

HERTSMERE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held in Committee Rooms A & B, Hertsmere Civic Offices, Elstree Way, Borehamwood

7 March 2019

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillors Spencer (Chair), RZ Butler (Vice-Chair), P Hodgson-Jones and M Sachdev

Officers:

H Shade	Head of Partnerships, Community Engagement & Housing
P Rosenberg	Revenues and Benefits Manager
C Menai-Davis	Partnership Support Officer
S Keenlyside	Democratic Services Officer

507. **MEMBERSHIP**

There were no changes.

508. **COMMUNICATIONS & APOLOGIES**

There were none.

509. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

510. **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting were amended to include Councillor Lyon as being present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2019 be approved and signed as a correct record subject to adding Councillor Lyon as being present.

[Councillor M Sachdev arrived at 19:37]

511. **COMMITTEE BRIEFING ON MENTAL HEALTH**

The Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement and the Partnerships Support Officer, were present for this item.

The Committee received a presentation and a number of points were discussed, including:

- Hertsmere Borough Council (HBC) did not currently have a specific mental health policy or a policy for mental health training for internal staff. In terms of staff managing their own mental and physical health, HBC had a stress-management policy and the Workforce Strategy both of which made reference to promoting a range of wellbeing initiatives for staff. All staff had access to the Learning Zone, which offered voluntary courses on managing their own mental health and awareness of mental health in others. Members could be granted access to the Learning Zone and self-enrol onto health and wellbeing courses. Officers were asked to provide further information to Members on how to access the Learning Zone.
- There were several providers of specific mental health training for staff. Human Resources (HR) had offered Mental Health First Aid training which had been completed by 37 members of staff in the last 10 years. The training was self-selected by staff interested in completing it and was not compulsory. The Committee asked about refresher training and were informed that five members of staff had been identified as Mental Health Champions and had recently completed refresher courses and more in-depth training.
- All staff had access to Care First, who provided assistance to employees with personal or work related problems which could impact their mental or emotional wellbeing.
- Every year HR organised a summer and winter workplace wellbeing event which included health MOTs and NHS health checks.
- HBC was part of the Mental Health Challenge which was run collaboratively by the Centre for Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation, Mind and other organisations. The Mental Health Challenge provided access to support and advice from the partner organisations. Councillor Clapper was the nominated Member Champion for Mental Health.
- HBC has hosted mental health and suicide prevention training for staff, Members and partner organisations, which included Mental First Aid for Young People and Spot the Signs suicide prevention training.
- After recent suicides at Elstree and Borehamwood train station, HBC and partner organisations had formed a railway suicide prevention group.
- HBC was working with Spot the Signs to offer mental health training sessions for local businesses and the wider community.
- The Committee discussed the need for Members and customer facing staff, to recognise and understand mental health issues

and be able to signpost service users to relevant mental health services and the Committee felt that Members and staff should receive specific training for this.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) it should be recommended to the Member Development Panel that training for Members be organised on recognising and understanding mental health issues and referral pathways to mental health organisations.
- (ii) Human Resources be asked to consider mandatory mental health training for specific service areas who have high levels of customer/resident interaction.

512. **ANTI-FRAUD UPDATE - HOUSING BENEFIT**

The Revenues and Benefits Manager and the Head of Counter Fraud, Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) were present for this item.

The report was presented and a number of points were discussed, including:

- The Committee were concerned about the level of housing benefit fraud and how it could be detected and prevented. Officers explained that since 2016, all housing benefit fraud investigations were carried out by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The Council in conjunction with SAFS carried out pre-investigative work and provided information and evidence for cases that were to be investigated or could lead to prosecution. The majority of overpayments were due to claimants who were working and not declaring it. The DWP was now able to access information from HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) which made the detection of fraud easier.
- A recent pilot scheme showed that where benefit fraud impacted on council tax and investigators from Local Authorities worked in collaboration with DWP and the Fraud and Error Service (FES), fraud cases were resolved quicker with a 50% improvement on outcomes. As a result of this, the pilot had been rolled out nationally and Hertsmere Borough Council went live on 27 February 2019.
- The Committee asked how overpayments were recovered. Officers advised that most overpayments were recovered by reducing a claimant's ongoing benefit payments. Overpayments could be collected through deductions from earnings whenever a claimant was employed. The Council was able to prosecute when fraud was detected and levy penalties. The Council received an overpayment subsidy of 40% of the money paid from the DWP. If the overpayment was recovered the subsidy could be retained by the Council.
- The Committee enquired about the roll out of Universal Credit. Officers advised that Universal Credit would replace the majority

of housing benefit payments. The Council would only be responsible for administering pension credit. Roll out was expected to be completed by 2023.

The Committee thanked the Officers for their report and for the work they were doing.

RESOLVED that the Council's arrangement in relation to the prevention and detection of housing benefit fraud be noted.

513. **FORWARD PLANNING PROGRAMME AND COMMITTEE WORKPROGRAMME**

The Forward Planning Programme was **NOTED**.

AGREED following changes to the Work Programme:

- **add** an item on Parking Strategy to the 8 July 2019 meeting.
- **add** to the meeting on 8 July 2019, a follow-on discussion of the report on the Physical Access Security Review which went to the Executive on 17 October 2018.

514. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDER URGENT**

There was none.

515. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting was scheduled for 8 July 2019.

CLOSURE: 8.53 pm

CHAIR