attendance is a cause for concern we have specific concern regarding absence as a result of stress and mental well- being.

11) What are the rules about for example reduced pay after prolonged absence, what are the triggers that initiate an absence monitoring interview?

Our attendance management policy, see attached, very clearly identifies trigger points for managers to undertake return to work interview , formal review of absence after a number of periods of absence. The terms and conditions of employment outline payment during sickness as 6 months full pay followed by 6 months half pay.

12) We need to support our staff and do everything practical to encourage them to return to work. This may involve an initial period of part-time working, more training or moving to a new area within the organisation.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am

We allow phased return to work, make adjustments to working arrangements to accommodate any issues and will make reasonable adjustments to working practise to encourage return.

13) Are long term and short term absences separately listed?

Yes, the reports, dashboards and SIP spreadsheets all identify short and long term absences and managers can identify patterns of sickness for example repeated regular absences on a Friday or Monday.

14) Number of staff interviewed on return to work, regardless of time out. Long term absence could indicate a need for support, physical, emotional?

All colleagues should attend a return to work interview with their manager. Best practise indicates that this is one of the best ways of addressing sickness. When managers record an individuals sickness they should also record the date of the return to work interview. In some areas where a manager manages large volumes of staff eg homecare they are unable to complete the return to work interviews, due to capacity and working practises, and in addition this field is not always completed by managers and therefore we are unable to report an accurate picture of the numbers of return to work interviews completed. To help managers we have produced a video on how to conduct a return to work interview and we send out reminders to managers HR works with managers and head-teachers on reducing long term absence and identifying supportive measures that will enable a sustainable return to work for an individual.

15) Are patterns of absence noted?

Managers can use My View Absence Calendar view to spot regular patterns of absences. And via the HR business partnering meeting sickness and patterns of sickness can be discussed and support and advice is provided on how to address specific issues identified.

3. People Strategy - Pre-decision scrutiny of the draft strategy

Context

“People to Purpose”, is the latest iteration of “Monmouthshire people” our current People and organisational development Strategy’, published in 2015. Building on “Monmouthshire People”, People to Purpose, continues to build on our belief that our people are best placed to identify, design and deliver the changes we need to make to effectively respond to continued austerity, rising demand and increasingly challenging demographics. As public servants, in Monmouthshire, we are committed to building a culture, founded on our organisational values and expected behaviours, which we believe, will enable our people to deliver against our purpose of “building sustainable resilient communities”

KEY ISSUES

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am

“Monmouthshire People “ our previous people and organisational development strategy focused on creating the conditions for the workforce to thrive and delivering impact in measureable outcomes. The strategy focused on the following key themes

- Our Work Environment
- Engaging our people
- Building Careers
- Training coaching and development
- Diversity, Inclusion and well- being
- And bringing it all together

Significant progress has been made against each of the themes and we have moved a long way to creating the conditions for people to thrive. The People Services annual report 2015/16 and 2016/17 outline what we have achieved so far and below are some examples of the activities we have engaged in which has shifted the organisational culture to enable the organisation to respond to the challenges we face reflecting the values, and behaviours we are committed to.:-

- Development of People Services hub to include a range of guidance, workflows, FAQs around a range of issues such as managing sickness, workforce planning, to enable the workforce to have easy access to information at all times.
- Key policy review eg Attendance and Managing sickness, Fairness at work(grievance);Disciplinary Policy, Volunteering. Each policy was revised or newly created to match the aims of the strategy and the needs identified by the organisation.
- Development of Evolve leadership programme based on considering identified societal/organisational problems, in order to identify potential short and medium term solutions. Two cohorts involving 12 officers from across the council have come together, so far, to consider; Customer service which identified the overall problem of how we engage with customers. Main outcome has led to us working with a new start-up organisation to embed AI (Artificial Intelligence) into our customer service offer; Transport Evolve has led to Transport Review, Personal Transport Budgets being introduced making significant savings in home to school transport, Vehicle trackers to optimise routes etc and to identify how best we use our fleet including sharing of vehicles/pool cars etc.
- In response to concerns regarding accountability and responsibility mandatory corporate training requirements for managers and all employees have been introduced including safeguarding, attendance management, induction, GDPR, to name a few, to ensure the workforce has a consistent level of skills and knowledge needed to operate effectively and accountably.
- Development of HR dashboard and My view to provide better workforce data around sickness, gender, age profile thus providing managers with the data and evidence to better workforce plan and manage sickness and performance. (Put in Enabling
- Improved well- being offer for staff to include; increased staff benefits, access to cycle to work scheme, access to individual health screening. Colleague well-being is fundamentally important to the organisation and activity is related to what colleagues tell us is important to them and improves well- being.
- Implementation of new corporate volunteer management database and volunteer coordinator role. We value the contribution volunteers make to our organisation

