

**JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
23 SEPTEMBER 2020**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: HR UPDATE

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE CORPORATE HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To update the Joint Staff Consultative Committee on the progress made in the last quarter completing HR work and projects and of course our work supporting the people issues and matters during the Coronavirus pandemic, lockdown and ongoing restrictions.

2. STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 The HR Update Information Note contains the 2020/21 HR Service Work Plan.

3. INFORMATION TO NOTE

- 3.1 Progress against the People Strategy 2015 - 2020 has been reported to all quarterly JSCC Meetings up to March 2020. The terms of reference for the Joint Staff Consultative Committee are to be the corporate interface with employees on major Human Resources issues and to be the Strategic HR Forum for NHDC Members. HR projects do require support from other support services such as IT, Finance, Legal Services and others.

In June 2020 there was a written update concentrating on work supporting the people issues and matters during the Coronavirus pandemic, lockdown and ongoing restrictions. This information note will give a further update on progress during this time.

3.2 People Strategy Planning

The coronavirus situation has naturally had a very big impact on the plans to create a new People Strategy for 2020 – 2026. The LGE are currently developing a new Workforce Development Framework and there will be a version that is specific to shire districts. This was expected to be available about now and its planned to be used in the future. A questionnaire was developed to survey services on their future resourcing needs and a good number were returned.

The Coronavirus situation has however changed all the normal forward planning forecasting on the economy, labour, market, pay and pensions etc. So instead of a long-term People Strategy being created at this time, it's proposed to adopt a 1 -2-year pandemic people/resources recovery plan. EELGA has been doing a lot of work to support Councils who of course have very similar people issues at this time and lots of useful material will be available to support this piece of work.

The East of England LGA area is hosting regular virtual regional meetings and sharing knowledge and experience of employee matters during the pandemic as well as carrying out a regular monthly survey that we are contributing to.

A Staff Survey has just been undertaken to help understand people's reactions to homeworking both during the lockdown and in the future. It also asked for feedback on the support provided to staff during the pandemic. Results and actions will be shared with staff.

The HR team has been undergoing some changes on the last quarter. The Corporate Human Resources Manager is leaving the Council on 2 October. Rebecca Webb is the new HR Services Manager and will take on the lead HR role and report to the Service Director Resources. However further temporary changes to the team have been put in place to cover a period of maternity leave of the HR Services Manager and Jo Keshishian will be taking on that role from the end of September.

3.3 Shaping Our Future

The Council has developed a strategy known as 'Shaping Our Future'. This is essentially an approach to Organisational Development which embraces all the activities that will help to evolve the organisation so that it is able to meet future challenges. The proposed outcomes for 'Shaping Our Future' are:

- A high quality, diverse, inclusive and resilient workforce, meeting the needs of our community;
- A healthy, creative and productive organisation;
- A vibrant culture that embodies our values and behaviours.

Whilst the Learning and Employee Engagement Manager is the specialist lead for the programme many of the activities will be central to the role of HR and require other HR expertise and input. The Service Director – Resources has overall responsibility and a Member and Officer steering group will support and ensure coordination.

A detailed video presentation was included in the last edition of insight and the Learning and Employee Engagement Manager clearly explained the programme and its purpose in some detail that was nice and clear for people to understand.

The first meeting of the steering group has been arranged for September.

3.4 The Human Resources department carried out welfare calls for all staff during April onwards to check on wellbeing during the lockdown working arrangements since whole time advertised the extended working from home period, has been to ensure people understand where they can access an excellent range of existing support and to provide additional resources and information relevant the situation.

The HR Team have been providing regular communication to staff via email (directly to staff and to Managers to cascade), Insight articles and intranet message this has included: information about building resilience, being organised, remaining in control, coaching, relaxation, managing positivity, getting and staying healthy and links to dedicated Covid-19 support eLearning module (the lockdown toolkit)

All this information has been consolidated onto a dedicated intranet page we are continually updating this resource page to provide staff with as much support as possible and signpost them to all the help that is available.

Several Learning workshops have already been arranged and run on-line as well as staff attending on-line webinars arranged by other organisations. The Management Fundamentals Workshops which were curtailed by the lockdown have been rearranged as on-line workshops to run during September. This will continue to develop and provides many opportunities as well as challenges.

