

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**26 NOVEMBER 2020**

### **STAFF SURVEY ON WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

**Extract from the record of the meeting:**

**Discussion:**

The Committee received a report and presentation on the results of a survey on the working arrangements experienced by Council staff during the pandemic. The survey had aimed to test how the Council responded to the needs of the workforce during the pandemic and to explore the opportunity for a different way of working going forward.

The survey had focused on work life balance, wellbeing, mental health, productivity, flexibility, support and equipment for people working at home. Over 1000 people had responded to the survey which revealed high satisfaction rates with the flexible working arrangements being made by the Council. Eight dedicated workstreams had been created to build on the achievements so far, using the data from the survey.

During the discussion, Members raised a number of issues and the officer response was as follows:

- **Difficulties in taking annual leave:**  
The Council managed, measured, and encouraged the taking of annual leave to aid wellbeing. Managers were prompted to address issues where compliance systems identified that leave was not being taken. Staff redeployment had been used to reduce the pressure on areas of high business demand to enable people to take their leave entitlement. Annual leave could be taken in hours as well as whole or half days.
- **Ongoing training for apprentices during the pandemic:**  
Apprentices continued to receive the support they needed. The Council's apprenticeship academy brought together all apprentices to ensure that there was a cohort of learning across the peer group. There was an expectation that all apprentices, and anyone new to their role, would still need to come into the office to have formal recognition into the role and to find out about the organisation. The induction process had been reviewed to take the distant

workforce into account. As Gun Wharf was a Covid secure building, it allowed up to 25% of the workforce in the office where their attendance was required.

- **Cyber Security risk issues associated with working from home:**  
The Council had a duty of care to staff working from home. Checks would be made to ensure cyber security was listed within the risks and priorities of the eight workstreams. Cyber security was captured within the Council Plan.
- **Measuring productivity and helping people to be more productive:**  
The way in which productivity was measured was changing. Given the current increased on-line activity rather than face to face discussions between colleagues, HR and ICT were working on the use of Microsoft Analytics to identify the different forms of interaction. This would help identify how people were spending their time and their productivity.
- Officers agreed to consider what more can be done to help people to be more productive. There was a lot of pressure on the workforce and people needed to feel valued to help them to be more productive.
- **Flexibility to improve a work/life balance for the 25% who are currently not satisfied:**  
The Council recognised that workloads had been an issue throughout the pandemic as people had to adapt quickly to working differently. More work needed to be done in this area. Medway Makers were active in some directorates and were working with teams to understand what more needed to be done. In addition, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions were a strong network that linked into the community and provided a good source of information.
- **Staff who are unable to work from home:**  
Rather than referring to working from home, the Council was seeking to introduce smarter working which referred to a more blended, agile approach which enabled people to work from a range of locations. The vision was for the main estates such as Gun Wharf to be used as collaboration spaces to enable people to come together for time with their line manager and social interaction.
- **Line management of staff working remotely:**  
The Council recognised the difficulty in managing people remotely. No-one was expected to be a permanent home worker and the expectation was that all staff would be visible as part of a team and use of collaboration space would be key to enable this.
- **The continuance of communication:**  
During the pandemic policies had been enhanced or relaxed as appropriate. Policy variations or advice on new guidance were communicated through HR hot topics that were communicated quickly to all staff. In Touch presentations

were a more interactive means of communication on issues such as mental health and well-being.

- **Availability of IT equipment to part-time staff:**

Laptops were available to those members of staff working remotely who needed them to perform their role effectively, irrespective of the hours they worked.

- **Home working protocols:**

A working group had been set up to consider a new home working protocol which would be much more detailed than the current version. It would include the protocols that were already in place for staff to work safely, including lone worker risk assessments and buddying arrangements. The Jabber telephone system enabled the user to use their office number through their private phone.

**Decision:**

The Committee noted and commented on the survey findings.