

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 17 December 2014 at 3.00 p.m.**

MINUTES

PRESENT: *Councillors: Allison Ashley (Chairman), Fiona Hill, Bernard Lovewell and Mrs Lynda Needham.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Corporate Human Resources Manager
Employee Relations Officer
Committee and Member Services Officer.*

UNISON: *Dee Levett.*

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

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Strategic Director of Customer Services, John Robinson, and Chris Carter representing SCF both sent their apologies for absence.

22. MINUTES – 24 SEPTEMBER 2014

It was agreed that the Minutes of the JSCC meeting held on 24 September 2014 be confirmed as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman, subject to the following omission:

“APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs Judi Billing and Frank Radcliffe, together with Chris Carter representing SCF, sent their apologies for absence.”

23. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was put forward for discussion at this Meeting.

24. CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed all Members and officers to the meeting.

She then read out the following statement:

‘Members were reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and they are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest which requires they leave the room under Paragraph 7.4 of the Code of Conduct, can speak on the item, but must leave the room before the debate and vote.’

A. JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

25. PRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES BY THE APPRENTICES

The Corporate Human Resources Manager (CHRM) introduced two apprentices – Laura Weston and Chris Ottolangui. The third apprentice who was to have taken part in delivering the presentation, Emma Jellis, was unwell.

Laura introduced the presentation and stated that the apprentices would remind the Committee of the current priorities of the Council and how their own roles influence these priorities.

The three current priorities were Promoting Sustainable Growth, Working with our Communities and Living Within our Means. The new priorities proposed were Technology and Communication, Community Safety and Regeneration and Targeting Young People.

Laura and Chris then alternately presented the new priorities as follows:

Technology and Communication

- Communication with service users is vital;
- Excellent use of technology and communication can promote a higher quality and more efficient level of customer service;
- Increase internet presence in terms of social media;
- Continue to increase self-services, but also promote their availability;
- Use events such as National Customer Service week to find areas where improvement is needed and listen to feedback from internal and external users;
- Utilise the technology available to us.

The apprentices stated that the current platform could be built on and certain enquiries could be directed to Facebook and Twitter.

The MSU Week in October had been used in this way, and the apprentices had taken on projects, such as updating Terms and Conditions.

Community Safety and Regeneration

- Research found that most local authorities focus on improving the local communities;
- Residents nationwide want to have a sense of community pride, social cohesion, good local amenities and to live in a community that is clean and safe;
- Working With Our Communities is a current priority – it is suggested that this would be expanded on;
- Ensure that residents are proud of their community as North Hertfordshire expands in size and population.

The apprentices agreed that this was the Number One priority. There was a focus on the regeneration of old buildings and one way of safeguarding these would be the use of CCTV cameras.

Targeting Young People

- Negative stereotype attached to young people;
- Fear amongst communities towards young people;
- Increase facilities;
- Address common issues such as work opportunities and volunteer schemes;
- Maintain education;
- Gov.uk states that apprenticeship roles are increasing in popularity;
- Apprenticeship roles to be increased and advertised to schools, colleges and Youth Connexions.

The apprentices felt that these were the key areas to focus on for the future. They understood that some ideas might be in the process of being trialled or even have been tried out in the past. It was also acknowledged that funding was always an obstacle.

Links to other local authorities' websites were provided in order to compare their priorities with those of North Hertfordshire District Council's.

The Committee were advised that St Albans was working with young people both in and out of university and acknowledged that North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) provided opportunities and encouraged team-building. They gave the impression that apprentices were valued.

The Chairman thanked the apprentices for their interesting presentation and one Member stated that democratic structures had not been mentioned – did they have any ideas to facilitate better engagement with this? She was informed that the apprentices had a better understanding of democracy since working at NHDC. It was suggested that this is a subject which could be relayed to older schoolchildren. The Committee agreed that younger people were more likely to use their vote if they could use social media.

After some further discussion, the Committee agreed that apprentices being part of the NHDC workforce was definitely a valuable resource.

26. STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM MINUTES – 1 OCTOBER, 5 NOVEMBER AND 3 DECEMBER 2014

The Corporate Human Resources Manager (CHRM) referred the JSCC to the Minutes of the meetings of the Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) held on 1 October, 5 November and the draft Minutes of 3 December 2014, for details of the meetings, actions taken and the items carried forward.

The CHRM provided a summary of the main updates from each meeting as follows:

1 October 2014

Under Item 2 - IT Restructure, Howard Crompton and Vic Godfrey gave some background on the reasons for this restructure. The proposed new structure was based on the previous temporary structure and would need the creation of two new career-graded posts (an additional Technical Support Officer and an additional Information and Asset Officer). The Web Manager post would be transferred to the Communications Team because of its content management and strategic responsibilities.

