

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 16TH DECEMBER, 2020 AT 10.00 AM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: (Chair), Councillor Kate Aspinwall (Vice-Chair), Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins and Claire Strong*

In Attendance: *Dee Levett (UNISON), Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews (UNISON), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Ian Couper (Service Director – Resources) Jo Keshishian (HR Operations Manager), Matthew Hepburn (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).*

Also Present:

9 WELCOME AND REMOTE/PARTLY REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Audio Recording – 6 seconds.

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Southern Rural Committee that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call and gave advice regarding the following:

- Attendance;
- Live Streaming;
- Noise interference;
- Rules of Debate;
- Voting.

The Vice Chair, Councillor Kate Aspinwall, started the meeting proper.

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 50 seconds.

Councillors Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kay Tart.

Having given due notice Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb advised he would be substituting for Councillor Kay Tart.

Apologies for absence were also received from Debbie Ealand – Unison, and SCF Representatives Andrew Betts, Christina Corr, Lea Ellis and Emma Jellis.

11 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 13 seconds.

There was no other business notified.

12 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 18 seconds.

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) 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.
- (4) The Chair reminded attendees of the extended Christmas closure period for some Council employees which would begin 24 December.

Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews – Unison advised the Committee that the North Herts Museum would be open during the Christmas period.

13 MINUTES - 18 DECEMBER 2019 TO 23 SEPTEMBER 2020

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 54 seconds.

The Vice Chair noted that it was the first occasion since the end of in-person meetings that the Committee had the opportunity to approve minutes. If approval was confirmed the Vice Chair's signature would be applied electronically by the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer.

The Vice Chair, Councillor Kate Aspinwall moved and Councillor Terry Hone seconded and:

IT WAS AGREED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 18 December 2019, 11 March 2020 and 23 September 2020 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and that the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer be authorised to apply the Chair's digital signature.

14 STAFF CONSULTATION FORUM

Audio Recording: 7 minutes 45 seconds.

The Service Director – Resources presented the Staff Consultation Forum minutes and provided a brief overview of the matters discussed including:

- The procurement of laptops for staff
- Attendance of Senior Management at meetings
- The relationship between SCF, JSCC and the Shaping our Future steering group

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions the Service Director – Resources advised:

- The request for capital funding being brought forward to Council in January was to meet increased demand for laptops and to enable staff to communicate while working remotely;
- There had been lots of positive feedback and engagement with the staff briefing on 5th November

In response to questions the Managing Director advised:

- While there had been supply issues in procuring laptops earlier in the year bringing forward the request for capital funding would capitalise on the opportunity to acquire more;
- Feedback from the staff briefing would be made available in reports to Executive Members, the Shaping our Future steering group, and in reports before Overview & Scrutiny;
- He was grateful to the SCF for adjusting their meeting time so that he could attend.

IT WAS AGREED: That the minutes of the Staff Consultation Forums held in October 2020 and November 2020 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Joint Staff Consultative Committee to consider any issues addressed by the Staff Consultation Forum.

15 HUMAN RESOURCES - INFORMATION NOTE

Audio Recording: 17 minutes 23 seconds.

The Service Director – Resources presented the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update including:

- The COVID Recovery Plan was close to being finalised including lessons learned during the lockdown and strategies for overcoming limitations presented by the pandemic;
- They hoped to share the COVID Recovery Plan at the next meeting of this committee;
- The £95,000 exit pay cap situation was still evolving; the pension rules had not yet changed and the HR team were keeping staff informed with any updates; the change was still subject to legal challenge;
- There were not yet signs of any restructures in the Council that would affect anybody caught by the exit pay cap;
- The HR Team continued to work on supporting employees working from home with a range of welfare support measures including welfare emails and guidance for managers;

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions the HR Operations Manager advised:

- Welfare calls made in April and May picked up key issues when the lockdown situation was new for everybody which the HR team were able to help with;
- There have been some long term absences but not more than usual;
- The HR team was giving support where they could and employee uptake of the Employee Assistance Programme had increased; response to the support on offer was positive;

The Managing Director noted that:

- The leadership team was very conscious of encouraging people to take leave and look after one another, particularly if the period of home working is to continue for a further 6 months with a greater risk of burnout;
- From next year there would be half a day each month set aside when the office was 'closed,' and employees could focus on learning & development;
- The first of these half days was 8th January and would focus on wellbeing;
- The flu vaccination voucher scheme was open to all employees irrespective of age, and staff who were eligible for free vaccination under the NHS scheme had been advised they did not need to request a voucher from NHDC;

IT WAS AGREED: That the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the Information Note entitled People Strategy Update.

