

Staff Consultation Forum Meeting

04/08/2021



Present: Anthony Roche (**AR**) Ian Couper (**IC**), Andrew Betts (**AB**) Dee Levett (**DL**), Emma Jellis (**EJ**), Jo Keshishian (**JK**), Christina Corr (**CC**), Toby Le Sage (**TL**) Michael Clark (**MC – Property Services Restructure**) Fallon Rumball–Nunan (**FRN – notes**)

Circulation: Global

1. Apologies

Debbie Hiscock, Nicola Viinikka, Matthew Hepburn, Vic Godfrey

2. Property Services Restructure

Currently some difficulties balancing reactive and projects, resolution was to re-evaluate the team structure. A consultation period with both team and individuals has resulted in some changes:

- Compliance Contract and Project Manager hours are being increased to 30 hours a week, with the intention being to utilise that extra time to split time between compliance contract monitoring and being able to provide some additional technical/project support for team members.
- Compliance and Facilities Co-ordinator JD has been amended to reflect the updated role and additional duties being undertaken, which are quite different to the role initially recruited to.
- We currently have two part time property services assistants with split shift patters. To meet the growing demand for on- and off-site inspection and repair works, a full time Maintenance Caretaker role has been introduced in place of the two part time facilities assistant roles. The Maintenance Caretaker will require greater skill and knowledge than a Facilities Assistant and will be able to provide greater support, for example inspection work and where possible undertaking repairs.
- There are some slight changes to Health and Safety Officer's role, taking a greater lead on asbestos, fire, and water hygiene.

Closure consultation meetings to follow.

3. Matters Arising

Question: Any updates on recycling of rapid flow test equipment?

Answer: IC has investigated and will re-evaluate the need when more employees are back in DCO regularly.

4. NHDC update

Pay Award update: National Employers Group made an improved and final offer, currently with the union for consideration, any further updates will be communicated.

Proposal is:

- 2.75% increase for Grade 1 (to keep in line with national living wage)
- 1.75% increase Grade 2-12
- 1.5% increase Grade 14-16

Once agreed pay will be back dated from April 2021.

Half Day Development is Friday 6th August: team or individual development, no corporate focus.

Holiday Flex applications are open for August for anyone who would like to purchase up to one-week additional annual leave, with managers approval.

Workplace Bikes scheme has returned; Government-approved salary exchange initiative allowing you to hire a bike and accessories from the Council for the purpose of cycling to work.

SCF vacancy has been advertised on the message board, if you know any colleagues who may wish to join, please encourage them to do so.

Mini Restructure in Emergency Planning is proposed to give a more robust and efficient structure as previously had shared resources with Herts County Council.

Review of Council Plan to be proposed late September to Cabinet and Council. Further updates in staff briefing. Five priorities will be reduced to three (exact wording to be confirmed):

- People first
- Sustainability (Financial and Environmental)
- A brighter future together.

Review of ward boundaries has begun with a working group and public consultation. Finalised report will be proposed in January council meeting. This will include number of councillors needed, population projections and frequency of elections.

5. Employee Queries

Question: In terms of number of office days will this be instructed by department managers or employees be able to ask for a certain number of days, i.e., Staff would be asked individual their preference outside of the staff survey process, and this would be discussed and agreed?

Answer: There would be a discussion based on business need, individual needs and how the manager feels their teams will need to operate. Fairness would also be a factor.,

Question: Other councils allow staff to work from office, home or other, such as shared workspace, café. Given everyone has been working from home for over a year is this flexibility going to be possible in the future?

Answer: There are a number of elements to this

1. The laptop roll-out will make working at different locations much easier.
2. However, it will still require a secure and reliable network connection. Working over the mobile network is only available to those that specifically need it for their role, due to the costs involved.
3. Need to consider the need for confidentiality (e.g., in relation to telephone calls and what can be seen on your screen). This will be more of an issue for certain roles.
4. The physical environment should be suitable for the length of time you are working there. It might be fine to work in a café for a short period, but the furniture (appropriate desk and chair) and background noise would make it in appropriate for a longer period.

Question: As we are working from home and have had people join the business during the pandemic, it's hard to put a face to a name. Could photographs be added to emails?

Answer: We had started a project to do this, but it has been delayed by the pandemic. There was also resistance from some. We also need a way to get a photo of any new starters.

Question: Is there any news about the Flu Vaccination?

Answer: Yes, a global email has been sent out. We have had a good response, with approximately 80-90 individuals requesting vouchers however many staff won't need vouchers as over 50's are eligible for a free NHS vaccine.

6. IT Update

Weekly updates for the laptop roll out project can be found on the intranet. IT has delivered 133 laptops, monitors, docking stations and headsets to employees. There has been an issue with delivery of docking stations, usually delivery takes 1-2 weeks however due to production issues it is now taking 6-8 weeks, this unfortunately is going to cause delays for the roll out. Using a different supplier would double costs.

Desk booking system purchase and implementation is in progress. This will allow individuals and teams to book a desk. It will be intelligent enough to book a docking station, PC, or specialist equipment desk.

IT have also been carrying out work in the Council Chamber, each desk now has a power unit with 3 pin plugs so laptops and other equipment can be used.

Work to install power into the middle of the rooms in the larger meeting rooms is due to start on the 14th August with diamond drilling taking place that day. Following that on the 16th – 18th August electrical installation will take place.

Question: Are those working in the office aware of the drilling?

Answer: The drilling work will be carried out on the weekend.

Question: Will the lack of docking stations available have an impact on those planning to return to the office?

Answers: No, there will still be a bank of 3 docking stations on 6 desks along with a PC.

Question: When is the aim for laptop completion?

Answer: It was October, but stock levels may delay this.

7. Building Services Update

Plans to return to DCO set out in previous meeting are still ongoing therefore new ways of working will be introduced and suggestions for this are:

Quiet Floor: due to many people returning for social needs and team meetings, areas could become noisy. Employees would have option to book a desk on a quiet floor to able to focus. Popularity of this will be monitored by the desk booking system.

Question: What is acceptable behaviour on a quiet floor?

Answer: Some guidance will be put in place.

Lockers: Due to quiet floor proposal and potential to have booked a desk elsewhere within the building, suggestion for lockers for the majority of employees to become daily use only. This will need to be facilitated as many lockers are currently full! Exceptions will be made for those who have a corporate need for a permanent locker.

8. AOB

None

Chair for next meeting – Dee Levett

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):

Emma Jellis #4312 - MSU team based on Floor 4

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

Matthew Hepburn #4311 - Member, Committee & Scrutiny Officer

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