

**TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP: THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF THE WORKFORCE****1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to establish background information, set the scene and set out an approach for a task and finish group looking at the health and wellbeing of the Council's 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 The first of these topics will be to look at the health and wellbeing of the Council's workforce. The task and finish working group will aim to conduct a focused, clearly scoped, and time-limited piece of work with clear objectives.

**3. Context to the Issues*****The Workforce***

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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).

***Health and Wellbeing***

- 3.3 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.

- 3.4 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, 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 The country, as a whole, is experiencing a cost-of-living crisis, and Sunderland City Council has recognised this and its potential influence on employee health and wellbeing, so have also undertaken a cost-of-living survey with employees. The survey highlighted the worries employees had around car parking costs, paying bills and concerns about how they should be working in City Hall. The survey also highlighted a number of positive initiatives, acknowledged by employees, including the introduction of an employee benefits portal, promotion of the car lease and living wage schemes.

#### **4. Title of the Working Group**

- 4.1 The title of the review is suggested as 'The Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce'.

#### **5. Overall Aim of the Working Group**

- 5.1 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.

#### **6. Proposed Terms of Reference for the Working Group**

- 6.1 The following Terms of Reference for the working group are proposed:-
  - (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.

#### **7. Gathering the Evidence**

- 7.1 The task and finish working group will gather evidence from a number of sources and this will be coordinated, on behalf of Members, by the scrutiny officer. Every

effort will be made to involve Members in the research, data collection techniques could include a combination of the following:

- Desktop research;
- Use of secondary research e.g. surveys, questionnaires;
- Evidence presented by key stakeholders.

7.2 The review will gather evidence from a variety of sources. The main evidence will come from information provided by council officers and external partners likely to include, though not exhaustive, the following:

- (a) Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder(s);
- (b) Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services;
- (c) Learning and Organisational Development Manager;
- (d) Specialist Lead – People Management.

## **8. Scope of the Review**

8.1 The review will consider, as part of the review process, the following issues related to health and wellbeing of the workforce:

- What do we mean by health and wellbeing in this context?
- What are the benefits of a healthy workforce?
- What policies support the health and wellbeing of the workforce?
- What barriers or challenges are there to supporting the health and wellbeing of the workforce?
- What initiatives support the health and wellbeing of the workforce?
- How are the impacts of initiatives measured by the organisation?
- How are health and wellbeing initiatives promoted across the organisation?
- How can employees access health and wellbeing support at work?
- How are surveys and information gathered shaping future policy and initiatives?

8.2 As the review investigation develops Members need to remain focused on the key terms of reference to ensure the review is conducted within the time constraints, as well as being robust and based on the evidence and research gathered.

## **9. Timescales**

9.1 Attached for Members information is a draft timetable (**Appendix 1**) for the piece of work which outlines the short and focused process for this working group. Members of the working group will be invited to attend all the meetings.

## **10. Membership of the Working Group**

10.1 In order to conduct the task and finish project it is suggested that the membership of the working group should consist of no more than 5/6 Members drawn from the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee.

10.2 The Chair of the working group can be decided by either the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee or be left to be determined by the Membership of the Working Group.

## **11. Recommendations**

11.1 That the working group agrees the title of the review as 'The Health and Wellbeing of the Workforce'.

11.2 That Members agree the terms of reference for the task and finish working group.

11.3 That membership of the working group is agreed by the Committee and consideration given to the appointment of Chair for the working group.

## **12. Background Papers**

Employee Health Needs Assessment – Autumn 2022  
Health and Wellbeing Staff Survey Results – November 2022

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## APPENDIX 1

Timeline	Review Task	Aims & Objectives	Methodology	Contributors
Session 1	Setting the Scene	To provide the working group with an overview and understanding of the work being undertaken around health and wellbeing in the workforce	Working group meeting	Working Group Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services Learning and Organisational Development Manager Senior HR Business Partner Scrutiny Officer
Session 2	Policies and initiatives	To look at the various policies and initiatives incl; Better Health at Work and Stars Awards that are supporting health and wellbeing in the workforce	Working group meeting	Working Group Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services Learning and Organisational Development Manager Senior HR Business Partner Scrutiny Officer
Session 3	Challenges, barriers and benefits	To look at the key challenges and barriers to health and wellbeing in the workplace as well as considering the benefits.	Working group meeting	Working Group Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services Learning and Organisational Development Manager Senior HR Business Partner Scrutiny Officer
Session 4	Future Developments	To look at future developments and how employee information is driving initiatives within the organisation.	Working group meeting	Working Group Director of Smart Cities and Enabling Services Learning and Organisational Development Manager Senior HR Business Partner Scrutiny Officer
Session 5	Reflection of evidence and development of draft report and findings.	A look at all the evidence gathered and the development of a draft report	Working Group Meeting	Working Group Scrutiny Officer