

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD IN THE TO BE ADVISED
ON WEDNESDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2022 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), Claire Strong, Tony Hunter and Tom Plater*

In Attendance:

Abigail Hamilton (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources), Rebecca Webb (Human Resources Operations Manager), Jo Keshishian (Interim Human Resources Services Manager), Dee Levett (UNISON), Debbie Ealand (UNISON) and William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)

Also Present:

There were no members of the public present

39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 0:00

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Terry Hone who was substituted by Councillor Tony Hunter

Councillor Raj Bhakar was absent.

40 MINUTES - 8 JUNE 2022

Audio recording – 0:41

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 8 June 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

41 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 1:04

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting
- (2) 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 need to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

42 SCF Minutes

Audio recording – 2:24

Ian Couper presented the Staff Consultation Forum and highlighted points including:

- The majority of the information within this will be included in the HR update information note.
- In relation to the Ways of Working document, we are taking it to the senior management group for discussion. We have already implemented many of the ways of working but want to finalise our formal document stating it.

There were no questions from Members.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for June, July and August 2022

43 HR UPDATE

Audio recording – 3:40

Rebecca Webb presented the HR Update Information Note and highlighted points including:

- Teams have been developing how they work after the pandemic. This looks at balancing the benefits of face-to-face collaborative work and homeworking
- As mentioned in the last item, a formal document is being developed to show these new ways of working and it is being taken to the senior management group
- The Committee requested further detail on recruitment and retention as this is an ongoing issue
- This quarter, the overall number of vacancies has stayed the same (compared to the same quarter last year), but there has been an increase in the number of apprenticeship posts.
- There has been an increase in the number of apprenticeship applicants, but the number of other applicants has decreased
- 19 posts this quarter have been filled, there were 4 that weren't filled at first attempt and so HR have worked with recruiting managers to fill these roles. One has been filled and the rest are being re-advertised
- There is a recruitment refresh project which includes a welcome payment to support recruitment
- The use of feedback from apprenticeship groups and senior managers feedback group will be used to improve the project, website, and the processes
- Turnover seems to have stabilised at roughly 10% but there is potential for this to increase
- The apprentice scheme continues and there was a careers fair with schools to advertise the apprenticeships and job roles at the Council. Many apprentices secure job roles after their apprenticeship which is a positive outcome.
- In relations to pay bargaining for 2022, the unions are consulting with members for the final pay offer. We don't expect an outcome until late October, early November

- HR are currently looking at options for the benefits review as the surveys have been completed. This will be presented to the leadership team
- A real focus for the HR team is mental health and wellbeing.
- Reminders of support are sent out regularly to employees as well as the flu vaccine
- There is a financial wellbeing intranet page to signpost where employees can find help
- There is also a salary advance scheme to help employees that need it
- The inclusion group is continuing to meet quarterly and at a recent meeting discussed marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, paternity, fertility, and adoption. There was also a guest speaker who shared their personal career journey and challenges
- The inclusion group has asked all employees to use a photo of themselves on internal Microsoft accounts to promote diversity at the Council.
- The number of absences due to covid is reducing. This feeds into the short term absence levels which are high.
- The Council continue to support both long and short term absences

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg

In response to questions, Rebecca Webb and Jo Keshishian advised:

- The three job roles that couldn't be filled were a Civil Enforcement Officer role, a Customer Assistant role, and a Food Safety role in Environmental Health
- The welcome payment would be funded from the salary lag initially. This would be up to 10% of the starting salary and would be spread over a period of 12 months and would get the first half after their successful probation period, and the second at the end of the 12 months.
- The welcome payment wouldn't apply to all posts, only ones where it has been shown it is hard to fill
- At the time of writing, 2 employees have used the salary advance scheme. When we issue the advance, we issue advice on finances and managing finances and look at the advance as a short term solution for those who are struggling. We want to introduce further financial support in the benefits review but are still looking at this
- There is one case of long covid but it is not a significant impact so we don't know the amount of absences due to this. We look at support and any adjustments we can make for those individuals with long covid.

