

RESOURCES & DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD - 2 December 2020

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: Mrs K Wild (Chairman), T Diccico (Vice-Chairman), M Allen, B Groom, M Gough, M Brain, M Parker and W Qais

Officers:

Apologies: Councillors: J Fairburn

1. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Present: Councillors: K Wild (Chairman), T Diccico (Vice Chairman), Mrs K Wild (Chairman), T Diccico (Vice-Chairman), M Allen, B Groom, M Gough, M Brain, M Parker and W Qais
M Allen, B Groom and M Brain

Officers: Paul Johnson, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive
Sam Gilbert, Assistant Director (Finance and Property Services)
Mark Pinnell, Executive Director (Asset Management & Development, SCH)
Adrian Cattell, Head of Human Resources
Paul Rogers, Democratic Services

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Fairburn.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

4. MINUTES

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To agree the Public Minutes arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9 November 2020 as an accurate record.

5. FOLLOW UP REPORT – ‘IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE HACKITT REVIEW POST GRENFELL’

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The Assistant Director (Finance and Property Services) introduced the report to the Members of the Scrutiny Board.

Members were informed that the report provided an update following the Scrutiny Board's consideration of the Hackitt Review in 2019. The recommendations and implications arising from the Hackitt Review would continue to have a significant impact in the sector going forward. Members were further advised that the subject of the Draft Building Safety Bill was subject to a future report to Cabinet.

The Executive Director (Asset Management & Development, SCH) informed Members that the golden thread arising from the Hackitt Review related to the digital retention of data relating to building information to the required building safety standards. The initial assessment of the strategic impact of the draft bill could be summarised under the following headings:

- Resources (entailing the need to employ competent employees)
- Resident Engagement (key to capturing the voice of residents with auditable processes in place)
- Financial (entailing additional resources and ICT costs, with other areas to be quantified)
- Stock Viability (Options Appraisal)
- Record Keeping and Processes (all current and future legislation to be met)
- Oversight (requiring a clear accountability framework and detailed oversight arrangements in place)

Members were informed that, in summary, the Draft Building Safety Bill entailed the introduction of a more regulatory regime, involving the establishment of Duty Holders (i.e. persons that will have accountability and statutory responsibilities for managing risks across design, construction and occupation of buildings); definition for high rise buildings and the introduction of 'gateway points' (i.e. stop/go decision points, which will provide rigorous inspection of regulatory requirements to help ensure building safety risks are considered during planning, design and construction phases).

Members were advised that the Bill established the Health and Safety Executive as the Building Safety Regulator and is held responsible for implementing the new arrangements for higher-risk buildings. The Bill also amends the Building Act 1984 to require the regulator to establish and maintain registers of building control approvers and building inspectors.

The Executive Director (Asset Management & Development, SCH) drew Members attention to the detail around the arrangements for establishing a

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Building Safety Board to oversee all aspects of building safety and oversight arrangements for SCH, the Council and West Midlands Fire Service.

Following receipt of the presentations, Members submitted a number of related questions to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

With regard to the financial implications arising, Councillor Groom questioned whether the Council's Capital programme of £23.451M for the Housing Revenue Account for 2020/21 was to be taken from the Council's Revenue budget directly or from other funding streams. Board Members were advised that the Council was reviewing a variety of funding sources, some of which was earmarked for development/acquisitions. Funding for the retro-fitting of sprinkler systems was to be taken from Reserves.

Councillor Qais referenced the Bill's detail for statutory responsibilities and questioned how the private landlord sector would be supported to ensure compliance. Members were advised that the Council and SCH would offer support, guidance and sign-posting for the private landlord sector regarding the new legislation and its implementation.

Councillor Parker noted that as well as the Building Safety Bill, the Fire Safety Bill was also going through the legislative process, which would address the overall building safety requirements for high-rise properties.

The Executive Director (Asset Management & Development, SCH) advised the Board that newsletters had been prepared by SCH for tenants explaining how the Fire Safety Bill linked to the Building Safety Bill.

Councillor Wild queried whether the 'appointed nominated individual' would be an SCH tenant and was advised that the individual could be an appointee of a corporate entity, such as SCH or the Council.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the implications arising from the Draft Building Safety Bill with no further implications arising to be drawn to the attention of the Cabinet;
- (ii) To note the financial implications involved and costs arising from the related legislation arising from the Hackitt Review;
- (iii) To note and acknowledge the Fire Safety Bill and the significance of its future role in supporting the management of the housing stock;
- (iv) To receive an informal briefing via e-mail from SCH addressing the Fire Safety Bill; and,

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- (v) To receive a further 'Implications Arising from the Hackitt Review' Update Report as part of the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for the 2021/22 municipal year.

6. SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Head of Human Resources introduced the report to the Scrutiny Board.

Members were advised that since the 2019 Annual Sickness Absence report received by the Scrutiny Board, the sickness absence rate had fallen to 9.9 days per FTE (Full Time Equivalent) to June 2020. For the year ending 30th September 2020 the level of sickness had fallen further to 9.42 days per FTE. The total number of days lost for the same period was 17,074. For the year ending 31 March 2020 the total number of days lost was 22,134, representing a 23% reduction in sickness absence. Year ending to November 2020 sickness absence figures stood at 9.16 days per FTE. Members were informed that the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) had set a target of 9.9 days sickness absence per FTE to 31 March 2021.

In terms of sickness absence breakdown by Directorate, Members were advised that Adult Social Care and Children's Services reported the highest sickness absence days per FTE, although there had been a reduction of 1,000 sickness absence days for conditions related to mental Health. Of that total, one-third of reported mental health conditions were reported as for personal reasons. The majority of sickness absence days relating to mental health were reported from the Adult Social Care and Children's Services Directorates. Since the start of the pandemic period and up to 30 September 2020, Covid-19 had resulted in sickness absence totalling 972 days, representing 5% of the total sickness absence.

The Council had undertaken a survey of all its employees to ascertain how staff were working and feeling during the pandemic period. A total of 1,730 responses were received, comprising of over 9,000 individual comments. Of the response, the overwhelming majority welcomed the ability to work from home in support of a positive work / life balance, providing the means better physical fitness and to support one of the Council's corporate objectives of delivering zero carbon through a significant reduction in commuting to the office. However, it should also be noted that some employees had reported missing the office environment. The findings of the survey would help shape future HR strategies going forward.

Members were also advised of the Council's Well-Being Action Plan and of the receipt by the Council of the WMCA Thrive at Work accreditation at Bronze level, the first local authority to achieve the accreditation. The Council was now seeking to achieve Silver status accreditation moving forward.

Following receipt of the presentation, Members submitted a number of related questions to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

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Councillor Allen stated that she was concerned with the level of sickness absence in the Adult Social Care and Children's Service Directorates, querying whether there were any underlying factors other than those associated with the complexities and stress often associated with the roles in these Directorates. Councillor Allen further referenced the Compliments and Complaints Report and noted that both services had received the highest number of complaints. Councillor Allen questioned whether staff in these services were valued and paid adequately and were the Council's recruitment and retention policies adequate.

The Scrutiny Board was informed that the sickness absence figures for the two services were higher compared to the wider Council workforce, which could be attributed to the nature of the two services, i.e. largely 'front-line' in nature with staff being susceptible to transmission of illnesses and infections.

Sickness absence was reviewed on a monthly basis and the reported figures were an improvement compared to previous years reporting. It was also reported that Adult Social Care had seen an increase in mental health sickness absence. Specific attention was paid to mental health related absence by CLT and respective Directorate Management Teams and the Council's line-managers also received training to facilitate support of staff in this area.

Councillor Parker noted and supported the reported aligning of the Council's Workplace Wellbeing Priorities 2020/21 with the Council's priorities. Councillor Parker further noted that front-line staff, such as those in the Adult Social Care and Children's Services Directorates, were open to infections and in the case of Covid-19 transmission would be subject to self-isolation at home. The Head of Human Resources advised that in any such cases where Covid-19 had been contracted through workplace duties resulting in a requirement for self-isolation, the resulting absence was not counted as part of the sickness absence figures. Furthermore, any office based staff who were self-isolating could continue to work from home.

Councillor Qais questioned whether the Council Staff Survey analysis facilitated further drilling down of the data for gender, disabilities, and age profiles. Members were informed that the Staff Survey led to the production of a corporate report, which could be analysed at the level of Team, Service, Division and Directorate. An Action Plan had subsequently been developed to address any areas of concern, as well as capturing any equalities implications. The Council's Employee Assistance Programme also facilitated referrals to the Occupational Health Service (OHS), which provided services including counselling and financial advice. Members were advised that the OHS was well utilised, with users identity kept anonymous.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the report and endorsed the actions identified within it.

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7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting was not open to the public during discussion of the following item because the report contained exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

8. PRIVATE MINUTES

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To agree the Private Minutes arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9th November 2020 as an accurate record.

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting
closed at 7:03 p.m.

Time Not Specified