

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD IN THE VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 6TH DECEMBER, 2023 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

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

In attendance: *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Rebecca Webb (HR Services Manager) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

UNISON: *Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews*

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

77 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 40 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Claire Strong.

78 MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 18 seconds

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis proposed and Councillor Terry Hone seconded, and following a vote, it was

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 October 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

79 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 45 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.

80 SCF MINUTES

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 7 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the item entitled 'SCF Minutes', alongside the Minutes from the meetings of October and December 2023 and highlighted the following:

- Work was ongoing to clear floor three for a potential lease.

- Staff had been requested to keep their working environment clear and tidy to enable a more pleasant working area.
- The consultation period for the pay and notice period for the Deputy Chief Officer had concluded and their pay would be linked to Green Book and they could choose if their notice period was aligned to the Chief Officer or the Green Book.
- Transitional changes had been put into place for Long service awards, and an additional special award had been made available for employment exceeding 30 years.
- Meeting free Friday had commenced and feedback was encouraged via the SCF.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forum for October and November 2023.

81 HR INFORMATION NOTE

Audio Recording – 7 Minutes 10 seconds

- It had been a busy period for recruitment, there were fewer vacancies than in previous years but the 3 apprenticeship roles had attracted 117 applications.
- There had been a slight increase in staff turnover but nothing significant.
- Staff received the 2023/24 pay award in their November pay, it was expected negotiations for the 2024/25 pay award would commence in January.
- The contract for the Learning Management System was due to end in July 2024 and this was being reviewed.
- The Inclusion Group had received training on microaggressions and unconscious bias.
- An inclusion sub group had been formed to review the gender pay gap, which for 2023 was 14%, an improvement from 19.3% in 2022. An action plan to focus on attracting females into senior roles was continuing.
- There had been an increase in absences above what was expected for the time of year.
- Work was ongoing regarding more complex absences, especially as the majority of long term absences related to mental health.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Terry Hone

In response to questions the HR Services Manager stated:

- The work force had more female employees, however the majority were employed below Grade 10, this area would be specifically targeted.
- A confident women workshop had previously taken place and was again being considered.
- Employees seconded from Hertfordshire County Council were not included in the Gender Pay Gap percentage calculations.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis highlighted that staff were able to be reimbursed for the Flu Vaccine.

N.B Councillor Tom Plater joined the Zoom meeting at 10:15.

82 DISCUSSION PAPER - PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR STAFF WELLBEING

Audio Recording – 15 Minutes 24 seconds

The HR Services Manager presented the Information Note entitled 'Providing support for Staff Wellbeing' and advised that:

- Staff wellbeing was important and impacted on employee engagement, retainment and effectiveness.
- The report highlighted the Council values, in particular, that staff work together to support each other to deliver the best they can.
- There was a wide range of direct support and signposting to external sites available for staff.
- The internal support available to employees was highlighted on page 23 of the report.
- The external support available to employees was highlighted on page 24 of the report and included, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programme, North Herts Wellbeing, GP Helpline and Support for Staff who are Carers.
- Wellbeing articles were timed around calendar events, with an article about loneliness, bereavement and suicide prevention scheduled for December.
- HR continued to review resources available for staff wellbeing.
- There would be a staff survey in the Spring, which would include a section on the wellbeing resources available and their suitability.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Terry Hone

In response to questions the HR Services Manager stated that:

- HR Business partners were available to work with managers to help and advise them on staff wellbeing, this was being reviewed and updated with the roll out of SharePoint.
- Wellbeing was highlighted at the SMG and through the Insight magazine and Intranet pages.
- The HR Team attended discussion groups with other local HR leads where wellbeing knowledge, experiences and ideas were discussed.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis noted that:

- The bimonthly drop-in sessions for menopause were a great idea as this area was often overlooked.
- The football group running from Baldock Arena helped to improve mental health in men.
- Supporting staff with mental health issues was especially important throughout December and towards Blue Monday in January.
- There was a good measure of support for staff wellbeing.

RESOLVED: That the Committee commented on and noted the Discussion Paper on Providing Support for Staff Wellbeing.

83 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio Recording – 24 minutes 42 seconds

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis suggested that Face to Face v Online Learning could be an idea for the next meeting.

Councillor Terry Hone stated that there were a lot of interesting topics, including Diversity Practices, Social Media for Recruitment and the Online learning.

Councillor Raj Bhakar commented that the Long-Term Absence Management would be good topic.

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Councillor Elizabeth Dennis stated that the Online learning item would be particular helpful for delivering the new Councillors training. She suggested that the long term absence discussion paper focused on how the Council supported employees throughout their absence and back into the workplace.

The Service Director – Resources requested that Micro Aggression and unconscious biases should be added to the suggested discussion topics.

The Chair confirmed the topics of 'Face to Face v Online Learning, Striking a Balance' and 'Long Term Absence Management' for the next meeting of the Committee and this was agreed with Members present.

The meeting closed at 10.33 am

Chair