

# Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

2 March 2016



## DRAFT Minutes

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**Present:** Claire Morgan (Chair), David Scholes, Kerry Shorrocks, Amanda Dell, Oliver Furbur, Dee Levett, Debbie Ealand, Sharon Nahal (notes), Jeanette Thompson, (item 1 & 2), Martin Lawrence (item 3), Antonella Di'Maria (item 4), Ian Fullstone (Item 5)

**Apologies:** John Robinson, Maggie Williams, Catherine Cole, Anne McDonald, Christina Corr

**Circulation:** Those Present, John Robinson, Maggie Williams, Catherine Cole, Anne McDonald, Christina Corr

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### 1. Whistleblowing Policy

Jeanette Thompson attended for this item and presented her report following the introduction of a new Code of Practice. It should be noted that this report has been considered by the Senior Management Team at its meeting in February 2016.

SCF were asked to note that the policy sets out the arrangements the Council has to ensure that workers can raise concerns/make protected disclosures in the 'public interest' and how these will be handled. This policy is intended to encourage such disclosures to raise concerns.

JT advised of the requirement to rationalise/streamline training either via training all staff or just at manager level. This will be considered and staff will be updated.

JT asked that any comments be with her by Monday 7 March 2016 to enable her to prepare final reports for Finance, Audit, Governance & Risk Committee and thereafter Cabinet

Action: SCF.

### 2. Anti Bribery Policy

JT also presented her report on Anti Bribery Policy changes. SCF were advised that this report has been considered by the Senior Management Team at its meeting in February 2016.

The policy has been amended to include a greater level of description and guidance on what bribery is and indicators of it. The policy is applicable to all employees, agency workers and Members. The Council is still considering the necessity for training as to whether this should be rolled out to all employees or Managers and, whether the reporting and monitoring arrangements we have in place can be improved.

It was noted that the current annual declaration requirements will be reviewed and the potential for one form or procedure will be considered and confirmed in due course.

JT asked that any comments be with her by Monday 7 March 2016 to enable her to prepare final reports for Finance, Audit, Governance & Risk Committee and thereafter Cabinet

Action: SCF.

### **3 Housing Services Restructure**

Martin Lawrence attended for this item and provided SCF with a verbal update on the proposed restructure for Housing Services.

In summary formal consultation on the proposed restructure had opened with the team on 9 February and would close on 9 March 2016. ML explained the background to the proposals in that there were concerns around the ability to meet the Council's legal housing responsibilities, including accommodating certain households on an emergency basis. The housing environment can be volatile with a high demand from the public for assistance and it this is unlikely to improve in the near future. The restructure proposals seek to improve the resilience of the service through a number of measures within existing budgets, including rebalancing resources to support the front line delivery of services.

ML outlined the proposals which included the deletion of one post, the Housing Policy Officer hours reduced from 1.4 FTE to 0.7 FTE, to create an additional Support Officer post and the creation of another manager position. In addition, career grading was proposed for front line staff and there was also a proposal to transfer the emergency housing 'out of hours' service to Careline and removing the requirement for staff to undertake the duty. This would generate a saving of £5,000.

Debbie Ealand had attended SCF to act as the SCF representative for the Housing Team. DE requesting information on the justification of the business case and advised that some of officers within the Housing Team were concerned that an additional manager post had been created when resource was needed within the front line team. Furthermore, some officers had expressed concern that by adding an additional management position this would encourage 'micro management' of the team which was, in their opinion, not required. Finally, DE stated that there was a opinion, from some officers that, there was a problem with existing poor management and that they did not have faith in the consultation process.

DE agreed to send the feedback to ML so he can respond more fully to the Housing Team after the meeting of SCF and he reaffirmed his commitment that he would be happy to look at any alternatives put forward by the team. DS commented that a number of consultation exercises had been undertaken on various restructures and there were examples of where consultation had resulted in changes being made to the original proposals.

### **4. Careline Restructure**

Antonella Di'Maria attended for this item. ADM provided an update on the Careline restructure and advised that posts had been evaluated and work was underway to fill posts. In addition, ADM advised some of the admin support work for the service would transfer to the MSU and an additional post would be created to meet the demand in this area.

### **5. Development Control Restructure**

Ian Fullstone attended for this item and explained that Anne McDonald the SCF representative for Planning Services was unable to attend today but did ask that a substitute to attend to cover this item if the team had any issues with this restructure. The aim, IF explained, of the restructure was to make permanent temporary

arrangements and to prepare the services for the next 3-5 years.

IF explained that he would be looking to recruit to Mary Caldwell's position following her retirement and that this has been advertised internally in the first instance. In addition, it was intended to delete the Principal Planning Officer post and to create an Strategic Sites Planning Officer. The post holder of the deleted Principal post was a slot in for the new role. IF also confirmed that it was proposed to make permanent the increased hours some officers in the Technical Support team had been working over the last number years to continue to provide the level of service required. In regards to this team, a new career graded technical support post had also been created, this was to be ring fenced to two existing members of staff.

