Sunderland City Council

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

AGENDA

Meeting to be held in Committee Room 1, City Hall, Plater Way, Sunderland on Thursday 11th April 2024 at 5.30 p.m.

Membership

Cllrs Burrell, Dodds (Vice Chair), Hartnack, Jones, Leonard, Mason-Gage (Chair), Morrissey, Mullen, Samuels, P. Smith, Thornton, Usher and Walton

For Further information and assistance, please contact:
David Noon, Principal, Democratic Services Officer
Email: david.noon@sunderland.gov.uk

6.　　　**Annual Work Programme 2023/24**　　　36

Report of the Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support
Co-ordinator (copy attached).

Part C – Health Substantial Variations to Service

No items.

Part D - CCFA/Members' Items/Petitions

No items.

E. WAUGH,
Assistant Director of Law and Governance,
City Hall,
SUNDERLAND.

2nd April 2024.

At a meeting of the **SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE** held in **COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND** on **THURSDAY, 7 MARCH 2024 at 5.30 p.m.**

Present:-

Councillor Mason-Gage in the Chair.

Councillors Burrell, Dodds, Hartnack, Jones, Leonard, Samuels, P. Smith, Thornton, Usher and Walton.

Also in attendance:-

Michael Crozier, Head of Adult Social Care, Adult Services Directorate
Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate
Amanda Duminghan, Superintendent, Northumbria Police
David Noon, Principal Democratic Services Officer, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Services Directorate
Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager, Corporate Strategy, Strategy and Corporate Affairs Directorate
Gillian Robinson, Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members Support Co-ordinator, Law and Governance, Smart Cities and Enabling Directorate

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Morrissey and Mullen.

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 8th February 2024

1.	RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 8th February 2024 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

No declarations were made.

Safer Sunderland Annual Report

The Director of Adult Social Care submitted a report (copy circulated) which highlighted the achievements of the Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP) during 2023 - 24 and provided an opportunity for Members to discuss the progress made.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr. Michael Crozier, Head of Adult Social Care, provided the Committee with a commentary on the key aspects of the Annual Report with particular reference to the work undertaken to tackle motorcycle disorder and the disconnect between the public perception that crime continued to rise and the statistical evidence that showed the opposite to be true. Superintendent Amanda Duminghan, of Northumbria Police, then provided the Committee with the context that lay behind the figures in the Annual Report and briefed Members on the Force restructure introduced earlier in the week.

The restructure had seen the doubling of the number of area commands from three to six, to align with the local authority areas. As a result, Sunderland and South Tyneside which previously comprised a single command would now have dedicated teams each headed by a Chief Superintendent. This reflected a recognition that across the Northumbria Police Force area, its communities had their own identities and issues which mattered most to them. The Police believed that moving to the new structure would help it to best respond to those needs and ensure that they were there when people needed them.

The Chairman thanked Mr Crozier and Superintendent Duminghan for their report and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Hartnack referred to the figures in relation to motorcycle disorder detailed in paragraph 9.9 of the report and asked if these referred to the South Tyneside / Sunderland pilot area or the Force area as a whole? Superintendent Duminghan believed that they related to the pilot area. Councillor Hartnack stated that the figures in relation to the numbers of arrests and seizures of motorcycles were excellent. He suggested that they should be publicised as widely as possible to highlight the good news and help educate people in the hope of reversing the disconnect in public perceptions.

Councillor Hartnack referred to motorcycle retailers, citing the case of one outlet that sold 23 children's motorcycles in December alone during the run up to Christmas. He asked if the Police education programme included speaking to retailers? Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that it did, and also included schools, young people and parents.

Councillor Walton referred to discussion at the North Area Committee on motorcycle disorder and that reference had been made to the setting up of hotline to report issues. Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that establishing a dedicated phone line in relation to motor cycle crime had definitely been part of the plan and that she would check to see whether it was operational yet. She added that the purpose of dedicated phone line was not as a hot line to report incidents as they happened but as means for the public to submit intelligence and information. Mr Crozier added that he would liaise with Michelle Coates who he believed had attended the North Area Committee meeting, regarding the status of the phone line.

Councillor P. Smith expressed her concern that drugs continued to be a massive issue, highlighting that drug crime was at its highest level than at any stage over the last 8 years. It had reached a stage where people were emboldened to openly smoke drugs in public.
Superintendent Duminghan replied that the increase in the Area Commands from 3 to 6 showed the Force's focus on geographical policing along with the enhancement

of the Neighbourhood Model. A county lines operation had been undertaken in Sunderland over the previous week with the aim of tackling drug dealers. The operation was ongoing, but policing alone would not solve the problem and education needed to be added to disruptive action. Drug use amongst young people was a national concern and was not a problem that was specific to Sunderland. Superintendent Duminghan urged people to report concerns to crime stoppers. Mr Crozier agreed that you could not police your way out of a drugs problem and that a holistic approach was required that included the support of every part of the local community.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that Sunderland and South Tyneside now had their own Area Commands. As part of the enhanced Neighbourhood Model, the individual Neighbourhood Inspectors were seen as owners of their neighbourhoods who would keep their Area Commanders briefed.

With regard to intelligence, Councillor Samuels advised that Southwick had been lucky to benefit from the presence of the SARA project and its 'soft model' approach. This had resulted in more people reporting crime and intelligence had improved. The problems had been long standing but in seeing that they could be tackled had helped improve public perceptions about crime. However, it was also true that it could take only one incident to provide a setback. Regarding the public perception that crime continued to rise, Mr Crozier advised that this didn't always match the data. Retail surveys showed that business owners felt that things had improved massively however this was not reflected in residents' surveys.

Councillor Usher added that there was no doubt that the SARA project had worked. The extent could be measured by the fact that many of Southwick's problems had now been displaced into neighbouring Witherwack. He referred to the project supported by the North Area Committee to fund two mountain bikes to help Northumbria Police patrol local estates and asked if Superintendent Duminghan could provide any feedback. He appreciated that the new command model had only been introduced earlier that week but felt it would be useful to see the Sunderland crime figures broken down to neighbourhood and ward levels. He stressed the importance of finding better ways of communicating successes because the public perception was that the city contained a lot of 'no-go areas'. In conclusion Councillor Usher related his experience of trying to get through on the 101 number which had not been good.

Superintendent Duminghan replied that she would check how the mountain bikes had been operating and assured Councillor Usher that she was aware of the issues arising in Witherwack. With regard to the 101 system she advised that it was performance managed and asked Councillors to feed back to her on the issues they were experiencing.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Burrell, Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that the £1m provided through the Safe Streets Fund was a force wide allocation rather than dedicated purely to Sunderland.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thanked Mr Crozier and Superintendent Duminghan for their attendance and it was:-

2.   RESOLVED that the information contained in the Safer Sunderland Annual report be received and noted.

Performance Management Update – Quarter 3 of 2023/24

Mrs Beverley Poulter, Senior Manager Corporate Strategy, Strategy and Corporate Affairs submitted a report (copy circulated) providing the Committee with the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3 of 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mrs Poulter took the Committee through the summary for the three key themes of Dynamic Smart City, Healthy Smart City and Vibrant Smart City of the Sunderland City Plan, highlighting commitments, key achievements and progress made for each key theme, as well as performance against the additional Council indicators for good organisational health, strong financial management, productive and innovative working and a Council ready for the future.

The Committee raised a number of questions and comments under each of the key themes as follows:-

Dynamic Smart City

Councillor Walton welcomed the Crown Film Studios development and expressed a hope that the investment could be used to address the city's qualification gap and boost attainment. Ms Poulter advised that this represented a large part of the project and was the aspect that was most stringently pushed for and negotiated. The key aim was to ensure that as many of the resulting jobs went to Sunderland people as possible. In the initial stages of production this may not be the case but as Sunderland continued to grow its own, it was envisaged that it would become a reality. The Head of Sunderland College had played a key role in designing the skills strategy aligned to the project. Councillor Walton compared this to the Automotive courses established at Gateshead College to provide local people with the skills to obtain employment at Nissan.

Councillor Hartknack referred to the issue where neighbourhood police officers in Roker and Seaburn were relocated to the city centre at the weekend to help police the nighttime economy. This was at a time when Seaburn and Roker was experiencing its own rapid expansion of the nighttime economy which also required a police presence. Councillor Jones added that this issue was also being flagged up to her by members of the licensing trade in Washington. Superintendent Duminghan confirmed that she would take the issue away with her.

Vibrant Smart City

Councillor Samuels noted that total visitor spend had increased at the same time as the number of visits had declined and asked for the reasons.
Ms Poulter advised that she would investigate and report back.