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the HR Update Information Note

44 DISCUSSION PAPER - SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Audio recording – 14:13

The following Members and representatives took part in the discussion

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Debbie Ealand
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Rebecca Webb

Points raised in the discussion included:

- There should be more information regarding hysterectomies and the recovery and support for this
- It is worth noting that none of the potential absences listed within the paper trigger the HR return to work forms which is good
- There needs to be support pre and post absence and referencing the mental health toll this may have
- There should be another session within the inclusion group around women's health issues within the workplace to give added visibility
- The boxes within DCO toilets are now regularly stocked with sanitary products which is positive and normalises periods which isn't often done. Women should feel like they can come forward and talk and there should be more support in this, especially if they have a male manager.
- It is good that people know they have people to talk to and we should make sure that managers of all levels, both men and women, are being kind
- There should be a point of reference or a few people that are highlighted for women to talk to. Women should feel like they have a safe space to talk and want support but don't want it to feel formal. This goes for all protected characteristics.
- We have mental health champions so why can't we have women's champions and hopefully this can be taken forward
- There should be a women's forum on the intranet, this can be circulated in internal emails so people have access to knowledge. This would be useful to Councillors too that need support
- The back door of the women's toilets is a good place to get women's attention so there should be information on the back of these. If they don't want a poster they should have a permanent sticker to remind women they aren't alone.
- The posters should highlight things such as women's health issues and raise awareness.
- Breast awareness is not on the document so this could be looked at in the future as women need to check themselves and things such as fibrous tissue which isn't always cancerous can cause distress
- There is a lot on men that needs to be highlighted as well, as a lot of these things also apply to men so there needs to be another piece of work on mens health and mental health topics
- Hopefully these discussions and information will create a more friendly and supportive environment for women

In response to questions, Debbie Ealand and Rebecca Webb advised:

- If a woman does have a male manager and doesn't feel comfortable talking to them, there are many female managers that they can talk to. Additionally, the people who attend the inclusion group have made themselves available

to be people they can talk to. This goes for every protected characteristics, not just women.

- There is a lot of good ideas from this conversation and these will be looped back into the inclusion group as this will be a good place to start a conversation
- Support is already available and is regularly circulated to staff but we could look at doing more

It was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the Strategic Discussion Paper on Supporting Women in the Workplace

45 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 31:32

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

The following Members took part in a discussion:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Claire Strong

Points raised included:

- The mental health information we have should be checked and there should be a discussion paper on mens health and mental health
- It should be looked at how we are working with different age groups surrounding mens mental health in terms of things such as bereavement and domestic abuse.
- Many people worry about job security when it comes to absence due to things such as surgeries so there should be a supportive network everyone is aware of
- There should be an information note that is circulated regarding this and we should look at how we are communicating this to managers
- The apprenticeships that were discussed should be looked at further down the line and there should be profiling on those who have stayed within the Council.
- What can be done about people who are not cleaning their desks.

In response to questions, Rebecca Webb and Ian Couper advised:

- There is occupational health that is in place and it is a fundamental piece of work done to support people
- There hasn't been any more complaints regarding people not cleaning their desks. There was an email sent to stress the importance of cleaning desks.

Ian Couper advised that HR need to prep these topics so this may be a discussion rather than a long report.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg responded by agreeing that these topics should be a discussion rather than long reports but suggested that the topic of apprenticeships may need slightly more information.

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That men's health and mental health is looked into further and a discussion topic of men's mental health and how we are working with different age groups on a range of subjects is included in future meetings
- (2) That a discussion topic of occupational health is included in further meetings
- (3) That the apprenticeships we offer is looked into further and there is profiling of those who have stayed within the Council, and include this as a discussion topic in further meetings

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

The meeting closed at 10:47am

Chair