

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

6 May 2015



Minutes

Present: Kerry Shorrocks, Chris Carter, Susanne Gow, Amanda Dell, Maggie Williams, Dee Levett, Jess Young, Les Davison (item 1)

Apologies: David Scholes, John Robinson, Helen Rae, Claire Morgan, Christine Corr

Circulation: Those present, David Scholes, John Robinson, Helen Rae, Claire Morgan, Christine Corr

Actions

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from David Scholes, John Robinson, Helen Rae, Claire Morgan, Christine Corr

2. Smoking Update

Les Davison attended for this item on the agenda. It is proposed that the smoking bins are to be removed from outside of the building. There have been reports of smoke ingress on the ground floor and first floor and there has also been a fire in the bin.

Members of staff have been noticed smoking by the bin store and not the smoking bin which has resulted in non smoking staff being worried about passive smoking. DL suggested to place more signage around the smoking bin to inform staff on where to stand.

KS raised concerns that by removing the smoking bin we are not providing for the members of staff who do smoke. NHDC as an employer should be providing facilities for all staff not just those who do not smoke. LD advised that by removing the bin from the wall on our building we are not stopping staff from smoking just merely directing them away from our building to smoke. There are alternative smoking bins – two on the other side of the road, two by the car park and two towards the front of the building. KS raised concerns that by telling staff to go over the road, or by the car park to smoke will increase in complaints/concerns that staff are seen away from the building smoking by members of the public.

KS advised LD that she will be looking into the smoking policy, and would like to see any information that is due to be sent out to staff to ensure that NHDC as an employer is being fair and providing for all staff.

LD raised concerns about staff members using electronic cigarettes near the main entrance. Staff members must stand away from the main entrance however KS raised that there is nowhere suitable for them to stand and smoke and that they cannot be expected to stand where the smokers stand.

SCF suggested that some shelter be provided however LD advised that there is nowhere suitable for a shelter as there is no space. The same rules will apply at Town Lodge, that there will be no smoking in the close proximity of the building.

It was suggested that a draft notice of information is sent to KS for consideration before it is sent out to staff. There is no date for removal of the bin so this shall be considered once all information has been reviewed.

3. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

AD raised that there was a matter missing from previous minutes. She had been asked to raise concerns on behalf of a member of staff about staff who would be working on elections and for the count as to whether they were expected to report in for work for the next morning. KS advised that there needs to be a pragmatic approach around this. The elections have to be covered as we are a Local Council. Electing to help should be discussed with line managers in advance so that cover can be arranged. KS stated she will raise with Corporate Board to discuss what the arrangements will be next year so that we can have an approach which will be the same for everyone across the organisation.

There being no outstanding actions the minutes were otherwise agreed.

4. Shared Parental Leave

MW introduced a new shared parental leave policy which has come into effect which aims to improve the balance of who looks after children. The policy NHDC has introduced reflects the statutory scheme which is provided by law. The policy will be supported with FAQs, with forms on the intranet and by support from Hrhelp.

This policy is open to everyone and anyone who wishes to apply for it must discuss it with their line manager in the first instance. The leave must be taken in one week blocks and not with a day or two here and there. It can also be taken as months in one block (continuous leave) or in blocks of weeks here and there (discontinuous leave). However discontinuous leave can be refused by management if they feel it will disrupt workload of the team too much and the position will be harder to fill by a temporary post.

C Corr

This policy is not to be lightly considered. Staff thinking of taking up this policy must think of the financial impact this may have as the pay is the same as basic maternity pay.

The policy came into effect in April so staff are able to apply now if they wish to however please note 8 weeks notice must be given when applying. This policy is due to be reviewed in a year.

5. Green Issues

It was proposed that Green Issues will be removed off the agenda as issues can be raised under Employee Queries or Any Other Business.

6. NHDC Update

KS reminded SCF that there are elections taking place tomorrow which may affect us. All area committees are suspended at the moment until the results from the elections are announced.

The outdoor swimming pool's are due to be opened on the 23 May 2015. KS also informed everyone that the splash pads are open in Howard Park and Gardens and Avenue Park in Baldock and we are due to be installing splash pads in Bancroft Park in Hitchin and Priory Gardens in Royston.

