

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
REMOTE MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 15TH DECEMBER, 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) Rebecca Webb (HR Operations Manager) Laura Bignell (HR Business Partner) William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) Louis Mutter (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews (UNISON)*

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 3:08

No apologies for absence were received from Councillors.

16 ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR FOR REMAINDER OF CIVIC YEAR 2021/22

Audio Recording – 3:18

IT WAS AGREED: That a Vice-Chair would not be elected during this meeting; in the absence of The Chair in future meetings during this civic year, the committee will elect a new Chair.

17 MINUTES - 10 MARCH, 9 JUNE, 22 SEPTEMBER

Audio Recording – 5:32

IT WAS AGREED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 10 March 2021, 9 June 2021 and 22 September 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

18 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio Recording – 6:30

There was no other business at the meeting.

19 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 6:35

- (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.

20 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

Audio Recording – 6:55

The Service Director – Resources presented the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in September, October and November 2021 and drew attention to points including:

- Updating and refining the Terms of Reference for the Staff Consultation Forum;
- The distribution of a staff survey to gather feedback and raise awareness of the Staff Consultation Forum;
- The reopening and closure of the District Council Offices.

IT WAS AGREED: That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Committee held in September, October and November 2021 to be noted.

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

21 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

Audio Recording – 10:16

The HR Operations Manager presented the report entitled HR Update and drew attention to points including:

- The ways of working covered in the report are now outdated due to the closure of the District Council Offices;
- Staff are working from home unless there is an exceptional need;
- There was a small number of staff members in the Council Offices during the last lockdown. Any staff at the Offices at the moment will be looked at on a case-by-case basis;
- The Council is in a good position for when the Offices are reopened, highlighting the desk-booking system and hybrid meeting facilities;
- The ongoing meetings between Council HR departments, sharing experiences and information on particular issues that have arisen;
- Recruitment has continued at a steady level despite the Office closure and should continue at this level;
- Undertaking a review on how temporary workers are used at the Council. As part of this, HR have developed a new fast-track recruitment option to get positions filled more efficiently;
- Pay negotiations are ongoing and the Unions are in the process of balloting for strike action;
- Various types of support available for employees during this time; including online wellbeing classes, mental health drop-in sessions and a project looking at funding a wellbeing app for staff;
- Prepared an update for managers reminding them to check in with their team and that HR are available to support them;
- Personal development days are continuing into 2022 and are well received;

- The Shaping Our Future Committee agreed on the new values of the Council, which now includes inclusion. The Committee are working with a graphic designer to set out these new values in a memorable way;
- COVID absences have increased, which reflects the increasing case numbers in the district. Other absences have remained low;
- The labour turnover trend is continuing to increase.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the HR Operations Manager advised:

- That the discount for the gym and other various discounts are still available across the district for Members and staff;
- That the managers update that is going out will have information surrounding the need to visit the Council Offices, as managers will best know how their staff reacted during previous office closures and are aware that HR are willing to provide support;
- HR will be sending out a 'checking-in' email to staff to ensure they have the support necessary.

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

22 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER

Audio Recording – 25:26

The HR Business Partner presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on the Modernisation of the Recruitment Process and highlighted points including:

- Effective recruitment means hiring the right candidate to a vacancy with the required skills and experience. Modernising the recruitment process plays a huge part in this;
- Candidates expect to be able to search for jobs and apply online and are able to do this in their own time;
- The Current NHC system allows candidates to pause, amend and check their application before it is sent;
- The NHC website allows the Council to have a shop window to prospective employees, advertising that the Council is a good place to work;
- The online system allows applications to be anonymous and streamlines the application process;
- Advertising is available to all staff on the intranet, including temporary staff;
- External vacancies are also advertised on the NHC website;
- A recruitment video was created in 2020 which is shared online to prospective candidates;
- At the end of 2020 updates were made to application forms to be more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community. Candidates are now able to declare if they are non-binary or prefer not to say;
- NHC has modernised the process for DBS checks, which is now done by a third-party company Experian;
- NHC have continued to take part in careers fairs at local colleges or schools;
- Looking to review the North Herts Council employer brand;

- Further developments to be made to the recruitment tool, including reminders sent out to applicants who have not finished their application;
- Modernising the new starter process to cut down on administrative burden for managers.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Keith Hoskins
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the HR Business Partner advised:

- NHC is still attracting a good level of applications for vacancies given the current national employment rate;
- All applications are anonymized via the recruitment tool. Managers only receive answers to shortlisted questions and other information is only discovered during the interview phase.
- Equality data is collated annually.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Strategic Discussion Paper on the modernisation of the recruitment process be noted

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on the modernisation of the recruitment process.

23 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 37:28

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 What's the employer's role in keeping staff healthy? Topic would be discussed with a specific focus on mental health in the backdrop of a pandemic in March.
- (ii) Wellbeing and staff support measures will be discussed as a regular part of the HR update at each meeting.

The meeting closed at 10:52 am

Chair