3.5 Recruitment update

Recruitment has continued throughout lockdown and onwards with shortlisting being completed remotely with interviews and assessment using Zoom. The number of applications received for recent adverts has been good and we have recently appointed applicants in Democratic Services, Strategic Planning and Green Space as well as the new Legal Team Managers and the temporary Service Director – Transformation. We are currently in the process of recruiting 4 new apprentices as some of the existing apprenticeships are coming to an end.

3.6 Apprentices

Another apprentice has now completed his End Point Assessment and received a Distinction. We are fortunate that all our apprentices have been able to access their learning via remote teaching and online resources. We are continuing to provide additional support to our Apprentices during this enforced working from home time and they are meeting regularly as a group using Zoom.

3.7 Pay and Benefits

3.7.1 Payroll & Elections Payroll

The payroll system iTrent for officers and councillors has now been in place for 5 months and we have moved into the business as usual phase. Members of the HR team meet monthly with the Liberata team to review the previous payroll and discuss any operational issues or queries. The first Payroll Performance meeting has also taken place to review the KPI's for the first quarter. All KPI's have been met and good working relationships have been established with the team at Liberata.

Work on the Elections payroll has now got to the testing phase and the Elections Manager is pleased with the progress.

3.7.2 Pay

The Pay Policy Statement (PPS) for 2020/2021 went to full Council in February and is published on the Council's website. It will be updated following the recent senior managers changes and pay increases (see national pay bargaining below) and to note the latest news on the Exit Payment cap progress.

3.7.3 National Pay bargaining

For 2020/21 The Employers made a final offer of: -

A 2.75% pay increase;

A one-day increase on the Green Book minimum level of annual leave;

Joint work on mental health.

UNISON's national joint council (NJC) committee agreed to launch a full consultation of UNISON members on the final pay offer as the best pay offer achievable by negotiation. However, the consultation did not go with a recommendation that their members should accept or reject the pay offer. We finally heard on 24 August that the LG Employers final offer was agreed, and HR shifted our efforts directly to making sure that the increase and arrears to April 2020 would be paid to staff in their September salaries.

Exit Payment cap

The regulations were expected to come in force from October 2016. The proposals included placing a cap on exit payments of £95,000. An update received in November 2016 stated there had been some slippage in the timetable and following this another consultation opened on 10 April 2019 and closed on 3 July 2019. The Council contributed to the consultation through EELGA. For a very long while there was no further response until announcements in the last couple of months that the government intend to proceed with the Exit Payment cap, it will require an amendment to the Local Government Pension Scheme. JSCC will be kept update of its progress.

3.8 Benefits and Reward

- 3.8.1 At the start of the new Occupational Health (OH) contract there were some problems with the administration and speed of service and a delay in transferring to a new on-line system. More recently service has improved, and we finally saw the transfer to the new portal in June. User training was given via Zoom. As with the old Portal, this allows us to upload OH referrals and access reports / updates as soon as they are available.

The new system is intuitive to use, and well monitored. In addition, due to the pandemic working practices, the OH appointments are been held via telephone and we are getting them booked and advice back very quickly.

The HR team have been researching suppliers for the annual Flu vaccination for staff programme. This year we will be supplied with E-vouchers by our OH provider, and these can be used in Boots branches. A Global email was sent out in mid-August to establish potential uptake. We are expecting a larger than usual uptake this year due to concerns around the Coronavirus pandemic.

- 3.8.2 The GP consultation service for all NHDC employees and the availability of confidential health related advice and guidance provided by this benefit proved valuable during the period of lockdown when physical access to medical support was severely limited. Staff can arrange a GP telephone consultation, or a GP online consultation (webcam) and details of how to do this are available on the intranet. The service also includes a private prescription service and a medical information service, giving access to health, disease, lifestyle and travel information. The renewal documentation has been received for this annual contract and the price (£2 per employee) remains unchanged from last year. Usage figures for the service shows a reasonable uptake of it so we have decided to renew it for this coming year.