Furthermore within Planning Control, IF advised that it was his intention to create 3 career graded Planning Officer roles, these were existing officers who were either on temporary or fixed grade contracts and would slot in to these positions.

Within Strategic Planning a proposed to be deleted post, the Research and Monitoring Officer (RMO) (post holder currently seconded to planning control), was to be replaced by a career graded Graduate Planning Officer post. With some roles of the RMO being included within a new Planning Technician post, for which an existing member of the support team was a match.

## **6. Property Services Update**

This items was deferred to the next meeting as a representative from Property Services was unable to attend.

Action: SN

## **7. Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes**

Subject to a minor amendment to the minutes on page 2 on the Building Control Project, the minutes were agreed.

Action: SN

## **8. NHDC Update**

DS advised that the staff briefings were well attended and that the budget for 2016/17 had now been agreed. Corporate Board would now be working with Members to look at the approach for future years. In addition to this, Head of Service/Corporate Manager would be working on finalising their service area work programmes for the coming year and this will be fed through the appraisal process.

In terms of corporate projects, DS advised that in relation to the Churchgate project Council had resolved to not progress with any sort of development scheme for the time being following Hammersmach's failure to present a suitable scheme.

Work on the Town Hall/Museum was ongoing and the Chairman's Civic reception would be held on 18 March and would be part of the soft launch exercise in preparation of opening the facility.

KS advised that a new single tier, flat rate State Pension is being introduced for people who reach State Pension age after 5 April 2016. If you are a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) you are currently 'contracted out' of the additional State Pension and therefore receive a rebate on your National Insurance (NI) contributions and are paying a lower amount of National Insurance contributions. From 6 April 2016, the rebate of 1.4% on your National Insurance contributions will cease and you will notice your take home pay has gone down due to the higher NI payment. There are more details on the intranet message board via the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/contracted-out/what-is-contracting-out>

KS advised that the results of the Equal Pay Audit would shortly be published on the intranet. However the results were encouraging The council employs a high number of females 65.5%, however a half to three quarters of the workforce being female is the average in Local Government. We are satisfied with the equality findings in a large number of examples, the minority groups were earning the same or more than the comparison group. The report gives a positive picture in terms of the narrowing differentials between men and women's average pay since the last equal pay audit.

However, in when conducting this work it was noted that the organisation does not hold the same amount of diversity data that was previously. Officers were asked to let staff know they can use Employee self service to update their information themselves. The diversity data can only be viewed by the individuals so it is confidential and managers do not see it.

KS confirmed that HR are always striving to improve the amount of data they hold because HR want to understand the diversity profile of the organisation to attract and retain minority groups and develop policies and practices that are inclusive to all diversity groups. KS therefore encouraged staff to log on to SAP and update this information.

## **9. Office Accommodation Update**

KS advised that the date for the office decant had been moved back to September 2016. This was to allow officers time to send out tenders and for sufficient time to evaluate and undertake a value engineering exercise if required. DS confirmed that this date was fluid and that until a successful contractor has been appointed it was not possible to confirm decant dates or whether the works would be carried out in stages or all at once. A link to the office accommodation pages on the intranet can be viewed here <http://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/strategy-and-performance/dco-refurbishment-and-modernisation-project/office-refurbishment-0>

Finally, KS reminded SCF members that Chris Carter's role on the Office Accommodation Project Bard had not been taken up by anybody just yet. If any SCF representative was interested in acting as a representative on the Board then please contact her directly .

Action: SCF

## **10. Employee Queries**

### **• Bullying/Harassment**

OF raised an issue around the recent Sub Standards Committee hearing where a complaint against Councillor Leal-Bennett on bullying and harassing officers was upheld. OF asked what measures the Council would be putting in place to protect staff who had been exposed to this or could be exposed to this sort of behaviour in the future.

DS confirmed that a hearing had taken place over a 3 day period. However, it was noted that Councillor Leal-Bennett still had an opportunity to appeal against the sanction. As a general response should any officer have any concerns about conduct then he advised them to raise these with either their Head of Service, their Strategic Director or himself. In respect of a Member of the Council, then they should discuss this matter with the Monitoring Officer.

- **Temporary Termination of Services**

OF advised that a number of officers had approached him with regards to the recent loss of water at the DCO offices which meant a number of facilities were out of use. It was agreed that issue be raised at the next meeting of SCF where a representative from Property Services would be present to explain.

- **Outlook Exchange Server**

AD raised an issue around the recent problems with the Outlook exchange server. It was noted that not all staff had signed up to the text alert service and that communications could be better improved via a tannoy message at DCO. It was agreed that this feedback would be passed to IT Services for action. Furthermore, the text message from IT advised that officers '...whose 'Christian names' starts with..... it would have been better to say first name or forename. It was agreed to alert IT to make this change in future. .

Action: SN