Councillor Walton noted that there was a decline in the availability of affordable housing and asked if there was anything the Council could do about it? Ms Poulter

replied that this was an issue that the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee had investigated, and she would share the data.

Healthy Smart City.

The Chairman referred to the recent increase in the tax on cigarettes and vaping products and asked if this actually worked in terms of driving down the numbers of people smoking. Ms Poulter replied that she did not have any figures to hand that would show a correlation, however she could say that the Director of Public Health was very happy to hear the announcement. Mr Crozier confirmed that Public Health did see a reduction in the smoking figures in the aftermath of an increase in taxation.

Organisational Health

Councillor Hartnack advised that he had received a number of complaints regarding telephone calls not being taken once put through by the Customer Service Network (CSN). He believed that the front of house service at City Hall was very good but that this was not matched by the telephony service. Ms Poulter suggested that this was probably not an issue related to the CSN rather it centred on the availability of the person to whom to call was routed to.

Councillor Hartnack replied that the issue was multi-facetted with the caller often not knowing who it was they should be speaking to and consequently were put through to the wrong person.

Councillor Usher asked if it was possible that a visit to the CSM could be arranged for members to see it in operation.

Councillor Dodds offered by way of balance, her positive experience of dealing with the CSN.

There being no further questions or comments, the Chairman thank Ms Poulter for her attendance and it was:-

3.   RESOLVED that the Performance Management Update be received and noted.

Annual Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Member Support Co-ordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching, for Members' information, the thematic Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2023/24 and which provided an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2023/24.

(For copy report – see original minutes.)

Mr Nigel Cummings presented the report, updating Members on the current position regarding the Work Programmes of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee and the three thematic Scrutiny Committees. Members were advised that the April meeting would be the Committee's final meeting of the current Municipal Year and would receive the Committee's Annual Report and the report of the Task and Finish Group on the Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce. There would be one more meeting of

the Task and Finish Group to be scheduled in prior to the final meeting of the Committee.

4.   RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committees' work programmes for 2023/24 and the variations to these work programmes be noted, together with the current scrutiny budget position.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from the 14th of February 2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was advised that if Members had any issues to raise or required further detail on any of the items included in the notice, (that were within the purview of the Committee), they should contact Mr Cummings, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

5.   RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting, having thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed)   K. MASON-GAGE,
                    Chairman.

SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE   **11 APRIL 2024**

TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP: HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF THE WORKFORCE

Report of the Task and Finish Working Group

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   The purpose of the report is to present the findings of the task and finish working group established to look at the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

2.   Background

2.1   The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Work Programming session held on 15 June 2023 provided Members, officers and partners with the opportunity to discuss a variety of scrutiny topics, compiling a shortlist of potential issues for task and finish work during the coming year.

2.2   Following the workshop the Committee agreed to establish a task and finish working group to look at the health and wellbeing of the Council's workforce.

Context to the Working Group

2.3   Sunderland City Council employs over 2,650 people across approximately 175 workplaces. The majority of City Hall employees are desk-based, although this is not the only office-based location, or much of their work is undertaken from a computer. However, there are also a number of employees at key council sites that are in manual roles. These include Jack Crawford House, South Hylton and The Port to name a few, with a range of roles including environmental services, catering, cleaning, drivers and machinery operators etc.

2.4   The workforce is ageing with over 50% aged 50+ and an average age across the organisation of 48. Interestingly the workforce is generally older than the Sunderland population (22.27% residents aged 16-29 vs. 8.3% Council employees).

2.5   The investment and promotion in the health and wellbeing of employees is important to any organisation as it can help to improve morale, understand and reduce sickness absence, and increase productivity and performance across the organisation. There are many issues that impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals through lifestyle choices, personal and professional circumstances to the impacts of the recent pandemic and the current cost-of-living issues. How people deal with these issues and how that affects their own health and wellbeing can vary greatly. It is however important for an organisation to understand its workforce and support groups and individuals through policies, schemes and initiatives that can promote improved health and wellbeing both in the workplace and outside of it.

3.   The Aim and Terms of Reference of the Working Group

3.1   The working group was established with the specific aim of looking at how the council supports the health and wellbeing of the workforce through policy development and

key initiatives as well as identifying the challenges and key achievements in employee health and wellbeing.

3.2 The working group consisted of Cllrs Tracy Dodds, Michael Hartnack, Beth Jones, Katherine Mason-Gage, Antony Mullen, Pat Smith and John Usher; the group selected Cllr Dodds as the Chair.

3.3 The following Terms of Reference for the working group were agreed:-

(a) To understand the factors that contribute to the health and wellbeing of the workforce;

(b) To look at the policies and initiatives in the workplace that promote and support the health and wellbeing of the workforce;

(c) To consider the challenges and barriers to health and wellbeing in the workforce; and

(d) To recognise the benefits of health and wellbeing to the workforce and the organisation.

4. Gathering the Evidence

4.1 The task and finish working group gathered evidence from a number of sources and this was coordinated, on behalf of Members, by the scrutiny officer. Members gathered evidence from the following:

- Desktop research;
- Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services;
- Learning and Organisational Development Manager;
- Specialist Lead – People Management.

4.2 Attached for Members information at **Appendix 1** is the draft report developed by the working group. The report covers a number of issues relating to the health and wellbeing of the organisation's workforce. Some of the key areas covered include:

- The Workforce
- Health and Wellbeing
- Strategy, Support and Recognition
- Challenges, Barriers and Communications
- Priorities.

4.3 The intention is that the report and the recommendations support and complement the current and future work in relation to the health and wellbeing of the workforce within the organisation.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Following discussion and agreement on the draft report by the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee it will be submitted to Cabinet for discussion and agreement.

5.2   Follwing submission and subject to agreement by Cabinet, the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee will monitor progress against the agreed recommendations through its work programme.

6.   Recommendations

6.1   That the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee discuss and following any amendments agree the final report of the working group.

6.2   That Members agree to the submission of the final report to Cabinet.

Contact Officer: Nigel Cummings
                       nigel.cummings@sunderland.gov.uk

Scrutiny Coordinating Committee
Task and Finish Review 2023 – 2024

Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce

Draft Report

**Scrutiny Coordinating Committee
Task and Finish Working Group 2023 – 2024**

Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce

Draft Report

Contents

1   Foreword from the Chair of the Task and Finish Working Group

Having a job is good for our health, but the quality of our jobs makes the difference. Ensuring people have a safe, encouraging and supportive working environment will help keep them well and in work for longer. This is something that all employers can and should take steps to achieve.

Ducan Selbie
Former Chief Executive Public Health England

We spend a lot of time at work during our lifetimes, this can be from our late teens into the early part of old age, it is a long time. Therefore, it is important that the work environment is place where staff can thrive and be confident in their roles.

For businesses that truly champion mental health and staff wellbeing, it can pay dividends not only in terms of attracting and retaining staff but getting the best out of people – benefitting both individuals and the business that supports them.

According to the National Health Service in the UK, the principal reason for work stress is a lack of support and understanding from managers/leadership. When people are stressed, exhausted and feel that they aren't listened to in the workplace it's detrimental to their health, happiness and performance.

The 2022 Deloitte UK Mental Health report estimates that for every £1 spent by employers on mental health interventions, employers could get back £5.30 in reduced absence, presenteeism, and staff turnover. This exemplifies the real importance and benefits of support and interventions not only on the health of the workforce but also the organisation itself.

The working group has looked extensively at the procedures and initiatives that the Council is employing to support and promote the health and wellbeing of the workforce. It is good to see the range and scope of activities taking place and the clear importance that the authority is placing on this aspect of work.

On behalf of the working group, we hope that this report and the recommendations that we have suggested complement the work that is already taking place and adds further support to the whole health and wellbeing agenda across the Council workplace.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the working group for their contributions and the officers who gave their time and expertise to help us see and understand the work that is taking place in this important area.

Cllr Tracy Dodds
Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Task and Finish Working Group

2 Introduction

2.1 The Annual Scrutiny Workshop provided a variety of scrutiny issues for potential review during the coming year. The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee agreed to undertake a task and finish working group to look at the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

3 Aim of the Review

3.1 To look at how the council supports the health and wellbeing of the workforce through policy development and key initiatives as well as identifying the challenges and key achievements in employee health and wellbeing.

4 Terms of Reference

4.1 The title of the review was agreed as 'The Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce' and its terms of reference were agreed as:

(a) To understand the factors that contribute to the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

(b) To look at the policies and initiatives in the workplace that promote and support the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

(c) To consider the challenges and barriers to health and wellbeing in the workforce.

