

# Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

02 December 2020



**Present:** Anthony Roche (**AR**), Dee Levett (**DL**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Ian Couper (**IC**), Vic Godfrey (**VG**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Lea Ellis (**LE**), Andrew Betts (**AB**), William Stafford (**WS**), Matthew Hepburn (**MH**), Caitlin Bruce (**CB – notes**)

**Circulation:** Global

---

## 1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock, Alison Fox, Nicola Viinikka

## 2. Matters Arising

Welcome to the new SCF members: Nicola Viinikka, William Stafford and Matthew Hepburn.

Question: Had JK and IC discussed the requirement for SCF and JSCC?

There had not yet been any detailed conversation but there is currently the requirement for both. **JK and IC to discuss further.**

Question: Is there any progress on updates from senior management?

This will be picked up in the re-run of the staff survey.

Question: Last months minutes mentioned too many people being on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor – why was this?

This was an anomaly and does not usually happen and has not happened since.

## 3. Active Communities Restructure

JK: Vaughan is not able to present the restructure as the open consultation meeting was the same time as the SCF meeting. A summary will be circulated to SCF members and any questions should be sent to Vaughan Watson.

## 4. Building Services update

We will be coming out of the national lockdown on 02/12 but the policy for coming into the office still applies – staff should continue to book slots or get approval from their line manager.

## 5. IT Update

Apologies for the slow running of the network – this was due to a power outage earlier in the week and the team are looking at it as a priority.

FOI plea – please make sure requests are completed and returned before the 23<sup>rd</sup> December as the office closedown will not be seen as an acceptable reason for extension and the legislative time frame of 20 working days remains the same.

Please ensure you are calling the helpdesk on #4444 and not the helpdesk employees directly on their extensions.

IT staff will keep a confidential bin in the IT van so if you have any confidential documentation that you would like to be destroyed when IT come to collect or drop off equipment let the team know.

A proposal for all staff being supplied with laptops for use when working at home and in the office is going to cabinet in December.

## 6. NHDC Update

The spending review was slightly better than forecasted for next year. This is due to some COVID support from central government.

The re-run of the staff survey should be launched before Christmas.

Shaping our Future have now had 2 meetings with the next meeting to be held 07/12. This is still in the information gathering stage.

There will be a monthly half day launched for employees to focus on learning and development the first one will be on the first Friday morning of January. Managers are to set the scope for each team. More details to come with the formal launch. The themes will align with the Shaping our Future themes.

Holiday flex (purchase of annual leave) will now be a permanent staff benefit.

HR are in the process of moving policies to the new templates, policies which are being amended heavily will be sent to SCF and Unison for feedback before they are circulated.

Staff are reminded that the Council offices will be closed on 24<sup>th</sup> December as a thank you for their hard work in this difficult year. **Please record Christmas Eve as special leave on time sheets to avoid this day being taken out of your flexi time allowance.**

## 7. Employee Queries

Question: Will there be an increase in homeworking expenses for heating and electricity during the winter?

This question has been raised and answered in past SCF meetings. All staff who are currently working all of their hours from home are able to claim £16 per month towards homeworking expenses, and this amount is kept under review. It is a fixed monthly amount which does not change during the winter months. It was changed from a broadband allowance to a homeworking expense to ensure that the amount it would not be taxed, and as a contribution to the expenses associated with working from home (not just broadband). **All staff are encouraged to claim the homeworking expense monthly as currently not all staff do.**

Further discussion highlighted that many other councils have their staff working at home currently and some do not pay any homeworking expenses. **IC to arrange a message board reminder for staff to claim their £16 in homeworking expenses.**

Question: Can staff be encouraged, if they are able to, to spend what they might on office secret Santa and Christmas meals on a donation to charity this year?

There is an Amazon wish list for Christmas gifts for children who will be in the Lister hospital over Christmas. Every child who is in the ward over Christmas gets a sack of presents, and every child who is seen in A&E gets a present:

<https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/lister-hospital-childrens-ward-christmas-present-appeal>

The staff briefing on 15<sup>th</sup> December will be our Christmas jumper day and the donations link will be sent from Sarah Kingsley.

Question: Will there be a limit on annual leave be carried over?

There is no limit on carry over leave, however, we encourage staff to take leave for wellbeing as well as to prevent the build-up of excessive leave as this could result in managers having to deny leave requests due to service needs.

There was a thank you for the extra day of leave on Christmas Eve.

The January meeting will be rearranged to the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of January, 13/01.

**Chair for next meeting – Christina Corr**

## Have something to say?

If you have an issue you think should be brought to the attention of the SCF, please contact any SCF representative via phone, email or in person. They will raise your issue at the next meeting. You will not be identified unless you want to be.

Issues relating to property e.g. broken lift, non-flushing toilets, etc. must always be reported to Property Services in the first instance: [propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:propertyservices@north-herts.gov.uk)

Alternatively you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - [SCF@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:SCF@north-herts.gov.uk)

### **Representatives (and extension):**

**Lea Ellis #4830** - Community Engagement team based on Floor 3

**Emma Jellis #4312** - MSU team based on Floor 4

**Allison Fox #4203** - Technical Support Officer based on Floor 3

**Christina Corr #4325** - Senior Technical Officer R&B team based on Floor 5

**Nicola Viinikka** Visitor Services Assistant based at Hitchin Town Hall and Museum

**William Stafford #4151** - Visitor Services Assistant based at Hitchin Town Hall and Museum

**Matthew Hepburn #4311** - Member, Committee & Scrutiny Officer

**Andrew Betts #4282** - Contracts Officer Waste Management based at Buntingford