Museum Update

The construction phase of the museum is now completed and the fit out is now due. The museum staff restructure has taken place and NHDC are hoping to open the new facility in October.

KS has requested that a message is included in the next issue of team talk to remind staff to book their summer leave early so that managers can manage their teams accordingly.

7. Office Accommodation Update

KS advised there is a meeting coming up for the Office Accommodation however the architects are working towards potential designs with the main aim to replace windows, and make the building more heat efficient.

Town Lodge is a lot bigger than what it appears to be however KS reminded staff that this is a temporary short term arrangement so staff must keep this in mind. Property services are doing their best to better the building for when staff move in at the end of the year. By moving to Town Lodge it will allow the works to be completed quicker than originally anticipated when it was suggested that works take place floor by floor.

All information relating to the office accommodation are uploaded onto the intranet and OAC (Office Accommodation Committee) meetings have also been set up in order to represent the interest of the staff.

8. Employee Queries

AD presented an extract from SAP on behalf of CC which informed staff that 5 days leave will automatically carried over and no manager authorisation is required. KS advised that this statement has been removed from SAP and the policy remains that 5 days leave can only be carried over with manager authorisation. AD reported that a member of

staff had been refused leave by their manager, and KS informed that managers are well within their rights to refuse to carry over leave as ideally leave should be used within the financial year to avoid everyone trying to use up leave in April/May. .

AD also sought clarification for the query that was raised last month about claiming broadband expenses. KS advised that the broadband payment was set up by IT and not HR therefore IT will need to be consulted for a definitive answer.

MW raised that a telephone line may be required as part of the initial set up of homeworking and stated she will look into this.

KS advised that the reimbursement payment has not been reviewed recently and this may be something that is reviewed in the near future.

AD asked if rooms could be soundproofed in the new office – DL advised that this had already been considered and will not be implemented. This concern arose because a member of staff raised to AD that when colleagues are in the meeting rooms everything can be heard outside – staff may not be aware of this and requested that signs are put up on doors to inform staff that rooms are **not** soundproof. It was decided that as there is particular concerns about two meeting rooms on the 3rd floor where there is a gap between the walls it could be raised to property services to maybe put a sign up in that room as AD to advise staff on third floor of this.

AD informed that someone she knows who had recently applied for a job on the website had found that the form states there is a word count however when applying for the job and filling in the application it is actually a character count . AD also stated that it was brought to her attention that when applying initially it tells you that you have 25 minutes to complete the form but when it is about to time out there is no reminder of this and it just automatically shuts you out and an work done so far is deleted. KS to raise with IT to look at solutions o these problems.

JY raised a query on behalf of a member of staff who had requested that a change in the leave year to be considered. JY stated that this member of staff had been informed by HR that this query had been raised previously and to look in the minutes from a previous meeting however was insistent that this is raised as a new matter. KS advised that as stated this had been previously looked into and decided that this would not be practical as there would be problems regardless of when the leave year runs. Staff should be planning their leave in advance and the policy is already lenient in that 5 days leave can be carried over with manager approval.

DL asked if leave can be booked during working hours? KS advised that it should be allowed as it is generally a part of your working day however this should not be interfering with a days work for staff. There will be refresher sessions running for staff on how to use Serco. The refresher course will be held on 4 June 2015 in two sessions – Session 1 – 9.30 – 12.30 and Session 2 – 13.00-16.00. To book onto the course please email Hrhhelp.

It was also decided that AD will become payroll champion for 3rd floor.

9. AOB

MW advised that cycle2work was open once again for staff to take part in. This scheme which is running from 01/05/15 – 31/05/15 allows staff to enter into a hire agreement. The council buys the bike from Halfords and then rents it back to the employees. There is a chance to purchase the bike at the end of the agreement for a nominal fee. The salary sacrifice gives allowance for the national insurance and tax payments.

There are many schemes available under the salary sacrifice – kiddisave vouchers, wider wallet, careline discount.

It was also raised that it is walk to work week next week.

10. Chair for Next Meeting

It was agreed that Christina Corr would chair the next meeting.