(d) To recognise the benefits of health and wellbeing to the workforce and the organisation.

5 Membership of the Working Group

5.1 The membership of the Task and Finish Working groups was as follows:

Cllr Tracy Dodds (Chair of the working group), Cllr Michael Hartnack, Cllr Beth Jones, Cllr Mason-Gage, Cllr Antony Mullen, Cllr Pat Smith and Cllr John Usher.

6 Methods of Investigation

6.1 The approach to this work included a range of research methods namely:

(a) Desktop Research.
(b) Use of secondary research e.g. surveys, questionnaires.
(c) Evidence presented by key stakeholders.

6.2 Throughout the course of the review process the committee gathered evidence from a number of key witnesses including:

(a)   Liz St Louis – Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services.
(b)   Gillian Hunter – Specialist Lead – People Management.
(c)   Karen Donaldson – Learning and Organisational Development Manager.
(d)   Jemma Burdis – Communications Officer.

6.3   Statements in this report are based on information from a variety of published sources and from individual witnesses. No guarantees can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of such information. Views and opinions expressed by individual witnesses may or may not be representative of the views of the majority but are worthy of consideration, nevertheless.

7   Findings of the Review

Findings relate to the main themes raised during the committee's investigations and evidence gathering.

7.1   The Workforce

7.1.1   Sunderland City Council employs over 2,650 people across approximately 175 different workplaces. Approximately 33% of employees (952) are based at City Hall with the majority being desk-based, although there are a number of other key sites with concentrated numbers of staff. These include:

South Hylton House where approximately half of employees are in Environmental Services within 'Operational Services' roles. The remainder predominantly represent Corporate Services ('Catering', 'Cleaning' & 'Business & Property').

Jack Crawford House with around a quarter of employees in 'Operational Services' (Environmental Services). The rest sit mainly within 'Regulatory Services' and 'Information Planning & Transport' (City Development).

The Port does have some desk-based workers but there are also a good proportion of manual workers, including drivers/operators of forklift trucks & cranes.

Houghton Depot accounts for a small number of the overall workforce (2%), but it is important to note that nearly all employees at this location are frontline 'Operational Services' workers (Environmental Services).

7.1.2   The workforce is ageing with over 50% aged 50+ and an average age across the organisation of 48. Interestingly the workforce is generally older than the Sunderland population (22.27% residents aged 16-29 vs. 8.3% Council employees). It is also worth noting that 59% of employees are female compared with 41% of employees being male.

7.1.3   The incidence of part-time working across the organisational structure shows a predominance of part-time working in lower paid roles, and this pattern is similar across the UK. The majority of these role types are within 'Business Administration', 'Catering', and 'Cleaning' service areas, with women predominantly occupying these lower paid positions, it is also highly likely that societal factors are a contributor to gender pay gaps. (Women taking on low paid part time roles to balance family and caring responsibilities more often than men.) Further measures are being taken by the Council to combat this. Sunderland wide data (Nomis – Official Census and Labour Market Statistics (nomisweb.co.uk)) on earnings also suggests that earnings for women are lower overall due to part time workers.

7.1.4   It is also worth noting that the workforce has a turnover, in terms of leavers, of 13.53% of staff which is in line with median annual turnover rates expressed in the most recent LGA workforce survey. The majority of council leavers are classed as voluntary and this includes end of contract employees, those at retirement age (65+) and voluntary resignations, which can lead to beneficial opportunities arising for recruitment and promotion from within the organisation.

7.2   Health and Wellbeing

7.2.1   The investment and promotion in the health and wellbeing of employees is important to any organisation as it can help to improve morale, understand and reduce sickness absence, and increase productivity and performance across the

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organisation. There are many issues that impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals through lifestyle choices, personal and professional circumstances to the impacts of the recent pandemic and the current cost-of-living issues. How people deal with these issues and how that affects their own health and wellbeing can vary greatly. It is however important for an organisation to understand its workforce and support groups and individuals through policies, schemes and initiatives that can promote improved health and wellbeing both in the workplace and outside of it.

7.2.2   Sunderland City Council gathers anonymous data and insights about the health and wellbeing of the workforce through the Employee Health Needs Assessment (HNA). The 2022 version was completed by 593 employees or 22% of the workforce, which was a significant increase, of 130%, compared to the previous survey. The Employee HNA can assist in tracking progress and performance against a number of measures as well as supporting strategies, policies and action plan priorities.

7.2.3   The working group enquired how the organisation would look to improve the 22% response rate in future. It was reported to the group that it was important to continue to promote the importance of responding as proactively as possible through council media, wellbeing mentors and council communications. In that promotion it was crucial to stress the anonymity aspect of any survey to ensure responses are candid and reflect a candid view. Ultimately though employees needed to see the benefits of filling in the survey and that their concerns have been recognised and responded to.

7.2.4   The Employee HNA survey covered a variety of issues including employee feelings towards their own mental health, wellbeing, physical health, alcohol consumption, smoking and vaping, lifestyle, sleep health and financial wellbeing. The survey identified that the general health and wellbeing of the workforce as being either good or very good.

7.2.5   Respondents to the survey also highlighted, when asked, key priorities around mental wellbeing including work-life balance, anxiety, stress and depression. It was positive to note a robust three-year Health and Wellbeing Strategy and emerging action plans to address priorities and needs. Members also acknowledged that there were approximately 60 wellbeing mentors across the organisation providing support and signposting for employees. The Health Survey is due to be repeated in 2024 and this will provide further information to shape future support and initiatives. Members also noted that the full staff survey 2023 did include the following wellbeing questions:

- My workplace is inclusive and celebrates diversity.
- The council truly values the diversity of its employees.
- My health, wellbeing and safety are taken seriously.
- My direct line manager/supervisor takes a genuine interest in my health and wellbeing.
- I am aware of the council's wellbeing offer to its employees.
- I know how and where to access the support for my wellbeing that is provided by the council.

Mental Health

7.2.6   From the staff survey Members of the working group could see that the general mental wellbeing of employees fell between fair and very good with the majority surveyed feeling comfortable having conversations about their own mental wellbeing.

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How is you mental Health?		I am confident having conversations in the workplace about my mental health	
Very Good	14.5%	Agree	74.3%
Good	41.7%	Disagree	25.7%
Fair	31.4%		
Poor	10.8%		
Very Poor	1.6%		

Figure 1: Staff Health Survey Responses 2022

7.2.7 Members were informed that there was extensive work being undertaken around mental health in the organisation, which was being supported by Washington Mind. Members identified that there was a clear focus on general awareness raising, signposting and support for national campaigns to de-stigmatise issues around mental health. This includes access to wellbeing at work awareness sessions for staff and increased signposting to counselling support.

7.2.8 Members were also informed that, in conjunction with Washington Mind, a mental health awareness training programme for managers has been developed. Sitting alongside this is also a newly developed toolkit providing support and guidance in relation to key mental health issues for managers.

7.2.9 The group also noted that the Council had launched an Employee Mental Health and Wellbeing policy and procedure. Clearly the organisation recognises the importance of promoting good mental health and providing support for employees who are experiencing mental ill health. This policy aims to set out the workforce impact, responsibilities, risk factors and support available to all employees in relation to their mental health and wellbeing.

7.2.10 Members queried if there was a more proactive approach taken to the data from specific service areas e.g., Sunderland Care and Support or Social Services due to the nature of the work involved. It was acknowledged that there was considerable work undertaken with such staff around mental health including the creation of 'staff ambassadors' to highlight issues and areas of concern. The working group recognised the significance of ensuring that those service areas with highly emotive and stressful roles should be monitored more closely for signs, trends or patterns in mental wellbeing.

Physical Health

7.2.11 Apart from mental health another key aspect of health and wellbeing at work is around an employee's physical health. This can be defined as the condition of their body, taking into consideration everything from the absence of disease to fitness levels. Physical health is critical for overall well-being, and can be affected by lifestyle: diet, level of physical activity, and behaviour.

7.2.12 With this in mind the organisation has a number of promotions that support physical health including health MOT's across the organisation, wellness walks and runs, active breaks and use of the City Hall Wellness Suite as well as discounted memberships to gym facilities across the city. The Council also has a dedicated Employee Wellness Coordinator who delivers those health MOT's and supports with

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promotion and use of the Wellness suite at City Hall. There is also continued promotion and support of Active Travel and Active Sunderland initiatives, support for winter vaccination programme and active participation in the BIG Workplace Games. The working group clearly acknowledged that physical wellbeing is a cornerstone of overall health and productivity. Employees tend to be more engaged and focused, while less prone to burnout, when they are physically healthy.