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am

and the community and we are committed to ensuring that their experience is safe and purposeful.

We have made significant progress against the actions identified in “Monmouthshire people” and our culture and operating practice reflects that. We will continue to build on the activity to date, whilst ensuring we support and facilitate the objectives and ambitions of the corporate plan and enabling strategies.

Member comments

It was asked if increased partnership work with other Councils and other bodies would influence current training provided.

A Member asked for a more concise strategy and disliked the reference to managers and employees as surely everyone is an employee.

A comment was made in regard to the positive effect of agile working and applauded the work undertaken so far.

Members supported the work of the Go to Group as a non-official group to allow staff let off steam and talk in a less formal setting.

It was asked if agile working impacted performance.

Committee's Conclusion:

Members felt that the issue of staff wellbeing had been discussed in depth and the committee needs to maintain momentum on this, potentially on a bi-meeting basis.

It was felt that sickness levels and number of staff using Occupational Health services need to come to committee regularly.

The Committee were encouraged by the detail in the report and the training taking place within the Council.

It was asked that all relevant information was sent to Members ahead of the meeting well in advance to allow Members time to familiarise themselves with all necessary data.

It was asked for a summary sheet for each report, highlighting the most pertinent issues.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am**

4. Welsh Language Monitoring Report

Context

To provide a performance overview of our compliance and recording systems in relation to the Welsh Language Standards that were allocated in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

Key Issues

- The Council was informed by the Welsh Language Commissioner of the standards that it was expected to comply with on the 1st August 2016 and with the exception of a few time extension caveats was expected to have everything in place for the 30th March 2016.
- The Monitoring report details information recorded in relation to specific areas of the Welsh Language Standards allocated to this council. The Welsh Language Commissioner requests this information annually in order to be able measure our progress in terms of compliance with the Standards.
- The report will be forwarded to the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office by the 30th June 2017. Once the report has been read and analysed by the Commissioner the Council meets with the Commissioners' Office to discuss any areas of good practice and any areas of concern that require improvement. It will also be posted on the council's English and Welsh web sites to allow for public scrutiny.
- Fundamentally the Council is doing well in terms of compliance with these challenging standards. One particular area of concern though is the low numbers of fluent Welsh speakers that are employed by the Council (30) potentially making us susceptible to challenge as a result of our inability to provide or proactively offer any kind of frontline services to the Welsh speaking members of the public of Monmouthshire. A Workforce Planning process has been developed and led by the Welsh Language and Equality Officer and People Services and has been underway for the last year. This involves auditing the Welsh Language skills that exist in divisions, looking for any gaps and then designating posts as Welsh Essential when they become vacant. It is anticipated that the numbers of fluent Welsh speakers in the council will increase gradually but that will take some time to have the desired effect.

Member Comments

Members applauded community groups who receive funding for promoting the Welsh language, they were particularly interested in a baby yoga and massage group.

It was asked what provision we have for Welsh speaking social carers.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 14th June, 2018 at 10.00 am

A Member asked if there were any local groups to encourage those learning Welsh to practice their Welsh together.

Members requested a Welsh language awareness training session.

Committee's Conclusion:

Members conducted performance monitoring scrutiny, highlighting areas of concern in relation to performance to the Cabinet Member.

The report is a record of the Council's activities over the last financial year in respect of compliance with its allocated Welsh Language Standards. Members were happy for the report to be forwarded to the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office by the 30th June 2017 for their scrutiny, response and formal approval.

It will also be posted on the council's English and Welsh web sites for public scrutiny.

The meeting ended at 1.19 pm