

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

13 January 2021



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

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock

2. Matters Arising

It was raised that the half day of training at the beginning of January was appreciated by both members of the SCF and others on their respective teams.

AR confirmed that this was to be a monthly activity.

Question: Had JK and IC looked further into the value of having JSCC, Shaping our Future and SCF meetings?

Answer: The JSCC is mainly for members and is valued by them, and there is a benefit of having a representative from SCF there as the councillors value the input.

It is a good opportunity for SCF reps to get involved with councillors and committees. Shaping our Future has a different perspective, with a focus on the Learning and Development needs of the Council.

Question: How long do JSCC meetings usually last and how often are they held?

Answer: They are held once every quarter for 1 to 2 hours, they are currently being held over Zoom.

Question: Is there any update on supplying laptops to officers?

Answer: This is due to be taken to full cabinet on 21/01 – if approved the next step will be procurement. When the contract is out to tender timescales can be looked at.

3. Hitchin Town Hall and Museum Restructure – Rob Orchard

RO: The structure currently being used was put together before the full facility was in operation as the museum was not fully open. The structure was theoretical and following a first year of operation this has been reviewed in order to ensure the staff structure is fit for purpose and meets the service needs going forward.

The duty manager and events assistant casual bank has been identified in the budget, formally recognising it. The facilities assistant post would be removed in this proposal – this is result of a post which follows a fixed pattern intended to cover weekly events in the

evenings, having a permanent post for the hours identified isn't really reflective of the service needs anymore. There is recognition of needing to move towards a more flexible approach there. The budget has been moved across into the duty manager casual bank so that any events that have been left unattended by the removal of the facilities assistant post can be covered. There is a slight change in the support officers with the removal of one hour in the overall team, there are currently vacancies in that team so that reduction will not affect the current staff and we would obviously look to recruit to fill up those hours in due course. There is a slight alteration with the cleaners with 2 hours being removed, that is currently being followed by the existing cleaners so there will be no change to existing posts. The new structure is not a savings approach it is to try and make sure the structure is fit for purpose and meets the service need. The role of catering supervisor will be created as a new role. There is a need for the catering manager to step away for meetings, training and admin leaving the catering team without much supervision – by introducing a new supervisory level within that team it is hoped this can be covered more effectively. Overall there isn't a change in accumulative hours between the catering assistant and catering supervisor post but because the catering assist hours are being reduced it does mean that those 3 posts are being put at risk of redundancy. The digital audience development officer role which was a grant funded post will now be a permanent part of the structure at 14.5 hours per week. The visitor services assistant hours have also been increased and a formal VSA casuals bank has been identified to cover holiday and sickness.

4. Building Services update

The DCO building is currently open but employees are being discouraged from going in due to the national lockdown.

Question: Are employees still able to work in the building if they are struggling to pay winter bills?

Answer: Employees are still able to work in the building, it is just discouraged. **If you need to work in the office please discuss this with your line manager or service director.**

5. IT Update

The server room is being refreshed and the systems are being migrated – this can sometimes slow things down for employees. 36 systems have been migrated and there are 67 to do.

Please use the IT helpdesk on the intranet, the helpdesk number 4444 or the helpdesk app on tablets to get in touch with staff who work on the helpdesk instead of calling or emailing them directly.

The help desk is currently open from 7:45am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday although calls can be logged out of hours. VG is currently looking at reviewing standby to improve flexibility.

When passwords are due for renewal you will be sent an email. Some employees are not renewing their passwords in time and so their account is becoming locked. If you register your mobile number you can reset your own password.

The G;drive files are set to be moved to the cloud on the 21st and 22nd January.

Question: Councillors often contact employees in the CSC and democratic services to put issues through for them on the helpdesk, is there a way this can be made more accessible for councillors.

Answer: The councillors have the ability to log issues on the helpdesk themselves through the app on their tablets.

Reminder that there are documents on the intranet that should be used before a new IT project is started or new equipment is purchased.

Reminder that any data shared outside the organisation needs to be protected by encryption.

