

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING**  
**ON WEDNESDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2020 AT 10.00 AM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Kate Aspinwall (Vice-Chair), Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins and Claire Strong*

**In Attendance:** *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Kerry Shorrocks (Corporate Human Resources Manager), Jo Keshishian (HR Operations Manager), Lea Ellis (Staff Consultation Forum Representative), Dee Levett (Unison), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Hepburn (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

**Also Present:**

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio Recording – 20 Seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kay Tart (Chair) and:

- Debbie Ealand – Unison;
- Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews – Unison;
- Andrew Betts – SCF;
- Christina Corr – SCF;
- Allison Fox – SCF; and
- Emma Jellis - SCF

**2 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio Recording – 36 Seconds*

- (1) The Vice-Chair welcomed those present at the meeting;
- (2) The Vice-Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded and streamed live on the Council's Youtube Channel;
- (3) The Vice-Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

**3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio Recording – 57 Seconds*

There was no other business notified.

#### 4 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

*Audio Recording – 1 Minute 5 Seconds*

The Service Director – Resources presented the Staff Consultation Forum minutes and provided a brief overview of the matters discussed. He advised that there had been no Staff Consultation Forums in April, May or June owing to the pandemic.

It was raised at a later stage of the meeting but Members requested that the attendance of Senior Management at Staff Consultation Forums should be improved.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in March 2020, July 2020, August 2020 and September 2020, be noted.

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

#### 5 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

*Audio Recording – 3 Minutes 9 Seconds*

*NB: Councillor Claire Strong joined the Committee at the start of this item.*

The Service Director – Resources presented the Information Note entitled HR Update, including:

- The Coronavirus had impacted on the plans to create a new People Strategy for 2020 – 2026;
- The Council had developed a strategy known as 'Shaping our Future' which would help to evolve the organisation and create a diverse, inclusive and resilient workforce. The first meeting of the steering group was due to take place in September;
- The Human Resources Department had carried out Welfare Calls for all staff during April in order to check on their wellbeing during the 'lockdown' period;
- The National Pay Bargaining had been completed. Employers had made a final offer of a 2.75% pay increase; and
- The Exit Payment Cap may come into force at the end of October 2020.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Terry Hone;
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall;
- Councillor Claire Strong; and
- Councillor Keith Hoskins.

The Members' questions opened up a discussion on Mental Health particularly in light of the pandemic and the effects it could have on Staffs' wellbeing.

In response to Members' questions on what the Council was doing to support Staff during the pandemic, the Corporate Human Resources advised as follows:

- The pandemic had an enormous impact on Staffs' Mental Health;
- Welfare Calls were carried out by HR in order to ascertain if any colleagues were struggling or in need of further support;
- Staff had access to the Confidential Employee Assistant Programme;

- There was information on intranet to help staff during the lockdown including a lockdown toolkit; and
- There were trained Mental Health First Aiders.

The discussion on Mental Health continued and Members raised that the Welfare Calls were carried out in April and a lot had happened since then.

In response to that point, the Corporate Human Resources Manager advised that there was a People Covid Recovery Plan which would look at Staffs' Mental Health and more Welfare Calls were due to take place.

The Service Director – Resources added that they were looking at rolling out support to Line Managers in order to help them carry out welfare calls to their staff and the Staff Survey was conducted in August which helped pick up any issues staff had.

In response to the Service Director's point, The HR Operations Manager advised that there was a managers section on the Employee Assistance Programme to help them support Staff experiencing mental health issues. She also advised that further welfare calls were made to staff if required.

A Member raised the subject of Domestic Violence and whether staff were able to come into the Office for 'rest-bite'.

In answer to the Member's point regarding Domestic Violence, the HR Operations Manager advised that she was not aware of any cases but acknowledged it was a very difficult subject for staff to raise. She further added that she was in contact with the Community Protection Manager regarding the White Ribbon Campaign and putting a White Ribbon on the intranet.

In answer to the Member's point regarding staff being able to come into the Office, the Service Director – Resources confirmed that staff were allowed to come into work if it helped their Mental Health.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager advised that she would have a conversation with the Learning and Employee Engagement Manager regarding implementing some Mental Health webinars for managers.

A Member raised the point that some staff may not talk about their mental health to Managers or Human Resources but would more likely open up to their colleagues during lunch or whilst making a drink. However, owing to remote working, 'Kitchen catch ups' and informal colleague conversations were now harder.

The Service Director – Resources and the Corporate Human Resources Manger responded that team meetings should still be taking place and staff should be encouraged to still talk to each other as the social side of work was important, even if this now needed to be done differently.

The Staff Consultation Forum Representative informed that the Staff Social Committee were thinking of ways to bring staff together. She also added that the organisation was doing well in raising awareness of Mental Health.

Following the discussion on Mental Health, Members moved their attention to Recruitment, including:

- Unconscious Bias in job advertisements; and
- The software used to remove words that could unconsciously discourage someone from applying for a role.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In answer to questions, the HR Operations Manager advised that it was difficult at that stage to determine if the software was working as the equalities data was reviewed annually. Furthermore, owing to Covid, there had been a decline in applications.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Information Note entitled HR Update be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled HR Update.

## 6 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER - KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

*Audio Recording – 43 Minutes 50 Seconds*

The Corporate Human Resources Manager presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on Knowledge Management and outlined the importance of capturing the skills and passing those onto other members of staff.

The HR Operations Manager contributed to the discussion by sharing her own personal experience of transitioning into a new job role and how she had referred to a knowledge capture to help.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall; and
- Councillor Claire Strong.

In response to questions, the HR Operations Manager advised that on the new payroll system, managers were able to input an employee's end date once a notice of resignation or retirement had been received. Once an end date was inputted, HR were notified of this.

The Staff Consultation Forum Representative spoke of the benefit of job shadowing and learning about what other teams and colleagues do.

In answer to job shadowing, the Service Director – Resources agreed that job shadowing was good and allowed people to develop and progress.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager echoed the comment made by the Service Director – Resources by stating that the Organisation wanted people to progress internally to other roles.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Strategic Discussion Paper on Knowledge Management be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on Knowledge Management.

## 7 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio Recording – 1 Hour 55 Seconds*

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and

**IT WAS AGREED:**

- (1) That the discussion topic for the next meeting would be:
  - (i) Wellbeing for carers, supporting employees with caring responsibilities;
- (2) That a separate update on the topic of Apprenticeships be provided to the Committee; and
- (3) That in light of the current pandemic, the topics of Managing a Remote Workforce and Employees' Mental Health and Wellbeing, be incorporated into the Information Note - HR Update.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to choose a discussion topic of interest.

## 8 RETIREMENT OF CORPORATE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

*Audio Recording – 1 Hour 10 Minutes 47 Seconds*

The Vice-Chair and Members of the Committee thanked the Corporate Human Resources Manager for her service to the Council at what was her last Joint Staff Consultative Committee before retiring.

The Service Director – Resourced joined in thanking the Corporate Human Resources Manager for all her work. He informed Members that she had worked for North Herts District Council for 18 years and within those years she introduced the pay grade system, the centralisation of the HR, homeworking in 2010 and apprenticeship schemes in 2012.

The Corporate Human Resources Manager thanked the Service Director – Resources for his kind words and that it had been a pleasure working for North Herts District Council for all those years.

The meeting closed at 11.17 am

Chair