7.2.13 Engaging in regular physical activity helps to prevent chronic diseases, obtain good quality sleep, better manage stress and maintain a healthy weight. Promoting physical wellbeing not only benefits individuals, but also has a positive impact on an organisation, helping to reduce absenteeism, improve employee retention and enhance overall company performance.

Financial Health

7.2.14 The organisation is acutely aware of the importance of financial health for employees especially in the current cost of living crisis. Members noted that the Council introduced face to face training in 2023, Making Every Contact Count, a financial wellbeing a 2-hour session open to any member of staff. The Council has a number of initiatives which aim to provide support around financial wellbeing working in partnership with a number of groups including Moneywise and SHARP including road shows and pop up stands across the city. The Council are also improving promotion and engagement in Union Learn Initiatives via digital touchdown zones. The organisation also continues to develop and promote staff benefits and offers through the introduction of the Vipup scheme. The group acknowledged that staff also have access to financial resilience training.

7.2.15 The biggest financial concerns for the workforce, from recent staff surveys, are around not being able to pay bills, risk of future redundancy, not being able to retire and insufficient savings. Members noted that the Council had in-house workshops to support retirement planning and AVC (additional voluntary contributions) advice.

7.2.16 Financial wellbeing is often associated with mental health problems. According to the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute, people with mental health problems are three times as likely to be in problem debt. Employers are well placed to offer support. The business case for doing so is clear: financial wellbeing programmes can help employers reduce people risk, manage workplace costs and improve productivity[1].

Alcohol and Smoking

7.2.17 Employers have a crucial role to play in reducing alcohol harm among their staff, through approaches such as education, confidential support and ending the stigma about seeking help for a problem with alcohol. According to Alcohol Change UK**,** around 17 million working days are lost to alcohol each year at a cost of £1.7 billion. With sickness levels at a 20-year high at 2.6 per cent and depression and anxiety topping the table of reasons for long-term absence, progressive employers are beginning to understand that supporting people to have a healthier relationship with alcohol could have a significant impact on their workers' health and wellbeing.

7.2.18 The Learning and Organisational Development Manager outlined a number of initiatives that the Council supported in terms of tackling alcohol consumption as part of an overall approach to health and wellbeing. This included supporting Dry January, drop-in sessions supported by Change-Grow-Live at a number of sites

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[1] Financial Wellbeing – Price Waterhouse Cooper. 2018

across the organisation. Change-Grow-Live also provided on-line alcohol intervention training as well as continued promotion of the Sunderland Tier 2 Alcohol service.

7.2.19 The working group highlighted the question design around alcohol consumption in the staff health survey and suggested it would be more helpful to have the days in a typical week where someone consumes alcohol defined as 0-1 days and 2-3 days rather than 0 and 1-3 days.

7.2.20 In terms of smoking the staff health survey highlights that only 5% (32) of survey respondents stated they smoked daily or occasionally. At a national level, the prevalence of e-cigarette use (vaping) has risen over recent years but appears to have settled at about 6% of the adult population. The Council also continues to promote interventions with continued support for National No Smoking Day and Sunderland Stop Smoking Services. As well as leading the way for others in the City to become smoke-free employers via Sunderland Health Alliance.

Healthy Eating and Sleeping

7.2.21 A balanced and healthy diet is a cornerstone of a healthy lifestyle and supports a person's general wellbeing. Members were informed that the Council continues to support the expansion of Sunderland Weight Management Programme as well as the continued promotion and support for healthy choices sessions across the City.

7.2.22 Sleep, or lack thereof, is a big part of the equation when it comes to health, wellness, and productivity. Sleep disorders can snowball into bigger problems, with people having less energy, so they exercise less. Sleep disruptions have been shown to impact people's food preferences[2]. As the staff health survey now looks at sleep health Members were interested to know how this data would be taken forward. The Learning and Organisational Development Manager acknowledged that this was one of the challenges, but as highlighted poor sleep is often linked to other aspects of wellbeing and can be driven by lifestyle choices.

7.3 Strategy, Support and Recognition

The Vision of Wellness and Wellbeing

7.3.1 The group were informed that the vision was very much around a happy, healthy, safe workforce and it was important that people felt valued and rewarded for their contribution within the organisation. It is also important that staff feel connected to the people they work for and are prepared for their role with the skills, tools and knowledge required. The working group members recognised that job satisfaction was a critical factor that has a bearing on an individual's health and wellbeing.

7.3.2 The Learning and Organisational Development Manager reported that, within the Council, there was a very clear vision around the wellness and wellbeing of the workforce including:

- Staying healthy at work.
- Mental wellbeing support.
- Improved healthy eating and weight management.
- Reducing smoking levels.
- Reducing alcohol consumption.
- Increasing physical activity.

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[2] A healthy workplace starts in bed by Chris Orchard. 2015

- Promoting sustainable living.

Supporting Digital Engagement and Wellbeing

7.3.3 Members were informed of the Microsoft 365 F1 licence rollout programme to those staff who are often the hardest to reach within the organisation. It was noted that an Microsoft F1 licence was a very basic council account with email address and access to the Sunderland Council Hub.

7.3.4 It was positive to note that there had been 539 licences ordered that would be rolled out to over 100 locations. It was acknowledged that there had been challenges to this, particularly around hardware and in many instances installation of the licence on an employee's personal device. But this has allowed the organisation to engage with cohorts of staff, that for varying factors have been harder to reach, in a way that had not been achieved before. It was noted that feedback from staff had been very positive.

7.3.5 Members acknowledged this as a positive step to staff feeling more connected with the organisation but queried if there had been any issues with staff using the digital technology. It was reported to the group that there was a pilot scheme commencing with Sunderland College to upskill the workforce in the use of tech and improve the digital skill set across the organisation. Microsoft 365 F1 licence usage was to be monitored to assess the effectiveness of the rollout and the organisation would respond proactively to feedback from users.

Wellbeing Mentors

7.3.6 The organisation has a growing community of wellbeing mentors positioned across the organisation, currently 64, who are passionate about their role supporting employee engagement. There are quarterly workshops for the wellbeing mentors to share intelligence and influence health and wellbeing activities and initiatives. They are also represented on the Health and Wellbeing project team.

Support your colleagues to be their happiest, healthiest selves - get involved

Putting wellbeing first - that's the way we do things

We're looking for volunteers to spread the word about campaigns and activities, encourage people to take part, be our colleagues' voice, and even suggest what campaigns we run in the future.

This role is open to anyone in our organisation, regardless of experience, and can be a great addition to a CV.

We'll provide essential training, and there will be opportunities to continue this training to a higher, accredited level if you wish.

Figure 2: Wellbeing Mentor recruitment promotion

Mental Health Support and Signposting

7.3.7 It was recognised that the organisation has a number of policies and practices in relation to mental health support and signposting including an employee mental wellbeing policy and procedure and a managers guide to mental wellbeing. It was hoped that this guide can give managers the confidence and ability to discuss potential mental health issues with staff. It was also noted that these tools were available on the Council's Hub for all staff to access.

7.3.8 It was further noted that metal health related illness was one of the main reasons for staff sickness. Also, as the workforce operates in a more agile way post-pandemic it can often be difficult for managers and colleagues to spot the signs associated with mental health issues and far easier for them to be disguised. Therefore, it was good to note that there was also proactive and early interaction with Occupational Health Services, signposting to counselling services through Vipup and commissioned awareness raising training via Washington Mind.

Health and Safety Support

7.3.9 Health and safety was also highlighted as of paramount importance in keeping the workforce safe while working and carrying out their duties for the council, with a partnership approach having been adopted with services developing role specific training matrices. All health and safety policies were constantly reviewed and updated in light of new legislation and codes of practice.

7.3.10 Good health and safety practice and adherence in the workplace is supported by toolbox talks for specific service areas and regular workforce wide communications. There are also detailed policies and procedures around alcohol and substance misuse, health surveillance and fleet services transport to name a few. It was also pointed out to the group that there was always consultation with and support from trades union in terms of the development and implementation of strategies, policies and procedures.

Learning Opportunities

7.3.11 The Council also operates a combined face-to-face and e-learning offer that is open to all employees and covers a wide range of issues focused on health and wellbeing including domestic abuse, mental health awareness, menopause and stress and wellbeing to name a few. All training packages are open access, including mandatory training, and there is the opportunity to undertake these during work time.

