

# Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

6 January 2016



## Minutes

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**Present:** Kerry Shorrocks (Chair), David Scholes, Maggie Williams, Anne McDonald, Christine Corr, Amanda Dell, Dee Levett, Sharon Nahal (notes), Les Davison (item 1)

**Apologies:** John Robinson, Oliver Furbur, Catherine Cole

**Circulation:** Those Present, Property Services, John Robinson, Oliver Furbur and Catherine Cole

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### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from John Robinson, Oliver Furbur and Catherine Cole.

### 2. Funding for Eye Tests

LD attended for this item and advised SCF that following a presentation at the Health & Safety Committee, it was agreed that this proposal be considered by SCF. The proposal put forward by LD was that currently staff are able to claim up to £60 towards a new pair of glasses for VDU use. In addition to this, the costs of eye tests are also covered. To date in 2015/16 the Council has paid £1,358 towards the cost of prescription glasses. This equates to 26 claims which averages around £52 per person.

In order to keep costs low and to give people a good service/choice, LD has been in discussion with several opticians and proposes to use a single provider – Specsavers. The proposed scheme will consist of the following:

- If a member of staff wishes to have an eye test (which is recommended every 2 years) then a DSE risk assessment would be undertaken
- If the assessment necessitates VDU glasses then a voucher (cost purchase to NHDC £17) will be provided to them
- The officer is then able to go in to any branch of Specsavers and allows them to have a full eye test and will contribute up to £45 towards a new pair of glasses.
- Should the officer choose to select a higher priced frame then the £45 will be deducted from the price as NHDC's contribution. However, it was noted that if this was the case then Specsavers would increase the voucher value towards a new pair of glasses to £65 at their own cost.

There was some discussion about officers having their eyes tested and found no glasses needed then this would be at a loss to the Council i.e cost of eye test £10.00 which would equate to a loss of £7.00 per voucher.

In terms of the DSE assessments, LD advised that currently only he was qualified to undertake these but that Property Services were considering a suitable IT packages

where officer could undertake these assessments using this package.

SCF were agreeable to the proposal and it was noted that LD would shortly be preparing a paper for consideration at a future meeting of SMT.

### **3. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting were considered and the following actions were outstanding:

#### **Property Services Matters**

- On behalf of the SCF, JR had written to Property Services following on from a query raised at the last SCF with regards to the cost of sanitary products located in the vending machines in the female toilets. DH advised that Property Services were looking in to this and conceded that the cost was high. DH will provide an update via email once she has met with the suppliers.  
Action: DH
- GH confirmed that an officer on the first floor had asked that lighting around the back entrance of DCO be looked at as in the evenings when leaving the office, this didn't appear to be as well lit as it could be. DH advised that this hadn't been reported to Property Services previously but would look in to this and update SCF.  
Action: DH
- DH was advised that the third cubicle on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor ladies toilets appears to be out of action quite frequently and whether the flush mechanism could be looked at. DH advised that she wasn't aware that this was happening frequently but would have this looked at.  
Action: DH
- A question was asked about the decant plans for Town Lodge and whether consideration had been given to allowing for a 'rest room' similar to one on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. This is regularly used by a number of staff. DS confirmed that this hadn't been taken in to account but would raise the issue with ID.  
Action: DH

The minutes were otherwise agreed.

### **4. NHDC Update**

DS provided an update on a number issues including:

- **NHLC**

Cabinet agreed in December to proceed with the extension to the car park at North Herts Leisure Centre. In addition, Cabinet agreed and recommended to Council the approval of additional budget to progress the refurbishment and extension at North Herts Leisure Centre which will amongst other things, provide for a new learner pool. Council is scheduled to consider this item at its meeting in January 2016.

- **Churchgate**

A report will be presented to Council at its meeting in February 2016 to consider the Hammersmach aspirations for future development of this site.

- **Hitchin Town Hall**

Work on the fit out of the Museum is still underway and the contract for the fit out of the café has too been awarded with work commencing imminently. AD asked when the facility would be open and whether the Town Hall and Museum would both open at the same time. DS advised that the Council is in the process of resolving the final elements and that would be able to provide a more fuller update at the next meeting.

AD requested clarification as to who would be operating the Café and DS confirmed that the Council would be operating the Town Hall and Café for 3 years once open. Council would then consider who this would operate thereafter.

- **Commercialisation**

Following a Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Group on Commercialisation Cabinet considered the recommendations and agreed to establish a Commercialisation Project Board which would consider areas for commercialisation where the Council could generate income.

DS advised that he expected this process to take around 6 months with an aim to report to back to Cabinet in the Summer.

- **Local Plan**

Officers are working on developing the Local Plan and it was expected that the draft submission would be considered by Council in July 2016. The plan includes new housing for 14,400 homes by 2031 and the possibility of further development to make up for the shortfall in the surrounding areas.

- **Revenue Support Grant Announcement**

The Revenue Support Grant was announced on 17 December 2015 and DS advised that there were 16 Councils nationally which were worst hit – NHDC is one of these Councils. It was anticipated that the Revenue Support Grant would not be discontinued for a few years but it has now been revealed as ceasing after the 2016/17 settlement.

In terms of achieving the required savings to balance the budget for 2016/17 this has been achieved and DS confirmed that the Council will use its reserves to manage this process.

In terms of looking forward consideration will be given to commercialisation, shared services, ceasing some services and by looking at ways in which we can do things differently.

CM asked for an update on the Restructure and DS advised that he was awaiting news of the Revenue Support Grant before looking at the structure and that once the settlement was agreed, he would be looking at this again and this will be communicated with staff.

- **New Homes Bonus**

The Government has launched consultation on the New Homes Bonus scheme - the Government gives local councils money for every new house built in the district and guarantees this payment over a 6 year period. The payments are split 80% district Council and 20% County Council However, DS advised that early indications showed that there maybe a reduction in the amount received and that there may be a

change in the way the money is allocated between the District and County Council. Further updates on this will be provided once details become known.

**5. Office Accommodation**

KS advised that notice of a staff briefing on this project has been circulated to all staff. The briefing was scheduled for Thursday 14 January and all staff were encouraged to attend.

For information, KS advised that the building layout for DCO had been approved in principle by Corporate Board in December 2015.

**6. Employee Queries**

AD raised a query with regards to the allocation of statutory days and whether consideration could be given to closing the Council offices between Christmas and New Year. KS advised that as per previous discussions on this subject, the Council's customers expect to be able to contact the Council during this period and, like other businesses, we needed to be open for business.

**7. Chair for Next Meeting**

CC agreed to Chair the next meeting and CM offered to be a substitute Chair.