- 3.8.3 The Council's Wider Wallet discount portal gives staff access to a range of discounts and benefits at better-than-public rates and includes the list of discounts available to NHDC staff at businesses and shops local to DCO. Wider Wallet is also the platform for the Council's newest staff benefit – HolidayFlex. This scheme works through a salary sacrifice, or more accurately, salary exchange arrangement, where employees swap or give up part of their gross pay in return for additional annual leave. A pilot scheme had an application window in August and the first deductions will be taken from October salary, followed by 5 more monthly instalments, enabling the cost to be spread over the remainder of the leave year.

Employees can apply to buy up to one working week additional annual leave per year (i.e. 37 hours for full time staff and the relevant contracted hours equivalent to one working week for part time staff). All additional annual leave requests are subject to approval by line managers and payroll, with the normal process for booking annual leave on ESS being used for booking the additional holiday purchased. Normal rules regarding carry over of unused annual leave, including additional purchased leave apply.

In terms of the cost of the additional leave, 1 hour's additional annual leave is approximately equivalent to an individual's hourly rate e.g. the hourly rate for Grade 3 Scale Point 36 is £11.07, so if 37 hours additional leave is purchased, this will cost £409.59. As the deductions are taken from gross salary, there is a saving which will depend on the number of additional days purchased and the amount of tax and National Insurance normally paid.

There has been a low level of uptake for this for application window will 3 applications. This is to be expected given the number of holidays that have been cancelled and restrictions on travel abroad. A review of the pilot scheme will take place this autumn to determine whether a full scheme with two application windows (February 2021 and August 2021) will be introduced for the 2021/2022 holiday year.

- 3.8.4 The Bikes for Work Scheme which was re-introduced to the Council in November 2019 has seen a good level of interest with 6 employees joining the scheme so far. This is already more than the total of applications under the previous 3 schemes run by the Council. Further applications are expected in the coming months as central government continues to encourage the use of bikes as an alternative to public transport for travelling to work and to promote the benefits of exercise as a means of building resilience to illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and COVID-19.

3.9 Absence

- 3.9.1 The short-term absence target is 3.5 days. Table 1 below shows the absence performance for the whole year 2019/20 and following a manual adjustment due to an early March payroll cut off to change providers. Short term absence has essentially met the target but for 0.06 days lost. This was the best performance for some years.

- 3.9.2 Absence for the four months April 2020 to July 2020 is shown in Table 2. We can see that long-term absence is higher than it was a year ago by 0.62 days. Short term absence is down compared to the same 4 months in 2019/20 by 0.3 days per FTE. At the time of preparing this report we have not lost any day's sick absence due to Coronavirus.

Table 1

DAYS LOST LONG (b) cumulative 2019-20	DAYS LOST SHORT (a) cumulative 2019-20
0.02	0.23
0.06	0.43
0.13	0.69
0.13	1.11
0.18	1.27
0.20	1.49
0.20	1.98
0.35	2.27
0.41	2.54
0.46	2.89
0.55	3.26
0.68	3.56

DAYS LOST LONG (b) cumulative April to July 2020	DAYS LOST SHORT (a) cumulative April to July 2020
0.10	0.09
0.20	0.25
0.34	0.54
0.75	0.79

3.10 Leavers and Turnover

Year (1 April – 31 March)	%
2013/14	10.07%
2014/15	12.58%
2015/16	15.14%
2016/17	9.74%
2017/18	12.97%
2018/19	12.8%
2019/20	10.7%

(Turnover figures exclude redundancies, retirement, apprenticeships ending and end of fixed term contracts)

3.10.1 Turnover rates for 2019/20 were down in the two years before. Since 1st April we have also seen a lower number of leavers than last year, reflecting the current economic downturn and more limited employment opportunities available. We have seen a higher level of interest in internal moves with staff moving either within their existing service area or across the organisation to take up new positions.

4.0 **NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 Progress against the HR Service plan, work on Covid 19 recovery and creating a new People Strategy or combining it with the work on Shaping our Future will be reported to all quarterly JSCC Meetings and an annual report presented to the December meetings.

5.0 **APPENDICES**

- 5.1 Appendix A – HR Service Work Plan for 2020/2021

6.0 **CONTACT OFFICERS**

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7.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 People Strategy 2015 – 2020