7.3.12 All new staff are required to complete an induction with additional mandatory modules for managers including stress and wellbeing, health and safety management and risk assessments and safe working practices. Importantly induction ensures effective communication of expectations with signposting to wellbeing support services at the commencement of employment.

Employee Engagement

7.3.13 Employee engagement is also a major contributing factor to the success of any strategies, policies and procedures. In providing engagement through a number of means including 1-to-1's, annual appraisals, live events and staff awards provides a greater sense of purpose for employees and in understanding their contribution to the organisation and its success.

7.3.14 Further to this is there are two sets of awards within the local authority, the Stars Awards which supports employee recognition and highlights many of the Council's

values through the good practice exhibited by the workforce. There are also the VIP awards which focus specifically on the Council's values, which occur three times per year. Members enquired how Councillors can propose staff for awards and they are able to nominate staff for the Stars Awards, with a couple Members having done so for the last event. It may be useful to promote this further to ensure all members are aware and have the opportunity to nominate if they so wish.

7.3.15 Members were also informed that compliments and complaints were always relayed to the relevant service areas. Currently a piece of work was underway with Power BI (Microsoft package) to bring these varying sources of information together and provide useful data for the organisation around its performance and operation.

7.4   Challenges, Barriers and Communication

7.4.1   A key challenge is around health and wellbeing often being treated as a separate issue but to be effective it requires embedding into the organisation. The Council is a Better Health at Work employer and strives to ensure that health and wellbeing is considered and addressed at every level within the organisation.

7.4.2   This remains a challenge and there is work to be done. One aspect of this is in how the Council has changed its approach to appraisals, and the use of wellbeing conversations with those employees on long-term absence. Members enquired how the organisation supported managers in developing these skills in engaging in difficult conversations with staff. It was noted that face to face attendance management training had been introduced in 2023 to ensure managers have the knowledge and confidence to manage the absence of staff effectively. This includes regular check-in during absence and timely referral to occupational health services.

7.4.3   The importance of an inclusive work environment where employees have a sense of belonging is crucial to providing a workplace that is productive and fulfilling to employees. It was noted that a dedicated space on the Hub has been developed for inclusion and belonging as well as the reintroduction of the Supporting Employee Equality Network (SEEN). With this in mind Members suggested that it was important to give some priority and further support to the Equality Network within the organisation to build capacity within the group.

7.4.4   The group also highlighted the importance of integrating wellbeing into procedures, policies, appraisals and one-to-ones. It was also acknowledged that it was about recognition and opening conversations about real problems. Again, it was re-iterated that there was training for managers, and it was not to be seen as just another question to be asked. It is important that managers get to know their staff.

7.4.5   The working group did note that agile working, including working from home, had made this more challenging with reduced face-to-face contact. As the organisation has adopted a more agile working pattern in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and to create a better work-life balance for employees, it can also mean that spotting the signs of potential health and/or wellbeing issues becomes more difficult. This highlighted the real importance of team meetings, team development and team building opportunities. Members queried if working from home was an issue for the organisation and it was noted that, where roles permit, staff are encouraged to work in an agile manner, however, there is an expectation that time should be spent in the workplace to enable collaborative working with peers and colleagues. This was very much down to personal circumstances and choice along with the requirements of the role of each employee. It was also worth noting that

flexible working and working from home is more attractive to younger people and can help in recruitment and retention of staff.

7.4.6   Challenges also existed in sharing key information in working depots, it was noted as not always easy to engage with the workforce in these settings through usual social and digital channels. Therefore, it was important to take key messages directly to depot employees.

7.4.7   Another key challenge was around the cost implications associated with health and wellbeing in the workplace and how much the organisation wants and more realistically can invest into this agenda. It was noted that currently there was no dedicated health and wellbeing budget although associated budgets provide a valuable source of investment such as training and Public Health budgets.

7.4.8   Delivering those key messages to employees on a variety of issues, including around health and wellness, is extremely important. The group invited one of the council's senior internal communications officers to provide an overview of how these key messages are relayed to staff. It was reported that the internal communications team functioned under five key pillars which contributed to the positive working environment and culture of the organisation. These five pillars were identified as:

i.   Leadership Visibility
ii.   Reward and Recognition
iii.   Wellbeing
iv.   Engaging with the Frontline
v.   Employee Voice.

7.4.9   The council has approximately 2,650 employees and communications currently reach around 90% of staff. It was noted that analytics were employed to modify and provide focus around the various channels used to relay messages and interact with the workforce. The use of analytics also enables the direct targeting of specific groups of employees through appropriate channels to deliver key and role specific messages.

7.4.10 The recent employee survey has also seen an increased completion rate up from 1034 responses to 1507 responses. The survey will provide for a comprehensive action plan and feedback to all staff, as well as service level results. It was noted that results would be reported back into individual teams and services. The senior Communications officer stated it was important to be seen to be listening to staff and taking action which will lead to increased participation and engagement in future surveys. It is very much a case of 'you said, we listened.'

7.5   Health and Wellbeing Priorities

Better Health at Work Award
7.5.1   The working group were pleased to be informed that the Council had retained its 'Maintaining Excellence' standard as part of the Better Health at Work Awards. Importantly areas that were recognised included:

• Mental Health awareness/support.
• Financial wellbeing support/advice – commitment to real living wage 2023.
• Menopause awareness – inclusion in attendance management toolkit to aid understanding.

- Re-introduction of Domestic Abuse Champions (60) plus introduction of Domestic Abuse Policy.

7.5.2   There were also some recommendations from the assessor which highlighted some potential priority areas for improvement and development including:

- Less one-off events - repetition ensures events/activities become embedded and sustainable.
- Wider engagement - frontline services risk exclusion, maximise reach of comms, consider themed toolbox talks.
- Digital enablement to facilitate equitable access to information on the Hub and citywide services.
- Utilise QR codes more effectively as a cost-effective means of disseminating information.

Mental Health 2024-25
7.5.3   Mental wellbeing remains a key priority for the organisation in going forward with a number of commissioned services via Washington Mind including a number of training offers including mental health awareness for managers and employees as well as sessions on emotional resilience which aim to promote self-care.

7.5.4   As well as these sessions there will also be attendance management training offers which will help to support managers in holding effective wellbeing conversations, developing and implementing wellness action plans and completing stress risk assessments with their staff.

7.5.5   The Council are also committed to promoting a number of national campaigns on mental wellbeing including mental health awareness month, stress awareness week and world mental health day.

7.5.6   The development and implementation of policies and procedures will continue to help drive the organisation forward in terms of the health and wellbeing of its workforce. Key documents like the Dignity at Work Policy, Mental Health Toolkit for Managers and Employee Mental Wellbeing Guide will offer key support.

Appraisals
7.5.7   Appraisals are a vital way to create a two-way dialogue between the employer and employee and can provide that opportunity to discuss issues relating to an individual health and wellness in the workplace. Appraisals were relaunched across the organisation in April 2023 with revised documentation including guidance notes for both appraiser and appraisee. The organisation has also introduced group appraisals to support managers with larger teams and multiple employees in a similar role. Importantly appraisals have also been embedded into the new manger induction programme, manager development and leadership competency framework.

7.5.8   The Chief Executive's live events, manager briefings and Yammer have also been utilised to promote and encourage engagement with employees throughout the year. There is also continued targeted support for some of the organisations harder to reach teams which is resulting in a significant rise in appraisal completions. This has included the introduction of group appraisals which have been effective in certain service areas where employees have been reluctant, for a number of reasons, to come in alone.

7.5.9 It was also important to recognise that managers were expected to conduct appraisals, ensure return to work interviews were taking place, as well as formal attendance review meetings and referrals to occupational health where required. It was clear from discussions that managers would be held to account, with data being analysed to identify trends or patterns of behaviour. Data would also be also assessed to ensure that appropriate action is taken, in line with absence management policies, for employees who hit attendance trigger levels. It was expected that the organisation would expect to see changes and improvements as a result of these measures in the next couple of years.

Digital Engagement

7.5.10 As detailed throughout the report digital enablement and engagement remains a key priority with 11 digital touchdown zones across the city including City Hall, the Port and Barley Mow. Microsoft 365 F1 licences continue to be rolled out across the across the organisation which gives employees access to the Hub and the learning platform, policies, benefits portal and staff discounts. It is also good to note that services are leading the way and managing their own licences with support from the project team where required.

7.5.11 There continues to be a drive to identify skills gaps and develop service centric solutions working closely with managers e.g., recently developed and implemented a bespoke, digital upskilling programme for the bereavement team. The organisation also continues to improve and increase its digital skills programme with external support from Sunderland College.