The proposed structure did not put any staff at risk of redundancy and job evaluation would be carried out during the consultation period. The Committee were told that since the temporary structure had been put in place, informal consultation had been carried out with staff, which returned positive feedback.

Under Item 3 – Matters Arising from Previous Minutes, links had been provided for Serco Payroll FAQs to access User Guides. In addition a Temporary Payroll Contract Manager had been appointed and was currently working on the Payroll Contract alongside Caroline Gray. The user guides appeared to cover all the questions likely to come up and were considered an excellent resource for most tasks on the system.

Item 4 – Green Issues/Ideas contained a message from Kate Brierley and Reuben Ayavoo to be read out to all SCF members on behalf of the Corporate Climate Change Group. The main point of the message was that NHDC's efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions and energy usage appear to be successful. The greenhouse gas emissions from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2014 have shown a 21.06% decrease in comparison to the baseline year of 2008 in CO₂ emissions and a 10.54% decrease compared to 2013.

It was remarked that the Council were looking at the light switch and sensor mechanisms to see if they can be made more green-efficient and the point was made that the sensor on the staircase lights made them come on slightly late, which could be a safety issue. This would need to be 'tweaked'.

In Item 6, Office Accommodation Update, the SCF were informed that all staff would, have to decant from the DCO to Town Lodge in order for the renovations to be carried out.

Item 7 – Employee Issues raised the question of a member of staff who considered the changes to the new Flexi-Time Policy had made the scheme less flexible, due to the number of hours that staff have to attend. It was also felt that there should have been more consultation on the change.

5 November 2014

Item 2 on Car Salary Sacrifice Scheme stated that this would be introduced on 1 December 2014, to replace the Council's previous car loan scheme. The CHRM ran through the salient points of the scheme, and the remark was made that it was important for staff to realise the implications of joining this scheme, as it involved a significant financial investment for them.

Regarding the Car Loan Scheme at Item 3, the CHRM commented that this was not widely used and no longer offers a competitive interest rate for employees, compared to a car dealer, so will be closed to new applicants.

Item 4 concerned the Legal Services Restructure with the report being presented by the Acting Corporate Legal Manager and Monitoring Officer, Anthony Roche. He confirmed that the restructure proposed the redundancy of the Legal Officer- Property and Planning. A new role of Property and Planning Lawyer will be introduced and this post, along with those of Senior Lawyer, Property Lawyer, Contracts Lawyer and Advisory and Litigation Lawyer will be submitted for Job Evaluation.

The CHRM advised that in the NHDC Update at Item 7, a project was currently being undertaken to look at the possibility of a Joint Waste Service between NHDC and East Hertfordshire District Council. If successful, savings of £10m could be made over the life of the new contract. A report would go to Cabinet in December 2015, detailing this project.

Under Item 9 – Employee Queries, the invitation to all SCF members to attend the Chairman's Annual Christmas Reception elicited the response from some Members of the JSCC that they did not find out about this event until it was too late to put it in their diaries.

3 December 2014 - Draft Minutes

She referred to Item 3, Green Issues/Ideas and reminded the Committee that it was very important to use the Document Centre for all large scale printing.

Referring to Item 4 on NHDC Update, the Committee were advised that the Just Drive Scheme had now "gone live".

A new website is to be implemented in early 2015, and this would be tablet/smartphone friendly.

The Local Plan had been discussed and was out for consultation until the beginning of February. It was stressed that as Members of Cabinet had pointed out, targets must be met but a major issue was longer term protection for the area.

The JSCC were advised that a pay offer of 2.2% had been accepted and communicated to all staff by LOM. The CHRM explained that this pay offer ran from January 2015 to March 2016, after which it would be reviewed. It was pointed out that the payment in December was not back pay or form part of employees' pensions, and a few members of staff would receive an additional payment in April. The pay offer was bolstering up those on the lower pay scales, to bring them in line with the minimum wage and the pay scales referred to were National ones, not the NHDC pay scales.

A possible change in the structure of the Human Resources (HR) Department had been presented to the Corporate Board. It was important to ensure that HR was strong and robust in the short term and that there were resources available to help other services manage change, although another shared service might be joining NHDC in the long term. The new structure would be reported back to SCF early in 2015.

The subject of Office Accommodation at Item 5 was raised, and the Committee was informed that the first of the two briefings on this had been held. The project was due to commence in 2016 and would involve a complete office decant whilst work on the District Council Offices was carried out, which involved complete replacement of all windows. The timescale for this had been estimated at six months and the budget was currently being worked on. All staff were encouraged to attend the second briefing on 11 December 2014 at 2.30pm in the Council Chamber.

In Item 6 – Employee Enquiries, the problem of extensive graffiti and green puddles of water accumulating in the stairwell of the multi-storey car park had been mentioned. The Committee were advised that it had taken some time for the graffiti to be removed, and that the green water was disinfectant that had been thrown down the stairs by the cleaner.

