

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD IN THE REMOTE MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 8TH JUNE, 2022 AT 10.00 AM
MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Raj Bhakar (Vice-Chair), Claire Strong, Terry Hone and Tom Plater*

*Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews (UNISON)
Christina Corr (Staff Consultation Forum)*

In Attendance: *Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources), Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager), Helen Bylett (Learning and Employee Engagement Business Partner), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

Also Present: *There were no members of the public present.*

32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2:35

There were no apologies for absence.

33 MINUTES - 9 MARCH 2022

Audio Recording – 2:50

Councillor Terry Hone advised that at minute 28 the phrase “Labour turnover” had political connotations and that the minutes should be clarified to avoid confusion.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg advised that phrasing such as ‘Staff turnover,’ would be preferable.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

34 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio Recording – 4:20

- (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;

- (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.

35 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

Audio Recording – 5:03

The Service Director – Resources presented the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March, April and May 2022 and highlighted the following discussions:

- The introduction of regular Green Updates to keep staff aware of what actions the Council is taking on climate change
- The Staff Recognition Awards
- The Ukrainian refugee schemes and the role the teams in the Council's housing and environmental health departments are playing

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that there was no push from management for staff to return to office working but that teams were being encouraged to consider the benefits of working in the office more frequently, and that individual service managers would have the discretion to consider working patterns in light of service needs. Support was still available to staff via the EAP and HR team but gradual adjustment of childcare arrangements as the Council returned to a more regular way of working in the future might be necessary for some staff.

It was:

RESOLVED: To receive the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings from March, April and May 2022.

36 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

Audio Recording – 9:43

The HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled “HR Update” and highlighted the following points:

- The People Recovery Plan covered a gradual return to office based working and noted that flexibility was considered a key benefit by staff;
- The HR team was working on guidance and principles to assist managers and teams in returning to more in-person working;
- Staff turnover was still high in line with national trends and this was reflected in the number of vacancies;
- Several successful appointments had been made including the recruitment of new apprentices and one role under the Kickstart scheme;
- The HR team was undertaking a recruitment refresh project to review each stream of the recruitment process to ensure that talented candidates were attracted to roles at the Council;
- A review of staff benefits was underway to assess best value for money and which benefits staff most valued;
- Given economic conditions and the local government funding situation staff benefits beyond pay were increasingly important in attracting and retaining talent;

- Mental health and wellbeing remained a focus for the HR team; Mind e-learning was available on the growzone for staff and managers and corporate use of the Headspace offer was positive with 18,000 minutes spent on the app in total;
- The Inclusion Group continued to meet quarterly; the meeting in March focussed on religion and belief, and the group continued to be a forum for open and safe discussion of individual perspectives and experiences;
- Absences due to COVID had reduced slightly but short term absences have increased overall likely related to an increase in social activity and the circulation of minor infections.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Raj Bhakar
- Councillor Claire Strong

Questions raised covered topics including:

- 2022 Pay bargaining and negotiations
- Guidance and principles to managers on the return to office working
- The Council's diversity and inclusion strategy
- Recruitment refresh and review plans

In response to questions the HR Services Manager advised:

- Regional pay briefings were ongoing and it was anticipated this round of negotiations would be difficult; employers were expecting the unions submission soon and expected there to be significant differences in the unions' request and the employees offer
- The HR team and management understood that staff value flexibility and guidance offered to service managers and team leaders on encouraging office-based working would reflect that;
- The Inclusion Group was expanded from the Gender Pay Gap working group in 2020 and has discussed a range of characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 and was now looking at broadening the focus of its work; feedback from staff was valued and while no senior leadership team were part of the group in order to keep it a safe space for open discussion, the HR team briefed the Service Director – Resources after each meeting with any key issues raised;
- A recruitment review/refresh was on the horizon as a potential project for some time but now was an especially apt time to undertake the work;
- There was not a clear pattern evidenced in exit interviews to explain why staff were leaving; some turnover was positive but the HR team tries to identify trends that might indicate problems in the organisation.

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that the guidance and principles document for managers on returning to office working would highlight the four main groups of staff as regards home/office working; those that always work from home; those that always work in the office; those who worked across the District travelling to various sites and locations; and hybrid workers.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Information Note entitled "HR Update" be noted.

Audio Recording – 22:45

The Learning and Employee Engagement Business Partner presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on Shaping our Future and highlighted points including:

- The Council's values had recently been refreshed but were based on a set of values produced in consultation with staff from across the Council making sure to include staff at all 'satellite sites' as well as those working in the District Council Offices;
- The values and behaviours were now clearly displayed to staff across the Council at every opportunity and formed part of the regular performance review process as well as other training which ensured that the values and how staff were expected to demonstrate them was at the core of all work at the Council;
- The Shaping our Future group had the aim of developing a high quality, diverse, inclusive and resilient workforce; resilience had been a key focus in recent years with the pandemic and work on other priorities was ongoing particularly in the IT department in facilitating creative and innovative new ways of working.

The following Members and representatives asked questions and took part in discussion:

- Councillor Raj Bhakar
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews
- Christina Corr

Points raised included:

- How were values communicated to staff and incorporated into the recruitment strategy
- How did the Shaping our Future group encourage and engage with diverse perspectives on the future of the organisation
- Values and behaviours highlighted the attitudes practiced by staff as a matter of course in their work

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

- The values and behaviours were conveyed in part through a major branding effort; personal development sessions had been held that focused on the values; values already featured in the RPR process but as part of the recruitment refresh the team would be looking at how to promote values-based recruitment and display the Council's values prominently to prospective applicants;
- Ideas from the Shaping our Future group were discussed by the Inclusion group and feedback was gathered from other groups including apprentices and staff at all levels;
- All staff that worked with the Council – whether full time, part time, or on fixed-term contracts – were considered members of staff;

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised that the Shaping our Future group had previously included Members but it was felt by the steering group that staff-led feedback from a wider range of levels across the organisation was key.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Discussion Paper on Shaping Our Future be noted.

Audio Recording – 36:11

The Chair led a discussion on potential future discussion topics at forthcoming meetings.

The following Members took part in discussion:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Raj Bhakar

Points raised included:

- Recruitment and retention of staff was a key topic and should be featured at this Committee every time it meets, and could be included in the regular HR update;
- The resourcing topics of “attracting and retaining talent” and “rewards and recognition of staff” would be appropriate for a future meeting;
- Wellbeing strategies to support staff tied in with resourcing and retention and particularly discussion of the support available for staff going through the menopause;
- Menopause education was lacking generally and it was positive that workplaces were starting to provide support; this should be a focus going forward;
- Resources on the menopause and support available should also include staff impacted by endometriosis.

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That recruitment and staff retention be included as a topic in future HR Update notes
- (2) That the discussion topics of Supporting Staff through the Menopause and Endometriosis and attracting/retaining staff in the workforce be included in future meetings.

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Committee to determine suitable topics for discussion at future meetings.

The meeting closed at 10.50 am

Chair