

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING HELD IN THE REMOTE MEETING**  
**ON WEDNESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2021 AT 10.00 AM**

**MINUTES**

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

**In Attendance:** *Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources) Jo Keshishian (Interim Human Resources Services Manager) and Helen Bylett (Learning & Employee Engagement Business Partner), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Anna Gouveia (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

**Also Present:** *Dee Levett (UNISON)*

**9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 2:07*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sue Ngwala.

Apologies for absence were also received from UNISON representatives Debbie Ealand and Keith Fitzpatrick-Mattews

**10 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio Recording – 2:50*

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded and live streamed to the Council's YouTube channel;
- (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.

**11 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM**

*Audio Recording – 3:43*

The Service Director – Resources presented the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in June, July and August 2021 and drew attention to points including:

- A main theme was the return to work in person; from the results of the staff survey through to developing a plan about how workers would return to the office from early October;
- The laptop roll-out project was also discussed;
- The provision of recycling facilities and recycling targets in DCO;

- Pay negotiations and the pay award.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Terry Hone

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that recycling points for lateral flow devices and kit in DCO would not be publicised while the offices were closed to the public and access was restricted to an appointment basis. This position could be reviewed in future.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in June, July and August 2021 be noted.

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

## 12 INFORMATION NOTE: HR UPDATE

*Audio Recording – 6:15*

The Interim HR Services Manager presented the report entitled People Strategy Update along with the appendices:

- 2021-2022 HR Service Plan
- Covid-19 People Recovery Plan 2020-2022.

The Interim HR Services Manager drew attention to points including:

- The general approach of encouraging staff to come back to the DCO for just one day per week from 4th October has been appreciated by the majority of staff and was a good test of the measures in place;
- There was a booking system to facilitate the allocation of hot desks and which would enable teams to book an area;
- The IT team was busy with the laptop rollout project;
- The customer service teams, waste team, and Town Hall and North Herts Museum teams had been working in person;
- HR intended to seek feedback from staff during the first few weeks of the return to office working;
- Recruitment had been busy in the last quarter including the recruitment of a new Service Director – Place
- The Council was pleased to be supporting the government kickstart scheme and the first trainee under the scheme had arrived in the IT department;
- 3 more apprentices were recruited over the summer and 2 more vacancies were advertised to bring the cohort up to full capacity;
- Regarding the pay award and negotiations: a final offer was made by the National Employers Group and was rejected by the National Joint Council in August; now union members would be invited to vote on whether the offer would be accepted towards the end of the month and into early into October;
- The rollout of flu vaccination vouchers was going well;
- The Mental Health First Aiders had created a monthly drop in session to support employee wellbeing
- The Council had marked World Suicide Prevention Day by taking the opportunity to raise awareness and share information about how we can all play a part in spotting the signs;

- The Council also provided a more detailed suicide prevention training to over 70 employees following a request by the corporate safeguarding group;
- The Inclusion Group recently discussed Disability and found that despite being a small group and the organisation having a low rate of staff reporting disability that many in the group had a personal connection to disability;
- The report included a summary of the COVID-19 absence data, which showed that the numbers for April to June and June to September this year being slightly higher than they were last year;
- On labour turnover statistics: they had started to increase with a higher number of leavers as the employment markets become buoyant.

The Service Director – Resources advised that there had been a recent steering group meeting of the Shaping Our Future group, which looked at to translate the new proposed Council Plan and its objectives into what we want from staff.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised:

- The Council had not faced difficulties in recruiting more generally but there were certain posts that had been advertised a number of times seeking candidates with specific qualifications, which were traditionally hard to fill;
- There were currently no advertised vacancies in the Planning department;
- Apprentices were supported in working from home or in the office;
- There were no indications of 'Long COVID,' in the workforce or number of employees taking long-term sick leave;
- Diversity statistics and their relationship to the increased flexibility available from part home-working would be kept under review.

**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.

## 13 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER

*Audio Recording - 25:48*

The Learning & Employee Engagement Business Partner presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on the challenges and rewards of long term home working and highlighted points including:

- Homeworking had been in place at NHDC since 2010
- Some teams e.g CSC, civil enforcement and the grounds team were not able to work from home;
- The IT department set up 130 connections in March 2020 to enable staff to work from home;
- Some staff reported they did not have a suitable environment at home to work and arrangements were made to provide additional equipment and/or the option to work in the office if it was safe to do so;
- The lack of face-to-face office contact was felt by teams and managers were encouraged to find ways to build and maintain relationships while remote working;

- The HR team conducted welfare calls to address the mental health challenges faced by staff working from home during the pandemic;
- The organisation had seen benefits in a reduction in short term absences, the ability to recruit from a wider geographical area, and higher retention rates.

The following Members asked questions and took part in discussion:

- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the Learning & Employee Engagement Business Partner advised:

- there were educational resources made available to staff about good remote meeting etiquette, timetabling and working from home in a healthy and safe way.
- There had been an increase in staff participation at briefings and training workshops since they had moved to online platforms

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that a desk booking system was being implemented and that the third floor would be kept out of use on a trial basis.

In response to questions the Interim HR Services Manager advised that the flexible working scheme allowed individual teams and managers to balance service need and workload around employee needs e.g as carers, and that the HR team was available to provide advice. There was also the right to request flexible working practice at any time.

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the Strategic Discussion Paper on the challenges and rewards of long-term home working be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on the challenges and rewards of long-term home working.

## 14 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

*Audio Recording – 42:43*

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and

**IT WAS AGREED:** That the discussion topics for the meetings would be as follows:

- (i) The modernisation of the recruitment process would be discussed in December
- (ii) The meeting to take place in March should review the results of the gradual return to office-based working.

The meeting closed at 10.49 am

Chair