In 2020 NHDC had 677 FOI requests and 165 data protection requests.

6. NHDC Update

Supporting the NHS: a county wide call for help has gone out to support the Hertfordshire NHS in various administration, logistics and estates tasks that they might need help with.

Staff survey was planned for December, this will now happen in the next few weeks. Any issues that employees need to address personally can be put to their manager, HR or they can speak to someone through the employee assistance programme.

Pay bargaining April 2021: the local government association have not received the pay offer for Unison yet – there will be updates on this going forward.

The reorganisation policy and the special leave policy have both been updated and sent to SCF and Unison for review and comments.

Question: What support is being offered for parents who are home schooling?

Answer: As with the first lockdown, the council want to support working parents and employees should discuss the flexibility they need with their line manager in the first instance.

Question: An employee has been waiting for suitable work from home equipment since the first lockdown, who should they speak to about this?

Answer: Employees should open an IT helpdesk ticket to request equipment.

Question: Once the new equipment is brought in what happens to the old equipment?

Answer: The old equipment has a resale value and so is sold.

7. Employee Queries

If anyone comes into the office either for a quick visit or a few hours – please can they sign in and out, as well as clean desk when come in and leave and also wash up any cups they may use.

Question: Is there a reason that team leaders are not set up for creating their own team meetings via Zoom. Is there a process for someone else in the organisation that can create them for us on request?

Answer: If IT added Zoom to everyone's profiles, using it over Citrix will have exactly the same issues with buffering, in the same way as MS Teams.

Buffer with MS Teams and Zoom is not a local NHDC issue, it affects all Citrix sites. I can assure you all that I am working on this and in regular communications with the 10 other Hertfordshire Heads of IT via the HERTSLINK.

As you will appreciate, there is a cost for Zoom licences and at the moment it is £150.00 per year per person.

Question: I know this question was asked before about the £16.00 homeworking expenses which NHDC has confirmed will not be changed at present. Is it, therefore, more beneficial for people to not claim the £16.00 homeworking expense and apply to HMRC for the £6.00 per week tax relief as recommended by Martin Lewis' Money Tips or can you claim the NHDC allowance and also the HMRC allowance or will this cause issues with your tax?

Answer: The £16 per month that you can claim from the Council should be being paid to you without any tax deductions. We have had an issue with ITrent that means that tax has been being deducted. We are getting that fixed and it will be adjusted back to April. So once that is done, you will get £16 per month in your pocket/ bank account. Or £192 in a full year.

The HMRC rate is £6 per week. But if you claim that (which you can do here <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/claim-tax-relief-expenses/only-claiming-working-from-home-tax-relief>) then it adjusts your tax code by the equivalent of £6 per week. So across a whole year would increase your tax code by £312 (£6 * 52 weeks). Your tax code determines how much you can earn before you start paying tax, so increasing it reduces your taxable income. You then pay tax on earnings above that threshold. If you a standard rate taxpayer then you pay tax at 20%, so the amount you save (net impact on money in your pocket/ bank account) is around £62.

Here is a quick example, using made up numbers and ignoring impacts of National Insurance and pension contributions:

	£	£
Salary	25,000	25,000
Tax free allowance	10,000	10,000 + 312 = 10,312
Income that you pay tax on	15,000	14,688
Tax paid at 20%	3,000	2,938
Amount you get to keep	22,000	22,062

The website above does seem to allow you to claim tax relief where your employer does not pay the full £6 per week. So as we pay around £3.68 per week (£192 per year / 52.14 weeks in a year). It would seem that you could claim tax relief for the difference of £2.32 per week, or about £120 per year. The benefit to you would be 20% of that so would be £24 (assuming 20% tax rate). So total benefit of both is £192 + £24 = £216.

The rules around tax are that you have to work from home (i.e. not just because you choose to). That applies to everyone working at home under Covid-19 conditions, but you will need to review what you continue to claim post Covid-19.

Chair for next meeting – Lea Ellis

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

Alternatively you can send any issues to the SCF inbox - 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