

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE FIRST FLOOR, ROOM 2, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY ON WEDNESDAY, 28TH MARCH, 2018
AT 3.00 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Councillor Fiona Hill (Chairman), (Vice-Chairman), Sarah Dingley, Bernard Lovewell, Lynda Needham and Martin Stears-Handscomb*

In Attendance: *Anthony Roche (Deputy Chief Executive), Kerry Shorrocks (Corporate Human Resources Manager), Maggie Williams (Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager), Claire Morgan (Communities Officer), Dee Levett, Ian Gourlay (Committee and Member Services Manager) and Amelia McInally (Committee and Member Services Officer)*

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Christina Corr (Staff Consultation Forum).

28 MINUTES - 13 DECEMBER 2017

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee meeting held on 13 December 2017 be confirmed as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

29 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

30 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman welcomed all Members and officers to the Meeting;
- (2) The Chairman reminded all present that, in line with Council policy, the meeting was being audio recorded;
- (3) Members were reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and were required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest which required they leave the room under Paragraph 7.4 of the Code of Conduct, could speak on the item, but must leave the room before the debate and vote.

31 **STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM**

The Corporate Human Resources Manager drew attention to the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held on 3 January 2018, 7 February 2018 and the Draft Minutes of 7 March 2018 as follows:

Minutes – 3 January 2018

The Corporate Human Resources Manager stated that the office return to the District Council Offices, and the previously announced Senior Management Restructure had been a recurring key theme at the SCF meetings that had taken place in January, February and March.

Investors in People (IiP)

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that there had been a few questions raised on IiP, stating that the report had been shared on the Intranet. She informed the Committee that NHDC had been accredited by IiP, but she reiterated that it was felt that more work was required due to some disappointment with the quality of the initial report. The Corporate Human Resources Manager informed the Committee that the matter of IiP had been discussed at the Senior Management Team meeting on 27 March 2018. She informed the Committee that it had been agreed continuing participation in the scheme would be reconsidered at the end of the period of accreditation, and a value for money review undertaken at that time.

A Member commented how pleased he was with what the Corporate Human Resources Manager had reported that a review would be undertaken and very much looked forward to the results.

NHDC Update

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that there would be the same allocation of statutory days for Christmas Eve and New Year 2018, both fell on a Monday, as in 2012.

Pay Offer

It was reported that the pay offer for staff up to Grade 12 was a recurring discussion topic in the first three months of SCF meetings. The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that all staff were being kept up to date.

Office Accommodation

The Corporate Human Resources Manager reiterated that communications regarding the office accommodation project had been excellent. There had been a very good attendance to drop in sessions that had taken place before Christmas in Town Lodge.

Fire Evacuation Process

A Member raised the matter of Fire Evacuation and queried whether any thought had been given to that particular procedure. He asked how NHDC ensured, that in the event of a fire, everyone that was in the building would be evacuated. He further enquired as to whether or not there were any electronic means of knowing who was in the building at any given time.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager conveyed that detailed instructions had been issued to staff. She pointed out that there were a number of trained fire wardens who would, in the event a fire, carry out a floor sweep, checking toilets in their designated area before leaving the building themselves. She further advised that after NHDC fire warden checks had been carried out, it would, at that point, be the job of the firemen to undertake a more thorough check of the building as swiftly as possible.

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The Corporate Human Resources Manager explained to the Committee that Health and Safety was responsible for organising the Fire Evacuation Policy procedures. She, did, however, reassure the Committee that communication to all staff was paramount and felt, thus far, had been successful. The Corporate Human Resources Manager took on board the comments from Members that perhaps Councillors had not received as much information. The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that both Members and staff would be advised again of the policy.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager stated that, at that time, there were no electronic means of knowing who was in the building at any given time.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed to the Committee that in the event of a legitimate fire, the floor sweep was manual. He stated that the Policy had been reviewed, confirming that the approach NHDC had taken was also adopted, used and proved successful in other districts and authorities within the County.

It was suggested by a Member, that perhaps in future, to ensure efficient communication to all staff and Members, that the Fire Evacuation Process advice was communicated by both email and Member Information Service (MIS).

Minutes – 7 February 2018

Smoking and the Workplace Policy Revision

The Corporate Human Resources Manager referred to item 3 of the Minutes informing the Committee that the smoking and the workplace policy had been reviewed and was now updated. She commented that there had been quite a lot of staff input on this matter.

