

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

4 November 2015



DRAFT Minutes

Present: Chris Carter (Chair), John Robinson, Kerry Shorrocks, Claire Morgan, Catherine Cole, Oliver Furbur, Amanda Dell, Maggie Williams, Dee Levett, Sharon Nahal (notes), Emma Hart (observe)

Circulation: Those Present, David Scholes, Christina Corr

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from David Scholes and Christina Corr.

2. Mattes Arising from Previous Minutes

Subject to a typographical error, the minutes were agreed.

3. NHDC Update

JR advised that work was underway to secure savings for 2016/17 but the next critical point will be the Chancellor's autumn statement expected in late November which will set out the Government's overall spending plans. This is likely to be followed by announcements about how this affects Local Government in December.

A major element of reforms already announced is a proposed shift to the retention of business rates in the area where they are generated and an end to the Government's Revenue Support Grant. This is a significant shift and many of the details and impact locally are currently unknown.

The Planning Service are working hard on the developing the Local Plan and publication as soon as they are able.

SCF were informed of an upcoming campaign where efforts were being made both to thank residents for all their support with recycling and to further encourage and educate them on what types of recyclable materials are permitted in their recycling bins to help with the increasing problem of contaminated loads. If the wrong materials get in there more recycling has to be sent to landfill.

A Task & Finish Group report on Commercialisation was due to be considered by Cabinet on 10 November which would look at some measures for making the Council more Commercial especially when looking ways to increase income for the Council to offset the reductions in funding from central government.

Finally, JR was asked by Ian Davis to consult with SCF on the removal of the hot drinks machine from the 5th floor canteen. This had been first introduced at the request of an SCF meeting and was a nil cost to the Council. However, due to the low level of usage, the machine now incurs a charge of around £70 a month which is not sustainable. It was therefore suggested that this machine be removed and the multi vend machine be used to dispense carton drinks, with a selection of healthy snacks and the usual popular snacks such as chocolate and crisps.

SCF agreed to this proposal but DL requested clarification as to what facilities would be available at Town Lodge next year. It was agreed that JR would raise this with ID and advise accordingly.

Action: JR

KS provided an update on the progress of two consultations undertaken recently by government – exit payments for local government employees and tax and NI treatment of these payments.

The government announced that it intended to end six-figure exit payments for public sector workers. The core elements of the proposal were to:

- Apply a £95,000 cap on the total value of exit payments made to employees in the public sector
- Apply the cap to all forms of exit payment, including cash lump sums, early access to an unreduced pension, payments in lieu of notice and non-financial and other benefits
- Apply the cap to all types of arrangements for determining exit payments
- Establish a waiver process for exceptional circumstances
- Apply the policy to all public sector bodies, with a small number of bodies granted an exemption from the policy

The Government has recently published the response to the consultations and it is proposed to continue to legislate to introduce a cap on exit payments. The policy proposal is to cap the total cost of exit payments available to individuals leaving employment to £95,000 and to apply the cap to all types of arrangement for determining exit payments.

On the government consultation on the tax and NI treatment of Termination Payments, the consultation closed on 16th October and we are awaiting the outcome of this. This is an area that has been under review for some time and it had been expected that the current rate of £30,000 granted tax free might increase since it has been set at the same rate for some years. However the consultation has proposed the amount is reduced.

In respect of payments such as redundancy there would be a set amount (suggested at £6,000) that would require two years service and that a possible further amount for each year of service (with the example given of £1,000 a year) which we expect will also have a cap of some sort applied to it. The proposal also goes on to reduce the distinction between contractual and non contractual payment so all payments would be eligible for tax and NI contributions.

Finally there were still places available at the children's Christmas party which is to be held on Friday 11 December at the Council Offices with the kind support of Unison. This is free of charge and open to NHDC staff and their children/ grandchildren and will suit children up to 8 years of age. For anyone wanting to book, please contact Emma Hart in HR.

AD raised a question about encouraging staff to book their statutory days leave on SAP. KS confirmed that a message had been included in the last edition of Team Talk. In addition, KS encouraged staff to look at their remaining leave entitlement with a view to using these days by the end of March 2015.

4. Office Accommodation

There were no further updates other than to advise that a Office Accommodation Project Board meeting was being held next week and that an update would be provided at the next meeting of SCF.

C Cole confirmed that Democratic Services had recently held a bit of a clear out of their files and had been left with a number of lever arch files. She asked whether these could be reused elsewhere in the organisation or indeed, externally. SCF members noted that the majority of business was conducted via email and that other than placing a message on the staff message board making these available, then the next option would be perhaps looking recycling these or donating them to schools etc.

5. Employee Queries

C Cole requested confirmation that the recycling bin in the kitchen on the first floor is for mixed recyclates. OF confirmed this to be the case.

C Cole asked what would be happening to the old audio visual equipment in the Council offices. JR suggested that she raise this with David Miley.

Finally, C Cole had been approached by a member of staff on the first floor about the lease car scheme currently being promoted to staff. The member of staff looked at possibly participating in the scheme but, was unable to participate as they didn't qualify. C Cole asked whether consideration had been given to withdrawing from the scheme and to perhaps look at something else? KS advised that there are roadshows planned and we will see what happens following those and after that if there were still no orders we may need to consider whether the scheme is viable in the long term. In the interim we are continuing to promote the scheme.

Update

There is a justdrive event planned on Wednesday 11th November. There will be 3 sessions 10.30-11.30, 11.30-12.30 and 12.30-13.30 in Committee Room 1, to provide staff with details of the scheme and another event would take place in the new year.

CM raised a query from the 5 floor around the cost of the vending machines for sanitary products in the female toilets which was viewed as being very high. It was agreed that JR would raise this with Property Services and would provide an update at the next meeting.

Action: JR

6. Chair for Next Meeting

It was agreed that Claire Morgan would chair the next meeting. Chris Carter is leaving the Council so this was his last meeting..

JR and SCF thanked him for his efforts during his time on the SCF Forum and wished him well in his new role at Welwyn & Hatfield Council.

KS also thanked Chris Carter for his efforts in taking part in the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and the Office Accommodation project.