16 APPRENTICESHIPS UPDATE

Audio Recording: 26 minutes 45 seconds.

The HR Operations Manager presented the Apprentices Update including:

- There was high demand for apprentice placements across the organisation;
- The details of the Apprenticeship scheme were outlined in the report; NHDC paid apprentices above the national living wage;
- Approximately 50 apprentices had started since 2013 and many had stayed with NHDC for a while;
- Apprentices benefited the age profile of the organisation;
- The apprenticeship levy could benefit existing employees that wished to gain new qualifications;
- The scheme had been promoted to schools in the local area;
- The report included feedback from apprentices on the scheme which was positive.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall

In response to questions the HR Operations Manager advised:

- Around 40 apprentices have completed their apprenticeships with NHDC; 9 of those were still with the organisation; 24 had spent some length of time working with NHDC after completing their apprenticeship;
- The Learning & Development Team kept in regular contact with apprentices to support them through their course; there was a small drop out/non-completion rate;
- Managers enjoyed having apprentices on their teams particularly as they tended to be younger;
- In HR the apprentices had demonstrated more tech-familiarity and introduced a new approach to recruiting.

The Managing Director advised:

- The apprenticeship scheme was a big benefit to NHDC from the perspective of succession planning; the demographic of the organisation was skewed towards over 50s and successfully enrolling younger employees was positive.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Apprenticeships Update provided be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the content of the Apprenticeships Update.

17 DISCUSSION PAPER: CARERS AT WORK

Audio Recording: 35 minutes 29 seconds.

The HR Operations Manager presented the Strategic Discussion Paper on Carers at work and outlined the strategies and support NHDC had in place to support employees with caring responsibilities including:

- That the definition of a carer was expansive and the number of people with caring responsibilities across the UK was high;
- With an aging population and a rise in pensionable age it was likely that the population of carers would expand in future years;
- Supporting and retaining carers at work was essential to the aims of the organisation;
- NHDC had in place flexible working arrangements including compressed hours, flexi-time schemes, home working and special leave arrangements that supported carers in the workforce;

The following Members asked questions and contributed to the discussion:

- Councillor Kate Aspinwall
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn

In response to questions the HR Operations Manager advised:

- The HR team was conscious that some younger employees were working from home in less conducive environments;
- Managers were making the best of the resources available to them in light of the COVID restrictions;
- The HR team had adopted a virtual office hours technique which had proved helpful

Dee Levett, UNISON Representative, advised that the SCF had discussed employees finding working from home for long periods of time difficult and asked about a return to the office on a part-time basis.

The Service Director – Resources advised that there was a policy to minimise the number of employees in the office at any time but where there was a wellbeing need or practical necessity space could be made.

In response to questions the Managing Director advised that individual teams across the organisation had organised their own remote Christmas get-togethers and that Steve Crowley, Service Director – Commercial, gave a magic show at the last staff briefing which was well received.

IT WAS AGREED: That the Strategic Discussion Paper on wellbeing for Carers be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to consider the discussion paper on wellbeing for Carers.

18 FUTURE DISCUSSION TOPICS

Audio Recording: 52 minutes 50 seconds.

Members considered which subjects should be discussed at future meetings and:

IT WAS AGREED:

- (i) That the discussion topics for the next meeting would be as follows:
 - (i) Uptake of salary sacrifice schemes
- (ii) That a separate verbal update on COVID-19 Recovery plans be provided to the Committee; and
- (iii) That the discussion topics of the meeting after next would include:
 - (i) The challenges and rewards of home working;
 - (ii) The return to office working.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to choose a discussion topic of interest.

The Vice Chair offered congratulations and thanks to the HR Team for handling the challenges of the last year and wished everybody a merry Christmas and enjoyable break.

The meeting closed at 10.57 am

Chair