NHDC Update

The Corporate Human Resources Manager referred to the report, pointing out the Senior Manager restructure.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that pay offers for Chief Officers and Executives mirrored that made to all staff.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager reported that, pleasingly, IT were now attending SCF Meetings on a regular basis. IT made themselves available to answer the numerous questions that arose, and explaining their key projects.

Draft Minutes – 7 March 2018

NHDC Update

The Corporate Human Resources Manager reported that both the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive had been in attendance, and had provided an extensive round-up of several ongoing projects.

Pay Offer

The Corporate Human Resources Manager highlighted that trade unions were still in consultation with their members around the pay offer. She explained, of the three unions, the first had, very quickly, accepted the offer. She stated that Unison would make no announcement until April, meaning there would be no outcome received in time for the start of 2018/19 financial year. A significant majority had rejected the pay offer within the Trade Union. The Corporate Human Resources Manager informed the Committee that the matter of Pay Offer was a continual complex matter.

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In answer to a question by a Member, the Corporate Human Resources Manager stated that all staff, starting from their employment induction, were encouraged to become a member of the trade union. She further stated that, whilst unable to confirm an exact figure, it was estimated that presently there were well over a quarter of NHDC staff who were members of the trade union.

Office Accommodation

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that all operational staff including Careline would be re-located into the District Council Offices (DCO) by the end of April.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held on 3 January 2018, 7 February 2018 and Draft Minutes for 7 March 2018 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Joint Staff Consultative Committee to consider any issues addresses by the Staff Consultation Forum.

32 INFORMATION NOTE - PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee received an information note entitled People Strategy Update.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager advised that the report was the last for that financial year and drew attention to the following:

Payroll

The Corporate Human Resources Manager stated that the Payroll Contract was due for renewal as that contract would come to an end in 2019. She confirmed that NHDC joined the Hertfordshire Shared Management Services framework for a payroll service from 2014 to 2019. Hertfordshire County Council had exercised their right to extend their agreement for a couple of years, and had announced that, they would be extending their contract. NHDC were in discussions with Legal and Procurement on what effects, if any, this would have on NHDC. The Corporate Human Resources Manager stated that NHDC had been offered a price, but this was at a much inflated rate. She informed the Committee that ongoing discussions with Legal and Procurement were taking place in order to make the best payroll agreement decision for the future.

The Employee Assistance Programme and Occupational Health were two other contracts that NHDC shared with Hertfordshire. The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed to the Committee that, along with Hertfordshire, those contracts were in the process of renewal.

Childcare Vouchers

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager explained to the Committee that having made the announcement that, as a result of the introduction of the Tax-Free Childcare by the Government, new applications for the Kiddivoucher Scheme would not be accepted. She went on to explain that the Government had decided to extend the deadline until September, but was awaiting confirmation of the exact date. The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager confirmed that existing members would be unaffected, unless they applied for Government Tax Free Childcare, as they would be unable to receive both childcare vouchers and tax free childcare. She confirmed that via Insight and the Intranet, Human Resources were endeavoring to communicate to members of staff all of the various government scheme options.

Learning and Development

The Corporate Human Resources Manager communicated to the Committee that the Council's Learning Management System had been replaced with the much more interactive and easier to utilise Grow Zone System.

Regular Performance Review

A new set of competencies had been developed and were in use to drive and support organisational change.

Policies

The Corporate Human Resources Manager highlighted paragraph 3.9 of the report confirming that there were several policies that required updating and there was a process for this.

Absence

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed, as relayed in paragraph 3.10 of the report, that there had been a general rise in absence that year. She referred to the Absence Rate figures shown on the table on page 19 of the report, confirming that the Long term absence figures had continued at an ongoing consistent low from February 2017 through to October 2017. The Autumn figures of Long Term Absence, which was confirmed as being over 21 days, had however, risen. The Corporate Human Resources Manager reported that those figures were once again decreasing.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that Short Term Absence was likely to be marginally over target.

