

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD REMOTELY
ON WEDNESDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2023 AT 10.00 AM
MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Claire Strong, Terry Hone and Tom Plater*

In Attendance:

Debbie Ealand (Housing Supply Officer), Christina Corr (Senior Technical Officer), Rebecca Webb (Human Resources Operations Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Maggie Williams (Senior HR and Contracts Manager) and Louis Franklin (Admin Support Officer)

Also Present:

There were no members of the public present.

54 ELECTION OF A CHAIR

Audio recording – 0 minutes 45 seconds

Councillor Terry Hone proposed, and Councillor Tom Plater seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Claire Strong was elected Chair for this meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 46 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg and Raj Bhakar.

56 MINUTES - 14 DECEMBER 2022

Audio Recording – 3 minutes 48 seconds

Councillor Claire Strong, as Chair proposed, and Councillor Tom Plater seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 December 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

57 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 33 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded.

- (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 needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

58 SCF MINUTES

Audio recording – 5 minutes 4 seconds

The Service Director – Resources, presented the Minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum meetings held in December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023 and highlighted the following:

- The restructuring of the Community Engagement team had been discussed.
- Staff queries had been received on ensuring the office environment was looked after and that this is communicated to all staff.
- The regular IT updates had focussed on the new laptop rollout.

In response to Councillor Claire Strong question the Service Director – Resources, stated that workstation assessment should be an annual process for staff, or when an Officer changes their work setting.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023.

59 INFORMATION NOTE - HR UPDATE

Audio Recording - 8 minutes 14 seconds

The HR Service Manager presented the 'HR Information Note' and highlighted the following points:

- There had been a focus on recruitment selection and working with recruiting managers, with welcome payments considered for hard to fill vacancies.
- The Recruitment Refresh project was ongoing, and was reviewing our Social Media presence, as well as the recruitment pages on the website, to assess how, this can attract new employees, it reflects us as an employer, the role is presented.
- The Recruitment Refresh project would amalgamate the Job Description and Person Specification into one document.
- Testing will begin on using a rolling closing date for vacancies, based on receipt of an application from a suitable candidate.
- A trial was ongoing with an in-house recruitment agency at Essex County Council who are providing advertisement on their website and job boards.
- Managers attended a recruitment training session, that included: the best approach to recruitment in this changing recruitment market, being ready for challenging question from candidates and selling the Council as an employer.
- Staff turnover is being reviewed and monitored, with a focus on exit data and feedback from leavers.
- National Apprenticeship week 6-13 February was a success.
- The Employee Assistance Program would have a new provider from April 2023.
- The Gender Pay Gap for 2022 was 19.1% compared to 17.4% in 2021, the first increase since 2017. The Inclusion group will be working with HR to develop an action plan.
- HR were offering support to managers dealing with absence management.
- There had been a considerable drop in Covid absences.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Plater
- Debbie Ealand

In response to questions the HR Manager advised that:

- There were no key trend for our leavers, but promotions opportunities were mentioned by some.
- The Council was great at providing staff with ongoing development opportunities but did not always have a clear career progression path.
- Salary featured as a reason for leaving, with roles in private sector organisations often paying more.
- In 2021-22 an additional Service Director role was created which has impacted the Gender Pay Gap report.
- There were interviews scheduled for a Development and Conservation Manager later this month.
- The new Employee Assistance Program will be open to Members.
- The HR department are providing support for Officers, and their managers who are suffering from the effects of long Covid.

RESOLVED:

- (1) The Committee noted the HR Update Information Note.
- (2) That the Committee agreed to stop reporting specifically on Covid absences in future Information Notes, but requested Officers monitor these figures and report back to the Committee should they increase.

