

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE  
AND  
HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIC FORUM**

**Meeting held at the Council Offices, Gernon Road,  
Letchworth Garden City on 10 December 2008 at 3.00 p.m.**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** *Councillors: Tricia Gibbs (Chairman), T.W. Hone, F.J. Smith and  
Martin Stears-Handscomb.*

**IN ATTENDANCE:** *Strategic Director of Customer Services, Acting Monitoring  
Officer, Human Resources Services Manager and Committee  
and Member Services Officer.*

**UNISON:** *Tony Barker*

**STAFF CONSULTATION  
FORUM:** *Christina Corr and Valerie  
Farquharson.*

**22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Robin Norton (UNISON) and Kerry Shorrocks (Head of Human Resources).

**23. MINUTES – 10 SEPTEMBER 2008**

It was agreed that the Minutes of the JSCC meeting held on 10 September 2008 be confirmed as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

**24. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

No other items were presented for consideration by the Committee.

**25. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Members were reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, and the nature of the interest, should be declared as either a prejudicial or personal interest at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item.

**A. JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

**26. STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM MINUTES – 03.09.08, 0210.08, 05.11.08**

The Director of Customer Services (HHR) referred the JSCC to the Minutes for the meetings of the Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) held on 3 September 2008, 1 October 2008 and 5 November 2008 for details of the three meetings, actions taken and items carried forward.

The Director of Customer Services provided a summary of the main points held at each meeting with particular reference to: the continuing work being undertaken to develop Careline; that staff are keen to enable recycling "in house" with a range of activities available to encourage staff to recycle; the current status of the Home Computing Initiative; the review of the Council standby payments; the pay review negotiations; the success of the homeworking initiative and the Code of Conduct for Government Officers.

Members asked several questions including whether an alternative had been made available to staff who were using Childcare Vouchers and whether the recycling of Christmas cards was taking place.

The Director of Customer Services advised that approximately 6 staff were affected by

the fact that Childcare Vouchers were no longer available, the staff affected had been contacted and HR were exploring the possibility of replacing the scheme with a salary sacrifice alternative. Plain Christmas cards could be recycled with cardboard however cards with glitter or foil attached needed to be processed separately and staff were being advised of the places where all Christmas cards could be recycled.

**It was agreed:** That the information provided in the three sets of Minutes for the Staff Consultation Forum be noted.

**27. PEOPLE STRATEGY – UPDATED 2008–2011**

The Human Resources Services Manager (HRSM) presented an update on the People Strategy 2008-2011.

The HRSM advised that all actions were now on green; that the Human Resources surgeries were taking place; that the “Open Learning” sessions were becoming more proactive; that absence remained an issue and that turnover of staff was very low with the projected end of year figure being 10 per cent.

Members asked several questions including whether a Member Development programme would be available in the Members Information Service (MIS) and whether there was a corporate target for turnover of staff.

The HRSM advised that it was planned to put Members Development details in MIS and that the corporate target for staff turnover was 9.5 percent. She advised that the figures for the last few years had been within targets set.

**It was agreed:** That the progress against the implementation of the updated People Strategy actions 2008–2011 be noted.

**28. CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING**

The Acting Monitoring Officer (AMO) presented the report regarding Confidential Reporting. She advised that the report had been presented to the Standards Committee in September 2008 at which point some minor reviews had been made; that the policy looked at the Council and colleagues and that it would be preferable not to deal with anonymous allegations. She informed the Committee that the policy set out reporting lines; it made clear what was the role of the Independent Chair of the Standards Committee and that staff always had the right to take issues to outside regulators.

Members commended the policy stating it was very important and encouraging and then asked several questions including that alternatives should be given where staff are unable or unwilling to discuss the matter with the Monitoring Officer; that Line Managers would require training and what further consultation would be taken before the policy is instigated.

The AMO advised that Managers will be briefed in due course and that the next step would be to consult through the Staff Consultation Forum.

Members made the following suggestions regarding minor alterations to the wording of the document :

- Page 47 first paragraph fourth line – delete reference to “Independent Member of the Council” and change the word “his” to “their”;
- A flow chart could be included regarding reporting lines

**It was agreed:**

- (1) That the Confidential Reporting Code be recommended to the Standards Committee for approval
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer work with the Audit Manager to produce protocols for the investigation and review process of the Confidential Reporting Code
- (3) That protocols for the investigation and review process be referred to this Committee prior to approval.

**29. HUMAN RESOURCES PAYROLL SYSTEM UPDATE**

The Human Resources Service Manager (HRSM) presented the report regarding the Payroll System Update. She advised the Committee that the procurement process began in 2006 and that implementation had taken place in 3 phases; there had been an underspend on the project of £8000 with ongoing savings due to fewer staff being required; that the system had improved electronic communications with HM Revenue and customs; there had been a significant decrease in the requirement for paperwork with many processes now being automated; that on line recruitment is planned for March 2009 which would reduce administration and that the Council is now in a good position with technology and skills developed in house and opportunities to offer services to other Local Authorities.

Members asked several questions including whether sharing facilities with other Authorities had been discussed and whether outsourcing of payroll should not be considered until new system implemented:

The HRSM advised that initial discussions were being held with 2 other Authorities and that other Authorities had not so far found a business case for outsourcing to NHDC:

*It was agreed:* That the progress regarding the implementation of the Human Resources Payroll System be noted.

**B. HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIC FORUM (DISCUSSION)**

**30. ADDRESSING STAFF SHORTAGES IN PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

The Director of Customer Services advised the Committee that the report had been prepared prior to the current economic downturn and it was now expected that planning applications would reduce in the medium term, although the downturn is likely to affect demand, recruitment and retention in a number of ways within the organisation.

Members debated the report taking into account the economic climate and noted that planning control workload may reduce, however the planning policy workload is likely to remain constant; that it was unwise to reduce the number of staff drastically as the Authority should plan for the future when the economic climate would improve and it would be wise to retain the core planning skills already in the department and that current policies should be applied for example by moving staff to different areas of work as required by changing circumstances. Members felt that it would be advantageous to receive a report in the future regarding career grading.

*It was agreed:*

- (1) That the report on Addressing Staff Shortages In Planning And Environmental Health be noted.
- (2) That a report regarding career grading be brought to this Committee within the next 6 months

**31. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting of the JSCC and Human Resources Strategic Forum in the Civic Year 2008 - 2009 will be:

Wednesday 18 March 2009

The meeting closed at 4.00 p.m.

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Chairman