7.5.12 Members noted as digital engagement increases across the local authority the development and greater use of QR codes, as highlighted by the Beter Health at Work assessment, has the potential to enhance referral routes and health promotions across the organisation.

Inclusive Workplaces

7.5.13 There is a clear commitment to relaunch and grow the membership of the Supporting Equality Network through engagement and consultation with existing members. The aim is to widen participation beyond LGBTQIA+ to include carers, veterans and domestic abuse victims.

7.5.14 There has also been a revision to the learning offer for employees with 5 bitesize e-learning modules developed around equality, diversity and inclusion, discrimination and you and your workplace. The Council has also embedded equality, diversity and inclusion into new starter and new manager induction programmes. As well as adopting and benchmarking Sunderland City Council against the Equality Framework for Local Government which has seen the development of a robust action plan. It was also suggested by Members that as well as a robust induction checklist the organisation could also introduce a simplified handover document for staff moving internally within the organisation, providing a clarity of expectation and a seamless transition.

Leadership Competencies

7.5.15 In September 2023 the council launched its first Leadership & Management Competency Framework, Leading with Purpose. The organisation has also worked with our partner, Sunderland College, to identify professional qualifications to support the leadership journey in 2024, this will include:
- Level 2 - Aspiring Managers
- Level 3 - Team Leaders

- Level 5 - Operational Managers.

7.5.15 The Council continues to grow its corporate learning offer and in 2024/25 will be adding coaching skills for managers, performance management and managing agile teams.

8   Conclusions

The Committee made the following overall conclusions: -

8.1   Workplace health and wellbeing can no longer be merely taken for granted or seen as an afterthought; it is critical to the overall health of an organisation. The evolving demographic of today's workforce means it is more important than ever for employers to create effective health and wellbeing initiatives. Within the Council there is an ageing workforce, an increase in women working and a variety of roles, from manual to desk-based, meaning workplace health and wellbeing is now an essential part of business.

8.2   Healthy workplaces help people to flourish and reach their potential. Investing in employee wellbeing can lead to increased resilience, better employee engagement, reduced sickness absence and higher performance and productivity. However, wellbeing initiatives often fall short of their potential because they stand alone, isolated from the everyday business. To gain real benefit, employee wellbeing priorities must be integrated throughout an organisation, embedded in its culture, leadership and people management. At present health and wellbeing is resourced from several budget headings such as training, Public Health and Communications, perhaps some consideration could be given to ascertaining if the level of resource is sufficient and how this is sustained moving forward.

8.3   The working group has clearly seen that there is a real drive within the Council to ensure that such initiatives are embedded into and considered at every level of the organisation. The working group noted examples of this through the addition of equality, diversity and inclusion training into new starter and new manager induction programmes and the considerable emphasis on appraisals within the new manager induction programme.

8.4   There is strong evidence to suggest that workplaces with high levels of mental wellbeing are more productive and that by addressing wellbeing in the workplace can lead to an increase in productivity. Importantly good mental health at work and good management go hand in hand in developing strategies and approaches for an organisation. From the evidence gathered the working group acknowledged the emphasis and importance the Council has in promoting good mental health and providing support for employees through policy and in collaboration with Washington Mind. It was also good to note that this remains a key priority for the coming years.

8.5   The working group did recognise the importance of ensuring that those service areas with highly emotive and stressful roles (e.g., social services, care and support) should be monitored more closely for signs, trends or patterns in mental wellbeing to ensure advice and support was available for employees as and when required.

8.6   There are many other factors that contribute to health and wellbeing in the workplace and the working group has explored a number of these with officers. Clearly physical wellbeing is equally as important as mental wellbeing, and the organisation continues to promote wellbeing initiatives that support this cultural drive to ensure employees are engaged and want to be at work. There are numerous other factors that contribute to this agenda including lifestyle choices around eating, sleeping, smoking and drinking. Again, the Council is acutely aware of the impact of these factors on employee wellbeing and continue to support and extend a number of initiatives in these areas.

8.7   Staff surveys have the potential to create a lasting positive impact on the organisation's health, wellbeing and overall culture. The working group noted that it was important to understand how employee feedback is measured, how surveys are acted upon and how progress is tracked and relayed back to employees. Engagement continues to improve on staff surveys and to maintain this upward curve it is clearly important that employees see action taken from the results of surveys. They remain an important resource to track the wellbeing of the workforce across a number of metrics and provide important data to target future support and interventions. Members would welcome feedback on future surveys to the committee to be able to monitor progress against identifiable actions. The group also suggested modifications to the question design around alcohol consumption to provide a more definitive profile.

8.8   Clearly a lot of work has been undertaken around staff appraisals to support both appraisers and appraisees to provide a worthwhile and meaningful process. Appraisals are an excellent tool to engage with staff and commence an ongoing conversation around a number of work-related themes including performance, job role and health and wellbeing. The work group were pleased to see levels of accountability being incorporated into the process and that training was available for managers. It was also positive to note the use of group appraisals to engage with those staff who may not be so confident or able to engage on a one-to-one basis. By creating these inclusive approaches, it can make the process more positive and generate further engagement with staff who may have been reluctant to engage previously.

8.9   A lot of the work that is ongoing around the health and wellbeing agenda will have an impact on sickness and absence rates across the Council. It is recognised that levels of sickness absence across the organisation are above expected levels but as identified throughout this report a number of these initiatives are aimed at improving and supporting the health and wellbeing of the workforce. As a result, it is anticipated that progress and improvement against sickness absence targets will be realised in the next couple of years.

8.10   The rollout of Microsoft 365 F1 licences throughout the organisation is helping to drive digital engagement across the workforce and this can only have benefits for delivering key messages and providing access to health and wellbeing support. It also helps to foster an environment of inclusivity where all staff are notified of and have access to the same resources. This has also helped the drive to improve the digital skills gap across the Council. Echoing the recommendation from the Better Health at Work Award it is also an opportune time to develop and implement a greater use of QR codes across the organisation as a way to promote and signpost staff to key information relating to the Council and more specifically health and wellbeing initiatives.

8.11　Inclusion is an essential and imperative component of organisational culture. Helping cultivate a sense of belonging is crucial for employee well-being, productivity, and retention in the modern workplace. The Council again recognises the importance of this and are supporting and investing in programmes that will help to foster this inclusive approach.　This includes relaunching and growing the membership of the Supporting Equality Network, which the working group fully endorses.

8.12　Recognising the staff within the organisation is also a good way of promoting wellbeing by acknowledging excellence in work across the council in a number of categories. This again can help to foster a positive and appreciative culture within the organisation and help towards an inclusive environment. The STARS Awards are one way to raise the profile of staff recognition and provide an opportunity to highlight good working practices across the organisation. The Members of the working group recognised this, and it is important that all Members of the Council are aware of the opportunity that exists for them to nominate staff for the Stars Awards to recognise the achievements and show appreciation to employees in the Council.

8.13　The Council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its workforce through support, upskilling, engagement and compassion across the workplace. Promoting employee wellbeing is good for people and the organisation. It can help prevent stress and create positive working environments where individuals and organisations can thrive. Good health and wellbeing can be a foundation to employee engagement and organisational performance. The workplace is changing, perhaps as consequence of the pandemic, traditional concepts are being replaced by working from home and more agile forms of working patterns that provide a more attractive offer for prospective employees. The Council continues to strive and innovate to provide an inclusive, supportive and attractive place to work where people feel confident in themselves and where employee health and wellbeing is at the forefront of the Council's culture.

9　Recommendations

9.1　The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has taken evidence from a variety of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Committee's recommendations to Cabinet are: -

a)　To support the development of the role and build capacity within the Council's Equality Network to promote and drive inclusion across the organisation.

b)　To ensure feedback is provided to all employees across the organisation on the results and outcomes of staff surveys including the reporting of progress and achievements to the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee as and when applicable.

c)　That the further utilisation of QR codes is considered in future health and wellbeing promotions and communications with staff.

d)　That consideration is given to establishing mandatory mental health training for managers.

e)   That robust monitoring mechanisms are in place for those employees who are working in highly emotive and stressful environments to identify signs, trends or patterns in mental wellbeing to provide support in a timely and appropriate way.

f)   That in future staff health surveys the question around alcohol consumption is further refined to provide a more definitive profile of consumption across the authority.

g)   That consideration is given to ascertaining if the provision of resources for the health and wellbeing agenda is sufficient and how this can be sustained to meet current and future demands.

h)   That further work is done to publicise and promote the ability of Members to nominate for the Stars Awards as an opportunity for Members to acknowledge and recognise performance in the workplace.

i)   To consider the introduction of a simplified handover document for staff moving internally within the organisation, to help provide a seamless transition from one role into another.

