

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 9 September 2009 at 3.00 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Tricia Gibbs (Chairman), Judi Billing, T.W. Hone,
L.W. Oliver and F.J. Smith.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Strategic Director of Customer Services, Corporate Manager
Human Resources, Learning and Development Manager,
Employee Relations Officer and Committee and Member
Services Officer.*

UNISON: *Robin Norton, Bob Leverett.*

**STAFF CONSULTATION
FORUM:** *Christina Corr.*

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

11. MINUTES – 10 JUNE 2009

It was agreed that the Minutes of the JSCC meeting held on 10 June 2009 be confirmed as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

12. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other items were presented for consideration by the Committee.

13. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were reminded that 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

14. STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM MINUTES – 3 JUNE, 1 JULY AND 5 AUGUST 2009

The Corporate Manager Human Resources (CMHR) referred the JSCC to the Minutes for the meetings of the Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) held on 3 June, 1 July and 5 August 2009 for details of the three meetings, actions taken and items carried forward.

She informed the Committee that personnel from Property Services and IT are invited to attend the SCF Meetings on a regular basis. She then provided a summary of the main points held at each meeting, with particular reference to: an update on the Pay Review at the SCF meeting of 3 June (this would be discussed later in this meeting, as it was on the Agenda); staff being kept up to date with commercial negotiations on the Grammar School on the Broadway, Letchworth; staff also being kept up to date and advised regarding the swine flu pandemic; the availability of fans to be purchased from Property Services by departments, on production of precise requirements and a budget code; and that the Green Group (a sub-Group of the Staff Consultation Forum) had two new members – Simon Young for Green Travel and Vic Godfrey for IT.

The CMHR then gave a short verbal summary of the business discussed at the SCF Meeting of 2 September, as follows. The Minutes would be available with the Agenda for the December meeting of JSCC:

- More staff volunteers were required for the Health and Safety Committee, to relay what staff feel about Health and Safety issues;
- Men and women, disabled and able-bodied were needed to address anomalies for the Pay Audit. Staff from SCF and the Trade Union were to join and take it forward;
- A further update on swine flu was given.

Members stated that it was awkward that the Minutes of the SCF meeting held on 2 September should be issued with the JSCC Agenda in December. It was suggested that the gap between the third SCF meeting in each quarter and the following JSCC meeting be widened by holding the JSCC meetings a week later, to enable the SCF Minutes to be produced in time to be discussed at that meeting. **Action: completed (next meeting is on 16 December instead of 9 December 2009).**

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

15. PEOPLE STRATEGY 2008-2011 UPDATE

The Corporate Manager Human Resources (CMHR) presented her report, to update the Committee on the progress in implementing the People Strategy. She confirmed that good progress is being made, and informed the Committee that an exercise in Business Continuity had been held, which had produced excellent payroll procedures, with the result that a member of staff had now been trained on this. The Learning and Development Manager was in charge and had also “learned the ropes”.

Councillor Hone commented that a new member would act as an audit check to this process. The CMHR stated that managers had attended a training workshop on Absence Management, and funding had become available and would be spent on a similar course for other officers. She explained that the Learning and Development team had taken a key role in the shared Customer Service training and were making good progress in key projects in the People Strategy. On-line appraisals had been piloted, and there had been a review of projects.

The CMHR took the Committee through the updated chart on performance indicators and stated that the turnover showed 8.57%, which was lower than ideal (12.5%). However, they were on target for August and the target this year was 9.8%. It was thought that the low turnover reflected the effects of the recession.

Absence was generally up 10.25% on last year, and the current rate was more than the target of 9 days, possibly because of swine flu (6 staff were currently off sick). This was having an adverse effect. All Heads of Service had been notified of this fact.

The CMHR was asked about the recommended length of time that people with swine flu were absent, and responded that it was normally a period of seven to ten days, but the Chief Medical Officer had specified an appropriate length of time between one and 29 days.

Replying to a question, the CMHR stated that long-term absence did include sabbaticals, and gave the average rate of absence as 3-4 employees per month.