33 INFORMATION NOTE - EQUALITIES UPDATE

The Committee received an information note entitled Equalities Update

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager confirmed that within the report there were three items:-

The Gender Pay Gap
Equalities Data Requirements
Equal Pay

The Gender Pay Gap and Equalities Data Requirements

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager pointed out the background within the report which stated the requirements. The legislation had been introduced in April 2017, but the stated first reporting date was 30 March 2018, which would make the data a year old by the time it was published. She confirmed that all employers with 250 employees or more were required to publish their Gender Pay Gap figures. It was further confirmed that there were a number of differences in reporting requirements for local authorities in the public sector as there were in the private sector, but were not hugely dissimilar.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager stated that there were four items of essential reporting which translated into eight separate figures. She further stated that the calculations were carried out by the outsourced payroll provider Serco, but confirmed that the results had been carefully scrutinised and checked by Human Resources and Finance. The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager reported that, along with a narrative explaining all of the statistics, NHDC had completed, submitted and published their results, meeting the required deadline.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager went on to report to the Committee that there had been a lot of confusion in the differences in Gender Pay Gap and Equal Pay. She explained that Equal Pay meant that men and women doing the same job received the same amount of pay, whereas the Gender Pay Gap looked at the difference between men and women's average earnings across the whole of the organisation, which was expressed as a percentage of women's earnings.

In terms of Equal Pay at NHDC, an objective job evaluation system was used to determine grading, and the Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager reported that no issues had come to light over equal pay within the organisation.

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The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager highlighted the figures in Tables 1 and 2 of the report. She stated that the organisation's figures demonstrated, on average, women were being paid 25% less than men. She further stated that there was a requirement to publish gender bonus gap figures due to the organisation presenting long service awards. She confirmed that the long service award was the same amount for both genders. The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager also informed the Committee that out of the 23 members of staff who had received a long service award, nearly three times as many women than men had received that particular payment.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager explained to the Committee that there were a total of sixteen grades within the Council. The top five managerial grades were predominantly filled by males, who earned more than those on lower grades, therefore the overall average hourly rate for men was highly influenced by those at the top of the scale. The Committee were informed that there were more men employed at managerial level than women within the organisation, which had contributed to the gap, rather than the fact that men were being paid more for those particular jobs.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager highlighted that the opportunity to increase the number of females in senior roles was very dependent on relevant vacancies that arose.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager explained that Car Allowances were also included in the pay calculations. She stated that, as the more senior graded staff who received that particular benefit were predominantly male, this had influenced the reported average pay figures.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager confirmed, as written in the report, that additional responsibility payments were included in the pay calculations. She explained that the gender split was quite small, but would still add to the higher calculation of averages.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager referred to Table 3 within the report, and the graph which illustrated the significant breakdown of grades within the organisation between males and females. She confirmed that up to, and including Grade 8, there were more women working in the Council than men. Thereafter, the percentages began to swap over. The greater number of men than women in the higher grades increased the average hourly rate for men in the Council.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager confirmed to the Committee that the Council had a large number of customer facing administrative roles graded below 8. It was explained that many of those jobs were part-time or had suitable flexible working hours which made them more attractive to women with caring responsibilities. The pattern of roles in the lower quartiles were predominantly held by females, and was further exacerbated by the fact that the Council outsourced many of its operational functions. It was reported that if those roles were filled by NHDC employees, there would then be an increased number of men within the lower two quartiles and the gender pay gap would be significantly reduced.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager stated that the workforce at NHDC was regularly monitored and appropriate action taken if there were areas of concern identified. She confirmed that the Council had a number of policies and procedures that ensured transparency, fairness and equality listed within the report at paragraph 3.1.6.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager pointed out that the language used within the report could perhaps be altered to communicate better the Gender Pay Gap explanation. The Corporate Human Resources Manager explained that women were earning less because they were working part time or working in a lower grade post through choice, rather than being paid less.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager reported that every year equalities data was submitted by the end of January for the previous year. She explained that this was the data breakdown of the Council workforce profile across nine protected characteristics. She confirmed that the data was reported on the NHDC website, but not to Government centrally. However, she informed the Committee that there was a move to report to Government in the future.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager referred to the figures on the graphs shown on pages 39 and 41 of the report, confirming that the make up of the Council's workforce by protected characteristic was very stable. She further went on to reaffirm the equality data figures that were shown on the graphs containing Gender, Disability, Ethnic Origin, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Age and Marital Status analysis.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager – Equal Pay Review

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager referred to paragraph 3.3 of the report confirming the importance of the Equal Pay element, stating that the Council had been undertaking those reviews since 2007. She further stated that they were satisfied there had been no significant inequalities in the pay system, highlighting that on review, there had been a significant number of the minority groups earning the same or more than the comparison groups over the reviews undertaken.