60 DISCUSSION PAPER - COUNCIL VALUES

Audio Recording - 26 minutes 20 seconds

The HR Service Manager presented the Discussion Paper 'Strategic Discussion Paper on Council Values' and highlighted the following points:

- The Council's core values were; Listening, Together, Learning, Adaptable and Inclusive.
- Organisational culture is a value and belief which is shared across the organisation and outlines the way the organisation functions.
- The Discussion Paper highlighted how Values can be used in practice to help create the Organisational Culture.
- The Values were integrated into Job descriptions, regular performance reviews, staff training and the Conduct and Capability Policy.
- The Council's Values aid decision-making process.
- Using the Council Values would ensure a consistency of approach and behaviour.
- Recruitment would be focussed on employing staff with personal values aligned with those of the Council and would build this into recruitment and interviews.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Platter
- Debbie Ealand

In response to questions HR Manager advised that:

- The aim was to repeat the values message and embed it, into everyday work life, so that it becomes a reality, rather than just on screen or paper.
- Values forms part of the standard appraisal document and discussion.
- It was important that staff were aware of how the Values fitted within their role at the Council.
- Staff are encouraged to take part in a development morning on the first Friday of every month, which often focuses on Values. Staff are able to take part in the development work at other times, should they be required to work on the allocated time.
- The Employee Recognition Awards were open, and any staff can be nominated for their demonstration of the Values in their work.

The Service Director – Resources in response to questions stated:

- That Values form the main discussion of an Appraisal, and this applies at all employee levels.
- The Staff Consultation Forum (SCF) has discussed the refreshed Values.
- At the next SCF meeting The Service Director will initiate a further conversation on Values.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the Strategic Discussion Paper on Council Values.

61 DISCUSSION PAPER - MANDATORY PAY GAP REPORTING

Audio Recording - 40 minutes 56 seconds

The Senior HR and Contracts Manager presented the Discussion Paper 'Strategic Discussion Paper on Mandatory Pay Gap Reporting' and highlighted the following points:

- Pay Gap is an undesirable or unfair difference between the average amounts that different groups are paid. The report shows basic inequalities in the work force and is separate to equal pay. The Pay Gap looks at everyone across the organisation and compares them by their different characteristics.
- The Gender Pay Gap report was an annual snapshot of our employees on the 31 March based on two groups.
- The Gender Pay Gap reporting has been mandatory since 2017 for employers who have over 250 employees, however this may change to 500 employees in 2024.
- After 2024 the Council would continue reporting the Gender Pay Gap on a voluntary basis, as the data is invaluable.
- It would take 20 years at the Council's current rate to bridge the Gender Pay Gap.
- The Pay Gap was not limited to gender but includes as an example, ethnicity and disabilities, however gender is the only area where reporting is mandatory.
- Ethnicity Pay Gap Reporting may become mandatory but currently there were some issues regarding how this would be reported, as there were 5 ethnicity categories and 18 sub-groups. There were concerns that the information would vary, due to the demographics in different regions of the Country and for the confidentiality and anomaly of staff where there are few ethnic minority employees.

The following Members asked questions

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to questions the Senior HR and Contracts Manager stated:

- Ethnicity formed part of the Equalities Data Report on staff and recruitment, and this figure was not in line with the demographics of the District.
- Gender Pay Gap was likely to remain mandatory for the County Council and District Councils would produce the information on a voluntarily basis.
- When the Council publishes their Gender Pay Gap it includes an action plan and narrative.
- The Council does not monitor Ethnicity as a Pay Gap, but the data is included in the Equal Pay Review completed every two years.

In response to questions the HR Manager stated that:

- Ethnicity was a main subject of discussion at the Inclusion Group.
- At the next Inclusion Group meeting they will be discussing the Halo Collective regarding hair discrimination.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the Strategic Discussion Paper on Mandatory Pay Gap Reporting.

62 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio recording – 56 minutes 08 seconds

The following Members took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tom Plater

It was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the topics “Diversity and changing workplaces accommodation and practices” and “Attracting and Rewarding Scarce Talent” be discussed at the next meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.
- (2) That the topics “Employment Tribunals” and “Employment Law” be discussed at a future meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

The meeting closed at 11.05 am

Chair