

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD IN THE TO BE ADVISED
ON WEDNESDAY, 9TH MARCH, 2022 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 (Human Resources Operations Manager), Maggie Williams (Senior HR & Contracts Manager) and Louis Mutter (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present:

Debbie Ealand (UNISON)_

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2:00

No apologies for absence were received from Councillors.

Apologies for absence were also received from UNISON representatives Dee Levett and Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews

25 MINUTES - 15 DECEMBER 2021

Audio Recording – 2:20

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 December 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

26 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3:20

- (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.

27 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

Audio Recording: 3:50

The Service Director – Resources presented the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in December 2021, January and February 2022 and drew attention to points including:

- At the December meeting it was announced that the Council is extending the right to request flexible working to day 1 of employment;
- Also discussed annual leave carry forwards;
- All three meetings consisted of a review of the Consultation Forum, looking at the Terms of Reference and how to encourage engagement.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources advised:

- Nothing to imply the Council is going to let DCO as a residential space;
- The Elections in 2023 are going ahead as normal.

IT WAS AGREED: That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Committee held in December 2021, January, February 2022 be noted.

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

28 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

Audio Recording: 8:45

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

- Since restrictions have lifted there has been a gradual return to the office;
- Several measures still in place including facemasks, distancing and desk cleaning;
- The higher turnover is reflected in increased recruitment activity. 2 posts advertised at this time had to be advertised again due to low interest;
- In the process of recruiting three further apprentice posts;
- Section 3.6 covers the pay award which is now outdated; have now had an agreement on the 2021 pay award, and has been processed for March;
- The 2022 pay bargaining isn't expected to begin until next month, there will be another delay until that has been agreed;
- The inclusion group met in December and discussed sexual orientation and gender; overall it was felt that the Council is a inclusive place to work;
- COVID absences have increased, this is expected due to the cases currently in the District;
- Overall short term absences have continued to increase, felt this is due to be from the lifting of restrictions and the increased likelihoods of minor illnesses circulating;
- Labour turnover is at a high, it has slowed down in the last three months but expect these high levels to continue.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the HR Operations Manager advised:

- The Council has actioned the pay award quicker than most other councils; the pay negotiations are in the hands of the national employers.
- The values of the Council are single words to ensure they are memorable; there will be some description as part of the communication about these values.
- Some employees have had long COVID, managers have been supported to ensure the employees that are suffering from this are provided with what is needed.

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.

29 INFORMATION NOTE - EQUALITIES UPDATE MARCH 2022

Audio Recording: 25:05

The Senior HR & Contracts Manager presented the report entitled Equalities Update March 2022 and drew attention to points including:

- The graphs in Appendix 1 set out the data provided in the report;
- The equalities figures are from 2021;
- Overall the figures are stable; very few changes in the last few years;
- Notable increase of those in the 35-44 and 45-54 age bracket and a decrease in the 25-34 group;
- 21% increase of those under the age of 25 leaving the Council;
- No change in the number of staff declaring a disability since last year;
- No notable change in amount of staff in ethnic minorities or gender;
- Numbers of long term sick cases have had little change in the past three years;
- 2021 saw the highest number of leavers since 2015 and represents a 50% increase from 2020;
- During 2021 the percentage of leavers who resigned increased by 4% to 70%;
- The latest equal pay review has shown it is very stable; used a traffic light system to focus on the most important reports;
- The majority of cases in the equal pay review was due to the increments of pay rewarded to those who have stayed in a position longer;
- Now have figures from the 2021 Gender Pay Gap review, which will be published in the next couple of weeks; have an improvement in mean and median gender pay gaps; now at its lowest level;

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the Senior HR & Contracts Manager advised:

- Long term sickness cases are discussed as a part of Business Partner team meetings, they will take that opportunity to look for patterns that may be concerning. We have a wide range of reasons at this point and see no pattern. Occupational health are always providing information to the senior team.
- The flexible return to work is available to everyone.
- The equalities data is published on the website; HR also look at the data to pull out any themes or actions to progress.

- There was a change to the gender pay gap group in 2021, this has developed into a broader group of the inclusion group. The actions from the gender pay group have been integrated into the inclusion group;

IT WAS AGREED: That the Information Note entitled Equalities Update March 2022 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled Equalities Update March 2022.

30 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER

Audio Recording: 58:35

The HR Operations Manager presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on the employer's role in keeping staff healthy and highlighted points including:

- The report was requested with a focus on mental health with a backdrop on the pandemic;
- North Herts has always been conscious of its responsibility to support the wellbeing of its employees;
- Since the pandemic the Council has responded to the emerging wellbeing and mental health needs with a wide range of additional direct support and helpful resources;
- The initial response to the COVID pandemic was to ensure that within the first months of lockdown every member of staff received a call from HR to ensure their wellbeing had been supported;
- These calls allowed individuals to converse with colleagues outside of their team and to have a direct route to raise problems;
- HR also created a lockdown toolkit on the intranet which included resources in where to find support;
- HR launched the headspace wellbeing app which was received well by employees.

The Chair and Members thanked the HR Operations Manager for the paper.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Strategic Discussion Paper on the employer's role in keeping staff healthy be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on the employer's role in keeping staff healthy.

31 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 1:07:10

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and

IT WAS AGREED: That officers should continue to update the Committee on the work of the COVID Recovery Plan, and should be presented at the first Committee meeting of the new civic year.

The meeting closed at 11:09 am

Chair