

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD AS A REMOTE MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH JUNE, 2021 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

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

In Attendance: *Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Leader of the Council), Dee Levett (UNISON), Christina Corr (SCF), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public present.*

1 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Audio Recording – 1 minute.

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call and gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Rules of Debate;
- Voting.

The Chair, Councillor Kate Aspinwall, started the meeting proper.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 29 seconds.

Apologies for absence were received from Anthony Roche, Managing Director.

3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 13 seconds.

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;

- (3) The 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.

4 MINUTES - 10 MARCH 2021

Audio Recording – 5 minutes.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer advised that minutes could no longer be approved remotely and that the minutes of the meeting of the committee on 10 March 2021 would be presented at a later date.

5 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

Audio Recording – 7 minutes 20 seconds.

The Service Director – Resources presented the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in March 2021, April 2021 and May 2021 and drew attention to the following:

- The Staff Consultation Forum had discussed outcomes from the previous staff survey;
- A new vehicle policy introduced for tax compliance was discussed in April;
- The inclusion group was publicised;
- An extensive update from Property Services had been received.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised that the work of the Inclusion Group would feature in an article in Insight and that topics were publicized widely by members and on the intranet, and comments submitted outside of the meeting were welcomed by the HR team.

IT WAS AGREED: That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in March 2021, April 2021 and May 2021 be noted.

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

6 INFORMATION NOTE: PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

Audio Recording – 11 minutes 41 seconds.

The Interim HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update and drew attention to points including:

- The HR team focussed on key areas in the recovery plan and attended regular meetings of HR managers in Hertfordshire and the East of England LGA group, discussing hybrid working, the return to office working, and the success of the apprenticeship scheme.
- Pay negotiations were ongoing and staff would be updated on progress;
- The payroll would be backdated from April of this year;
- COVID grant funding had been secured for employee wellbeing and resilience support programmes across Hertfordshire;
- The Shaping Our Future group had discussed a service manager development programme to focus on how managers can demonstrate the Council's corporate values and develop as leaders;

- The staff survey was concluded gathering views on the return to office working, confirming that the majority of staff were in favour of a high level of home working than prior to the pandemic; some staff were concerned about the return to office;
- Section 3.11 of the Information Note covered absence figures; the Council ended the financial year under target for short term absences with lower numbers than prior years due to home working, with an increase in the number of long term absences;
- The impact of COVID-19 on job vacancies and leavers had resulted in the lowest labour turnover for 10 years but it was expected this would pick back up over the coming months.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised that:

- Data was not collected on the number of staff self-isolating that were not based in the office;
- In the last year around 22 staff took absence due to COVID related reasons; this is relatively low in line with the national picture;
- There was not an internal staff network on mental health but the subject could be raised at future Inclusion Group and/or SCF meetings;
- The Inclusion Group had formed to gather concerns and feedback from the organisation in a way appropriate to its size, rather than producing independent support groups which could be small given the minority status of the subjects involved;
- The project team was looking at how additional funding for mental health support could be used in developing mental health first aider skills and resilience training;
- There were a variety of mental health and wellbeing services signposted on the intranet and the HR team conducted welfare checks on staff.
- Staff had been encouraged to talk and meet informally while working from home;
- The Holiday Flex scheme had smaller uptake than hoped due to timing when travel destinations were closed or limited due to lockdown regulations; interested was demonstrated from some staff that had used the scheme more than once; t
- There was always a risk that when workloads were high employees did not take their holidays and the HR team was working with managers to update the on quarterly leave balances and encouraging people to take leave when they are able.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update.

7 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER

Audio Recording – 27 minutes 34 seconds.

Laura Bignell, HR Business Partner presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on the Employee Assistance Programme and highlighted points including:

- The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was an essential support service to assist employees and Members and was advertised as a benefit in attracting new staff and retaining employees;

- The EAP was provided by Workplace Wellness and had been for 2 years;
- The EAP was available to employees and their immediate family and provided information on physical and mental wellbeing as well as financial and employment advice;
- Advice through the EAP was confidential and did not come through HR or the Council; the only data HR received was on the number of staff that had accessed the service;
- The EAP was considered to be of significant benefit to NHDC;
- The highest uptake in the use of the EAP was in July/September 2020;
- In the year 2019/20 prior to the pandemic access of the EAP was consistent with this year;
- About 7.5% of the workforce had accessed the EAP, slightly above the national average for use;
- The annual cost of the service to the Council was £1,800 which came to around £4.50 per employee;
- The HR team promotes the EAP at every opportunity and will continue to do so.

The following Members and Representatives asked questions and took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Dee Levett, UNISON

In response to questions the HR Business Partner advised:

- Workplace Wellness did not advertise the EAP to employees directly and all signposting to the service at NHDC came from the HR team;
- The HR team promotes the manager specific resources on the EAP to managers when liaising with them on employee relations cases;
- Anecdotal feedback on the EAP was available and presented in the information note;
- There was one example of negative feedback and Workplace Wellness was contacted to discuss the employee's experience.
- The HR team was satisfied with the standard of care provided to employees by the EAP;
- Workplace Wellness could be approached to provide training and a survey of the EAP on training days to employees directly;
- The intranet page on the EAP was laid out succinctly and signposted the log-in details to employees.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Strategic Discussion Paper on the Employee Assistance Programme be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on salary sacrifice schemes.

8 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 37 minutes 45 seconds.

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and the following points were considered:

- By September the results of the staff survey would be available for discussion;
- Information on the success of a return to the office could be presented at the December meeting as part of the Information Note and via the SCF;
- Modernisation in the way NHDC hired particularly with the prospect of long term home working and the work of the inclusion agenda would be an interesting topic;

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- The NHDC website recruitment pages were being updated in conjunction with the Communications team and in line with the Council's rebranding and the impact could be presented in December;
- The equal pay review and progress on the gender pay gap could be advertised and an update presented as part of the recruitment topic.

IT WAS AGREED: That the discussion topics for the meeting in December would be as follows:

- (i) The modernisation of the recruitment process

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

The meeting closed at 10.50 am

Chair