10.   Acknowledgements

10.1   The Committee is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our review. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named individuals and organisations:

(a)   Liz St Louis – Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services.
(b)   Gillian Hunter – Specialist Lead – People Management.
(c)   Karen Donaldson – Learning and Organisational Development Manager.
(d)   Jemma Burdis – Communications Officer.

11.   Glossary of Terms

AVC –	Additional Voluntary Contributions.
Microsoft 365 F1 Licence -	A software platform designed, by Microsoft, specifically for employees who don't have a desk or office and don't need the full suite of Office applications.
HNA –	Health Needs Assessment.
LGBTQIA+ -	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual.
Moneywise -	Credit Union who have been providing financial services to the people of the North East for over 30 years.
Power BI -	An interactive data visualisation software product developed by Microsoft with a primary focus on business intelligence.
SEEN -	Supporting Employee Equality Network.
SHARP -	Shiney Row Advice and Resource Project.
VIPUP -	Employee benefits scheme.

12.   Background Papers

12.1   The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:

Financial Wellbeing – Price Waterhouse Cooper. 2018

A Health Workplace Starts in Bed. Chris Orchard. 2015

Ten workplace mental health statistics you should know in 2022 – MHFA England. 2022

Reasons your company should be investing in employee health and wellbeing – Perkbox. 2023

The importance of workplace wellbeing. Joe Wedgewood. The Happiness Index. 2023

The importance of Employee Appraisals. XCD. 2023

Item 5

SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

11 APRIL 2024

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY, MAYORAL AND MEMBERS' SUPPORT COORDINATOR

1.   Purpose of the Report

1.1   To approve the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee report as part of the overall scrutiny annual report 2023/24 that is to be presented to Council.

2.   Background

2.1   As in the previous 2022/23 municipal year the annual report will be a single combined report of four scrutiny committees. The annual report will outline the scrutiny function and provide overviews from the four committees (Scrutiny Coordinating, Children and Young People, Economic Prosperity and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committees) from the 2023/24 municipal year.

3.   Current position

3.1   The proposed Scrutiny Coordinating Committee report is attached at **appendix 1** for member's consideration. The report provides a very brief snapshot of some of the main work undertaken by the committee during 2023/24. It should be noted that the report is written from the perspective of the Chair of the Committee reflecting over the year.

3.2   Some of the main themes covered in the annual report revolve around the following issues:

- Council Finance
- Performance Management
- City Plan Update
- Smart City Update
- Cost of Living Crisis
- Task and Finish Working.

3.3   A final version of the Scrutiny Annual Report in its entirety will be presented to this Committee in the new municipal year. It will then be submitted to the next available Council meeting for approval.

4.   Conclusion

4.1 The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee has once again developed and carried out an extensive work programme. The Committee has continued to work well with Council Directorates, stakeholders and partner organisations to deliver on this work programme. The Committee will hold work programming development sessions with a number of key stakeholders for 2024/25 in the early part of the new Municipal Year.

5 Recommendation

5.1 That Members approve the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee report for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24.

6. Glossary

n/a

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nigel.cummings@sunderland.gov.uk

SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Chair: Cllr Katherine Mason-Gage
Vice-Chair: Cllr Tracy Dodds

Committee Members: Mark Burrell, Michael Hartnack, Beth Jones, Lindsey Leonard, Ciaran Morrissey, Antony Mullen, Alex Samuels, Pat Smith, Melanie Thornton, John Usher and Peter Walton.

I am pleased to be able to present the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee's annual report that provides a summary of the work of the Committee over the last municipal year. It has been another challenging year with both global and domestic events impacting on everyone's lives. The Committee has looked at a number of issues through its work programme and Members have contributed and engaged throughout the year.

Budget and financial scrutiny remains one of the key remits of the Committee. A range of comprehensive reports are submitted to the Committee over the municipal year including around the Capital Programme, Proposed Council Tax, Revenue Budget and the Budget Planning Framework and Medium-Term Financial Plan. Members of the Committee continue to monitor and challenge the budget as well as continuing to acknowledge the current financial situation for the local government sector.

Performance management is another cornerstone of the Committee's work programme, and we continue to monitor and challenge Council performance, achievements and progress against a range of issues across the key themes of Dynamic Smart City, Health Smart City, Vibrant Smart City and Organisational Development. This year has seen further developments with the presentation of performance information focusing on a different key theme for each quarter and inviting relevant key officers for that area to attend. It is hoped that this provides a greater focus and benefit to the Committee and will be reviewed during work planning sessions for the new municipal year.

The Committee also established a task and finish working group during the year to look at the health and wellbeing of the workforce. The working group has looked at how the council supports the health and wellbeing of the workforce through policy development and key initiatives as well as identifying the challenges and key achievements in employee health and wellbeing. The report and recommendations are aimed at supporting and highlighting the work that is already taking place around this important area of work, as well as recognising some of the key challenges that still exist. The report will be submitted to Cabinet in the new municipal year.

In addition to this piece of work the Committee also received an update on the current position in relation to sickness absence. The Committee were interested in better understanding the sickness absence position within the Council and the measures to support employees to remain healthy at work. This was aligned to the Organisational Health performance measures and the task and finish working group that was also taking place at the time. There was a good level of discussion, and it provided the Committee with an overview of the situation and the various initiatives and support for employees within the Council.

The Committee has continued to monitor the vision and delivery of the Smart City programme, particularly in the context of the impact on City Plan aspirations. Concerns were raised during discussions at the standard of the reinstatement work undertaken by fibre broadband providers following the installation of cabling. Members concerns were to be passed to the relevant officer for further investigation and ensure appropriate rectification. Members also acknowledged the importance of this work in terms of strengthening partnership working, extending ultra-fast broadband across the city, introducing a Sunderland App and enabling digital inclusion.

The cost-of-living crisis continues to make life difficult for people across the UK and is attributable to factors that are beyond the influence or control of local Councils. The Committee took an active interest in the actions being taken across our city to support residents with their financial wellbeing. Members highlighted a number of issues to officers from their own experiences including around foodbank usage, welcome spaces, Household Support Fund, policies on evictions, money advice and interacting with those harder to reach residents. The Committee recognised the positive and supportive work that was being undertaken through the ongoing development of the Links for Life project, the production of a fuel poverty action plan, boiler replacements for those in crisis, identifying the most vulnerable households and supporting emotional health and financial resilience through partnership working with the voluntary and community sector.

The updated City Plan and indicative timeline assurance process were also submitted to the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee for consideration during the year. Members received a comprehensive overview of the updated plan and provided a number of comments and observations including around addressing the decline of the City's retail and leisure offer, greater reference to partner involvement and the terminology used in the plan. These comments were to be reported back to Cabinet and given further consideration with the continued updating and development of the plan in the future.

In finishing this summary of the work of the Committee, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Members for their support, contribution and continued cooperation throughout the year. I would also like, on behalf of all Members of the Committee, to put on record our appreciation to officers and partners for providing their expertise and knowledge to the work of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee.

Councillor Katherine Mason-Gage
Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

Item 6

SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE   **11 APRIL 2024**

WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY, MAYORAL AND MEMBERS' SUPPORT COORDINATOR

1.   Purpose of the Report

1.1   The report attaches, for Members' information, the thematic Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2023/24 and provides an opportunity to review the Committee's own work programme for 2023/24.

2.   Background

2.1   The role of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee is two-fold, firstly it has a role in co-ordinating efficient business across the Scrutiny Committees and manage the overall Scrutiny Work Programme and secondly to consider the Council's corporate policies, performance and financial issues.

2.2   In order to ensure that the Committee is able to undertake all of its business and respond to emerging issues, there will be scope for additional meetings or visits not detailed in the work programme.

2.3   The work programme should reflect the remit of the Committee and the need to balance its responsibility for undertaking scrutiny, performance management and policy review (where necessary).

3.   Thematic Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes

3.1   **Appendix 1** sets out the Scrutiny Committee work programmes for the Children, Education and Skills, Economic Prosperity and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committees respectively.

4.   Scrutiny Coordinating Committee's Work Programme

4.1   **Appendix 2** outlines this Committee's full work programme for the year, updated to reflect new additions and amendments requested by Committee as the year has progressed.

4.2   Topics for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme will vary from single issue items for consideration such as policy and performance reports through to regular updates on issues that the committee have adopted a more focused monitoring role.

