

SERVICE AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Minutes of hybrid webcast meeting on
10 January 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

Present
in County
Buildings: Councillors Bob Shields (Chair), Kenneth Bell, Gavin Scott and George Weir.

Present
Remotely: Councillors Ian Cochrane and Chris Cullen.

Attending
in County
Buildings: L. Reid, Assistant Director – Strategic Change; W. Carlaw, Service Lead – Democratic Governance; W. Wesson, Chief HR Adviser; A. Gibson, Committee Services Officer; and C. McCallum, Committee Services Assistant.

Attending
Remotely: T. Eltringham, Director of Health and Social Care.

1. Chair's Remarks.

The Chair

- (1) welcomed everyone to the meeting; and
- (2) outlined the procedures for conducting this meeting and advised that this meeting would be broadcast live.

2. Sederunt and Declarations of Interest.

The Chair called the Sederunt for the meeting and having called the roll, confirmed that there were no declarations of interest by Members of the Panel in terms of Council Standing Order No. 17 and the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

3. Minutes of previous meeting.

The Minutes of 22 November 2022 ([issued](#)) were submitted and approved.

4. Action Log and Work Programme

There was submitted an update of the Action Log and Work Programme ([issued](#)) for this Panel.

Having heard the Assistant Director – Strategic Change, the Panel noted that an updated Risk Register would be reported to the Audit and Governance Panel on 22 February 2023 and thereafter to Cabinet on 14 March 2023.

With regard to Action 2 on the Action Log relating to the proposal to have 284 car charging points by 2025 and having heard a Member of the Panel, it was agreed that the Assistant Director – Housing and Operations would be asked to provide more detail with regard to the current situation with regards to the installation of these charging points. It was further agreed that in light of this request, the action remain open until this request had been completed.

A Member of the Panel enquired the position with regards to the entry in the Work Programme relating to the Integration Joint Board Annual Performance Report 2021-22. The Director of Health and Social Care advised that the report had still to be considered by the Integration Joint Board Audit and Performance Committee and, as a result, it would not be in a position to be considered at the next meeting of the Service and Performance Panel.

The Panel

Decided:

- (1) to agree that action (1) in the Log had been completed; and
- (2) to note the current status of the Work Programme and the position with regards to consideration of the Integration Joint Board Annual Performance Report 2021-22, as stated above.

Councillor Cochrane joined the meeting at this point.

5. Employee Absence – Update.

There was submitted a report ([issued](#)) of 20 December 2022 by the Chief Executive providing the Panel with a mid-term update (1 April to 30 September 2022) of detailed information and analysis of sickness absence across Council services.

The Chief HR Adviser indicated that a confidential Briefing Note would be provided to Members of the Panel with further information on this subject matter.

Following a question from a Member of the Panel, it was noted that national comparisons could not be provided for mid-term reports.

It was agreed, following an issue raised at this Panel, that information relating to the success of the Employee Assist Programme with regards to its effect on absence rates and the referral programme as well as figures relating to occupational health and the Access to Work Programme be included in the Briefing Note that would be provided by the Chief HR Adviser to the Panel Members.

Following a Member of the Panel enquiring after what duration of sickness would an employee be contacted regarding their sickness absence and what action was taken to assist them to return to work, the Chief HR Adviser indicated

- (1) that initially an employee would predict the duration of their absence to their line manager, with a review being undertaken after four to six weeks;
- (2) that if the absence was of a psychological nature, they would be referred to occupational health services and if it were due to muscular skeletal issues, the employee could be referred for physiotherapy;
- (3) that after eight to twelve weeks of absence, there would be a Stage 1 Review meeting conducted with the employee; and
- (4) that each employee should be treated in a consistent manner by line managers but that in terms of intervention and support this would vary in relation to each individual absence.

After it being noted that a short-term working group had been established, comprising service representatives and HR and Trade Union colleagues with an aim to review the Local Government and Teaching Maximising Attendance Frameworks and to streamline administrative processes, it was agreed that more information relating to the Terms of Reference and the working of this group would be included in the Briefing Note being provided to Members of the Panel.

Following a question from a Member of the Panel regarding whether the Working Group should consider reviewing the current absence management procedures, the Chief HR Adviser indicated that the current Framework was seen as being good but that some areas would be reviewed.

A Member of the Panel enquired if information relating to psychological and muscular skeletal absences was used to make adjustments to services. It was noted that there was an increase in counselling services being provided for psychological issues and that face-to-face physiotherapy was again being offered to front line staff such as this in Neighbourhood Services and the Health and Social Care Partnership. It was further noted that the Chief HR Adviser would be working with colleagues in the Health and Social Care Partnership to introduce wellbeing champions as result of the high number of absences in that Service due to psychological issues.

The Director of Health and Social Care advised that the sickness rate for his service was comparable with other Health and Social Care Partnerships across the country and that he was conducting a workforce planning exercise to help alleviate issues. He also advised that an officer had recently been appointed on a short-term basis by his Service to work with his staff to hopefully assist with the high sickness levels.

The Chief HR Adviser indicated that she would provide a breakdown of the psychological absences as part of the Briefing Note that she would be providing to Members.

Following an issue raised by a Member of the Panel, it was agreed that the Chief HR Adviser would take on board as part of the working group considerations, the suggestion that the offer or promotion of membership of Council sports facilities may assist employees' wellbeing.

The Chief HR Adviser intimated that she would ascertain from Payroll Services if information relating to the amount of overtime generated by absenteeism could be reported to this Panel.

Having scrutinised this information and noted the work in setting up the absence review group, the Panel

Decided: to note that the six-month comparison showed LGE absence costs had slightly increased by 1.7% (£33,968) and Teachers costs had decreased by 28% (£177,377).

The meeting ended at 10.35 a.m.