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

27. PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Corporate Human Resources Manager (CHRM) presented the Committee with the latest quarterly update on the progress made to the People Strategy 2011-2015 Report, which also incorporated the Council's Workforce Development Plan.

She informed the Committee that HR had gone through a very busy period and had continued to concentrate on the new outsourced payroll service. A temporary part-time payroll contract expert had been engaged to assist with service provision, as the HR team is currently understaffed. The team will shortly be restructured to help retain the value and experience of the current HR team.

The CHRM went through the recent project highlights since the last meeting of the JSCC in September 2014 and the Committee expressed interest in the Flu Vaccination Scheme, available for the second year running. Five sessions were offered and there had been a higher take-up than 2013. There were two options: people could be given vouchers to have the vaccination at a pharmacy or they could have the vaccination at the Council Offices.

Another project of great interest to the Committee was the new policy and procedures on Shared Parental Leave, which would come into effect from 1 April 2015. This has necessitated considerable reviewing of the current maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave policies and procedures.

The CHRM advised the Committee that HR had been working on an online recruitment tool project with IT, which would allow applicants to view job details and submit applications through a secure online link. After a live trial, all posts were now linked to the online application form. Phase 2 of this project was now operating.

The Committee were informed that a number of learning and development opportunities had been planned. The ILM 3 in First Line Management and ILM 5 in Leadership and Management had both been successfully completed, and feedback had been positive. A Coaching for Managers workshop was planned for February 2015 to continue contributing to the coaching culture.

The CHRM touched on the Absence Rates rolling 12 months, from November and December 2013 until October 2014, and the Chairman asked whether these Absence Rates had been compared with any of the other Hertfordshire local authorities. Members also asked how NHDC had such good long- and short-term results. Appendix B, the Strategy Action Plan, was largely unchanged and at the bottom of p 25 it was clarified that BPSS was Baseline Personnel Security Standard.

It was agreed: That the progress against the People Strategy and HR People Strategy Work Plan for 2014/2015 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To support the achievement of the Authority's key priorities.

28. B. HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIC FORUM

DISCUSSION PAPER AND INFORMATION NOTE – LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY

The Corporate Human Resources Manager introduced the discussion paper and information note which explained the Single Status Agreement 1997 of the National Joint Council (MJC) for Local Government Services. This launched the Green Book in order to achieve better pay equality by 31 March 2007. It was emphasised that a lot of pay claims had been successfully made and it was necessary to carry out regular pay audits.

There had been 10 years of national pay bargaining between 2004 and 2014, from which some local authorities had opted out, but NHDC had remained in the process in maintain nationally agreed pay rises, taking into account the current economic circumstances.

The CHRM set out the percentage of reasonable annual pay rises from 2004 to 2008, although the recession which arrived in 2008 changed things. In 2009, all staff except Chief Officers received a 1% increase with no increase in 2010, followed by a 3-year national pay freeze. The local authorities stated that pay increases for their employees were unaffordable. The employers were worried about the local pay spines as it had had the effect of lowering the local minimum wage, and industrial action was taken in July 2014, followed by efforts to hold talks between the trade unions and employers. Agreement was reached on 14 November for a pay increase of 2.2% from 1 January 2015, with the exception of Chief Officers. It was organised so that the lowest paid employees would get bigger increases, in response to national pay scales having fallen low. The offer also included a £100 lump sum in December 2014 (pro rata for part-time staff and subject to tax and National Insurance), with a further lump sum in April 2015 of 0.45% of the new pay rate (less the £100 paid in December).

The CHRM advised that Grade 1 had different increases and lump sum payments, because the trade unions and the local government employers had agreed greater increases for the lowest paid. She went through the Grade 1 salary range as of January 2015 and compared this to the National Minimum Wage rates for 2014.

Finally, it was advised that 2013 had been the fifth year that Chief Officers pay had been frozen and the Trade Union submitted a pay claim for them and the employers made an offer of 2% up to £99,999.00 to apply from January 2015.

After some discussion Members of the Committee remarked that this rate was an attractive one.

The Chairman thanked the CHRM for presenting the Information Note and the Discussion Paper.

29. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

After some discussion the Committee decided that the topic on Shared Parental Leave would be chosen for the next meeting of the JSCC on 25 March 2015.

Before the meeting closed, the UNISON representative raised the subject of the sensors on the staircase lights which made them come on slightly late. She emphasised that this could be a safety issue. The Chairman suggested, and the Committee agreed, that concerns about this issue be passed on to Property Services and that they be asked to correct the timing of the sensors. It was agreed that the Committee Clerk Pass on these concerns to Property Services.

The meeting closed at 4.20 p.m.

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Chairman