4.3   It should be noted that the work programme is a 'living' document and can be amended throughout the course of the municipal year. Any Elected Member can add an item of business to an agenda for consideration (Protocol 1 within the Overview and Scrutiny Handbook outlines this process).

5. Dedicated Scrutiny Budget

5.1 A small budgetary provision of £15,000 per annum is available to the Scrutiny Committees to deliver the agreed Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes.

5.2 As of 2 April 2024 the breakdown of the budget stood as follows:-

Description	£
Scrutiny Development	Nil
Member Development	Nil
Policy Review Development	Nil
Total Expenditure to Date	£0.00
Budget	£15,000.00
Remaining Budget	£15,000.00

6. Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee:

(a) notes the variations to the Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes for 2023/24 and to its own work programme; and

(b) notes the current scrutiny budget position for 2023/24.

7. Background Papers

7.1 Scrutiny Agendas and Minutes

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REASON FOR INCLUSION	8 JUNE 23 (INFORMAL MEETING)	6 JULY 23	7 SEPT 23	5 OCT 23	2 NOV 23	30 NOV 23	11 JAN 24	1 FEB 24	29 FEB 24	18 APRIL 24
Policy Framework/ Cabinet Referrals and Responses										Scrutiny Annual Report – 23/24
Scrutiny Business	Work Programme 2023/24	Fostering Pathfinder (Majella McCarthy)	Respite Care Services (Jill Colbert)	Joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help (Jill Colbert) Youth Justice Plan 2021-24 – Update (Linda Mason)	Short Break – Update (Jill Colbert) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (Sharon Wills)	Sunderland Healthy Related Behaviour Study Report (Jennifer Green/Ryan Houghton)	Early Help Update (Karen Davison) Short Break – Update (Jill Colbert)	Wraparound Child Care – Implementation Update (Simon Marshall) Schools Attendance (Simon Marshall)	SEND – Update (Pamela Robertson) Vulnerable Pupil Update from the Virtual School (Simon Marshall) Elective Home Education (Simon Marshall) (NB:Informal Meeting 26 March)	Apprenticeships/T Level Qualification (Iain Nixon/Judith Quinn Sunderland College) Child and Adolescent Mental Health (Scott Watson)
Performance / Service Improvement		Children Services Customer Feedback – Annual Report (Stacey Hodgkinson)		TfC Meaningful Measures Performance Report (Jill Colbert/Stacey Hodgkinson)		Children Services Customer Feedback (Stacey Hodgkinson)	TfC Meaningful Measures Performance Report (Jill Colbert/Stacey Hodgkinson)			
Consultation / Awareness Raising		Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme	

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

REASON FOR INCLUSION	1 JUNE 23 (INFORMAL MEETING)	11 JULY 23	12 SEPTEMBER 23	10 OCTOBER 23	7 NOVEMBER/ 21 NOVEMBER 23	5 DECEMBER 23	9 JANUARY 24	6 FEBRUARY 24	5 MARCH 24	9 APRIL 24
Policy Framework/ Cabinet Referrals and Responses			Food Law Plan (Marion Dixon)							Scrutiny Annual Report
Scrutiny Business	Remit and Work Programme of Committee	Empty Properties (Graham Scanlan) Work Programme 23-24 - Feedback		Triathlon Feedback (Victoria French/Portfolio holder)	Housing Provider Consultation (Gentoo)/ (Other Housing Providers)	Environmental Services Update (Marc Morley) Regeneration of City – Update (Neil Guthrie Anthony Crabb/Portfolio holder) Road Safety Annual Report (Paul Muir)	Sunderland BID/Chamber of Commerce (Sharon Appleby/ (Natasha McDonough) Annual Low Carbon Progress Report (Catherine Auld/Portfolio holder)	Culture Sector and the Local Economy (Rebecca Ball) UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Catherine Auld/James Garland) Screen Industries – Update (Catherine Auld)	Cycling Infrastructure (Mark Wilson) Housing Update (Graham Scanlan) Draft Sunniside Masterplan (Dan Hattle) (NB – Informal Session)	Highways Maintenance (Graham Carr/Tim Smith) Siglion (Neil Guthrie)
Consultation Information and Awareness Raising		Notice of Key Decisions	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 23-24

To Programme:

Licensing Policy Review (Marion Dixon) (July 24)
Accessibility of the City Centre (Craig Mordue) (tbc)
City Heat Networks (Peter Graham) (tbc)
Business Centres (Catherine Auld) (tbc)

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

REASON FOR INCLUSION		4 JULY 23 D/L:23 JUNE 23	5 SEPTEMBER 23 D/L:25 AUGUST 23	3 OCTOBER 23 D/L: 22 SEPT 23	31 OCTOBER 23 D/L: 20 OCT 23	28 NOVEMBER 23 D/L: 17 NOV 23	16 JANUARY 24 D/L: 5 JAN 24	30 JANUARY 24 D/L: 19 JAN 24	27 FEBRUARY 24 D/L: 16 FEB 24	26 MARCH 24 D/L: 15 MAR 24
Policy Framework / Cabinet Referrals and Responses										
Scrutiny Business		Dental Services Update (NHS Improvement) Task and Finish Working Group Report (N Cummings) Determining the Scrutiny Work Programme (N Cummings)	Elective and Diagnostic Backlog (NHS FT)	SSAB Annual Report (Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board) Public Health – Annual Report (Gerry Taylor) Task and Finish Scoping Report (N Cummings)	ICB Sunderland Update (Scott Watson) Winter Planning (ATB/ICB)	South Tyneside & Sunderland NHS FT CQC Inspection Action Plan (NHS FT) Sunderland NHS FT work with college on recruitment in NHS (NHS FT)	MH Strategy Update incl. Community MH in the City (Sunderland ICB, Public Health) Suicide Prevention Update (Gerry Taylor)	Alcohol Strategy – Update also include Alcohol Care Team (Gerry Taylor, NHS FT) Changes to Health Scrutiny Arrangements (Nigel Cummings)	Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment Update (Gerry Taylor) South Tyneside & Sunderland NHS FT Action Plan Update (NHS FT) Water Quality (Public Health)	GP Access Update incl. pilot schemes (Sunderland ICB) North East Ambulance Service Update (Mark Cotton) Oral Health Improvements – New Strategy (Gerry Taylor) Annual Report (Nigel Cummings)
Performance / Service Improvement										
Consultation/ Information & Awareness Raising		Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23	Notice of Key Decisions Work Programme 22-23

SCRUTINY COORDINATING COMMITTEE – WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

Work Programme Items to be scheduled:

REASON FOR INCLUSION			13 JULY 23 D/L 3 JULY 23	14 SEPTEMBER 23 D/L 4 SEPT 23	12 OCTOBER 23 D/L 2 OCTOBER 23	9 NOVEMBER 23 D/L 30 OCT 23	7 DECEMBER 23 D/L 27 NOV 23	18 JANUARY 24 D/L 8 JAN 24	8 FEBRUARY 24 D/L 29 JAN 24	7 MARCH 24 D/L 26 FEB 24	11 APRIL 24 D/L 1 APRIL 24
Policy Framework / Cabinet Referrals and Responses			Capital Programme First Review 2023/24 (Paul Wilson) First Revenue Budget Review 2023/24 (Paul Wilson)		Budget Planning Framework 2024/25 and Financial Strategy (Paul Wilson) Capital Programme Second Review 2023/24 (Paul Wilson)		Capital Programme Planning 2024/2025 to 2027/2028 (Paul Wilson) Budget Planning Framework and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/2025 to 2027/2028 (Paul Wilson)		Collection Fund (Council Tax) 23/24 (Paul Wilson) Capital Programme 2024/2025 to 2027/2028 and Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2024/2025, including Prudential Indicators for 2024/2025 to 2027/2028 (Paul Wilson) Revenue Budget and Proposed Council Tax for 2024/2025 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/2025 to 2027/2028 (Paul Wilson)		
Scrutiny Business				Task and Finish Working Group Scope and Remit (N Cummings)		Cost of Living (Strategic Advice Service)		Smart Cities Update (Liz St Louis) City Plan Update (Beverley Poulter) Sickness Absence Update (Liz St Louis)		Safer Sunderland Partnership Annual Report (Stephen Laverton)	Annual Report (N Cummings) Task and Finish Working Group (N Cummings)
Performance / Service Improvement			Performance Management Q4 (Beverley Poulter)	Performance Management Q1 (Beverly Poulter)			Performance Management Q2 (Beverley Poulter)			Performance Management Q3 (Beverly Poulter)	
Consultation / Information & Awareness Raising			Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24	Notice of Key Decisions Scrutiny Work Programmes 2023/24