

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

1st April 2015



Minutes

Present: Chris Carter, (Chair), Kerry Shorrocks, Christina Corr, Susanne Gow, Helen Rae, Amanda Dell, Maggie Williams, Dee Levett, Jo Softly, Kiren Kalirai (notes)

Apologies: John Robinson, David Scholes, Claire Morgan

Circulation: Those present, Claire Morgan, John Robinson, David Scholes

Actions

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from John Robinson, David Scholes and Claire Morgan.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

CC raised that on previous minutes the date of moving back into Council Offices was recorded incorrectly as December 2015 and should have been December 2016.

Howard Crompton (HC) attended to provide an update of the Single Fraud Investigations Service transfer. He advised here are 4 members of the fraud team that currently work at NHDC. 1 manager, 2 officers and an intelligence officer. Their primary function is to investigate benefit fraud. However, the DWP have now decided that **all** fraud and HMRC investigations will be under their wing. The aim is to detect more fraud by saving money. Any members of staff who do 50% or more of Housing Benefit Fraud are guaranteed a job with DWP.

Staff have an alternative option of applying for a job with SAFS (Shared Anti Fraud Services) who do investigations alongside SIAS. 1 member of the team has already applied for a job with SAFs and was successful. 1 member of the team missed the initial application deadline therefore has applied in the second round. This therefore means that there are only potentially 2 members of staff who will be transferring to DWP on 01.06.15. Staff transferring to DWP could be transferring to offices in Stevenage, Bedfordshire or Cambridgeshire but have not been informed where they will be transferring to as yet. They need to be told 6 weeks before transferring therefore HC expects staff to be notified by mid April.

HC also advised that staff in the benefit fraud investigations team did deal with other kinds of investigations which will still continue to be dealt with by NHDC however will be passed over to DWP to investigate.

CC asked how long the staff member's terms and conditions are protected under TUPE. KS advised that employers can change terms and conditions for economical, organisational or technical reasons under TUPE regulations and it is often better to harmonise pay and conditions.

The minutes were otherwise agreed.

3. Green Issues/Ideas

No issues were raised.

4. NHDC Update

KS informed that there is to be bite size training refresher courses to be held on payroll self service concentrating on annual leave and expenses where most of the queries come about.

KS advised all carry forward leave should appear on SAP now and that all staff should book their carry forward leave to be taken by the end of May. Staff who had booked their carry forward leave earlier may need to cancel and re-book to ensure that leave booked in April and May is taken from the carried forward leave.

DL asked if approval is still required to carry forward leave. KS advised that the policy has not changed and approval should be obtained. Details are in the Holiday Entitlement Policy which can be found here - <http://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/holiday-entitlement>. CC asked if managers are aware that approval is needed to carry forward leave. KS advised that as nothing has been said to the contrary managers should be following the policy that is currently in place. MW suggested that next year when a message is sent out in January to remind staff to use up leave that maybe they could include something to remind managers that permission is still needed to carry forward leave.

KS advised that there is still a problem with the receipt upload function on SAP and that the issue has been referred back to the architects who built the system to find a resolution. In the interim period, receipts must either be scanned and emailed to their manager or provided in hard copy attached to a copy of the claim form. These should be sent to HR who will send them to County Hall for filing. The payroll quick guide has been updated to show the new arrangements.

MW advised that there is now a discount scheme in place for any employee wishing to use services that Careline provide from 01.05.15. The discount will allow the client to save 5% off services. AD asked about eligibility for this scheme. All staff are eligible for this scheme regardless of type or length of employment. The only criteria are that the client that will be using this service must live in the district. It does not matter whether the employee lives in the area or not. Discount will also continue even if the employee no longer works for the Council. MW advised that there shall be a message on the message board soon to inform all staff of this benefit.

5. Office Accommodation Update

KS advised that architects from Stevenage Borough Council Offices have been appointed for the design work for the refurbishment of the Council Offices.

The plan is to exit the building entirely so that the work can be completed as quickly as possible and when the office is vacated staff will move to Town lodge. It has not been decided yet as to where teams will be placed.

Some key principles are yet to be decided – i.e. whether part of the building could be freed up to let out.

The main aim of the office accommodation refurbishment is to make the offices more comfortable in terms of air and temperature. There shall be a ventilation system installed which will be cooling the air in summer and heating in winter. New boilers will be more efficient. The aspiration is to get the office as open plan as possible which in turn will increase the air flow.

JS asked if anyone had any queries/comments or issues with the Intranet to forward them to Sarah Dobor or Gavin Midgley. KS advised that the website and intranet update has been a difficult project that was done in a short amount of time. CC asked if the search function was available and JS confirmed that Gavin had resolved that issue.

6. Employee Queries

DL raised that it took a lot of time to book unpaid leave for Bank Holiday for staff. KS advised that she will include how to book unpaid leave on the bite size refresher training courses. DL advised that this is not included in the Quick Guides and KS said the HR team will be updating these in future.

AD asked if broadband expenses include the cost of telephone line rental as a telephone line may not be needed by the member of staff.. KS advised that the maximum that can be claimed is £15 therefore it is up to the employee to source the best value for money line rental.

AD also on behalf of a colleague queried what the selection process was for staff helping out with the elections. This was because staff on the same floor applied but some got the position and some didn't. KS advised that democratic Services appoint the people for elections work. Those that are trained and experienced are most likely to be used again.

Staff are always used to help out with the elections and with a general election this year staff there will be a greater demand. It is accepted that departments may be running with less people than normal. Letters have recently been sent out to staff who are helping in elections and this gives managers enough time to plan for sufficient cover.

7. Chair for Next Meeting

It was agreed that Chris Carter would chair the next meeting.