

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

7 October 2015



Minutes

Present: Christina Corr (Chair), Kerry Shorrocks, Claire Morgan, Chris Carter, Catherine Cole, Oliver Furbur, Amanda Dell, Maggie Williams, Dee Levett, Sharon Nahal (notes), Jeanette Thompson, (item 1), Debbie Hiscock (item 2)

Circulation: David Scholes, John Robinson

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from David Scholes and John Robinson.

2. Personal Employee Conflict of Interests

JT presented this report which including amendments to bring the Policy in line with the current Information Commissioners Office (ICO) guidance, was cross referred to other NHDC policies and procedures, updated reference from Officers to Employees and taking in to account the draft guidance on the management of organisational conflicts and duties.

KS advised that this policy update had been considered at Senior Management Team and subject to any comments made here and, with approval from the Leader, will be published on the intranet and an article to appear in the next edition of Team Talk.

JT acknowledged that comments from HR had yet to be incorporated but requested that these be provided by the end of the week so that the report could be sent to the Leader at the beginning of next week.

Action: MW

There being no further questions, SCF thanked JT for this report.

3. Property Services Update

Debbie Hiscock attended for this item and confirmed since the meeting in August, there had been no complaints/concerns reported. However, there is an issue with ladybirds in corridors and foyers and these are being dealt with.

There was a question raised about the cleaning contract in particular vacuuming. DH clarified that the cleaning contract specification was to vacuum offices/areas if they needed to be done. Any requests for cleaning should be made to DH who would communicate this with the contractors.

Action: DH

DH confirmed that an article would appear in the next edition of Team Talk to reiterate the reporting process on property services issues to staff.

C Corr thanked Property Services for their prompt response in rectifying the lighting in the Council Chamber.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

KS said the matter about the online application form had been resolved. There was a character count on each main section of the form but it allowed as much as two sides of A4 for each section which was more than enough. The form also was set to auto save and would give people a reminder before the session closed to prevent loss of data.

There being no other matters arising from the previous minutes the minutes were agreed.

5. NHDC Update

KS updated SCF on restructure in that an article from DS would be appearing in the next issue of Team Talk to provide staff with an update.

Head of Service/Corporate Managers are currently working on Corporate Business Planning with a view of forwarding savings proposals for Corporate Board to consider. The submissions are due at the end of the week and further updates will be provided at the appropriate times.

KS advised SCF that work was underway on refreshing the Working from Home Policy which was first launched in 2008 when homeworking was first introduced. Technology has moved on and the policy would be updated to incorporate the telephony system and other newly introduced procedures and processes. The updated policy would be considered by Corporate Board, SMT, Trade Unions and SCF with a view to launch this in Spring 2016.

AD posed a number of questions around the existing policy following on from discussions within the MSU Team whereby efforts were being made to ensure that staff could work at home to assist with the office decant in May 2016. The questions posed were:

- Would staff still be eligible for the £500 start up costs if their post was deemed suitable as a partial home working post?

KS confirmed this to be the case but also took the opportunity to confirm that it was not obligatory and that there were some officers who had declined the payment.

- A current MSU member of staff has been working from home for a number of years but no longer has a working laptop and is unable to purchase another one. As per the current policy, would the Council be in a position to provide equipment of this sort to staff who found themselves in this position?

KS advised that she had been discussing this matter with IT as part of the policy review and that IT had confirmed that they can provide equipment for Home-working but were generally replacing lap tops with desk tops and these could be provided if needed to staff who did not have such equipment when working from home.

Finally, KS updated on the Regional Pay Briefing seminar held September. SCF were advised that work is underway to assess the way in which the new National Living Wage increases will impact on local authorities national pay scales and on services that have sub contractors. The national living wage will rise to £7.20 in 2016 and is set to increase £9.00 in 2020. There had also been an announcement that public sector pay would be capped at 1% increases over the next 4 years.

SCF were also advised of an upcoming change in NI contributions. Staff currently in the Local Government Pension Scheme benefited from a contracted out (reduced) NI rate. However, contracted out rates of NI will be ceased from April 2016 and everyone will pay the full NI contributions which would be another 1.3% of pay deductions. There would be regular communications nearer the time.

6. Office Accommodation Update

KS confirmed that the team had not met since the last update and that the only matters to report were that planning permission had been granted for the exterior of the building. In addition, Head of Service/Corporate Managers had been presented with the first draft of floor plans for Town Lodge and were asked for comments. Once these have been firmed up and agreed by Corporate Board details will be released to individual teams.

C Corr asked if consideration to kitchen facilities had been given and, in particular, thought to having urn type facilities instead of kettles. It was agreed that C Corr would raise this with Property Services as a suggestion.

Action: C Corr

7. People Strategy

KS presented the People Strategy for 2015 – 2020. This was presented to JSCC on 30 September 2015. The Strategy is an update to the 2011- 2015 version and KS confirmed that immense progress had been made. However, since 2008, national and local government has changed dramatically and NHDC along with it. The most significant change has been the onset of the recession in 2008 and the period of austerity which followed and is expected to continue.

The Strategy included detail on: recruitment and retention, turnover, absence, apprenticeships, pay and benefits etc. The HR work programme would be constantly reviewed and updated and SCF noted that the Strategy would shortly be published more widely.

Whilst there were no comments made following this presentation, KS advised that should any SCF members have any questions or queries then she would be happy to answer these outside of the meeting.

8. Employee Queries

• Car Salary Sacrifice Scheme

AD updated SCF on a recent application made to NHDC's car scheme. She advised that she had put a lot of effort in to researching the type of vehicle she wanted and to be told after she had made the application that she was not eligible because the deductions would take her below the national minimum wage was a bit of a nuisance.

KS confirmed that this was the regulation for salary sacrifice schemes that any pay deductions should not take people below this rate. AD recommended that the finance calculator on the IFS website be updated or message be placed on the website that base salary figures are used to calculate eligibility and if staff are on a lower grade and working part time, the likelihood is that your application may not be accepted because of this minimum wage regulation. KS said that it would depend on the amount of salary sacrificed and a cheaper car or lower specification might be possible.

KS thanked AD for her feedback and advised that she was meeting with the scheme providers later that week and would use that opportunity to provide some feedback. CM asked how many staff had taken up this scheme and MW advised that AD had been the first applicant.

- **Payroll**

C Corr asked whether the SAP system was unavailable during certain periods of time as she was had difficulty submitting a leave request on SAP around the time of the pay run. C Corr confirmed that she had not reported this matter to SAP and, KS requested that such instances are reported to Serco so that issues like this could be monitored. If problems are not reported and HR were not aware the situation wont bet monitored. KS confirmed that she meets with SERCO to monitor the contract on a regular basis and any system issues are discussed at these meetings. By reporting such problems it will help better monitor the performance of the contract and resolve problems quickly.

Action: Note

9. Chair for Next Meeting

It was agreed that C Carter would chair the next meeting but was leaving the council so it would be his last meeting. .

C Corr advised she may not be at the next meeting and would like the opportunity to wish C Carter all the best in his new role and thanked him for all of his efforts with SCF.