It was agreed: That the Committee note the progress made against the implementation of the updated People Strategy actions 2008-2011.

Reason: The People Strategy supports the achievement of the Authority’s strategic objectives.

16. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ANNUAL PAY NEGOTIATIONS – 2009/2010 UPDATE

The Corporate Manager Human Resources (CMHR) presented her report regarding an update to the Local Government Annual Pay Negotiations. She informed the Committee that staff were being kept informed on the pay negotiations via the Staff Consultation forum, and that at the last meeting with the Unions, the offer of 0.5% valid to 1 June 2009 had been withdrawn. However, talks had continued and the employers had offered staff a 1% raise and one additional day's leave per annum for those staff currently on 20 days. This would equal out over five years and a response was expected from the Trade Union by mid-September.

The CMHR declared that the Chief Officers' pay claim would match the 1% increase, and a Member reminded the Committee that the online news headline "Tories Back Chief Execs Pay Freeze" referred to the fact that Chief Officers did not receive their 0.3% last year.

The matter of the deadline for all appraisals being 31 July was raised, and whether any spot checking was carried out on the quality of appraisals. This was confirmed; the Committee were also informed that some of the changes already implemented had had a positive impact on quality, eg that the Heads of Services collating and viewing all the appraisals for their service area raises their awareness of any issues that need follow-up.

B. HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIC FORUM (DISCUSSION)

17. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

The Corporate Manager Human Resources brought to the attention of the Committee a list of suggested topics for future discussion. Members were asked to pick a topic for discussion at the next meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee, and for the following meetings.

After some discussion, the topic suggested and agreed for the next meeting on 16 December 2009 was **Delivering More for Less**, with **Social Networking** (to include the policy on employees using shared networking) agreed for the meeting on 24 March 2010.

C. HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIC FORUM (DISCUSSION)

18. SHARED HUMAN RESOURCES SHARED SERVICES AND PATHFINDER

The Corporate Manager Human Resources (CMHR) led the discussion on the sharing of Human Resources services and benefits between local government authorities in Hertfordshire. She informed the Committee that the Hertfordshire Personnel Officers Group had been renamed the Hertfordshire Human Resources Partnership Group. It had been decided that a proactive line would be taken on collaborative delivery, and support had been received from Chief Executives. The business case being prepared for the Chief Executives Group would include escalation of costs and benefits from previous investments.

The diagram showing the potential model for Human Resources (HR) Services was explained, stressing that flexibility was needed by local authorities. Questions were raised regarding the progress made since the report had been presented to the Chief Executives Group and the Leaders' Group, and the Committee were informed that Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) are currently working on a short term interim offer via their existing contract, which would provide for all ten districts and local authorities should they wish to opt in. However, it would be relatively simple to drop out of it, as each district could and would make their own choices.

The Strategic Director of Customer Services (SDCS) declared that NHDC would consider entering into a business case, and the CMHR revealed that Pathfinder have been asked to fund the whole project, in particular the business case.

Members debated the report, and on asking how many districts were taking part, were told that only one or two would not be maintaining an interest – Watford and Three Rivers had already launched a shared service, and it may not be appropriate for Welwyn Hatfield.

The SDCS stated that there was limited regional coordination of shared services procurement, but that learning did not seem to be shared effectively. There was no conclusive evidence to prove that shared services were always cost effective and that each proposition needed to be considered on its own merits. Money was available, but this did not always work.

Members commented that it was not always ideal for near neighbours to share services, and that politics did not seem to be involved. The problem of overpaying leavers was raised, along with the cut-off time on leavers'/Members' badges. The CMHR responded that she could not remember any leavers on the payroll over the time in question. A robust process for leavers included returning keys, security passes and mobile telephones.

The Learning and Development Manager added that there was a checklist from managers which HR used. Both internal and external auditors examined this process each year, and procedures go beyond this.

It was agreed: that the report on Human Resources Shared Services and Pathfinder be noted.

The meeting closed at 3.57 p.m.

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Chairman