

# Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

4 May 2016



## Minutes

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**Present:** Christina Corr (Chair), David Scholes, Kerry Shorrocks, Amanda Dell, Dee Levett, Claire Morgan, Anne McDonald, Sharon Nahal (notes), Debbie Hiscock (item 1), Ros Allwood (item 2), David Hodges (item 2)

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

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

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### 1. Property Services Update

Following on from an enquiry from a member of staff with regards to the recent loss of water at DCO offices, C Corr requested clarification as to why when staff were advised services would not be available for an hour, this for a longer period of time.

DH advised that unfortunately she was not in the office when this incident occurred but would feedback to the team that better communication with staff was needed. In addition, DS advised that whilst contractors can provide an estimate on timeframes for such work, often this can be extended due to the extent of the problem. In future, a decision would need to be taken in terms of employee welfare if terms of operation of the building.

DH advised that there is a currently an empty vending machine within the 5<sup>th</sup> floor canteen area and it was anticipated that this would be filled with snacks and sales monitored to ascertain whether the machines was viable in the long term.

SCF thanked DH for attending the meeting.

### 2. Museum Uniform Policy

Ros Allwood and David Hodges attended for this item. RA advised that it was proposed that staff at the Museum would be required to wear a staff uniform as circulated to SCF members. RA advised that she had received some feedback from staff and would be providing written feedback but asked whether SCF had any views on the proposals.

In addition, DH advised that he was attending SCF on behalf of the Museum Team and advised that he had received some feedback around:

- Whether consideration could be given to half sleeve shirts as it was felt that the new Museum could get warm in some periods of the year
- Questioned why uniforms had been introduced at the Museum and not for reception staff at the DCO?

SCF advised that the uniform did look smart and noted comments made by DH in relation to short sleeve shirts.

RA confirmed that written feedback would be provided to staff in due course.

SCF thanked RA and DH for their attendance.

### **3 Minutes from the Previous Meeting**

There being no outstanding actions from the previous meeting, the minutes were agreed.

### **4. Cycle2Work Scheme**

MW advised that the that Cycle to work is a government-approved salary sacrifice initiative allowing staff to hire a bike and accessories from the Council for the purpose of cycling to work. The hire is free of tax and national insurance contributions which means you can make savings whilst keeping fit, reducing your carbon footprint and spending less time in your car.

The application window for 2016 runs from 3rd May to 31st May 2016 and you can sign up by visiting the [Cycle2Work website](#) and applying the employer code NHDC2W.

### **5. NHDC Update**

- **Home Working Policy**

KS advised that the updated Home Working Policy would be made available on the intranet by next week.

- **Broadband Payments**

KS confirmed that staff were now able to claim broadband payments for a year in advance on the production of a monthly invoice. However, it was noted that should circumstances change and they no longer worked at home or leave the Council's employment then the payment would be need to be refunded. KS also confirmed that staff could still claim on a monthly basis if they wished to do so.

AM questioned why such a payment was being made when nearly everyone has broadband at home and, that this could produce savings for the Council. KS advised that the when the Home Working Scheme was developed the Council looked at benefits other organisations offered i.e heating/power payments and it was deemed that this was an appropriate benefit. It was noted that employee's don't have to claim the allowance as many don't.

- **Pay Increase**

KS advised that Unison had now agreed the pay offer put forward with 1% pay increase for 2016 and 1% for 2017. When there is an official announcement that UNITE has also agreed and it becomes a formal pay agreement, arrangements will be made to pay staff and back date the increase to 1 April. A message will go out to staff. There are higher increases at the lowest pay points due to the new national living wage.

- **North Herts Museum/Hitchin Town Hall Update**

DS advised that an open evening will be held on Monday 9 May for potential hirers to come and visit the newly refurbished Hitchin Town Hall, following which the online booking system for hiring the newly refurbished Mountford Hall and Lucas Room will go live.

On 18 March, Hitchin Town Hall hosted its first private event since its refurbishment. The first public event to be held in the venue took place on 22 April where Hitchin Initiative used the Town Hall to host a Question Time style debate on the EU Referendum.

Work on the café has been commissioned and discussions were ongoing with the fit out contractor for the Museum.

- **Splash Parks**

The fountains at the splash parks at Avenue Park in Baldock and Howard Park and Gardens in Letchworth have now been switched on and slightly later in the year, we will be opening similar water facilities in Royston and Hitchin.

- **North Herts Leisure Centre**

DS advised that the contract has been let to Hutton Limited who will commence work on site later this month. Cabinet members agreed to proceed with the £3.3 million project to develop North Herts Leisure Centre. The development will include a new learner/teaching pool, a café with a view over the pool, dance studio, offices, a ground-sprung sports hall floor, refurbishment of the wet changing areas and increased parking facilities.

The project will be funded by both North Hertfordshire District Council and Stevenage Leisure Ltd, who operate the facility on behalf of the Council.

- **Local Plan**

Finally, DS advised that the Local Plan would be presented to Council in July 2016 with the expectation of 14,400 new homes.

## **6. Office Accommodate Update**

KS advised that tenders were due to be despatched shortly. Once these had been received further information would be provided to staff on the decant of DCO offices and what works had been included in the scheme.

SCF were advised that Howard Crompton was now responsible for this project with technical advice from Ian Fullstone.

## **7. JSCC Representative**

Claire Morgan agreed to take on this role.

Action: SN to forward JSCC Dates to Claire Morgan

## **8. Employee Queries**

- **Text Alerts**

C Corr raised the question as to why staff who were office based received text messages in relation to service disruption i.e IT service updates etc. KS advised that it was up to individual officers to sign up for this service but it is encouraged. Whilst officers may be office based, they could be in meetings, off site etc. when they receive such messages and they are intended to help people be aware of any problems.

- **Staff Survey**

C Corr questioned whether staff could be identified from the Staff Survey responses through e-mail etc.. KS advised that the survey was not submitted by e mail it was done directly on the internet. Individuals cannot be identified where there are fewer than 10 officers in a service area responding and results are not provided to prevent staff from being identified. The Communications team will have some headline results ready shortly.

- **Annual Leave**

C Corr requested consideration be given to allocating annual leave from January to December or have it run from their start date.. KS advised that as per previous requests this was not something the authority could agree to. C Corr advised that at times she was aware that's some staff couldn't take leave due to heavy workloads at certain times in the year and this would help address this issue. AM commented that staff are aware of their leave entitlement and if they plan their leave well ahead it shouldn't be an issue. KS said that HR put out regular reminders each year to staff to book their leave in advance

**9. Chair for Next Meeting**

Claire Morgan.