

ITEM 4

Commenced: 6.00pm
Concluded: 7.25pm

Resources and Governance Board 18 March 2013

Present Councillor Winter (Chair)
 Councillors Ashburner, Carr, Davis, Radford, Roberts, Sandhu, Stanton
 and Tittley

41/12 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies.

42/12 Late items introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

43/12 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

44/12 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2013

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

45/12 Call-in

There were no items.

46/12 Reducing sickness absence – workplace health

The board received a report from the Joint Director of Public Health. It was explained that the Joint Director would become a sole employee of the council, along with the Public Health department from April.

The presentation focused on the impact of sickness absence and of the business benefits to the council of encouraging a healthy workforce. This included that 75 per cent of work-related health problems were either musculo-skeletal or related to stress, depression and anxiety. The director informed the board that both of these were amenable to relatively low-cost interventions.

The members heard that physical activity programmes could reduce absenteeism by up to 20 per cent and that workplace health programmes had been shown to increase job satisfaction. It was therefore suggested that a focus on workplace health could offer an economic advantage to employers

such as the council. Measures that the council planned to encourage its employees to enjoy healthy lifestyles was the role out of the b-You programme, training in the Make Every Contact Count scheme, increasing the take-up of health checks and flu vaccines and through raising awareness generally.

Members expressed concern over exposing all employees to the same treatment when it was suggested every individual had their own needs. It was also suggested that aspirations to encourage employees to walk to work had to be offset against the reality that busy people sometimes needed to use cars. The director accepted both of these points. It was highlighted that the programmes put before employees were about choices and did take account of individual needs, and that employees could be encouraged to be active outside of their travel arrangements. One suggestion was that employees should be encouraged to be active during their lunch breaks.

The board asked whether the council had investigated establishing links with gyms to encourage employees to become members. The director stated that the council's own leisure strategy offered an excellent opportunity in this area through the development of a range of new facilities, and that participation in the b-You scheme would enable employees to access these.

The issue of incentivising employees was discussed, with particular reference to reducing absence. Some members suggested this could be used as a positive step to encourage employees to increase attendance. However, it was also noted that the risk of such a scheme would to unfairly penalise employees that were absent with good reason.

Resolved to note the presentation.

47/12 Council Cabinet Forward Plan

Members considered the Forward Plan. It was noted that all of the entries within the Business, Finance and Democracy portfolio would be disposed with at the March Council Cabinet meeting. Members felt the items may be appropriate for retrospective scrutiny at a future date.

Resolved to retrospectively scrutinise the following Forward Plan entries:

- **34/12 Adoption of a Local Assistance Scheme for Derby;**
- **52/12 Revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy; and**
- **77/12 Approval of the council's insurance supplier.**

48/12 Welfare Reform

A report of the Strategic Director of Resources highlighting the scope of welfare reform changes that had arisen was presented by the Head of Customer Service. Specific focus on the impact on customers was provided in relation to under occupation, the Council Tax Local Support Scheme, Empty Properties and the Local Assistance Scheme

Under Occupation

The board was informed that 2,750 letters had been sent out to recipients of housing benefit who were likely to lose part of their benefit as a result of the welfare reforms. It was reported that around 200 customers had responded stating that they felt they were exempt and that email contact had also risen as a result of the letters being sent.

Council Tax Support Scheme

It was reported that 15,000 letters had been sent to recipients of Council Tax support who were likely to lose that support as a result of the welfare reforms. Some 400 telephone appointments had been made to explain the changes to those affected.

Empty Properties

The board heard that around 2,500 letters had been sent to people affected. It was reported that the impact in terms of customer contacts had been minimal.

Local Assistance Scheme

The council's scheme was detailed by the Head of Customer Service. This included that vouchers would be provided rather than cash payments and that a systems-based and rules-based approach had been taken to computerise much of the assessment application and reduce the time required to administer the scheme. It was explained that there were five stages to an application, these being: eligibility, assessment, validation, award and review.

It was reported that the council would be internally reviewing the roll-out of the scheme weekly and formally reviewing before members on a three-monthly basis.

It was suggested for all of the welfare reforms highlighted, the greatest customer contact was likely to follow when the changes were imposed.

Members sought clarification on whether Derby Homes' tenants would be processed through the council's Customer Services division. It was reported that Derby Homes had its own unit to deliver the scheme and that tenants affected would be directed there in the first instance. Concerns were raised over whether tenants unable to access online services would be supported given the increasing focus on more efficient customer service methods. The board was reassured that while there would continue to be a focus on using online services, more traditional alternatives would remain available.

Resolved to:

- 1) Request that a briefing session on all aspects of how welfare reform was being imposed be provided for members; and**
- 2) Receive further updates on the impact on customers as appropriate.**

MINUTES END