The Senior Human Resources and Contracts Manager confirmed that the Equal Pay Reviews looked at grade, gender, age, ethnic group, disability, religion and sexuality being very similar characteristics to the Equalities Data. She stated that the Council had looked at a number of different elements of pay and data from 2017 and that had been extracted from the payroll system and was being analysed. She confirmed that initial findings would be given to the Committee in June with a presentation of the Report in September.

34 DISCUSSION PAPER - THE FUTURE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS, THE APPRENTICE LEVY, PUBLIC SECTOR TARGETS AND HIGHER APPRENTICESHIPS

The Corporate Human Resources Manager introduced a Discussion Paper on the future for Apprenticeships, the Apprentice Levy, Public Sector Targets and Higher Apprenticeships.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager advised that there had been some changes around Apprenticeships within the Council's Apprentice Scheme. She explained there were two key elements that had national effect around Apprenticeships:-

Target Setting within the Public Sector

The Corporate Human Resources Manager explained the requirement to employ a required number of Apprentices commencing each year based on the size of their workforce. She pointed out that the Council perhaps needed to look at employing more apprentices than they had in the past. She did however, report of the Apprentices employed in NHDC from 2012 there was a large number still working for the organisation, and felt that the scheme had been a great success.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager reported that new targets had been set to start people on Apprenticeships. A new Apprentice Levy came into effect from last year, stating that every employer was required to pay into a Levy Fund. She explained that the amount payable was dependent on the size of the workforce. She stated that, regardless whether organisations took on Apprentices, the levy had to be paid. The Corporate Human Resources Manager felt that this would encourage employers to take on Apprentices.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that a number of new Apprenticeship Standards had been introduced. She advised that there were a lot more paths for Apprentices to follow coming in at an entry level through to higher Apprenticeships. She further advised that higher Apprenticeships would allow candidates to advance to degree and Masters level, a route for young people to have the ability to progress.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager reported that the newer scheme introduced three different methods of starting more people on Apprenticeships:-

Entry Level Apprenticeships

The Corporate Human Resources Manager stated that the organisation would continue to accept those who wished to join on an Entry Level Apprenticeship. She further stated that Entry Level Apprenticeship was particularly aimed at School Leavers who had no work experience. She informed the Committee that at least one year's work experience and a vocational qualification would be achieved.

Higher Apprenticeships

The Corporate Human Resources Manager explained that Higher Apprenticeships would be offered to those that had achieved higher level qualifications but, perhaps, had not yet made the decision if they would attend University. She stated Higher Apprenticeships could be taken up by those who may desire to follow some of the career graded posts that would develop into particular professions within the organisation.

Staff Development

The Corporate Human Resources Manager advised that the Apprentice Levy fund was a great source of finance for learning and developing existing posts. She confirmed that there was no age limit against Apprenticeship training, enabling those who, given the chance to develop and learn, had an ideal opportunity for progression.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager explained that there were new Apprentice Standards being developed and introduced. Manager Apprenticeships would be available and the Apprenticeship Levy funds would be used to develop current managers.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager reported that further to discussions at the last Senior Management Team meeting, it was confirmed that recruitment of eleven Apprenticeships would soon take place. She explained that some of the service areas which had applied for a mixture of Entry Level Apprentices and Higher Apprentices would be funding or part funding those Apprenticeships.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager confirmed that the level of Apprenticeship pay had increased in Grade 1 which she confirmed as being more than the National Apprentice Rate. The Higher Apprentice Rate of pay would be evaluated against the post.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that the Council had been actively looking at ways to retain good Apprentices, stating that there was an element of luck from a timing point of view. He explained that if a position became available when there was a suitable person to fulfil that role, then the higher level Apprentice would be recruited with the intention to retain them.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager stated the Council visited schools and job fairs promoting Careers in Local Government.

35 **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS**

The Corporate Human Resources Manager reminded Members that the discussion topic for the June 2018 meeting was Coaching.

Members considered that Family Friendly Legislation should be considered at the September 2018 meeting.

IT WAS AGREED: That the discussion topic for the meeting of this Committee due to be held in September 2018 be Family Friendly Legislation.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and support, at what was the last Joint Staff Consultative Committee meeting for that Civic Year.

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The meeting closed at 4.23 pm

Chairman
Wednesday, 28 March 2018